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**IAFOR Journal of Education: Language Learning in Education**

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Edited by Melinda Cowart

## **Foreword**

### **(Musings from the Editor-in-Chief)**

2020 is an important year for the *IAFOR Journal of Education*. We are moving forward into new territory, publishing topic-specific issues as well as our usual general topic issue, now re-named *Studies in Education*. *Technology in Education*, *Undergraduate Education*, *Inclusive Education*, and *Education and the Liberal Arts* join the *Language Learning in Education* issue as annual issues. The topics chosen reflect current issues in education as well as sitting snugly in the IAFOR pillars of interdisciplinary, international and intercultural. The year ahead will bring its challenges as we move to the new structure, but we are looking forward to the new direction and have a strong team of editors, associate editors and reviewers looking forward to the opportunities in store. We begin the year with *Language Learning in Education*.

In the final preparations for this issue, I pondered on how apt this theme is for our first issue of 2020. The articles feature the importance of language learning and, at a time when many nations are looking inward, becoming more nationalistic, rather thinking globally, this is an important message to highlight. Learning to speak someone else's language can lead to mutual understanding.

A quotation, from Noah's memoir, *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood*, came to mind in reference to language learning. Noah writes:

When you make the effort to speak someone else's language, even if it's just basic phrases here and there, you are saying to them, 'I understand that you have a culture and identity that exists beyond me. I see you as a human being' (Noah, 2016, p. 236).

I frequently attend conferences, many overseas, where the academic lingua franca is English. As a person who is monolingual (despite the best efforts of my French and Indonesian teachers), I am embarrassed by my inability to speak another language and in awe of those who present in a language that is not their mother tongue. I always strive to learn some basic phrases of the language of the country where I am presenting – “thank you”, “good morning/evening”, “please”, “excuse me”. Usually I get the pronunciation wrong, but the response of the people I meet, not only at the conference but also in stores or on the street (where I am usually looking hopelessly lost) makes it clear that the effort is worthwhile.

Language is our way of communicating and, perhaps, if we could all speak many languages there would be less misunderstanding in the world. This issue of the journal helps to further our knowledge not only of language learning per se, but of language learning around the world.

My thanks to the authors, the editor, Melinda Cowart, the publications manager, Nick Potts, and to all the reviewers for bringing this issue to you, the readers.

Enjoy,  
Yvonne Masters,  
Editor-in-Chief

## Editorial Advice

Preparing a submission to the *IAFOR Journal of Education* is more than writing about your research study: it involves paying careful attention to our submission requirements. Different journals have different requirements in terms of format, structure and referencing style, among other things. There are also some common expectations between all journals such as the use of good academic language and lack of plagiarism. To assist you in reaching the review stage for this or any other peer-reviewed journal, we provide the following advice which you should check carefully and ensure that you adhere to.

### 1. Avoiding Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a practice that is not acceptable in any journal. Avoiding plagiarism is the cardinal rule of academic integrity because plagiarism, whether intentional or unintentional, is presenting someone else's work as your own. The *IAFOR Journal of Education* immediately rejects any submission with evidence of plagiarism.

There are three common forms of plagiarism, none of which are acceptable:

1. **Plagiarism with no referencing.** This is copying the words from another source (article, book, website, etc.) without any form of referencing.
2. **Plagiarism with incorrect referencing.** This involves using the words from another source and only putting the name of the author and/or date as a reference. Whilst not as grave as the plagiarism just mentioned, it is still not acceptable academic practice. Direct quoting requires quotation marks and a page number in the reference. This is best avoided by paraphrasing rather than copying.
3. **Self-plagiarism.** It is not acceptable academic practice to use material that you have already had published (which includes in conference proceedings) in a new submission. You should not use your previously published words and you should not submit about the same data unless it is used in a completely new way.

### 2. Meeting the Journal Aims and Scope

Different journals have different aims and scope, and papers submitted should fit the specific journal. A “scattergun” approach (where you submit anywhere in the hope of being published) is not sound practice. Like in darts, your article needs to hit the journal's “bullseye”, it needs to fit within the journal's interest area. For example, a submission that is about building bridges, will not be acceptable in a journal dedicated to education. Ensure that your paper is clearly about education.

### 3. Follow the Author Guidelines

Most journals will supply a template to be followed for formatting your paper. Often, there will also be a list of style requirements on the website (font, word length, title length, page layout, and referencing style, among other things). There may also be suggestions about the preferred structure of the paper. For the *IAFOR Journal of Education* these can all be found here: <https://iafor.org/journal/iafor-journal-of-education/author-guidelines/>

#### 4. Use Academic Language

The *IAFOR Journal of Education* only accepts papers written in correct and fluent English at a high academic standard. Any use of another language (whether in the paper or the reference list) requires the inclusion of an English translation.

The style of expression must serve to articulate the complex ideas and concepts being presented, conveying explicit, coherent, unambiguous meaning to scholarly readers. Moreover, manuscripts must have a formal tone and quality, employing third-person rather than first-person standpoint (when feasible), placing emphasis on the research and not on unsubstantiated subjective impressions.

Contributors whose command of English is not at the level outlined above are responsible for having their manuscript corrected by a native-level, English-speaking academic prior to submitting their paper for publication.

#### 5. Literature Reviews

Any paper should have reference to the corpus of **scholarly** literature on the topic. A review of the literature should:

- Predominantly be about contemporary literature (the last 5 years) unless you are discussing a seminal piece of work.
- Make explicit international connections for relevant ideas.
- Analyse published papers in the related field rather than describe them.
- Outline the gaps in the literature.
- Highlight your contribution to the field.

#### Referencing

Referencing is the main way to avoid allegations of plagiarism. The *IAFOR Journal of Education* uses the APA referencing style for both in-text citations and the reference list. If you are unsure of the correct use of APA please use the Purdue Online Writing Lab (Purdue OWL), – <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/01/> – which has excellent examples of all forms of APA referencing. Please note APA is used for referencing not for the general format of the paper. Your reference list should be alphabetical by author surname and include DOIs whenever possible.

This short guide to getting published should assist you to move beyond the first editorial review. Failure to follow the guidelines will result in your paper being immediately rejected.

Good luck in your publishing endeavours,

Dr Yvonne Masters  
Editor-in-Chief, *IAFOR Journal of Education*



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## From the Editor

Greetings readers! Welcome to the *IAFOR Journal of Education: Language Learning in Education*. Bilingualism and second language learning occur in virtually every nation. The number of second language learners throughout the world increases regularly prompting educators and researchers involved in teaching and investigating the multifaceted processes of second language acquisition and language learning that their work is important and long-lasting. The challenges and rewards inherent in the lengthy journey of learning another language are as numerous as the reasons and motivations given for engaging in that endeavor. Whether there is a need to meet school requirements, a pending move to another nation, an interest in a new career, family reunification, or a sincere desire to add a language to his or her existing linguistic repertoire, there exist unique issues that pertain to language in general and to individual languages specifically. Several persons have departed from their heritage nations in search of a safe haven and must learn the language or languages of the new home nation as a part of survival and starting the process of creating a new life. Whatever the motives for learning an additional language may be, the nature of language learning is complex and requires consideration of multiple factors. The mechanics, such as written discourse and pragmatics, of language and individual languages as well as affective issues such as cultural identity, marginalization, acculturation, assimilation, language shock, language loss, language status, self-esteem when communicating in the new language, and the contexts of exit and reception for the newcomer must be explored if language learning is to be successful. Furthermore, ascertaining what constitutes successful practice among those who teach child and adult language learners requires educators to look ahead for fresh ideas while concurrently considering strategies and techniques that are research proven. Finally, it is important to explore the types of teacher development that translate to effective teaching. Each of these topics is addressed in the variety of articles provided by the diverse group of authors who contribute their research and scholarship to this issue of the *IAFOR Journal of Education: Language Learning in Education*.

In the first article, Nour El Imane Badjadi, author of “Learner-Centered English Language Teaching: Premises, Practices, and Prospects”, takes a look at how Learner-Centered Education has been implemented in second language teaching courses by university faculty. Through the research, Dr Badjadi frames some of the challenges in planning teacher development that will promote second language teaching in higher education in the Middle East and North Africa.

Olga R. Bondarenko explores the characteristics of Russian English written discourse in “Russian Accent in English Written Discourse”. The author investigates the common variables of communication strategies, style, structure and register among speakers of Russian English who are learning English for the tourism and hospitality industry. Her research suggests the need for cross-cultural education as an important component of English as a foreign language programs if students are to master English as a Native language speech standards.

Karizza P. Bravo-Sotelo looks at the effective use of code-switching in a math classroom in “Exploring the Tagalog-English Code-Switching Types Used for Mathematics Classroom Instruction”. A qualitative approach was used to discover the types of Tagalog-English code-switching that were utilized by teachers and students in a rural college in the Philippines, in order to facilitate comprehension of math concepts.

In the fourth article, “Exploring the Effects of Digital Storytelling: A Case Study of Adult L2 Writers in Taiwan”, Min-Hsun Chiang examines the value of incorporating digital storytelling

in a freshman composition class to support digital literacy in English among college students who are studying English as an International Language in Taiwan. This qualitative and quantitative study also explored the effects of digital storytelling on English as an International Language students' confidence in their skills in written English.

Ali Dincer and Tevfik Dariyemez explore the characteristics of proficient speakers of English in their article, “Proficient Speakers of English as a Foreign Language: A Focus-Group Study”. The purpose of the study was to clarify how proficient speakers accomplish the skill of fluency. The goal was to take advantage of their skills and metalinguistic knowledge to discover how teachers might facilitate greater proficiency among EFL students.

Nesrine Abdullah EL-Zine and Ammar Mohamed Aamer investigate undergraduate students' motivation and desire to learn a French as a foreign language in “Tertiary Learners' Motivational Intensity and Desire to Learn the French Language: Evidence from a Non-Francophone Country”. The study was designed to answer the questions of how motivated the students were to learn French and to what extent they possessed a desire to learn French. The authors also explored whether there was a significant difference in motivation in terms of gender.

In “L2 Vocabulary Acquisition through Narratives in an EFL Public Elementary School” Maria Nelly Gutierrez Arvizu considers the effectiveness of the use of narratives in language teaching. The author presents the findings of a narrative intervention that was implemented as part of a research project that she conducted with 167 students in grades 3-6 in an elementary public school in Mexico.

In their article, “Peer Assessment in L2 Pronunciation Instruction in Russia: Students' Attitude Research”, Alexandra Kolesnikova, Alina Maslova, and Elena Mishieva discuss a study they conducted to examine the attitudes towards peer assessment of students in an L2 phonetics class of first year undergraduate students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies at Lomonosov Moscow State University. The results of the study showed that students were aware of the worth of peer assessment and generally possessed positive attitudes towards it.

In “Socio-Demographic Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension Achievement Among Secondary School Students with Learning Disabilities in Ibadan, Nigeria”, Kelechi U. Lazarus discusses the findings of a research study that explored the effect that socio-demographic factors such as school social environment, type of school and gender, have on achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities.

Happy reading!

**Melinda Cowart**

Editor, *IAFOR Journal of Education: Language Learning in Education*  
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### Notes on Contributors

#### Article 1: Learner-Centered English Language Teaching: Premises, Practices, and Prospects

**Dr Nour El Imane Badjadi** is a senior lecturer and researcher in the field of applied linguistics and second language acquisition at Ouargla University, Algeria. She is currently working in the same field of study while completing post-doctoral research. Her research interests include the cognitive aspects of foreign language pragmatics teaching and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) literacy instruction.

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#### Article 2: Russian Accent in English Written Discourse

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#### Article 3: Exploring the Tagalog-English Code-switching Types Used for Mathematics Classroom Instruction

**Ms Karizza P. Bravo-Sotelo** has a master's degree in Language Education from the University of the Philippines Diliman. With more than a decade of experience in the academe, she has explored the areas of language instruction and assessment, curriculum and materials development, teacher training, and ESL/EFL program management. Presently, she is an Instructional Coaching Manager at Teach for the Philippines, a non-profit organisation that endeavours to provide Filipino children access to an inclusive, excellent, and relevant education. Her research interests include code-switching, second language teaching, and teacher education.

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#### Article 4: Exploring the Effects of Digital Storytelling: A Case Study of Adult L2 Writers in Taiwan

**Dr Min-Hsun Chiang** has a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction from The University of Texas at Austin. She is an Associate Professor in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at Tunghai University in central Taiwan. Her research interests include computer-assisted language learning, language teacher training, and content and language integrated learning.

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**Article 5: Proficient Speakers of English as a Foreign Language: A Focus-Group Study**

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**Article 6: Tertiary Learners' Motivational Intensity and Desire to Learn the French Language: Evidence from a Non-Francophone Country**

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**Article 7: L2 Vocabulary Acquisition through Narratives in an EFL Public Elementary School**

**Dr Maria Nelly Gutierrez Arvizu** holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics awarded by Northern Arizona University, USA. She is an Associate Professor / Faculty Researcher at the Foreign Languages Department in Universidad de Sonora, Mexico. She has been an English teacher, teacher educator, and English teacher trainer for more than 20 years. She is a proud member of the National System of Researchers in Mexico. Her fields of expertise are English as a Foreign Language, young learners of English, development of speaking in EFL contexts, and second language assessment.

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### **Article 8: Peer Assessment in L2 Pronunciation Instruction in Russia: Students' Attitude Research**

**Dr Alexandra Kolesnikova** is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies at Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia, from which she has a PhD in pedagogy. She has a number of publications on ELT, teaching phonetics and assessing phonological competence. She is a member of the National Association of Applied Linguistics (Russia), and the National Association of Teachers of English (Russia). Her fields of expertise are Phonology and Phonetics: Instruction and Assessment.

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### **Article 9: Socio-Demographic Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension Achievement Among Secondary School Students with Learning Disabilities in Ibadan, Nigeria**

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## **Learner-Centered English Language Teaching: Premises, Practices, and Prospects**

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### Abstract

Although learner-centered education is claimed to have several learning gains, research suggests that teachers' attitudes and practices play a crucial role in promoting its prolific outcomes. This study examines the adaptation of learner-centered education and examines how it has been implemented in second language teaching by university teachers since launching an educational shift embodied in the learner-centered reform a decade ago. In so doing, a questionnaire was distributed to a random sample of 128 instructors. The data collected were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistical analyses using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS 16.0 software. Meanwhile, interviews were analyzed qualitatively. The quantitative analysis of data provides a snapshot of instructors' attitudes towards Learner-centered education and the extent to which they implemented it in their courses. More importantly, the analysis of qualitative interview results outlines a "contextualized" framework that takes into account the conceptual nature of the global premises of Learner-centered education by linking them to teachers' perceptions and practices in a particular context. The findings provide insights into the dynamism of meeting college students' second language learning needs. The study further addresses the problems of designing teacher training that aims at promoting higher education second language learning in the Middle East and North Africa context.

*Keywords:* learner-centered education (LCE), English language teaching (ELT), teacher education, instructed second language development

Globalized approaches to education are growing in spread and influence, informing the blueprint for educational reforms, forming current instructional practices, and reflecting the paradigm shift in education towards learner-centeredness. Learner-centered education (LCE) is a model that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century to shape a new understanding of learning, and to pave the way for what teaching and learning ought to be like in the new millennium (Myers & Lee, 2017; Starkey, 2019; Weimar, 2013). Accordingly, since 2007, higher education in Algeria has initiated an LCE-oriented reform called the LMD System, referring to License, Master, Doctorate (Azzi, 2012). Nowadays, learner-centeredness is hardly a new issue, but what is paradoxical about this notion is that although it has been around since the 1970s, it is rarely questioned in terms of its practicality for achieving specific objectives in specific contexts. Rather, mostly, it has been taken for granted as common sense about effective teaching, or as a fashion or a policy imposed by curricular changes. Besides, the need for more efficient practices in English language teaching (ELT) has triggered a shift away from searching out a perfect one-size-fits-all teaching method towards focusing on certain learners in particular backgrounds. Therefore, the fundamental concern of this study is to explore how the conceptual premises of LCE are perceived by second language teachers in Algeria and how they are realized in classroom practice as a means of promoting learners' L2 development. The study, thereby, aims at the betterment of alignment between espoused principles and enacted practices by highlighting the potential discrepancy between theoretical ideality and practical reality. The study further aims at offering new insights into how LCE-oriented instruction might be designed to effectively promote second language development.

LCE is rooted in the belief that learning is a qualitative change in a person's way of seeing and, when this change is acquiring another language, another soul. Indeed, the methodology of current practice in ELT has been informed by the notion that learner-centeredness (Hall, 2017; Nunan, 2012) is an axis around which contemporary ELT methods and post-methods revolve. From this viewpoint, LCE in ELT encourages the creation and negotiation of meaning by the learners themselves. As teachers strive to enhance students' English language development, they are often confronted with language deficiencies and shallow content knowledge. These obstacles are mirrored in the lack of vocabulary, grammatical mistakes, limited range of ideas, and the chaotic or incoherent presentation of ideas. As antidotes to those weaknesses, the teacher needs to integrate learner-centered teaching strategies due to two major characteristics. First, they encourage students to enlarge their knowledge, in terms of both language and content, through tasks and projects (Ellis, 2017). Second, other than the significance of the cognitive aspect, great importance ought to be given to the social and affective aspects and their role in learning a second language through cooperative and collaborative practices (Donato, 2016). Hence, the current study inspects the merits of using learner-centered ELT practices, namely content-based, task-based, and project-based, as well as cooperative and collaborative language teaching practices.

This article reports on a study investigating the adaptation of learner-centered education to English language teaching in a university in Algeria. Specifically, it explores the teachers' insights towards the theoretical premises and their practicality as classroom instructional practices. This paper firstly reviews literature related to LCE and its applied pedagogical practices in ELT, describes the research methodology used in the study, presents findings and discussion, and lastly draws conclusions and implications.

## Literature Review

LCE has established a worldwide track record in motivating students, stimulating personal growth and lifelong learning, and developing communication skills, among other gains (Ahmed & Dakhiel; 2019; Van Viegen & Russell, 2019; Villacís & Camacho, 2017). However, the gains of LCE are claimed to be largely dependent on the way teachers perceive, and implement it, especially that it is portrayed not to belittle the teacher's role but, rather, to multiply it (Ilieva, Wallace, & Spiliotopoulos, 2019; Van den Branden, 2016), a premise that maybe challenging to many teachers (Kaymakamoglu, 2018; Yamagata, 2018). In addition, previous studies have indicated that the implementation of LCE pedagogies requires high levels of awareness and specialized skills on behalf of teachers, together with encouraging school environments (Marwan, 2017; Shehadeh; 2018; Troyan, Cammarata, & Martel, 2017). Similarly, despite that several studies advocate that implementing LCE is challenging in terms of both course design and the development of instructional methods and materials (Bai & González, 2019; Philominraj, Jeyabalan, & Vidal-Silva, 2017), a number of research reports have shown that LCE has been successfully implemented even where teacher-centered instruction used to be the norm (Yu & Liu, 2017). In the same strand, this research is intended to contribute to the emergent body of knowledge which addresses the ongoing need for empirical studies on the implementation of LCE practices in ELT.

Exploring the implementation of learner-centered practices in the context of ELT is crucial to maximizing their usefulness in terms of strategic pedagogy and enhanced target language development. Haley and Austin (2004) suggest, "As the field is constantly changing, we want to stress that this process of questioning one's assumptions and reconstructing them on the basis of new knowledge is key to maintaining instructional practices that are responsive to our learners" (p. 1). The way theory is envisaged in classroom practice is worth investigation, especially since teachers and learners sometimes appear to be caught between tediously sticking to old tradition and obediently imitating current trends. In addition to linking theory to practice, an important aspect of ELT pedagogy is improving practice to optimize learning outcomes. As Leung (1993) states, "A researched pedagogy scrutinizes pedagogic activity to assess its mode of implementation, its operation, and its outcomes." (as cited in Bygate, Shehan, & Swain, 2001, p.1). In ELT, the main LCE-oriented approaches are: attending to learners' needs through integrating language-and-content (Lyser, 2017) raising students' awareness of their active role through tasks and projects (Beckett & Slater, 2019; Ellis et al., 2019); and leading learners towards autonomy through peer cooperation (Karim, 2018), and instructional communication (Ammar & Hassan, 2017).

Research on educational pragmatism is vital for advancing the field of ELT. Therefore, this study assumes that it is through critical appraisal that educational premises and practices can be adapted to specific contexts in order to inform future second language teaching and learning. Notably, the present study comprehensively focuses on the use of these particular practices as they relate to concurrent learner-centered ELT practices. Specifically, it attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How do university English language teachers perceive the theoretical premises that underlie LCE?
2. How do English language teachers implement LCE practices in the classroom?

3. From the teachers' perspectives, how can LCE be effectively implemented in ELT courses?

## **Research Methodology**

### **Participants**

To achieve the aforementioned aims, a descriptive exploratory study was carried out where a questionnaire was administered to a random sample of 128 second language teachers in the departments of French, English and Translation working at Algerian Universities. The participants were largely homogeneous in terms of background and included male and female as well as experienced and early-career participants. All of the participants spoke Arabic as their mother tongue and were teaching French or English as second languages. At the university level, second languages were mostly taught for academic (translation and literature) and educational purposes (applied linguistics and second language acquisition). The language programs taught by the participants were sets of compulsory courses including grammar, phonetics, literature, general linguistics, translation, language history and culture, TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), and educational psychology, or ESP (English for Specific Purposes) for non-English major students, all taught in the second language, i.e., French or English.

As for the interview, the participants were 9 teachers selected from the initial questionnaire sample based on their implementation rates reported in the questionnaire. After the collection of questionnaire responses, teachers who reported obviously frequent use of LCE oriented practices were manually detected (N= 24). However, only nineteen of them filled in their personal information since that was optional. In addition to availability, variability was also taken into consideration; the available participants were grouped into experienced (senior, N=12) and novice (N=7). Then, ½ from each group were randomly selected, phoned, and requested to participate in a semi-structured interview. Eventually, they kindly agreed to take part. The interviews were phone-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

This study employed quantitative and qualitative approaches to data collection and analysis. In accordance with the purposes of this study, a survey was designed based on the literature reviewed on LCE (Myers & Lee, 2017; Starkey, 2019).

First, the questionnaire was designed to elicit information about second language teachers' backgrounds, attitudes, practices, and implementation of LCE and consisted of three sections (Porte, 2010). The first four questions constituted the first section and were meant to gather information about teachers' age, gender, and work experience. The next section included question items about teachers' views of teaching and learning conceptions related to LCE. Teachers were required to indicate how far they agreed with some statements associated with LCE using: strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree. The focus of the third section was narrowed down to an inquiry into teachers' implementation of LCE methods. In this section, teachers were required to indicate the extent to which they use LCE methods in their courses. Cronbach's Alpha for the questionnaire was .891. The questionnaire responses were interpreted based on a 4-point Likert scale where means that ranged between 1 and 2 denoted a low value, means that ranged between 2 and 3 denoted an average value, and means that ranged between 3 and 4 represented a high value.

Qualitative research instruments are particularly useful in terms of the valuable insights an insider can report. As Miller and Bell (2002) argue, “The shift towards a focus on subjective experience and the meanings individuals give to their actions has led to a concern with the research process itself and the ways in which qualitative data are gathered” (p. 61). Because this study aimed at examining LCE premises, not only based on their theoretical meaning, but also on what they experientially meant to the teachers, and examining the ways in which these internalized meanings were translated into educational practices, taking ethical considerations into account was extremely important. In so doing, prior to the administration of the questionnaire, the participants were told that their responses would be treated with confidentiality, and would be used for research purposes only. The participants were also informed that filling in personal information (Name, email, phone number) was optional and would be used only in case they were interested in perusing probing questions or willing to share their experiences. The semi-structured interview sought information on teachers’ evaluation and implementation of LCE methods in their courses. Participants were also required to reflect on the difficulties they faced and the solutions they found practical within their teaching situation.

The choice of questionnaire and interview for data collection was based on the purpose of the study. It is common for investigators using quantitative research to conduct interviews in order to help verify research conclusions (Phakiti & Paltridge, 2015). This is known as triangulation and represents a primary means by which qualitative researchers establish validity of their research (Guion et al., 2011, p.1). The initially constructed versions were followed by revisions based on the feedback provided by three senior teacher educators in Languages and Human Sciences School at an Algerian University from which the study sample was taken. Using both questionnaire and interview data was appropriate for investigating teacher’s beliefs and practices and for inspecting challenges teachers faced in their implementation of LCE, along with the coping strategies they had developed.

The data collected were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistical analyses using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences SPSS 16.0 software. Notably, a level of significance of 0.01 was adopted for the quantitative analysis. Meanwhile, interviews were audio recorded and analyzed qualitatively (Richards, 2009). The analysis of interview data employed a reflexive approach to data coding and interpretation (Duff, 2018). This view suggests that throughout the process of data analysis, “constant checks must be made to ensure that it is the data, rather than one’s intuitions or assumptions that are leading the analysis.”(Burns, 2003, p. 157).

Figure 1 shows the different stages that were followed in completing the research. Initially, the researcher gathered all the collected data and scanned it to take notes of the outstanding ideas and impressions. Then, the categories of codes were developed so that more particular patterns could be identified. The latter step allowed for reading across the assembled data to build hierarchies or sequences to detect frequencies of occurrences, behaviors, or responses. One deviation from the scheme suggested by Burns (2003) is that, in this study, the categories were derived from the thematic categories that formed the foundation of the questionnaire items. These thematic questionnaire categories were, in turn, derived from the literature on the theoretical premises and concurrent practices associated with LCE (Attitudes Category: A. Transmission vs. discovery, B. Responsibility, C. Readiness; Implementation Category: D. Content-based, E. Task-based, F. Project-based, G. Cooperative and Collative, H. Awareness

Raising, I. Support Provision). The subsequent stage involved examining the underlying concepts and theorizing about why certain patterns had evolved.

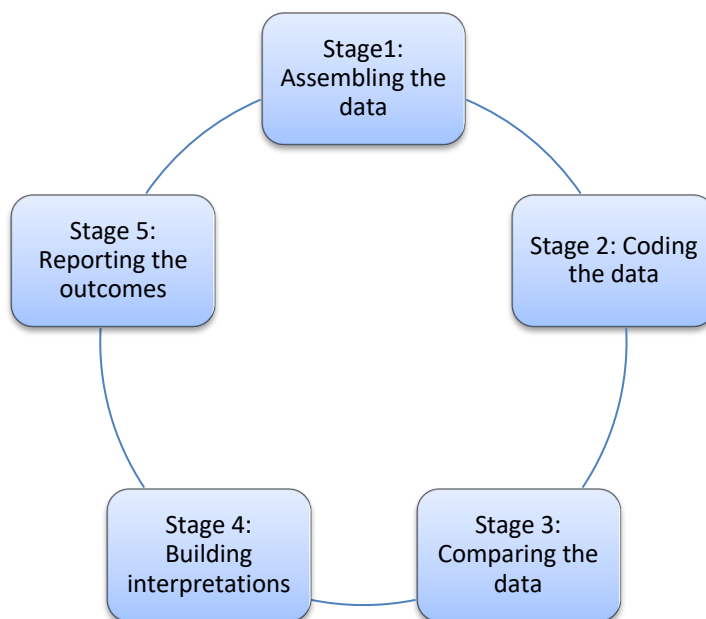


Figure 1: The stages of qualitative data analysis (adapted from Burns 2003)

## Findings

### Teachers' Attitudes Towards LCE

Attitudes toward LCE approaches to instruction show variation across questionnaire statements in the participants' responses.

Table 1: Descriptive results of teachers' attitudes towards LCE premises

Items in Category 1*	N	Mean**	Std. Deviation
Item1	128	2.84	.781
Item2	128	3.39	.679
Item3	128	2.79	.969
Item4	128	2.63	.946
Item5	128	3.88	.323
Item6	128	3.18	.837
Attitudes	128	3.1185	.59641
Valid N (listwise)	128		

N: Total number of participants  
 \*Category 1 of the questionnaire: Attitudes  
 \*\*Mean weight of responses given that response options are weighted as follows: strongly agree=4, agree=3, disagree=2, strongly disagree=1

Table 1 shows the descriptive results of questionnaire items indicating that, overall, teachers agreed with the pedagogic premises associated with LCE (total mean for Attitudes Category: 3.11=agree, see response weights above). However, from the responses' means in the

questionnaire data (Item 1: the view of teaching as knowledge transmission, Item 3, usefulness of providing learning opportunities, and Item 4: students' responsibility for their own learning), it was obvious that teachers assigned a remarkable amount of importance to the transmission of knowledge from teachers to students while, at the same time, encouraging active learning (Items 2, 5, 6; Category 1) as a significant aspect of LCE.

The interview data were coded focusing on the attitudes category and represents assumptions regarding the nature of learning and teaching, concerning the distribution of roles and responsibilities, and as regards students' readiness for LCE practices. The majority of the interviewees agreed on the active nature of learning with the teacher as a facilitator. Meanwhile, they disagreed with the notion of teaching as merely the transmission of content. As Senior 4 clarifies, "delivery ... for me as language teacher is only part of teaching and functions as input for language learning to be initiated". What is even more interesting, at the same time, is that all the respondents agreed with the idea of learning as a matter of discovery rather than delivery. For Novice 1: "... language learning as involves not just change in behavior, but in knowledge, skills, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes as well. Change of this kind is mainly intrinsically driven through discovery rather than transmitted."

The next set of assumptions, however revealed more controversy among teachers. Concerning the distribution of roles and responsibilities in the teaching-learning enterprise, most of the respondents, disagreed with "the total relinquishment of teachers' responsibilities to their students. The role of the teacher is pivotal if any learning is to take place and being responsible for one's own teaching implies being partly responsible for students' learning as well." (Senior 2). In addition, slightly more than half of the respondents disagreed with the view that students take full responsibility for their learning, nearly half of the respondents (N=4) agreed with the same assumption. The reason behind this controversy may be echoed in Senior 5's claim that "teaching always implies learning and thus is learner-centered to some degree and in one way or another. Teaching methods may agree in that the learner is a central axiom, but disagree about the nature and degree of this centrality, and how it best promotes learning". Indeed, the most debatable assumption was that students take full responsibility for their learning.

Lastly, the large majority of teachers agreed that LCE requires prerequisite knowledge and skills on behalf of students (Item 5). As suggested by Senior 3: "besides needing a solid knowledge background, I intend to design my courses in such a way to enable students, whatever their level is, to actively develop effective learning skills". When asked if this means structuring the teaching around LCE practices, Senior 3 replied "... well ... Just as a completely teacher-centered classroom would teach nothing, in an extremely learner-centered classroom, little or no learning would take place. Thus, a compromise is required." Not surprisingly, there was a tendency in the interview data towards favoring a balance of power and desiring to share responsibility for learning; in fact, this was the most appealing argument among the respondents.

### **Teachers' Implementation of LCE Methods**

Table 2 shows participants' responses regarding the use of concurrent LCE practices in their classes, namely Content-, Task-, and Project-Based, Cooperative and Collaborative practices (Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 5; Category 2) as well as Awareness Raising and Scaffolding (guidance and support) strategies (Items 6 and 7, Category 2). The responses from the questionnaire (Table 2) indicate that teachers moderately adopt reform-oriented LCE methods (total mean: 2.41=



average, see response weights below). Specifically, content and task-based methods (Items 1, 2: Category 2) are the most commonly used since they are regarded as the most practical as they can be easily adapted to teacher-fronted classrooms. Similarly, interview data point toward the practicality of joining the two methods.

Table 2: Descriptive results of teachers' implementation of LCE methods

Items in Category 2*	N	Mean**	Std. Deviation
Item 1	128	2.88	.790
Item 2	128	2.76	.929
Item 3	128	1.49	.589
Item 4	128	2.23	.837
Item 5	128	2.30	1.022
Item 6	128	2.50	1.004
Item 7	128	2.75	.763
Implementation	128	2.41629	.543770
Valid N (listwise)	128	2.88	

N: Total number of participants

\*Category 2 of the questionnaire: Implementation

\*\*Mean weight of responses given that response options are weighted as follows:  
always=4, often=3, sometimes=2, never=1

Interview data also indicate positive attitudes and gains from jointly implementing content and task-based methods. As a teacher interviewee clarified "... with regard to LCE methods, when the teacher reviews course content, explains a language point related to the course content as part of feedback on students' task performance or contribution, content knowledge will be deepened because students not only understand, but also apply course content and the language they use to express it." (Senior 2) Likewise, another interviewee noted: "frequently requiring learners to solve a problem, arrive at a conclusion, or complete a task and to share information allows them to collect information and cultivate themselves" (Senior 3).

In addition, a relatively large number of teachers have employed cooperative and collaborative methods (Survey Items 4, 5, Category 2). Similar findings were revealed in the reported experiences through qualitative interview data. As a senior teacher pointed out, "though time consuming, cooperative and collaborative methods can foster growth in many areas: learning to use interpersonal skills effectively, understanding and applying the course content to life situations, developing self-esteem and ability to explain concepts to others" (Senior 5). Similarly, a teacher interviewee reports "through encouraging student-student interaction, positive interdependence and individual accountability, students gain greater motivation and self-confidence, learn to work cooperatively, and eventually become autonomous learners" (Novice3). Another teacher noted: "varying teacher-student interaction through collaborative dialogue and mentoring students' groups stimulates the negotiation of meaning and allows the maximum of students to contribute to the discussion and develop as thinkers, and communicators in the second language... This is because students have the opportunity to

benefit from the presence of the teacher and peers, to receive feedback from multiple sources” (Novice 1).

Conversely, few teachers reported using project-based methods, (Questionnaire Item 3: Category 2). The findings also suggest that many teachers seemed to doubt the usefulness of raising students’ awareness of their active role in the learning process, assuming that changing their habits may cost much effort and time, and regarded the provision of adequate support and guidance as challenging (Questionnaire Items, 6 and 7, Category 2). In the interview, this theme was raised in specific reference to students’ readiness and the challenges that teachers face in implementing the LCE reform. One interviewee comments: “we cannot ignore that LCE methods require students to enlarge their knowledge by doing extra readings, investigate issues in depth, and solve problems and other study skills to which many students may not be used to... especially in over-crowded classrooms or lecture halls” (Senior 1). Another point raised by a teacher interviewee was that: “language teachers and learners come to class with a lifetime of experiences and preconceived notions about teaching and learning” (Novice 2).

### Teachers’ Attitudes and Implementation of LCE

The results show that while there existed a correlation among teachers’ attitudes (Category 1) and the implementation (Category 2) of LCE that was significant (Table 3), the descriptive statistics point to a noticeable gap between the two survey categories (Table 4).

Table 3: Correlation among teachers’ attitudes and implementation of LCE

		Attitudes	Implementation
Attitudes	Pearson Correlation	1	.837**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	128	128
Implementation	Pearson Correlation	.837**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	128	128
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 4: Descriptive statistics of teachers' attitudes and implementation of LCE

Questionnaire Categories	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Attitudes (Category 1)	128	3.1185	.59641
Implementation (Category 2)	128	2.41629	.543770
Valid N (listwise)	128		

In consonance with the quantitative results, interview data highlight a tension between teachers' attitudes toward the reform standards and the practicality of educational reform though many teachers were cognizant of the benefits of LCE reform for second language learning. For instance, an important point that was raised by a number of participants was skills integration. As a senior instructor explained, "A LCE framework provides a natural context for integrating the four skills. Oral interaction helps wiring development at least in two ways. First, content will be enhanced, through brainstorming in groups, for example" (Senior 5). Similarly, another teacher observed that "the acquisition of new vocabulary and improvement of learners' grammar are stimulated by interaction and likely to occur through scaffolding during collaborative work" (Novice 1). In the same vein, a writing teacher reported: "... In a learner-centered classroom writing not only triggers reading, but listening and speaking as well; this is likely to lead to an increase in students' overall competence and writing abilities thereby" (Senior 6).

## Discussion

This study sought to demonstrate how effectively the LCE approach could be implemented in the ELT context. Throughout the current work, the relationship between teachers' perceptions and ways of implementing learner-centered teaching practices were highlighted. To explore the extent to which LCE teaching practices affect the advancement of language learning from the instructor's perspective, the researcher has considered the most influential LCE theoretical premises as well as concurrent LCE oriented ELT methods in constructing the questionnaire instrument. In addition, the interview data have been used to identify patterns that explain why ELT teachers implement LCE in the way they do in terms of the influence of certain perceptions on their approaches to teaching. The qualitative analysis is based on reading across the respondents' answers to the open-ended interview questions and coding data into the questionnaire-derived categories which are: the nature of learning, assumed responsibility, students' readiness, content-based practice, task-based practices, project-based practices, cooperative and collaborative practices, as well as awareness-raising and support provision. This section focuses on analyzing the data gathered and discussing their interpretation in light of the research questions.

**Question 1:** How do university English language teachers perceive the theoretical premises that underlie LCE?

The quantitative results (Table 1) show that though teachers are evidently aware of the LCE orientation towards encouraging active learning through guided discovery in order to enlarge students' resources such as online learning and self-study instead of the heavy reliance on teacher's "spoon-feeding", they still assign a remarkable amount of importance to the

transmission of knowledge from teachers to students. These findings have been clarified by triangulation with interview results where participants frequently show concerns about the time needed to cover the programs' content and the demands discovery-based learning necessitates on both students and teachers. This contradiction is consistent with research findings that point to the significance of reform-focused training and, at the same time, provide support to previous studies indicating the need for adapting educational reforms according to the context of implementation. Similarly, the interview respondents believe that the implementation of LC practices positively affects students' second language development and enhances their comprehension and production skills. Respondents; however, highlight different aspects of this relationship.

First of all, with regard to the perceived nature of learning, the respondents expressed willingness “to break the rule that says teachers tend to teach in the way they were taught, I believe that good change takes time, but even a slight alteration to start with can make a difference” (Novice 3). This gradual nature of change in educational settings is also emphasized in (Qamar, 2016). Within the context of teaching EFL writing, Hedge (2000) states,

It is a result of various pressures of time and the need to cover the syllabus, writing is often relegated to homework and takes place in unsupported conditions of learning. The danger in these circumstances is that poorer writers struggle alone and the experience confirms them in their perceptions of themselves as failing writers. And better writers miss valuable opportunities for improvement through discussion, collaboration, and feedback. (p. 301)

Nonetheless, “these contextual constraints”, according to Senior 6, “may limit, but may not prevent the implementation of LC practices because they can be adapted for learners, at any of the stages of development, and in most curricula; it depends on the teacher's epistemological beliefs and experience of course”. This realistic yet optimistic response relates to Spada and Lightbown's (2006, p.50) claim that: “Many teachers watch theory development with interest, but *must* continue to teach and plan lessons and assess students' performance in the absence of a comprehensible theory of second language learning” - emphasis added-. By “must”, Spada and Lightbown hint at the contextual constraints hindering the adoption of educational innovations. To minimize the effects of contextual constraints, Ó Ceallaigh, Hourigan, and Leavy, (2018) argue for enhancing teachers' potential in terms of knowledge and skills. Also, solving the problems that arise in a particular context can be triggered through collaboration among teachers across and within disciplines (Zappa-Hollman, 2018; Pawan & Greene, 2017), and through teacher education as well (Camarata & Cavanagh, 2018).

**Question 2:** How do English language teachers implement learner-centered methods of teaching in the classroom?

On one hand, the findings indicating positive attitudes and gains from jointly implementing content and task-based methods, especially within the frameworks of cooperative and/or collaborative learning, are in consonance with of experimental research on the effectiveness of content-based, cooperative and collaborative language teaching methods (Eriksson, 2018; Mayo, 2018; Mohamadpour et al. 2018; Sato et al., 2017; Seah, 2020; Spenader et al., 2018). One example is Arboleda-Arboleda and Castro-Garcés' (2019) study which focuses on

teaching the target language through literature and provides evidence for the effectiveness of content-based with task-based approaches.

On the other hand, the findings that teachers moderately raise students' awareness of their active role in the learning process and regard the provision of adequate support and guidance as challenging lend support to the view that the adoption and adaptation of LCE reform requires collaboration among teachers (and between the teacher and the learners who have already constructed notions about what their role in the classroom is (Yen, 2016). The results also suggest that the implementation of LCE is a process that requires gradually refining epistemological beliefs and dropping stereotypical notions about learning and instruction (Van Loi, 2020). These findings are consistent with research in similar contexts which has highlighted the effect of students' responsiveness and readiness for a reform-oriented approach to teaching (Edwards et al., 2019), especially if the approach entails learning skills students may not be equipped with, study strategies they may not be aware of, and responsibilities they did not expect.

In content-based language learning, learners' understanding of texts is the result of integrating the knowledge and language which this text presents and the learners' prior knowledge. With this regard, in Senior 6's EFL writing course "explaining points relevant to course content frequently occurs in most sessions, yet it does not occur in isolation, but rather in a form of feedback in accordance with students' contributions. It usually aims at helping students express their ideas appropriately and develop a sense of audience through emphasizing the clarity of students' topic sentences." As far as writing is concerned, several studies demonstrate that students' written production considerably benefits from using LCE practices. Students will have the opportunity to learn from mistakes by allowing for different sources of feedback and by being exposed to variety of activities, students acquire multiple skills and enlarge their knowledge through interacting with peers and with the teacher (Yasuda, 2017). Moreover, using LCE practices is found to enrich students' vocabulary and fosters their retention; also, through unlocking their learning potential, and relying on themselves, students acquire useful learning strategies (Tseng, Liou, & Chu, 2020). Besides, through LCE practices, students develop not only cognitive and intellectual abilities, but also they gradually become more proficient learners and produce high quality pieces of writing in terms of accuracy and coherence (Kafipour, Mahmoudi, & Khojasteh, 2018).

Besides creating a context for interacting, task-based and project-based language teaching seems to provide a context for language skills' integration. With regard to writing, the respondents' views were further in line with Hedge's argument that students benefit noticeably from writing in the classroom; "If students experience some success in the classroom, they are more likely to write more at home and gain more motivation and improvement" (Hedge, 2005, p. 13). Similar findings have been revealed with regard to developing translation abilities (Lin, 2019). As Senior 6 described "During sessions in class, the focus may be on developing a particular skill, say writing or speaking for example, but almost always try to use the activities involve students to interactively develop the four skills."; when asked how?, Senior 6 clarified "when doing in-class writing tasks, the students not only write, but also speak about the topics proposed, listen to each other, read the handouts, and write to answer the activities." Congruently, Yasuda (2017) examined the integrated effect of systemic functional linguistics-based genre approach and task-based language teaching on the synchronized development of linguistic knowledge and writing expertise. Yasuda's (2017) findings lend support to the

aforementioned respondent's practice. However, the assumption of developing English language learners' integrated skills "in the background" while keeping the focus on one skill at a time has remained scarcely searched despite the proliferation in task-based ELT studies (Al Kandari, & Al Qattan, 2020; Anwar & Arifani, 2016; Ellis et al., 2019; Lee, 2016; Saaty, 2020). An extended form of TBLT is project-based language teaching (PBLT). The latter was the least used LCE practice among the interviewed teachers due to its "vagueness, especially in terms of assessment" (Novice 2). Coincidentally, PBLT has so far received little attention in ELT theorizing (cf. Beckett & Slater, 2019) and research (cf. Baş & Beyhab, 2017; Poonpon, 2017).

Finally, the respondents, overall, advocate that cooperative and collaborative teaching practices raise students' awareness of their active role and motivation by "making them feel dedicated to acquire the language more effectively in order to achieve more success and better self-esteem and self-confidence in return" (Novice 3). Likewise, research has shown that teachers' behaviors are directly related to students' motivation including behaviors influencing the affective atmosphere of the classroom (Marsh, 2018). Additionally, according to the interview respondents' view, implementing LCE strategies encourages students to be more interactive and productive because they are required to write more inside and outside the classroom. In addition, as one respondent claimed, "the more students are motivated, the harder they work, and the more they write" Senior 4. Indicating the effectiveness of requiring students to write frequently, Hedge (2005, p. 13) argues: "My own experience tells me that in order to be good writers, a student needs to write a lot". Eventually, when students recognize that their contributions are worthy, they develop a "we can, so I can" attitude. "with time, students develop self-confidence and self-reliance that encourage them to enrich their vocabulary and improve their language proficiency in general by working on their own." (Senior 3). Using a combination of LCE strategies is suggested to create variety and engages more students because "all the learners can participate, no matter what their talents might be. Everyone can find satisfaction in using language in different ways to produce interesting and attractive piece of work" (Davies & Pearse, 2000, p.100). By being motivated, students will be more eager to learn from each other (Namaziandost et al., 2019; Rochman, 2019) and from the teacher (Kukulska-Hulme & Viberg, 2018; Saha & Singh, 2016). As a consequence, the students feel more responsible to actively take part in constructing their knowledge (He & Lin, 2019; Morton, 2020), and strategically learn the target language (Lo & Lin, 2019; Zhong et al., 2019).

**Question 3:** From the teachers' perspectives, how can LCE practices be effectively implemented in ELT courses?

The results are in accordance with previous studies that examined the implementation of standards-based educational reforms and found inconsistency between conceptualization and practice in instruction (Nielsen, 2019). In addition, the findings provide evidence that if LCE strategies are to be successfully implemented, teachers need to tailor the implementation of these methods according to their teaching situations through what Kumaravadivelu (2003) refers to as "theorizing from practice". He further explains:

Such a continual cycle of observation, reflection, and action is a prerequisite for the development of context-sensitive pedagogic theory and practice...no theory of practice can be fully useful and usable unless it is generated through practice. A logical corollary is that it is the practicing teacher who, given adequate tools for exploration, is best

suited to produce such a practical theory. The intellectual exercise of attempting to derive a theory of practice enables teachers to understand and identify problems, analyze and assess information, consider and evaluate alternatives, and then choose the best available alternative that is then subjected to further critical appraisal. In this sense, a theory of practice involves continual reflection and action. (p.35)

Taken together, the findings draw attention to the effects of teachers' and students' epistemological beliefs and pre-assumptions of roles and responsibilities on reform implementation, adding, thereby, to previous studies on reform implementation and, more particularly, contributing to the literature on the implementation of LCE (Seah & Silver, 2018) and on the contextualization of second language education (Al-Humaidi, 2015). At this point, it can be argued that, besides being informed about existing choices, teachers need to investigate reform-oriented methods by themselves, neither to conform to nor to reject them, but rather to make sense of them so that they can be meaningfully implemented within their own teaching situations. The findings further raise questions as to how attitudes toward the distribution of roles and responsibilities develop and change and how LCE methods can be better assimilated into educational routines in a particular context.

Figure 2. Sums up the aforementioned implications and illustrates a data-driven model for contextualizing LCE practices into the ELT classrooms.

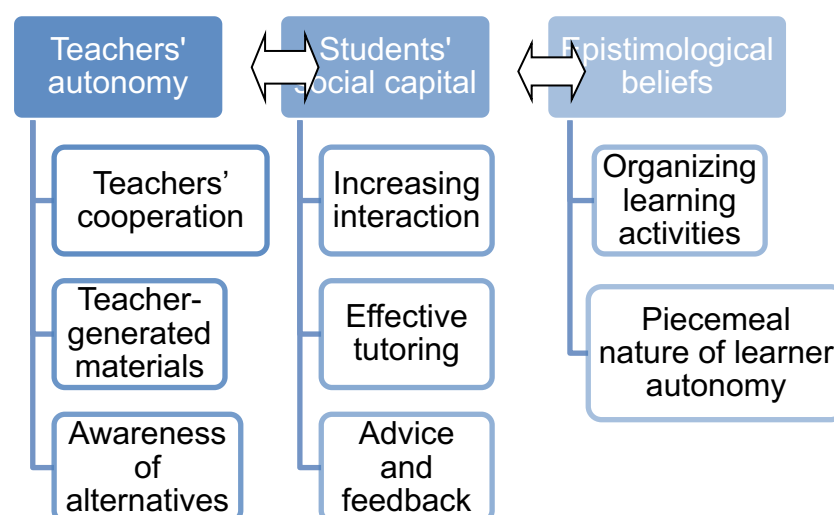


Figure 2. Model for contextualizing LCE in English language teaching

### Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

From the outset of this research, the aim has been to examine the implementation of LCE methods for second language learning in terms of both language and content. What was meant to be done is finding out the limitations and benefits of implementing LCE methods based on university second language instructors' attitudes and experiences. However, this study is not concerned with examining the relationship between implementing LCE methods and a particular aspect of second language learning. For instance, one way to extend the findings of this study is by addressing the effectiveness of LCE methods in promoting English academic writing, in particular, due to the importance of this skill in higher education contexts. It would

also be desirable to conduct such research using experimental or longitudinal designs with the analysis of students' perspectives.

Further intriguing issues with regard to the LCE methods discussed in this study include the challenges and prospects of technology-enhanced language teaching, peer assistance and collaborative learning in this same context of the present study. Other possible areas of research include investigating how the use of cooperative discussion tasks which highlight different aspects, options, and alternatives can enhance students' critical and higher-order thinking. Also, as with most attitudes-focused research, a limitation of this study is that the findings reflect the attitudes and experiences of the study participants; thus, replicating this research in a different context may shed light on other aspects of LCE-oriented reforms. Further research is needed to inspect their actual, isolated and integrated, prospective for promoting English language development among English-major and non-English major learners.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has explored teachers' perceptions of the challenges and benefits associated with the overall usefulness of implementing LCE methods. It, thereby, contributes to research on the interaction between theory and practice for effective educational change.

It can be concluded that, even in the present post-method era, the teacher adopts a particular classroom strategy according to their learners' characteristics and to the whole learning situation as well. According to participants' experiences, the implementation of learner-centered methods in the second language classroom is likely to contribute to the betterment of second language teaching and learning. However, teachers need to progressively introduce LCE methods not necessarily all the methods together or in all of the sessions. Rather, what is to be taken into consideration is that each method shapes and is shaped by the other. For instance, content may shape a task or a project to be completed cooperatively and/or collaboratively. LCE methods interweave and interact with each other in a synergic relationship; the result of such a relationship will vary from context to context depending on the teacher, the learners, and the learning objectives.

Noteworthy, LCE methods may not be effective for full-time use in the second language classroom. The effectiveness of LCE is by no means determined by how much time is spent in learner-centered activities. Rather what matters is what methods are used with whom, for what purpose, and in what way. This is not to gainsay the practical usefulness of LCE though; nor is it to suggest that there are rock-solid golden rules for implementing it. Rather, this article is meant to serve as another contribution to the pool of resources on education reform implementation which both provide educators with insights from, potentially similar, implementation contexts together with a set of suggested instructional activities and guide them toward becoming independent teaching material developers. Interestingly, the findings also indicate a teacher-initiated shift towards social-centeredness in reaction to reform-oriented learner-centeredness.

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## **Russian Accent in English Written Discourse**

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### Abstract

This research is a multi-aspect exploratory investigation of Russian English institutional written discourse and highlights its features demonstrated by Russian native learners, tertiary students of English for the tourism and hospitality industry. The author approaches the theme from the perspectives of World Englishes and the pedagogical agenda. This sample study is based on the analysis of the researcher's corpus of English written works by Russian students. It reveals Russian English discoursal variations as manifestations of ethnolinguistic and ethnocultural identity. The paper highlights users' repeated salient discoursal features, the main of which appeared to be in communication strategies, structure, and register. Specific choices of linguistic, stylistic, structural and strategic variables result in the uncovered Russian English discoursal features, such as straightforwardness, excessive evaluation, abuse of negation and others. The research also focuses on their possible unwelcome pragmatic effects in business communication. This paper is a contribution to scarce comprehensive World Englishes discourse studies, particularly to the under-explored theme of Russian English. Revelation of local voices in English discourse and their interpretation in terms of indigenous languages and cultures may be a demanded addition to the World Englishes theory and practice. The pedagogical inferences of this research suggest that culturally relevant English-as-a-foreign-language teaching should take into account the English discoursal profile of learners resulting from their interfering native profile to improve pedagogical practices.

*Keywords:* Russian accent, Russian English discoursal variations, World Englishes, discourse analysis, pragmatic dissonance.



As English is learned in Russia as a foreign language (EFL) to be used as a means of communication with native speakers and non-native speakers globally, it is evident that mastering English discourse is becoming a most important target, especially for today's students of English for Special Purposes (ESP) preparing to join the professional world community tomorrow. According to Graddol (1997, 2006), English used by non-natives poses at least two issues:

“English as a global lingua franca requires intelligibility and the setting and maintaining of standards” (Graddol, 1997, p. 3); and

“as English becomes more widely used as a global language, it will become expected that speakers will signal their nationality, and other aspects of their identity through English” (Graddol, 2006, p. 117).

Unlike prevalent linguistic EFL error-sensitive areas in grammar, syntax and mechanics (Pescante-Malimas and Samson, 2017, p. 194), particular vulnerable areas in EFL discourse have not become the focus of much scholarly attention yet. Meanwhile, as the overwhelming majority of English learners come from various non-native ethnic backgrounds there arises a pedagogical priority of exploring their discursal specifics. As Kachru (1997) pinpoints, it is equally legitimate to acquaint foreign writers with rhetorical patterns common to Inner Circle Englishes and at the same time to disclose to English educators differing rhetorical conventions of the world majority learners of English (p.161). Many of such learners are Russians and according to the author's previous quantitative studies, English discourse imperfections rank second after grammar in the most numerous errors of Russian learners (Figure 1).

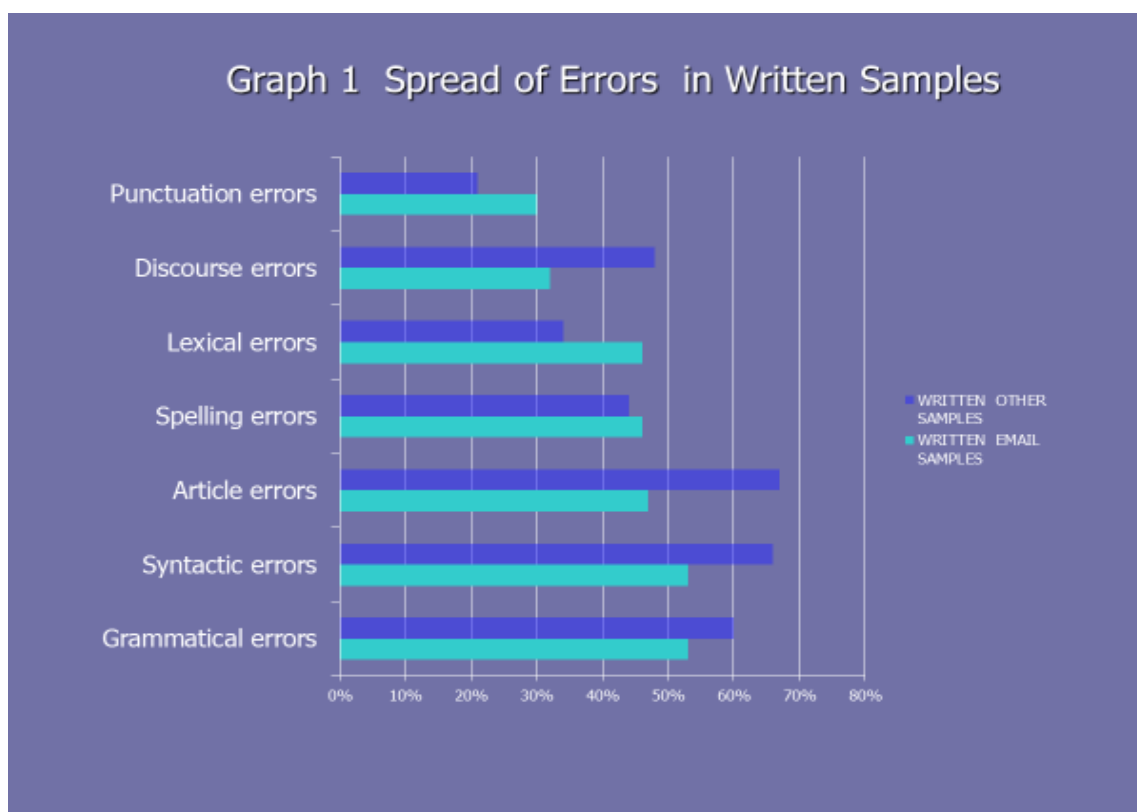


Figure 1. Share of discourse in the total of written errors of Russian learners

The data in Figure 1 show the average percentage of student informants out of the total number of 160 who made particular types of errors in English writing. The kinds of writing analysed were students' email messages to the researcher and written business genres important for students of tourism and hospitality. As the graph shows, the most widely spread errors were made by Russian natives in articles usage, grammar, syntax and discourse. Approximately every second informant violated discursial practices applied by natives in corresponding genres. This makes EFL discourse a zone of special pedagogical attention.

Forming discourse competence in a foreign language is a great challenge. First, there are no settled rules or prescriptions to assume because of the complex hierarchy of the subject and World Englishes diversity. Second, inevitable cross-cultural and cognitive barriers worsen discourse comprehension and production. As Rifkin and Roberts (1995) illuminate, a message can be both understandable and irritating, highly comprehensible and “foreign” (p. 522). In other words, there is something to EFL text that accounts for this “aftertaste”, and this something may be discursial inadequacy.

### **Literature Review**

Discourse study is a multi-focus endeavour. It can become an identification tool: What people are saying or writing makes recognisable who they are, and the ways they are writing construct what they are actually doing (Gee, 2004, p. 48).

White accentuated the influence of factors making spoken and written texts to seem well formed. (Canale, & Swane, 1980, cited in White, 1997, part 3 “Intercomprehensibility & Communicative Competence”). The knowledge of discourse rules is socially shared, and to make mutual understanding possible, “social actors share norms, values and rules of communication” (Van Dijk, 1997, p. 17). It means that, in order to be accurately understood, EFL users have to share them too.

It is important for EFL users to be aware of various discourse dimensions and realise the appropriateness of discourse elements usage at several levels. One of the most crucial and insufficiently investigated World Englishes dimensions is discourse strategies. Cots interprets them as “the systematic adoption of a series of verbal actions which respond to a more or less conscious plan or communicative routine to achieve a specific goal” (Cots, 1996, p. 94). It is here that non-native English users run the greatest risk of making “faux pas” producing unintended effects. Meanwhile, there is evidence that recipients are often less tolerant of pragmatic failures of their foreign interlocutors in intercultural communication contexts than they are of grammatical errors. Thus, Thomas (1983) emphasised the importance of pragmatic competence, as in international contexts it is pragmatic failure that affects communication rather than grammatical and lexical deficiency. Pragmatic dissonance may be cognition-bound or culture-rooted and is a special focus in EFL pedagogical contexts. Moreover, researchers claim that pragmatic failure can deny learners access to valuable academic or professional opportunities (Tanaka, 1997). Consequently, a particular WE discourse accent may pose an issue from communicative, social and pedagogical perspectives.

One of the serious obstacles in discourse study is the fact that unlike other language levels, discourse has no codified norm to which to resort. Therefore, the practical concern for EFL learners pertains to which English discourse norm they should regularly employ. Linguists give various answers. Kachru and Smith (2008) highlight an acrolect, or a preferred dialect, of an educated variety of English used for international communication (p.60). In McArthur's terms

(2001), it may be English as a Native Language (ENL) and International Standard English (ISE), which is globally used preserving the essential unity of English as a means of international communication. Unfortunately, for EFL learners, ENL and ISE differ. The idea of two diverging Englishes was highlighted by Crystal (1988, p. 265). Since ISE is not clearly described and remains no stable variety, it becomes unreliable from pedagogical perspectives. Consequently, the teaching model in the Expanding Circle should remain the native norm (Mollin, 2006, p. 54). Echoing this opinion, Saraceni (2016) acknowledges that World Englishes are mostly described in terms of the extent of their deviation from more established varieties (p. 79). Eligibly, this research considers ENL discourse patterns as a benchmark. Although there is no monolithic ENL, trustworthy authoritative British and American ENL sources of “model” exemplars and judgements about expected discourse features were considered. Digressions from them by Russian English (RE) users might be regarded as their discursal accent, because as Kachru (1983) argued, unlike mistakes, deviations are “the result of a productive process which makes the typical variety-specific features; and it is systemic within a variety and not idiosyncratic” (p. 159).

The Oxford Dictionary defines accent as “[def.1] a distinctive way of pronouncing a language, especially one associated with a particular country, area, or social class” (Oxford Dictionary of English, 2010, p.9). Scholars have already admitted foreign accents in written discourse and noticed that unlike face-to-face interactions, online communication makes categories of L2 identity less salient (Klimanova & Dembovskaya, 2013). In other words, a foreign accent can exist in oral and written discourse, although it is less conspicuous in the latter. Revelation of such accents and their interpretation by means of local culture contributes to the World Englishes theory and practice and may be pedagogically meaningful.

There have been a number of contrastive studies of English and Russian discourses recently, many of them by Russian researchers, such as Khoutyz (2013), Klimanova and Dembovskaya (2013), Uzlenko (2002) and others. Each concentrated on a particular aspect of cross-linguistic analysis of English and Russian discourse such as difference in reader engagement strategy, in social interaction behavior, and in symbolic meaning of folklore concepts accordingly. However, there has not been attempted a multi-aspect viewing of English written discourse strategies of Russian natives. The focus of this research, therefore, is on insufficiently investigated English discourse strategies as problem areas for foreign learners and characteristic RE discourse features. Written discourse is chosen because it constitutes a considerable share of business interaction in tourism, is functionally important for professionals, and, as evidenced by Godfrey (2016), clear written communication is ranked within the top five employability advantages (p. 114).

### Research Questions

Considering the importance of maintaining standards of written discourse by foreign students in view of potential pragmatic misfire; sparse scholarly information about written ENL features, and scarce data about RE discursal features, this study was undertaken to seek answers to the following Research Questions:

- a) What are the main acknowledged ENL prototypical features of written discourse in general and relevant written genres in particular?
- b) What are the multi-aspect characteristic features of RE written discourse and how do they compare to the ENL prototypical ones, if at all? How may they result in pragmatic dissonance? What may underlie differences?
- c) What kind of pedagogical implications may follow?

## Methodology

### Theoretical Framework

This exploratory research relies on the World Englishes theory of Kachru (1983) and Bolton (2004); discourse theory relevant to language learning developed by Cook (1989), Van Dijk (1997), Gee (2004), Paltridge (2012), Kachru (1997); as well as comparative discourse studies of Swales (1990). Also to be considered is the field of cultural linguistics as noted by Sharifian (2011) as “unfamiliarity with the systems of conceptualisations on which the international speakers of English are relying may lead to various forms and degrees of discomfort and even miscommunication” (p. 95). Since the researcher does not share the ENL linguistic repertoire and has insufficient “insider knowledge” (Saraceni, 2016, p. 97), a look at the studied matter through native familiar behavioural patterns of the researcher was practiced. Saraceni titled this approach “tourist gaze”, as the things that leap to the eye are those that stand out being different from familiar “home” features. The author also drew on Bhatia’s (2013) model of discourse genre analysis regarding integrated communicative purpose, structural patterns, distinctive textual characteristics, and rhetorical conventions.

### Methods

As there are no ready-made data banks of Russian English, the researcher's corpus of students' written samples was set up and investigated. The data were received over the period of 2013-2018. The informants were Russian native male and female adult tertiary students of tourism and hospitality of various ages: undergraduates for the specialist diploma, for bachelor's and master's degrees at the Moscow Institute of Tourism Industry. They used English in natural contexts (writing a trip report about one's journey) or quasi-natural contexts (simulated written activities in suggested professional situations like replying to a customer's letter of complaint, refusing a customer's request). Most written products were homework submitted by email, some were presented in handwriting in contact classroom sessions. Taking into consideration Van Dijk's (1997) requirement for discourse analysis known as “naturally occurring text or talk” (p.29), the samples were not edited and were studied in their appearance. The pedagogical context of the researcher reduced the genre range to professionally relevant ones. Thus, the research concentrated on such ESP genres as business letters and email messages of confirmation and cancellation, of request and refusal, of complaint and apology, cover letters, curriculum vitae, trip reports, as well as essays and home reading reviews. The total number of discourse samples analysed was 220. The number of informants involved amounted to 160 persons.

Data collection involved convenience sampling, that is, gathering written documents of students the researcher was teaching in particular years. The size of the sample corresponded to the normal size of many business genres and was one-page text of about 1800 signs.

The following study design applied:

- a) ENL scholars', writers' and rhetoricians' judgments about intrinsic English discourse features were summarised. The researcher, a native Russian, applied the “tourist gaze” approach to English written discourse of the selected genres in order to spot uncommon to Russian similar written genres features (trustworthy ENL resources of British Council, FluentU blog were used). Discoursal characteristic features of English as described by natives and spotted as noticeable by the researcher made up a kind of a matrix to judge RE discourse in terms of comparison with ENL.

- b) The RE discourse corpus of student-authored written samples was processed. The raw data were browsed through and coded with a predefined set of ENL dimensions codes, categorised and juxtaposed with the above qualities to identify the most visible features. The main principle for identifying RE discourse salient features was demonstration of the same feature by several informants rather than the number of a feature's occurrences, as the latter could result from some idiosyncratic preferences. Results below encompass only common and repeated specifics found in more than five people's works.

Although discourse analysis deals with complex and unstructured data, scholars have a choice of computer-aided tools for this purpose today (Stegmeier, 2012), like JASP (Love et al., 2019). Despite the fact that these platforms can extract topics from texts and create annotations, they are mainly useful for quantitative linguistic elements counts, frequency of word combinations, and parts-of-speech information. Such subtle matter as discourse strategies and their pragmatic effects are beyond their scope. That is why this research employed an e-tool only for assessing evaluative attitude, or sentiment analysis. The Stanford CoreNLP Natural Language Processing toolkit (Manning et al., 2014) was chosen for its accessibility and clear visualisation of prevailing in-text positive or negative attitudes in tree graphs.

During the research the themes and tasks offered to students did not involve any sensitive information, trespassing upon privacy, or personal identification. All quoted examples of RE discourse are participant students' quotations.

### Findings and Discussion

The research revealed a set of certain characteristic ENL discourse qualities that may distinguish it from other ethno-cultural discourses, presenting it at three levels (Table 1).

#### *(1) General discourse qualities.*

Researchers highlight the English tendencies to laconism (Visson, 2015, p. 82); factual presentation of information (Condon & Yousef, 1975); non-categorical indirectness and unobtrusiveness (Loveday, 1982; Leech, 1983) eased by softeners like *couldn't/wouldn't, I'm afraid that, rather* in contrast to Russian "self-confidence and dogmatism" (Visson, 2015, p. 78-81); positivity, unwelcome negation because of its psychologically intimidating impact on ENL users (Visson, 2015, p. 32–33) and so on. These are due to deeply rooted cognitive patterns or culture-based practices.

#### *(2) Particular discourse qualities determined by the channel of communication (oral, multimodal or, as in this research, a written channel).*

It has been noted that English written text requires clear structuring and cohesion of four types (Kirkpatrick, 1999, p. 49-50). Besides, it is characterised by explicitness or low context (Paltridge, 2012, p. 138; Khoutyz, 2013, p. 3). As Paltridge (2012) testifies, "spoken texts may be more implicit and leave a lot of what is to be understood unsaid whereas written texts (in English at least) may often be more explicit" (p. 138). Apart from that, English written discourse is marked by a high level of nominalisation that is presenting actions and events with nouns, rather than verbs (Paltridge, 2012, p. 137; Visson, 2015, p. 159; Uzlenko, 2002), which may align with the above-mentioned characteristic of laconism.

Interactivity as addressee awareness and self-engagement also characterises written English discourse. Hyland (2005) paid attention to the interactional quality of English texts marked by

boosters (definitely, absolutely) and hedges (possibly, hopefully, might) providing indirect evidence of the author presence and materialising such quality as self-identification (p. 49).

*(3) Special qualities determined by a particular discourse genre.*

As Paltridge (2012) pointed out, genres are culture specific with particular purposes and linguistic features (p.65). According to Swales (1990), a discourse genre has its own form, structure, contents and positioning determined by audience expectations (p.49). A written text may not seem plausible if its structural, linguistic, stylistic and content elements and their arrangement do not correspond to the “prototypical” features of the corresponding ENL discourse genre. Some dimensions of ENL genre discourse important for EFL learners are indicated in the table below.

Table 1. Target English discourse dimensions

General qualities	Written English qualities	Genre-bound qualities
Factual presentation	Explicitness	Content
Laconism	Nominalisation	Structure and frame (e.g. required opening and closing part corresponding to each other and the purpose of the genre)
Positivity	Self-engagement	Register (tone)
Non-categorical indirectness	Addressee-awareness by the writer	Acceptable discourse strategies of particular functions (requesting, refusing, face-saving, apologising etc.)
Non-evaluative presentation	Punctuation and spelling specificity (I not i as a pronoun, capital letter following the colon sign, capitalised nouns in titles, avoidance of exclamation mark etc.)	Communicative style (e.g. full sentences vs noun collocations; metaphorical vs non-metaphorical narration, with/without humour etc.)
	Elaborate structuring and cohesion (special markers, long noun groups, complex sentences types)	Language specificity (clichés, terminology, idioms, abbreviations etc.)
		Layout patterns

RE samples analysis pursued answers to the following questions: Do RE discourse samples demonstrate these characteristics? What are the most typical RE users discourse features? The results showed the following typical variations on the prototypical qualities.

### General Qualities of RE Discourse: Positivity, Non-Evaluation, Non-Categorical Stance

The analysis of RE 1-page essay samples showed that 64% of the informants made 3 to 7 negations per sample, so were not fully positive (negative verbal forms or negative adjective or noun prefix counted). The individual peak of negations recorded was 12 per essay. Here is an extract from this essay by Darya:

People think that zoos help endangered species to survive. But this is **not** true because most rare animals are extremely difficult to breed in captivity. In addition, it is nearly **impossible** to meet the animals' natural needs in zoos. On this basis I can conclude that zoos do **not** seem to help endangered species and keeping animals behind bars only for the sake of our entertainment is **not** quite fair.

These findings echo the opinion of Visson (2015), whose contrastive analysis of English and Russian discourses revealed dissonance between Russian linguistic “negativism” and “pessimism” and American “optimism and positive thinking” (p.31, 33).

Considering the non-evaluative quality of discourse, 71% of the Russian informants mostly imparted evaluative attitudes to their writing. The counts were based on three or more words with an evaluative sememe per sample. Students used the following highly evaluative lexis: *Terrible, disgusting, aggressive, boring, huge, helpful, enjoyable, great, outstanding; victims, suspicion, violence, happiness; efficiently; and destroy*. These findings confirm the comparative cognitive study of Uzenko about the difference between the Russian and English linguistic mindset. It revealed mostly non-evaluative, tending to be impartial English discourse as opposed to predominantly evaluative Russian one (Узленко, 2002). The fact that the evaluative quality is confirmed on the material of two researches testifies to the fact that there may be cognitive causes underpinning ENL and RE discursal differences. Native cognitive schema present a great risk for transferring them to international contexts.

The non-categorical stance appeared hard to trace in RE written discourse. Russian students of English do not typically use such markers as *rather, fairly, hardly, likely, possibly, might, some, would, I am afraid, I am sorry but, or regrettably*. Here are some examples:

- (1) “I want to ask you to return the money” (a bid for a refund).
- (2) “Our holiday was spoilt through the fault of the hotel” (a letter of complaint).
- (3) “Go to the Baikal. You will like it!” (A trip report).

Being non-categorical is a fundamental quality and a form of politeness in English communication, that is why ignoring it may lead to pragmatic failure or some unwelcome outcome, such as reluctance to refund the money or to visit Lake Baikal. The RE specifics shown above tend to demonstrate interfering native discourse features.

### Qualities of Written RE

RE written samples were checked for such qualities as explicitness, self-engagement, addressee awareness, and style of writing.

**Explicitness.** Explicitness was marked by broken cause and effect relations, omitted textual conclusion or content required by the context (missing names, dates), unclear allusions, evasive promises without specific dates, exact amounts and other details. An extract from a RE trip report below from the student Svetlana serves as an illustrative example:

I won't describe all delights of travel in second-class carriage of the train, I can only say that we were 'very pleased' with the number of the wagon 13. Superstitions and everything. However, we got to Ulan-Ude lucky. We transferred from the railway station to the bus station with a small adventure. Two hours later, we were admiring the expanse of the great lake.

This piece of RE contains reference to one of Russian superstitions, the belief that number 13 spells ill luck. This unwelcome circumstance is marked by "very pleased" in inverted commas and by mention of superstition without any explanation. Writing this report for TripAdvisor, the author overlooked the fact that superstitions are culturally-rooted and may differ globally, which makes her text inexplicit in international contexts. Besides, there is mention of some adventure, which is left behind the scene without any comments. This leaves the reader wondering why it was mentioned at all. In a word, RE reticence may run counter to the English requirement of explicitness. This phenomenon can be explicated by the high context of Russian culture in contrast to lower-context ENL cultures (Hall, 1976). RE writers keep from dotting their i's and crossing t's in order not to seem trivial or to offend readers doubting their intellectual capacity. This feature was noticed by other researchers (Khutyzy, 2013, p. 3). Alternately, lower-context Anglo cultures "embed much more meaning in the words that make up their verbal messages" (Hackman & Johnson, 2000, p. 301). Failure to follow this expectation is likely to produce the effect of a pragmatic dissonance and discursal accent.

**Self-engagement.** Self-engagement or self-involvement was demonstrated by 68% of the informants in their essays. Only samples with three or more markers like *I*, *my*, *as far as I can judge*, *I think*, or *in my opinion* per sample were taken into account. The personal maximum of self-identification instances came up to 22 per essay. In other words, the majority of students were not afraid of being personal and self-involved. This result runs counter to the data of Khutyzy (2013, p. 7) who compared English and Russian English academic articles and discovered that English-writing scholars more often than their Russian counterparts use the first-person singular pronouns. Such strategy is culture-rooted, as ENL users belong to individualistic cultures, and Russians are from a moderately collectivist culture background (Lewis, 2006), where it is in bad taste to point to oneself. The contradictory results may be due to the difference in the genres studied (personal essay vs academic paper). However, it may be a forerunner of a new trend in RE discourse under the influence of communicating globally in English.

**Addressee-awareness.** Reader awareness was demonstrated by 57% of the informants, which is less than in the case of self-engagement. This quality materialised with such markers as *you*, *your*, *we*, "*It's a well-known fact that*", "*We shouldn't forget*", "*It's up to you to*", imperatives "*Be yourself*", "*Don't be afraid*", rhetorical questions like "*Why are people fond of books?*", and "*Who wouldn't like to visit Lake Baikal?*" Since the researcher did not set the pre-task of applying these techniques by students, the fact that the majority of them demonstrated these two vernacular English written discourse strategies proves that they are not foreign to Russians and do not need much pedagogical effort.

**Style of writing.** A widely spread feature of Russian English business messages is the profuse usage of contracted forms, which produces an effect of careless familiarity sooner than expected. What is more, contractions may peacefully coexist in the same message with the formal markers like "*Dear Sir*" and "*Yours faithfully*". Evidently, stylistic consistency and full-form writing in English seem to pose a problem for Russian users despite the fact that



contracted forms do not exist in written Russian to interfere. It may be the result of intra-communicative interference of social netting.

RE users' written style is characterised by some noticeable punctuation features, which were highlighted in the author's earlier papers (Bondarenko, 2015, p. 99), the most salient characteristic being the abuse of the exclamation mark even in institutional writing. According to the data received, every third informant used it at least once per text.

### **RE Lexical Markers**

The reason for foreign looking text may be lexis as well. The research revealed substitution of descriptive word combinations and paraphrases for special terms and clichés, which is especially ruinous for business communication: "*The place of the event*" (the venue); "*the administrator on duty*" (the duty manager); and "*possibilities to eat*" (winning and dining facilities).

Another cause of the lexical "foreign effect" was connotation blindness of Russian writers. They are often unaware of the negative lexical connotations, for instance:

- (1) You must comment on the gala dinner menu attached here.
- (2) The problems of inbound tourism will be considered at the conference.
- (3) The toilets en route were dirty and not free.

"*Must*" is too imperative and authoritative a verb to use writing to a client. The word "*problem*" has a disapproving connotation in ENL communication. Ignorance of euphemisms ("*facilities*", "*the gents*", "*the ladies*") makes RE discourse seem too brusque and lacking courtesy.

### **Genre-bound RE Discourse Qualities**

**Structural RE variations.** Analysis of RE samples disclosed the following features. First, RE learners tend to avoid in business letters the introductory sentence stating the purpose of the message or gratitude for the previous message of the addressee. They prefer to take the bull by the horns from the very start without performative statements of apologising, or requesting like "I am writing to enquire about":

- (1) Dear Sir/Madam,  
Yesterday late in the evening I arrived in Spain and checked into the Don Angel Hotel (letter of complaint).
- (2) Dear Ms. Lari,  
On behalf of the Don Angel Hotel, kindly accept our sincere apologies for not being able to provide you the high standard of hospitality (letter of apology).

Second, RE writers like to preface factual narration with an evaluative emotional statement:

- (1) It was a terrific time spent together. We visited four cities: Dresden, Nuremberg, Munich and Stuttgart. We enjoyed the October beer festival.
- (2) Two days ago I returned from your Tour ST 104/5. I am so annoyed that I was there! The standards and the organization were awful. I have a number of comments about it.

The above structural features of RE discourse give evidence of some straightforwardness, impulsiveness and a strong emotional dominant, which is, by and large, in accord with the immoderate Russian national character as described in scholarly literature (Евтушенко, 2008, p. 105–106). Structural conventions are significant for successful communication, for “being a social outsider is very much a case of non-conformity to the norms and regularities of discourse structure” (Cook, 1989, p. 23).

**RE discourse strategies.** RE strategies of **requesting** turned out to be rather direct and less polite than ENL requirements. Below are some eloquent quotations:

- (1) Could you give us details about discounts?
- (2) We are very sorry but we have to ask your company to refund the money paid for the tour.
- (3) We should inform you that we demand a credit note toward the next deal.
- (4) We demand you have a proper attitude to our tourists.
- (5) Send us a check.
- (6) Please deal with this matter urgently, otherwise we will be forced to take the matter further.

The chosen examples are arranged in the order of growing brusqueness from the first politely neutral, through attempted softeners (we are sorry, we should inform you that) to an open warning demonstrating request strategies rather different from normally applied standards. Lewis (2006) testifies to vagueness and understatement of English people as manifestation of non-confrontation (p. 63). On the contrary, Russian strategies of verbal politeness are less elaborate in terms of discursal means and are reduced to a proper intonation and a special word – “пожалуйста” (please). As evidenced by other researchers, negative transfer may occur when “learning in one context negatively influences one’s performance in another context” (Hajian, 2019, p. 103).

RE strategies of **refusal** were also characterised with some straightforwardness without any verbal markers heralding bad news (although, however, whereas, unfortunately): “I was delighted to receive your offer but I will not be able to accept it”. In sensitive situations like refusal, RE users do not seem to care about face-saving, and at best exclude the addressee from the motivation of the refusal: “Another candidate’s qualifications better meet our requirements” (not yours); “I have accepted an offer from another company” (not yours).

RE samples of **apologising** have demonstrated examples of adopting such a strategy as fault-shifting:

- (1) It was not our fault.
- (2) I was very sorry to hear that the honeymoon of Mr. and Mrs. Kotov was spoiled through the fault of the Garden Hotel. The hotel did not cope with their duties and the staff in charge will be punished for their mistake. I will personally sort it out.

As can be seen, there is an attempt to keep face without resort to corporate ethics saving the reputation of the company. This is a kind of split-off from traditional Russian collectivism and may be suggestive of starting ethno-psychological changes in the Russian mindset. Besides, RE apologies are marked with verbal preference of the plural *We* to the singular *I*, especially in the opposition of collective responsibility versus personal actions: “*We are sorry for the*

*incident”; “Please accept our apologies for....”; “Our agency regrets”; “I can assure you that...”; “I will refund you the full amount”.*

Such language preferences can be interpreted from the ethno-psychological perspective as readiness of Russian natives to take decisive actions personally and, at the same time, certain reluctance to assume individual responsibility for doing wrong, preferring instead to share it with others concerned.

It is also worth mentioning such a noticeable RE “repair” technique in face-threatening messages as a “thank you” note at the end: *“Thank you for your cooperation”* (after asking for a refund); *“Thank you for your understanding”* (at the end of an apology letter); *“Thank you in advance”* (at the end of a letter of complaint). *“I believe I am entitled to a partial refund. I would be grateful if you could deal with this matter as soon as possible. I look forward to hearing from you. Thanking you in advance. Your faithfully”* (a letter of complaint).

This friendly gesture in an awkward situation makes a negative reply at the other end harder to make. However, this self-defensive strategy may produce pragmatic dissonance felt as weakness by the addressee because ENL cultures, especially North American, value assertiveness, pressure and persistence (Elashmawi, 2001, pp. 36, 38, 48). Such pragmatic dissonance can be explicated by the fact that Englishes are affected by users’ cultural and linguistic backgrounds and reflect their specific conventions mirrored in the schemas they use (Kirkpatrick, 2007, p.9).

The cover letter by the student Sergey below illustrates a multi-aspect RE discourse accent:

Dear Mr. Ferdinand

Having functioned as front office duty manager at IterContinental Moscow tverskaya for the last several years, I would like to serve as the Front office manager at Holiday Inn Taganskiy.

After almost 2 years working experience on the reception desk I've grown like a staff member and like a person as well. I've learned a lot of leadership skills and now there are about 3 people, who I responsible for.

Notice in my enclosed resume that I have:

- Strong Leadership skills
- Working involvement in progress and growth
- Stress-resistant

I have a proven great work and amazing results under pressure — and I can't wait until I can help you and your great team! Thank you for your consideration of my attached resume and cover letter. I'll check in with you next week to see when I can fit into your interview calendar.

Sincerely yours

As it is seen, alongside with some spelling, grammar and lexical mistakes the letter has an unusual structure (no opening sentence with reference to the information source about the vacancy, no paragraphing), non-prototypical rather direct and categorical laudatory comments without factual proof, self-centred, not company-centred. The tone is more presumptuous than respectful (the imperative recommendation to notice, the promise to participate in an interview

before being shortlisted). The emotional exclamatory mark, “thank-you” technique, and contracted forms are also there.

### **Summary**

As a result of this research, ENL discorsal features of relevant written genres were discovered and explored. Written RE repeated characteristic features were uncovered and inferences made about their correspondence to the expected qualities: RE is less positive and explicit but more direct and categorical, lacks addressee awareness and lexical accuracy as compared to ENL discourse. Genre-bound RE discourse is characterised by specific discourse strategies, such as evaluative attitude, emotional preamble before factual narration, and “thank you” courtesy closing phrases in the function of “advance payment” for expected response. The revealed RE discorsal variations can be explicated by the World English variety functioning in a Russian socio-cultural context, local cognition, negative transfer of Russian discorsal practices. These variations combined form a part of Russian learners’ specific discourse profile to be considered for reorientation of EFL instruction toward culturally relevant discourse teaching based on comparative discourse strategies analysis. Thus, this research significance is in highlighting the issue of selective approach toward discourse qualities that need special pedagogical effort from EFL instructors and learners and in outlining such qualities for Russian learners of English.

### **Recommendations**

Sensitising Russian students to problem-prone EFL discourse dimensions and making them visible for other learners are a worthy challenge because it makes them zones of focused attention and scaffolding for educators. To this effect, it can be recommended to redistribute time budget in favour of problem areas in order to efficiently approximate prototypical discorsal qualities through focused tasks and exercises, parallelly developing intercultural pragmatic awareness. The exploratory nature and limited scope of this research necessitate more data about RE discourse features from the perspectives of describing RE discorsal variety. It would seem illuminating to carry out comparative discourse genre analyses between ENL and particular Expanding Circle varieties, including RE. Besides, further research is required from educators to develop pragmatic awareness of students and elaborate efficient cross-cultural discorsal customisation.

### **Conclusion**

This research attempted a multi-aspect investigation of RE written institutional discourse and highlighted its features. It confirmed the importance of cross-cultural aspects of foreign language discourse learning and teaching and revealed Russian learners’ problem areas in mastering discourse competence. Besides, distinctive ENL discourse features were clarified.

The main RE variables lie in the field of communicative strategies, structure, register, and lexical choices. Inconsistency with the target discourse qualities and written genre patterns may lead to unwelcome pragmatic effects in international contexts because of failure to meet addressee’s expectations. It concerns such RE qualities as unavailable or low interactivity, abuse of negation, overdosed evaluation, insufficient nominalisation, familiarity, communicative straightforwardness, etc. Put together and regularly repeated these features account for Russian accent in English written discourse. RE discourse profile can serve as a manifestation of Russian identity in the Expanding Circle and could be taken into account by others as part of intercultural communication courses within EFL paradigm. Thus, the present

research is a small contribution to scarce comprehensive World Englishes discourse studies, particularly, to the under-explored theme of Russian English and may stimulate its further studies as well as investigation of discourse variations in other Englishes.

EFL learners often shape their discourse competence in monocultural contexts preparing for international contacts. That is why, although Expanding Circle learners and teachers of English need discourse models on which to rely, they will also need skills of cross-cultural discursal reconceptualisation. This fact makes mastering ENL discourse standards only a core basis of EFL discourse competence with necessary further multiple cross-cultural adjustments to follow.

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**Exploring the Tagalog-English Code-Switching Types Used for  
Mathematics Classroom Instruction**

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed to examine the types of Tagalog-English code-switching used in mathematics classroom discourse. Four purposively selected tertiary level math teachers in a college situated in a rural area in the Philippines were part of the study. Using a qualitative approach, data were gathered through non-participant class observations and interviews with selected math teachers and students. Syntactic analysis of code-switching types was done to categorize the Tagalog-English utterances. The findings showed that Tagalog-English intrasentential code-switching, which accounts for 58% of the code-switched utterances, was the most dominant type present in math teachers' spoken discourse, and this was evident when math teachers had to explain math concepts and solutions, or provide examples, among others. Intersentential code-switching made up 38% of code-switched utterances, while tag switching was used very sparingly. It is recommended that the use of Tagalog-English intrasentential code-switching for math lesson delivery and content knowledge explanation be considered.

*Keywords:* Tagalog-English code-switching, code-switching types, intrasentential code-switching, tertiary level, math teachers

English was introduced to the Philippine education system at the time of the American occupation in the 1900s and was sustained in the post-colonial years. In higher education institutions (HEIs), the directive of the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) is to teach mathematics in English or Filipino. For instance, the University of the Philippines (UP), the country's premier national university, prescribes the use of Filipino at the undergraduate level, while English and Filipino are used at the graduate level (University of the Philippines [UP], 2014). In other Philippine HEIs, English is widely used as the main language in academic discourse, particularly in science and mathematics (Bernardo & Gaerlan, 2012; Commission on Higher Education [CHED], 2013).

While a new language policy in the basic education program (BEP) is implemented through Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), Filipino teachers in the tertiary level and students in the secondary and tertiary levels in the past years up to the present are products of the education system that espoused the BEP, which may explain the difficulty of Filipino learners in mathematics. For a majority of Filipinos who neither use Filipino nor English as the first language, the BEP was cognitively and linguistically challenging (Bernardo, 2008; Gonzalez, 2002; Tupas & Lorente, 2014). When students do not understand what the teacher says because the subject is taught in a second or foreign language, learning challenges may abound. Thus, to address students' learning difficulties, a communication technique that Filipino teachers use in math classes involves the combination of two languages, otherwise known as code-switching (CS).

CS is defined as the “juxtaposition within the same speech exchange of passage of speech belonging to two grammatical systems or subsystems” (Gumperz, cited in Romaine, 1995, p. 121). It is a natural linguistic resource among bilingual and multilingual speakers (Gulzar, 2010; Muthusamy, 2010; Setati, Adler, Reed, & Bapoo, 2002), and a communication strategy used to compensate for missing language (Brown, 2007).

In the Philippines, a widely-used CS variety is Tagalog-English, or Taglish, which is formed by merging the first part of the word **Tagalog** and the last syllable of **English**. Taglish is the colloquial term for the alternation of Tagalog, a local language from the Philippines, and English in the same discourse. Tagalog has branched out into various dialects used in several provinces in the Philippines, such as Laguna, Cavite, Mindoro, Quezon, and Rizal, among others. It is important to note that Taglish has to be distinguished from Filipino-English CS. Filipino is the national language of the Philippines, and Filipino-English CS is the variety often used in Metro Manila.

As a language of instruction (LOI) in the classroom, CS is identified as short switches from the learners' mother tongue to the official LOI, and vice versa (Probyn, 2015). Considered as a common practice in education (Setati & Adler, 2000), it is argued that CS bridges the gap in classroom discourse (Al-Adnani & Elyas, 2016; Moore, 2002) and is a practical measure that content subject teachers take to aid students with low English language proficiency in understanding lessons (Probyn, 2015). This claim is plausibly supported by a number of studies that show its use in classroom instruction in various levels and in different learning areas (e.g., Abad, 2010; Borlongan et al., 2012; Gulzar, 2010; Lin, 2013; Muthusamy, 2010; Li, 2008; Pitpit, 2004). In the classroom context, the key participants in CS are teachers, students, and teacher aides (Li, 2008).

### Types of Code-Switching

The types of CS are commonly included as a variable in studies on CS as they provide insights on the language competence of bilingual and multilingual speakers. Poplack (cited in Hamers & Blanc, 2000) developed a typology often cited in literature which identifies three CS types. CS can occur between sentences (*intersentential*), within a sentence (*intrasentential*), or as a tag in one language into an utterance entirely in another language (*extra-sentential* or *tag switching*). Intersentential switches occur at the sentence or clause boundary. On the other hand, intrasentential switches are considered as the more complex or “intimate” type of switching, “since a code-switched segment, and those around it, must conform to the underlying syntactic rules of two languages which bridge constituents and link them together grammatically” (Poplack, 2000, p. 230). In another study, it was noted that intrasentential switching is the most complex form of CS as “it involves the greatest syntactic risk since the switching between languages occurs within the clause or sentence boundaries” (Liu, 2010, p. 11). Finally, tag switches, together with single noun switches, are described as a less intimate type, and “are often heavily loaded in ethnic content and would be placed low on a scale of translatability” (Poplack, 2000, p. 230).

### Related Studies

It is argued that CS is indicative of a speaker’s degree of bilingual competence. The alternation between two languages requires a large degree of linguistic competence on the part of the speaker to be able to switch smoothly from one language to another. Poplack’s (2000) 1980’s study, which observed the Spanish-English CS of non-fluent bilinguals in a Puerto Rican community, showed that in the 1,835 switches made, no ungrammatical combinations of the L1 and the L2 were noted. Skilled CS is characterized by smooth transition between elements of L1 and L2, “unmarked by false starts, hesitations or lengthy pauses” (Poplack, 2000, p. 241). Despite the limited language competence in one of the codes, the non-fluent bilingual speakers were able to produce grammatically-sound switches (Poplack, 2000). It should be noted, however, that the study does not provide the disaggregated results of CS per type.

In the classroom context, the findings of a study on the English proficiency of information technology (IT) instructors and their language use resonate with Poplack’s findings (Sarreal, 2008). Thirty tertiary-level instructors from various schools in Metro Manila teaching IT classes in English were observed and interviewed for the study. Among the variables observed were the IT instructors’ patterns and types of CS used in class. After identifying the CS types using Poplack’s model, the results of the study identified intrasentential CS as the most commonly-used CS type of IT teachers, as concepts pertaining to the subject matter had to be explained further in Tagalog to become clearer and more understandable for students (Sarreal, 2008).

The results of other studies (Martin, 2006; Liu, 2010) show deviations from the previous findings, mentioning that among the three CS types, intersentential switching was used prevalently in classroom instruction. A study of teachers’ CS to L1 in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms examined the general situation of the switching from English to Chinese (Liu, 2010). Sixty teachers and 261 undergraduate students randomly selected from three universities had their English classes observed. The LOI in all classes observed was English, and the lesson observed was “teaching a text.” Survey questionnaires and transcribed class observations were used to gather pertinent data. To categorize CS patterns, Poplack’s syntactic structure was used. A major finding of the study was that teachers and students used intersentential CS most frequently to translate from English to Chinese. Tertiary EFL teachers explained that in text analysis, English sentences were discussed with students through

translation as the teachers were having “difficulty in trying to conform to the different syntactic rules” of English and Chinese (Liu, 2010, p. 18). The difference in the syntactic rules of the two languages made the EFL teachers resort to intersentential CS to translate texts and make English content much more comprehensible for the EFL learners.

Another study regarding CS in the tertiary level included the CS type as a variable (Martin, 2006). Two instructors from a private, non-sectarian Philippine higher education institution (HEI) handling science courses for freshmen students were observed. Science courses were required to be taught in English. Both classes which spanned 3 hours and 30 minutes were video-recorded, and teachers were interviewed after class. Filipino-English CS types of both teachers and students were categorized using Poplack’s syntactic structure. The findings of the study showed that “[i]n both cases, intersentential switches registered as dominant among the three syntactic structures” (Martin, 2000, p. 56). Both teachers observed used intrasentential and tag switching very minimally. Another observation from the study was that one of the two teachers produced 90% of intersentential CS gathered from the whole sample. Although a large percentage of CS occurred, the researcher claimed that the science teacher was a “skilled code-switcher.” The researcher noted that all the code-switched utterances made by both the teachers and the students were grammatical and the utterances were smooth. It should be stated that while the strength of the study is the identification of the types of switches made, it would have helped confirm the claim of the researcher that both teachers observed were “skilled code-switchers” if other instruments were used to further validate the assumption.

This present study is timely and important as it can be a valuable addition to the literature on CS. Data and insights culled from the findings of this research may help set future directions for language planners and policy makers. The reports on the uses of the math teachers’ CS in the tertiary level can serve as a guide as they create, review, or modify existing policies on the LOI in content areas in the tertiary level. Additionally, school administrators in the higher education sector become more informed of the in-class language practices of mathematics teachers, so provisions can be made to appropriate codeswitching use in the tertiary-level mathematics instruction when necessary. Moreover, the results of the study can inform content teachers on the types of CS employed in the classroom and the contexts in which these CS types are utilized. For language teachers, this can open collaboration with math teachers for content-based instruction. The findings of the study can likewise provide insights to future researchers on the actual use of language in classroom discourse, identify the CS types used by math teachers, and confirm or disconfirm the findings of previous studies on the CS types used prevalently in the classroom.

### **Research Questions**

In order to examine the CS use in content areas, the study focuses on the following research questions:

- (1) What are the types of CS used by tertiary level math teachers in mathematics classroom discourse?
- (2) What are the instances in which the CS types are used?

## Methods

### Research Design

The study used a qualitative approach to identify and describe the CS types used by college level math teachers. Tallying and getting the percentages of CS types from the observed math classes were employed, while interviews with teachers and students were completed to validate the data gathered from class observations (Abad, 2010; Martin, 2006; Sarreal, 2008).

### Research Locale and Participants

The locale for this study was a state college in Occidental Mindoro, the Philippines. Since Tagalog is widely spoken in Occidental Mindoro in their day-to-day discourse, conducting the study in a tertiary institution in the province was deemed appropriate as it was a good opportunity for the researcher to observe the language contact and dynamics of Tagalog and English in mathematics discourse. Likewise, the decision to conduct the study in a college from a rural area was due to the high probability of Tagalog-English CS use in the classes to be observed. Unlike in an urban setting such as Metro Manila where English is commonly used as the default language in mathematics discourse, the rural setting was instrumental in allowing the researcher to observe how the two languages operated in mathematics discourse, with Tagalog as the more dominant language.

It is also worth noting that despite the dominance of the use of Tagalog in the community, the College implements an English-only policy for instruction across all subjects, except in the Filipino subject. Adherence to the policy is expected; thus, teachers and students in the College have to use the English language in all forms of spoken discourse in all subjects, except in the Filipino language subject.

The participants consisted of four math teachers who were selected purposively for the study, and whose names were withheld for purposes of confidentiality. The choice of purposive sampling was influenced by the idea of selecting math classes where the use of Tagalog-English CS was *moderate to high*, that is, 41 to 100% (Abad, 2010), which implies that CS is substantially present in the observed classes. Alphanumeric codes were instead used to refer to the teachers: T1 for the first teacher, T2 for the second, T3 for the third, and T4 for the last. Trigonometry was selected as it is considered to be a fundamental mathematics subject on which other subject areas, such as physics, architecture, engineering, and other sciences, are hinged (Weber, 2005; Moore, 2009). Also, students struggle with this aspect of math instruction due to its difficulty and abstractness (Gur, 2009; Moore, 2009).

There were 88 students in all four classes observed. Some of the students who were part of the math teachers' classes were selected purposively for key informant interviews (KIIs).

### Data Collection Tools

Data were gathered through a profiling form, a tally sheet for CS types, and KII guides for teachers and students. The tally sheet was piloted to a group comparable to the sample. Since the instruments appropriately and sufficiently gathered the pertinent data needed for the study, no changes were made on the tools.

The CS tally sheet was not used during the actual class observations as it would have been very difficult to classify CS occurrences while classes were ongoing. Instead, this tool was used after class observations to organize data and guide KIIs.

Two different sets of KII guides were made for selected math teachers and students, and questions were designed to obtain information on the use of Tagalog-English CS in mathematics classroom discourse.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

Data were culled from several sources, such as class observations, demographic profile of students, and KIIs with teachers and selected students. The data gathering was conducted in two full weeks.

Non-participant observation was used in this study. Preliminary observations were done in all four math classes to check the CS occurrences in classroom discourse and to let the math teachers and the students get used to the presence of an observer. After the initial observations, three class observations were completed for each class. Class observations were recorded using a digital camera, a tablet, and a smartphone. The total number of observation hours for the 12 math sessions was 18.

Two sets of KIIs were conducted individually, one with every math teacher in the sample and another one with selected students. All interviews with math teachers and selected students were digitally recorded. Notetaking was avoided so the researcher would have undivided attention while conducting the interview and would limit a possible source of distraction for students. Overall, there were four hours' worth of interview with the selected math teachers and students.

### **Data Analysis**

All recorded data from class observations were transcribed manually by the researcher using Microsoft Word. To facilitate ease of reading, fillers such as *um*, *ah*, and the like, were removed as they have little influence on mathematics discourse (Herbel-Eisenmann & Otten, 2011). The task was guided by the transcription conventions adapted from Metila (2007). Checking the accuracy of transcribed data was done. The quantitative data needed to identify the CS types of math teachers were derived from frequency count. In categorizing data, Tagalog-English CS utterances were syntactically analyzed and then classified using Poplack's CS categories, namely intersentential, intrasentential, and tag switching (Poplack in Hamers & Blanc, 2000, pp. 259-260). Categorized data were rechecked by a language expert to ascertain data accuracy.

To corroborate the results of the math teachers' CS types yielded from the quantitative analysis, data were triangulated with the responses of KII participants. Interview data were transcribed, then transcripts were reviewed afterwards. Repeated and similar responses were noted and grouped accordingly to generate themes. Triangulation was done to enrich the data from class observations and to strengthen the credibility and generalizability of the study (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2010; Tracy, 2013).

## **Results and Discussion**

All three types of CS – intersentential, intrasentential, and tag switching – were present in the spoken discourse of the four observed math teachers. However, the most dominant CS type used was intrasentential, accounting for 58% of the code-switched utterances. Intrasentential CS was followed by intersentential CS, which was equivalent to 38% of code-switched utterances. Lastly, tag switching was used sparingly across the 12 class observations. Data are shown in Figure 1, and more detailed explanations for each type follow.

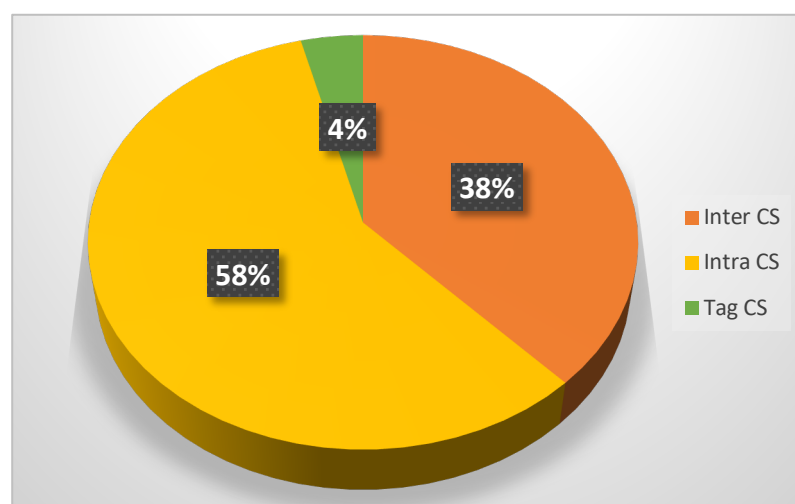


Figure 1: Percentages of CS types

### Intrasentential CS

The biggest chunk of the CS type was intrasentential, which is consistent with the findings of the studies of Poplack (2000) and Sarreal (2008), noting that it is the CS type used quite extensively in spoken discourse. This indicates that the utterances of math teachers were characterized by switching between two languages within a sentence, with one language compensating for the other. An example in Extract 1 follows.

#### Extract 1

T1: So *ibig sabihin, kung hindi available yung isang function sa calculator, pwede n'yong kunin yung kanyang complementary function kasi confident naman kayong they are just equal. (So it means, if one function is unavailable in the calculator, you can get its complementary function because you are confident that they are just equal.)* Can you follow? Can you follow? *Ganun din sa reciprocal function. (The same goes for the reciprocal function.)* That's why *kung napapansin n'yo, in your scientific calculators, only the three functions are there. (That's why if you could notice, in your scientific calculators, only the three functions are there.)* What are those?

In Extract 1, T1 explained the role of complementary functions by shuttling between English and Tagalog in a sentence. Using the two languages, the math teacher was able to express her points clearly and coherently. Likewise, it can be noted that the sentences from the extract conformed to the syntactic rules of the two languages, Tagalog and English, and the words from the two languages were linked grammatically, thereby facilitating smooth and natural transition between words. This is similar to the observation of Poplack (2000) where she noted that the intrasentential switches she gathered were grammatically sound. The results provide insights that speakers have sufficient awareness of the syntax of the two languages used, which prevents them from violating their syntactic rules.

The observed math teachers had to use English and Tagalog interchangeably within a sentence in explaining math concepts and solutions, among others. In short, both languages are complementary for instruction. Using pure Tagalog or pure English throughout the discussion poses limitations. Speaking in pure Tagalog can be preventive because the math terms which are crucial in understanding math concepts are often in English. Unless math teachers and



students are familiar with the equivalent Tagalog words of math terms, using Tagalog all throughout math discourse can be challenging. The same goes for using pure English. If math teachers were to use only English for classroom instruction, the concerns would be the math teachers' English language proficiency, lesson delivery, and students' capacity to understand the lesson. T1 and T4, for instance, observed that the math teachers themselves may have limited language capabilities to express their ideas fluently and use English in a more complex academic discourse. As regards students' capabilities to understand instruction in English, all four math teachers agreed that most students have basic English-language proficiency, and so the use of English would be a stumbling block for their learning. This is supported by the KII responses of all the interviewed students who all said that using both languages in math discourse is important for students to understand lessons better.

However, while the claim was that the use of intrasentential CS is done by highly-skilled bilinguals (Poplack, 2000), data yielded from the observed math teachers showed that bilingual speakers do not always demonstrate language fluency and accuracy when using intrasentential switching. As in the case of any second-language speaker who has yet to demonstrate mastery of the target language, the math teachers observed in this study had occasional slips and grammar lapses characteristic of non-native speaker speech. There were instances when intrasentential CS utterances did not conform to the standard Tagalog-English syntactic rules; thus, intrasentential CS was not fluid and clear. This could be seen in Extract 2, where an intrasentential switching caused confusion. In the dialogue, note that the underlined Tagalog-English code-switched utterance is the unclear part of the discourse.

### Extract 2

- T2: So what is the measure of the corresponding acute angle if the given is 520 degrees?
- S: 20
- T2: Why 20?
- S: Because 540 is equivalent to...
- T2: *Okay. So that's correct. 360 is the one revolution or full na pag-ikot, so one revolution is equal to 360, and iyong half revolution is 180. Ito po siya hanggang rito. Sabi nga natin kanina so kung nasa quadrant, dito siya and nandito iyong given, it is minus kay 180 so kapag tinotal siya is 540. (We said a while ago, so if it is in quadrant, it is here and the given is here, 180 is subtracted from the given, so when the total is computed, it is 540.) Unless ang given natin is 520 so the acute angle is 20 and this is what we call the corresponding acute angle. (Unless our given is 520 so the acute angle is 20 and this is what we call the corresponding acute angle.) Okay na po? (Is it okay?)*
- S: Yes.

The underlined statement in Extract 2 is an example of intrasentential CS that is ambiguous and confusing. T2 attempted to explain the process of solving for the corresponding acute angle, but the original translation contained the unnecessary use of the transition word, *so*.

- T2: *Sabi nga natin kanina so kung nasa quadrant, dito siya and nandito iyong given... (We said a while ago, so if it is in quadrant, it is here and the given is here...)*

Likewise, from the same extract, the phrase, “*kung nasa quadrant*” (if it is in the quadrant) lacked specificity. T2 was not clear about the quadrant being referred to, which could confuse the listeners.

Also, in this clause, “*it is minus kay 180 [degrees]...*,” the referent for the pronoun, *it*, was unclear, and the use of the Filipino preposition *kay* (from) was confusing as the 180 degrees was given a human referent. When translated to English, the clause “*it is minus kay 180 [degrees]...*” could be interpreted as “*it [the given] is minus [subtracted] from 180,*” but since what the teacher meant was that 180 is subtracted from the given, the use of an incorrect Filipino preposition, *kay*, could get in the way of understanding the math teacher’s explanation.

Note, however, that when T2 asked during the comprehension check if the explanation was *okay*, the students answered *Yes*. While the students answered in the affirmative, saying *yes* could likewise work as a conversation stopper (Palacio & Gustilo, 2016; Colin-Jones & Colin-Jones, 2008). Also, answering with a *yes* could be indicative of the speakers’ attempt to be polite, to lessen friction, or to maintain a cordial atmosphere (Bernardo, 2011).

In sum, contrary to the argument that intrasentential switches generally conform to the syntactic rules (Poplack, 2000), it has to be taken into account that there were notable instances wherein the observed math teachers committed grammar lapses in classroom discourse. While in some cases, the math teachers did self-correction, showing that they were able to detect the ungrammatical utterances they produced and to correct them, there were also instances when grammar lapses remained uncorrected, which may indicate that the math teachers were unaware of the grammar mistakes in their utterances. Table 1 presents the utterances with grammar lapses that were corrected.

Table 1: Examples of math teachers’ corrected utterances

Teacher	Utterance	Reference
T1	<i>Yung between (The one between), angles between zero degrees and negative 90 degrees. Where can we <u>found</u> (sic) that – where can we find that rather?</i>	Observation 3 Line 60
T2	Okay, that’s right. But I am asking <i>kung ano po iyong tawag sa sine, cosine, tangent (But I’m asking for the term for sine, cosine, tangent)</i> . So that is the trigonometric <u>functions</u> (sic). <i>‘Di ba nabanggit ko naman iyon? (Isn’t it that I have told you about it?)</i> So that is the trigonometric <u>functions</u> (sic). <i>Iyong pinaka-simplest (sic) (The most simplest). Pinaka na nga, simplest pa*</i>  *Note: T4 means that adding “pinaka,” which means “most,” is already redundant.	Observation 1 Line 45
T3	You should <u>familiar</u> (sic) – familiarize yourselves with these because it’s basic knowledge.	Observation 1 Line 163
T4	To view it more, in a <u>more clear</u> (sic) manner, in a clearer manner, for example I have here Giselle.	Observation 1 Line 27

As shown in Table 1, the math teachers were conscious of the ungrammatical statements they produced. For T1, T3, and T4, the correct version of the lapses they produced were later provided. T2, meanwhile, pointed out toward the end of the utterance her use of double superlatives.

Table 2 presents a list of some of the code-switched utterances produced by math teachers

which they were unable to identify as ungrammatical.

Table 2: Examples of ungrammatical statements produced by math teachers

Teacher	Utterance	Reference
T1	O, <i>eto yung mga things to remember ha</i> (O, these are the things to remember). That's why I told you to bring at least two colored pens <i>para sa first angle yung isang kulay</i> , second angle another kulay <i>kasi</i> you have to show the two initial sides and the two terminal sides and the <u>two angle</u> (sic) ' <i>pag ikot nung gano 'n</i> (That's why I told you to bring at least two colored pens so that you can use one color for the first angle, then use another one for the second angle because you have to show the two initial sides and the two terminal sides and the <u>two angles</u> when it rotates).	Observation 3 Line 248
T2	Acute angle because <u>30 degree</u> (sic) and <u>60 degree</u> (sic) <u>is</u> (sic) less than <u>90 degree</u> (sic) and we cannot form <u>90 degree</u> (sic) or we cannot have <u>an angles</u> (sic) with <i>iyong isa</i> is obtuse angle <i>kasi nga lalampas siya</i> (Acute angle because <u>30 degrees</u> and <u>60 degrees</u> are less than <u>90 degrees</u> and we cannot form <u>90 degrees</u> or we cannot have <u>an angle</u> with one as obtuse because it will go beyond).	Observation 3 Line 295
T3	And if a line <u>is move</u> (sic) <i>ano po ang na-form?</i> (And if a line <u>moves</u> , what is formed?)	Observation 1 Line 37
T4	Because the line in between the bubbles <u>act</u> (sic) as a border, <i>hindi makapunta yung hangin sa kabila papunta sa kabila</i> (Because the line in between the bubbles <u>acts</u> as a border, the air cannot move to the other bubble).	Observation 1 Line 340

As Table 2 shows, among the common grammar concerns of the observed math teachers were pluralization (e.g., *two angle*, *90 degree*), verb use (e.g., *is move*), and subject-verb agreement (e.g., *line... act*). However, these grammar lapses are examples of local errors which do not seriously interfere with one's understanding of the utterances and are negligible.

These examples indicate that intrasentential CS generally follows sound grammatical patterns, but there were also cases when ungrammatical constructions of Tagalog-English utterances were present, and imprecise word choice can compromise the clarity of a statement. This can lead future researchers to further look into the plausibility of arguments that intrasentential CS is apparent in bilinguals with high language proficiency (Poplack in Berk-Seligson, 1986: 314).

### 3.2 Intersentential CS

Intersentential CS accounted for 38% of the total code-switched utterances of the four math teachers. This differs from results of some studies (Martin, 2006; Liu, 2010) that intersentential CS is the type used prevalently for classroom instruction. The reason for the disparity of the results could be attributed to the limited sample size and the observation duration (e.g., Martin, 2006) and the lesson type during the class observation (e.g., Liu, 2010). In the twelve math classes observed for this study, intrasentential was used more dominantly than intersentential switching. Extract 3 follows.

**Extract 3**

- T4: So if  $3x$  is equal to 180 degrees, what must be the value of  $x$ ?  $X$  therefore is...
- S: 60
- T4: 60 degrees. *Sige po. (Alright.) Malinaw? (Clear?)*
- Ss: Yes
- T4: *Madali lang, ano? (It's easy, isn't it?)* Easy as pie.

When T4 asked for the value of  $x$ , a student answered correctly. So, T4 repeated the answer of the student and provided an affirmation by saying, *Alright*. To check whether students understood the process of arriving at the value of  $x$ , T4 used a one-word question in Filipino, *Malinaw?* (Clear?) The students replied with a yes, and T4 commented in Filipino that computing for the answer was easy.

As observed, pure English was used when providing mathematical explanations or definitions of mathematical terms. Only when the teacher would need to expound on a certain question or a concept that switching to Tagalog or Tagalog-English would be done.

In Extract 4, note that T4's first utterance was a definition of a ray, which he presented in English. Then, in the second part of the utterance, he switched to Taglish and simplified the information for the students. This is evident in the use of the words *ibig sabihin* (it means), which is an indication that the math teacher expounded on the idea to bring down the information to a simpler level of understanding, allowing students to comprehend the given definition by interspersing math concepts with a familiar language.

**Extract 4**

- T4: So, a ray is a part of a line characterized by a line bounded by a point on one end and that extends indefinitely on another. So *ibig sabihin (it means)*, as our figure depicts, *meron kang endpoint dito (you have an endpoint here)*, *tapos meron kang (then you have an)* indefinite line, or indefinite part of a line extending to one direction.

Extract 5 shows a similar example in which intersentential switching was used by a math teacher in her utterances to elaborate on her point.

**Extract 5**

- T2: So in determining the corresponding acute angle, so (*sic*) you need to determine also where the angle is located or [in] what quadrant is the angle located. So *sasabihin rin po natin kung nasa* quadrant 1 *siya, nasa* quadrant 2, *nasa* quadrant 3 or *nasa* quadrant 4 **(So we need to identify whether the angle is in quadrant 1, quadrant 2, quadrant 3, or quadrant 4)**. So if the angle is 120, then it is in the...? In what quadrant?

In Extract 5, T2 explained the concept of corresponding acute angle in English, that is, in identifying the corresponding acute angle, it is important to locate the quadrant where the angle is found. Then, the teacher used Taglish in the second utterance to emphasize her point. Finally, to check whether students understood the concept correctly, T2 asked them the quadrant where a 120-degree angle could be found.

In the examples, intersentential CS was useful when mathematical concepts in English had to be explained more thoroughly to students through Tagalog-English CS.

Likewise, intersentential CS was at play when the observed math teachers would ask students to answer a mathematical question or equation. Usually, the delivery of the question was in pure English. Extract 6 provides an example.

#### **Extract 6**

T1: So what is the complementary function of – you have your calculator?  
– what is the complementary function of sine 36 degrees 15 minutes 10 seconds? [This is a] review of the last meeting's lesson.

The math teacher asked her students to provide the complementary function of a given item, and she did not find it necessary to repeat the statement in Tagalog or Tagalog-English because she used a simple sentence construction, which was rather straightforward, and understandable.

It can be noted that the reason for using pure English when asking math questions and presenting math concepts and definitions was in line with the use of mathematics register. During the KII, T2 mentioned that mathematical equations are best expressed in English given that there are already canned expressions and jargons. For instance, she mentioned that the “square root of  $2x$  plus  $y$ ” does not need to be translated to Tagalog because it is a mathematical expression already understood by students, and that it would otherwise be complicated to translate “square root” or “ $2x$  plus  $y$ ” to Tagalog.

These examples show that intersentential CS is evident when expressing mathematical statements or questions in pure English.

#### **Tag Switching**

In this study, tag switching was used least extensively in classroom discourse, noting that in all 12 observations, tags accounted for only 4% of the total code-switched utterances. This is similar to the results of the study of Martin (2006) that noted the minimal use of tag switching in classroom discourse. Extract 6 shows the use of tag switching in an utterance.

#### **Extract 7**

T3: *Ano po ang cosine ng zero degrees?* (**What is the cosine of zero degrees?**)  
Ss: One, sir.  
T3: As simple as that *po*. (**As simple as that.**)

In Extract 7, T3 used a Tagalog word, *po*, and appended it to the statement, *as simple as that*. There is no English equivalent for the word *po*, as the word is unique to the Filipino culture. Filipinos commonly use *po* as an indicator of respect or politeness. Hence, the use of *po* as a tag marker fits the description of Poplack (2000) that tag switches “are often heavily loaded with ethnic content and would be placed low on a scale of translatability” (p. 23).

Other commonly used tag switches identified in the study include *tama?* (correct?), *lang* (only), *‘di ba?* (isn't it?), *din* and *rin* (also), and some Filipino particles with no direct equivalent in English, like *ba*, *naman*, *nga*, *daw*, *a*, and *ha*. *Okay* is also considered as a form of tag switch when appended to the end of the sentence. Note that the basis for categorizing it as a Tagalog

word was because of the teachers' pronunciation, which was characterized by syllabication and a distinct Tagalog accent.

Overall, the findings of this study affirm that math teachers used Tagalog-English CS in the classroom, with intrasentential switching as the most commonly used among the three, to explain math concepts and simplify information for students.

### **Conclusions, Recommendations, and Limitations**

This study was conducted with the idea of contributing to the existing knowledge on the language use in content areas and identifying the types of CS used by math teachers. What prompted this research was the inadequate and inconclusive findings on the CS use by tertiary math teachers and its implications for students' learning.

Intrasentential CS was the most commonly used Tagalog-English CS type, as more than half of the total code-switched utterances by the four observed math teachers were intrasentential. The high percentage of intrasentential CS confirms the findings of studies (Poplack, 2000; Sarreal, 2008) that it is the most pervasive type used by interlocutors in spoken discourse. On the other hand, intersentential CS was used when math concepts and principles have to be presented in English, then afterwards explained in Tagalog. Finally, tag switching was the least used CS type, making up only a negligible percentage of the total codeswitched utterances in all classes observed.

Intrasentential CS is indicative of tertiary-level math teachers' sufficient bilingual knowledge and competence of both English and Tagalog syntax. The dominance of intrasentential CS implies that speakers can switch with ease from one language to another, which, in this case, is Tagalog to English, and vice versa. The observed math teachers had to use English and Tagalog interchangeably within a sentence in explaining math concepts and solutions, among others.

It was noted in this study that both languages are complementary for instruction. Using pure Tagalog or pure English throughout the discussion poses limitations. Speaking in pure Tagalog can be preventive because the math terms which are crucial in understanding math concepts are often in English. Unless math teachers and students are familiar with the equivalent Tagalog words of math terms, using Tagalog all throughout math discourse can be challenging. The same goes for using pure English. If math teachers were to use pure English for classroom instruction, the concerns would be the math teachers' English language proficiency, lesson delivery, and students' capacity to understand the lesson. T1 and T4, for instance, observed that the math teachers themselves may have limited language capabilities to express their ideas fluently and use English in a more complex academic discourse. As regards students' capabilities to understand instruction in English, all four math teachers agreed that most students have basic English-language proficiency, and so the use of English would be a stumbling block for students' learning. This is supported by the KII responses of all the interviewed students who all said that using both languages in math discourse is important for students to understand lessons better.

Hence, Tagalog-English intrasentential switching is both instrumental and inevitable. It is instrumental for lesson delivery because it lessens students' cognitive burden of understanding both language and content at once. Likewise, CS is inevitable because math terms and expressions in English are necessary components in explaining and discussing content

knowledge, and so it is understandable when equations and jargons are expressed in English, while further elaborations are done in Tagalog.

For language planners and policy makers, it might be worth considering to draft clear provisions relevant to language use in the content subjects in the tertiary level. Having identified from the class observations and KIIs that the Tagalog-English CS was not a result of some random and inconsistent language switching, but rather a purposeful attempt to facilitate mathematics instruction and learning, the use of CS will give bilingual and multilingual students who require extra support in the English language a better chance of learning mathematical concepts and processes, and participate productively in classroom discourse through the infusion of their mother tongue.

For tertiary level math teachers, utilizing CS in classroom instruction when necessary helps facilitate learning, instruction, transition, and communication. These insights will allow math teachers to strategize their use of CS to complement the English-language instruction and avoid its unsystematic use. By focusing on elevating the quality of math discourse, CS can be used as a tool for analyzing math problems, understanding logical connections, and evaluating information, among others, since language would not be much of a concern in this context.

Secondary and tertiary level English language teachers can create learning opportunities for students to practice the English language in spoken discourse. Students' limited confidence to use the English language in spoken academic discourse is a concern because of their inadequate exposure to the language or their restricted vocabulary. Secondary and tertiary level English language teachers have to provide means for their students to use English meaningfully and extensively in communication. By creating a rich and safe classroom environment that promotes the use of English and allows the teacher to give meaningful feedback, students are helped to build their confidence in speaking the language, and to practice the English language in academic contexts, which will benefit classroom instruction and learning in the long run. Likewise, exploring a possible collaboration between English and math teachers in light of using content-based instruction in the classroom will allow the former to assist the latter in learning and using math register correctly in language discourse. Also, this will open opportunities for students to be familiar with the common math register and sentence structures in the subject area, and be exposed to the context-specific use of math language.

The findings of the study should be viewed in light of some limitations. Since it focuses on the CS types, it does not extensively discuss the functions and purposes of CS in math classrooms. Additionally, since the sample only includes tertiary math teachers, the CS types used by primary and secondary math teachers, and teachers handling other content areas may differ. However, given the dearth of literature that focuses on the use of CS in tertiary level content areas, this study can be further explored by future researchers in identifying the purposes by which CS is used in content areas, and whether math teachers' CS influence students' performance or learning outcomes.

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**Exploring the Effects of Digital Storytelling: A Case Study of Adult  
L2 Writers in Taiwan**

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### Abstract

With the advent of information communication technologies, an escalating number of youths is communicating, creating, and sharing narratives via Web 2.0 social networks. To ensure the continuity between in-class and out-of-class literacy practice, digital storytelling has become increasingly prevalent in educational settings. Digital storytelling has the potential to enhance digital literacy and self-efficacy through innovative learning and identity expressions. However, the research at this juncture is scarce. Therefore, this study incorporated Storybird, a Web 2.0 collaborative writing tool, into a freshman composition class to cultivate digital literacy in English among 18 college students who are studying English as an International Language in Taiwan. In addition to developing digital literacy, this study also explored the effects of Storybird-mediated storytelling on English as an International Language students' self-efficacy as a legitimate user of English. The results from both the quantitative and qualitative data analyses indicate that after year-long participation in Storybird-mediated digital storytelling, the majority of the participants rated their digital literacy in English higher than before. Similarly, they developed a stronger sense of confidence as English as an International Language writers. Some pedagogical considerations are offered at the end of this paper for those who wish to incorporate Web 2.0 tools into their English as an International Language classrooms to boost their pupils' confidence in participating in this ever-connected global community.

*Keywords:* English as an international language, digital storytelling, self-efficacy, digital literacy, L2 writing, Storybird

The rapid development of information communication technologies (ICT) in our modern society has transformed the ways people communicate with one another. Since human communication is mostly through the medium of language, as the technology advanced, language is becoming inseparable from the digital environment (Hockly, 2012, p.110). This phenomenon has brought attention to the scholars to reevaluate the existing literacy skills that were taught in current educational systems (Churchill, 2016; Potts, 2013). Many educators agree that new skills are required to comprehend and communicate using new technologies (Hockly, 2012). As a result, English as International Language (EIL) learners in the 21st century not only need to learn the language but also need to learn to communicate and utilize the language efficiently in the digital environment. This need becomes even more vital given the newly defined digital divide between those who are passive consumers of media and those who are proactive discerners and creators of media (Thomas, 2016).

Due to the widespread of ICT over the past decade, numerous researchers endeavored to conceptualize or describe the development of digital literacy (Eshet-Alkali & Amichai-Hamburger, 2004; Potts et al., 2010; Ferrari, 2012). This trend also brought an urgent need for developing digital literacy in a global society. Many governments or cross-national confederations, such as the European Union, emphasized the importance of digital literacy in the educational system (Churchill, 2016; Leahy & Dolan, 2010; Poore, 2011). The Ministry of Education (MOE) in Taiwan also recognized the importance of digital learning and included the development of information communication technology (ICT) skills in its educational guidelines (MOE, Taiwan, 2012). Much research has hypothesized a close relationship between digital storytelling (DST) and digital literacy (Karakoyuna & Kuzub, 2013; Robin, 2016; Thang et al., 2014.) and supported the connection between the use of DST and students' engagement and motivation for learning (Pop, 2012; Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009; Yang & Wu, 2012). However, fewer studies have scrutinized the link between DST and self-efficacy among EIL users. Therefore, the present study not only connects DST with several types of digital literacy, but also relates it to the learner's sense of confidence. The digital literacy under discussion in the current study comprises a set of skills that are essential for decoding and making meaning out of the digital texts (Churchill, 2016). In other words, these skills involve critical thinking, language ability, and communicative skills, so-called 21st Century Skills (Brown, Bryan, & Brown, 2005; Jakes, 2006). The present study intends to answer the following three research questions:

1. Is there any significant difference in university EIL students' self-rated English digital literacy before and after their participation in Storybird-mediated digital storytelling?
2. How does DST affect participants' self-efficacy as EIL users after taking part in Storybird-mediated digital storytelling?
3. What are the participants' perceptions of integrating Storybird into their L2 writing class?

### **Significance of the Study**

The results from this study contribute to the pedagogical application of DST and theoretical understanding of DST in the L2 writing context. Students nowadays are far more interested in continually engaging themselves in participatory social networks out of school than academic learning in school. The current results show that integrating DST into a formal composition class created engaging and meaningful literacy practices in class, which in turn cultivated EIL writers' digital literacy and sense of confidence. The current results shed light on the relationships among DST, L2 digital literacy, and L2 self-efficacy. Most importantly, the

ultimate outcomes of this project, the field-tested DST integration guidelines, and the empirically grounded implications, help provide English language teachers with the ability to think about and use technology in creative and culturally-responsive ways. The overall findings help language educators arrive at a deeper understanding of the substantial roles that DST can play in cultivating various aspects of digital literacy and boosting up writing-related self-efficacy as a language learner.

## Literature Review

### Digital Literacy

Literacy has evolved historically from classic literacy (reading-writing-understanding) to audiovisual literacy to digital literacy or information literacy and recently to new media literacy. With the advent of the new literacies, today's reading and writing instruction are influenced by the change in even more profound ways. Due to their inherent characteristic of change, a precise definition of the "new literacies" seems unfeasible. Nevertheless, teachers and researchers agree that today's students need and deserve the skills, strategies, and insights to successfully exploit the rapidly changing information and communication technologies that continuously emerge in our world (Leu, 2000; Street, 2003). Digital literacy is also called *21st Century Literacy*, *Digital Age Literacies*, and *21st Century Skills* (Brown, Bryan, & Brown, 2005; Jakes, 2006). According to Ferrari (2012), "Being digitally literate implies the ability to understand media (as most mediums are digitalized), to search and think critically about retrievable information (with the widespread use of the Internet) and be able to communicate with others through a variety of digital tools and applications" (p. 16).

Given the EIL context and the chosen platform of the present study, digital literacy here refers to the following types of literacy, namely information literacy, reproduction/visual literacy, language-based literacy, and connection literacy. The first two were adopted from Eshet-Alkalai et al. (2004), whereas the latter two were delineated by the researcher. Eshet-Alkalai et al. (2004) proposed that digital literacy can be categorized into five cognitive skills: photo-visual literacy, reproduction literacy, branching literacy, information literacy, and socio-emotional literacy. The current study adopted information literacy and combined reproduction and photo-visual literacy into one category due to their relevance to the current context. First, information literacy is defined as the ability to evaluate and assess information accurately, which is vital for information consumers in this information-overflow era. While surfing the Internet or navigating through digital databases, users face the difficulty of evaluating the credibility and originality of information. Therefore, users rely on their information literacy to make educated and intelligent assessments of information (Eshet-Alkalai et al., 2004). Information-literate people are skilled in critical thinking and are skeptical of the quality of information. Also, Mardis (2002) argued that information literacy is like a filter that distinguishes incorrect, unrelated, or biased information and avoids its influences on users' cognition. Second, reproduction/visual literacy is the ability to create new interpretations by using pre-existing information from different media such as texts, visuals, and audio. Reproduction literacy is vital in writing and art. In writing, people can reorganize and rearrange pre-existing sentences to produce distinct implications. In art, people can edit and combine visual or audio materials to make new creations (Eshet-Alkalai et al., 2004). Third, language-based literacy refers to EIL's students' ability in exploring, discerning, and utilizing English information from web 2.0 sources. The innovation of the Internet provides space for people to communicate and share information/knowledge with others. However, the Internet also presents many traps, such as hoaxes and malware. In general, English language-based literacy is the ability to make a sound judgment of various English-mediated online sources and identify

Internet traps. Finally, connection literacy pertains to EIL students' capacity of branching out to English-mediated cyber world with aims to communicate with other English speakers, establish a connection with them, and professionally collaborate with them. In other words, connection literate users are capable of sharing data with others, evaluating information, and collaboratively constructing knowledge with others.

### **DST and its Educational Benefits**

DST can be traced back to the late 1980s when new media technologies were merely just around the corner. DST is not a new invention. Joe Lambert (2002) helped establish DST as the co-founder of the Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS), a non-profit, community arts organization for new media and civic engagement in Berkeley, California. Since the early 1990s, Lambert and the CDS have offered training and assistance to those who were interested in creating and sharing their personal narratives (Center for Digital Storytelling, 2005). The development of DST highly relates to the evolution of internet technology known as *user-contributed content*, *social media*, and *Web 2.0* (Robin, 2016). Through Web 2.0, people transformed from “one-to-many” communication to “many-to-many” communication on the Internet (Roush, 2006). Similar to traditional storytelling, digital stories relate to specific topics and usually generate unique ideas (Robin, 2016). The definition is somewhat agreed upon; nevertheless, the uses of DST for learning have been quite diverse. Some educators use DST as a way to cultivate digital literacy, while others utilize it to motivate students to write. Both endeavors have been relatively successful for students in various educational contexts.

Many studies show that DST bears a positive impact on digital literacy. For instance, Robin (2016) claimed that students' technology literacy was enhanced as they added texts, images, audio, and video into their digital stories, whereas Sylvester and Greenidge (2009) found that students tended to employ both old and new literacies while creating digital stories. Thang et al. (2014) claimed that DST helped enhance students' language literacy, communication literacy, and media literacy. Besides, creating digital stories not only enhances students' digital literacy but also helps them achieve school-based curriculum goals (Karakoyuna and Kuzub, 2013). Besides academic gains and strengthened digital literacy (Alameen, 2011), DST also exerted its influence on L1 and L2 language learning (Yoon, 2013; Potts et al., 2010; Xu et al., 2011). Yoon (2013) looked into how DST affected the 5th-grade ELL students' English learning and concluded that students' learning motivation and reading comprehension were improved. Moreover, Potts et al. (2010) conducted an experimental study in a language arts class with a group of second grade, multi-lingual students in the US. They reported that DST engaged students in a meaningful social context in which their collaborative learning was promoted (Potts et al., 2010, p.190). The DST experience also boosted students' learning motivation. The above studies suggest that DST has the potential to enhance digital literacy, cultivate academic gains, facilitate language learning, and boost up learning motivation.

### **DST and Empowerment**

Besides its facilitating effects on digital literacy, language development, and learning motivation, DST has been used as a means of empowerment for marginalized voices across community-based projects worldwide. Xu, Park, and Baek (2011) examined the effects of DST on writing flow and self-efficacy in the virtual reality learning environment where sixty-four undergraduate Korean students were recruited to participate in the study. The results show that their writing self-efficacy and flow improved after engaging in DST (Xu et al., 2011, p. 188). Yoon (2013) found similar results in his study as he investigated the effects of storytelling on L2 learning attitudes and reading comprehension. Different from Xu et al. study, the participants in this study were 32 EIL 5th graders in South Korea. In addition to the

improvement of writing self-efficacy, this study also indicates that DST is instrumental in improving students' reading. In sum, the studies reviewed in this section point out a positive influence of DST in learning motivation and writing efficacy among L2 learners (Alameen, 2011; Potts, 2013; Xu et al., 2011; Yoon, 2013). These findings suggest that DST can be a valid tool for educational purposes. Aside from merely encouraging students to write, educators see digital stories as an empowering mechanism to provide a voice to those who are typically marginalized (Yuan et al., 2019).

The similar empowerment effect is very likely to take place with EIL participants when their writings are shared publicly through Storybird. In other words, integrating DST with the English composition class has the potential to boost EIL participants' confidence to compose and communicate in English as an empowering pedagogy. DST has been utilized as an empowering pedagogy in educational settings. For example, teachers delivered subject matters through digital stories and empowered the students by asking them to be the storytellers (Liu, Tai, & Liu, 2018). Creating digital stories encourages learners to develop their voices instead of merely imitating others' words (Al-Qallaf & Al-Mutairi, 2016). To be a good storyteller, a learner strives to integrate his/her intentions and perspectives into digital stories (Bloch, 2018). Similarly, Robin (2016) pointed out that the personal narrative that the storytellers tell about their own experiences constitutes the most popular type of digital story. For instance, in the study above by Robin (2016), the teachers who implemented DST in their classrooms found that students' motivation and engagement levels were increased as a result of telling their personal stories. Robin (2016) maintained that the phenomenon supported the idea of the "director's chair effect." By digital storytelling, students had chances to express themselves, which gave rise to their sense of efficacy. In sum, the findings from the previous studies suggest that digital storytelling, when utilized appropriately, can serve as a dynamic teaching and learning method that brings about academic gains, language development, digital literacy development, and a sense of efficacy in students.

Nevertheless, the contributing effects of DST on digital literacy identified by the previous studies (Karakoyuna & Kuzub, 2013; Thang et al., 2014;) are mostly derived from a single survey and/or self-appraisal by the participants. Besides, the questionnaire used by the previous study did not break down the construct of digital literacy into its sub-domains. To mend this gap and respond to the call by Belcher (2017) for further research on exploring the trajectory among the affordances of multimodality of digital storytelling, digital literacy, and L2 writing pedagogy, the current study employed both quantitative and qualitative methods to shed more light on this juncture.

## **Method**

### **Design**

This research utilized a case-study approach (Richards, 2003) to provide both quantitative and qualitative data of a group of Taiwanese university students engaged in year-long digital storytelling, which was integrated as part of their L2 writing practices. According to Duff (2014), a case study is suitable when understanding individuals' experiences and development courses within a particular educational context is the goal. This case study is exploratory in nature with an attempt to gain insight into the potential effects of DST on developing L2 learners' digital literacy and self-efficacy. The researcher functioned as an instructor of the course and a participant observer in the physical class and the cyber space. Most students entered this class with a good grasp of computer literacy and above-average communication competence in English. The study lasted for the entire school year from the fall semester of



2017 to the spring semester of 2018. At the onset of the study, the students were introduced to Storybird-mediated writing as an integral component of the course. To tap into the participants' view of Storybird-mediated digital storytelling, qualitative data were also gathered from an open-ended survey and a group interview toward the end of the study.

### **Participants and Setting**

As a result of convenient sampling, eighteen English-major freshmen enrolled in the Composition One course were recruited to take part in this one-year, Storybird-mediated DST project. The average English proficiency of 18 participants was between B1 and B2 based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) with one-third of them comfortably landed on B2 while two-thirds remained on B1. Composition One is a required year-long course for every English-major freshman in this 4-year college. The class meets two hours per week in an attempt to cultivate students' ability to write a 5-paragraph academic essay as the ultimate goal. At the beginning of the fall semester in 2017, two tutorial sessions were conducted to orientate the participants to this relatively novel way of composing and writing. In line with the course objectives for each writing practice, the participants were asked to compose and illustrate their first draft on Storybird. The instructor, also the researcher of the current study, commented on the participants' writings via Storybird. When the participants finished their second draft, they would receive voluntary comments from the other EIL students studying at the other university. The partnership was formed via the collaboration with another professor's composition class voluntarily. They were encouraged to visit their partners' Storybird writings and leave comments as well. There were three telecollaborative exchanges among the students.

### **Procedures**

Storybird was a free Web 2.0 <sup>1</sup>publishing tool providing collections of artwork for digital stories. It was chosen as a DST platform for this study because it is user friendly and safe cyberspace for creating and writing. Unlike other multimodal platforms, such as Padlet or Photo Story, Storybird allows teachers to conveniently set up accounts for their students and organize them into classes. Using Storybird, the teacher can comment on the students' written assignments and set the deadline for students to submit their revisions. The work students produce can then be shared among the members and peer-assessed. Thus, on top of the instructor's comments, students are able to see and learn from what other students have written. Crucially, it can also be published for the whole world to see, which lends itself nicely to the concept of learning English as a global language with communication as a primary goal.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to shed new light on how the participants' digital literacy and self-efficacy were affected as they took part in the Storybird-mediated writing course. This study also tapped into the participants' points of view as to how they perceived this novel way of writing. Two quantitative instruments, the Digital Literacy Scale and the Self-Efficacy of Using English as International Language, were developed by the researcher to gather numerical data on the participants' digital literacy and self-efficacy. The digital literacy scale has four dimensions investigating the participants' information, reproduction/visual, language-based, and connection literacy. These four dimensions were chosen in light of the prior research (Eshet-Alkalai et al., 2004) as well as the educational needs of EIL learners. The self-efficacy questionnaire for EIL learners was developed by referring to

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<sup>1</sup> Storybird is no longer free. Now it charges teachers and students for writing and publishing on the platform.

Bandura's (2006) notion of learner's sense of efficacy to gauge the empowering effects of Storybird-mediated DST on cultivating communication, writing-related, and purpose-driven efficacy. Both instruments have piloted with thirty other first-year college students and obtained satisfactory reliability coefficients of Cronbach's Alphas of .828 and .88 for digital literacy and self-efficacy, respectively. Several paired-samples t-tests were performed to detect any differences in digital literacy and self-efficacy between the pretests and posttests. An open-ended survey and a group interview regarding the participants' view of Storybird-mediated DST were conducted. The survey and interview data were content analyzed to explore emerging themes. To establish the trustworthiness of the qualitative data, the data gathered via qualitative methods were used to triangulate with the quantitative data.

## Results and Discussion

Quantitative data from digital literacy and the self-efficacy questionnaire were analyzed to identify the potential effects of Storybird-mediated DST on participants' digital literacy and self-efficacy as EIL users. In addition to quantitative analysis, qualitative data were collected through the open-ended survey to understand the participants' perceptions of partaking in the Storybird-integrated composition class. In the following sections, three major findings will be presented as tentative answers to the three research questions, accompanied by discussion.

### **Research question 1: Is there any significant difference in university EIL students' self-rated English digital literacy before and after their part-taking in Storybird-mediated digital storytelling?**

There is a significant difference in the participants' overall digital literacy after year-long participation in Storybird-mediated digital storytelling. A questionnaire for self-rated English digital literacy was administered to 18 students twice to detect any changes in their digital literacy before and after the intervention. Cronbach's Alphas of .84 and .89 were obtained for the pretest and the posttest of the digital literacy questionnaire, which suggests the satisfactory reliability coefficient of both tests. Table 1 summarizes the difference in the overall digital literacy, information literacy, reproduction literacy, language-based literacy, and connection literacy between the pretest and the posttest. The participants rated themselves higher in the overall and four sub-categories of digital literacy after year-long engagement in Storybird-mediated digital writing. Among the four sub-categories of digital literacy, the participants made the most substantial gain in reproduction/visual literacy while the least in information literacy.

Table 1: Summary of pretest and posttest of the digital literacy scale

	Pretest		Posttest	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Overall	11.05	1.28	11.77	1.65
I: Information literacy	2.90	0.43	2.97	0.55
II: Reproduction literacy	2.79	0.41	3.13	0.49
III: Language-based literacy	2.54	0.35	2.63	0.44
IV: Connection literacy	2.83	0.48	3.04	0.45

(N=18)

This identified discrepancy between information and reproduction/visual literacy may be attributed to the chosen DST platform and the designated writing tasks. The platform, Storybird, involves choosing artwork to illustrate the participants' writing as the end product, which

ultimately trained the participants' ability to create new interpretations by using pre-existing visual sources. The considerably increased reproduction literacy might also help the participants write better, the effects worthy of investigating in the future study. While writing, it is crucial to be able to reorganize and rearrange pre-existing sentences to produce distinct implications. According to Labbo, Reinking, and McKenna (1998), successful reproduction-literate scholars usually possess excellent synthetical and multi-faceted thinking, which may contribute to more skillful writing. However, as they wrote and selected artworks, the participants were not required to include outside source references as they composed their paragraphs or essays. As a result, the platform and the task did not land themselves to the development of information literacy.

To further identify if there was any significant difference in the overall and sub-categories of digital literacy before and after the intervention, five paired-samples t-tests were carried out. The results are displayed in Table 2. According to the paired-samples t-tests, there are significant differences in the overall and the reproduction/visual literacy between the pretest and the posttest. However, there is no significant difference in information literacy, language-based literacy and connection literacy between the pretest and the posttest.

Table 2: Paired-samples t-test results of a questionnaire of digital literacy

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Overall (Post-Pre)	0.72	1.10	0.26	2.80	17	.01*
Information literacy (Post-Pre)	0.07	0.41	0.10	0.78	17	0.45
Reproduction literacy (Post-Pre)	0.34	0.45	0.11	3.25	17	.005**
Language-based literacy (Post-Pre)	0.09	0.34	0.08	1.16	17	0.26
Connection literacy (Post-Pre)	0.21	0.43	0.10	2.10	17	0.05

\*P< .05 \*\*P< .01

Different from the researcher's anticipation, there is no significant difference in language-based literacy which the participants were offered ample opportunities to develop. The current results concerning digital literacy are partially consistent with the findings from previous research (Thang, Sim, Mahmud, Lin, & Ismail, 2014; Robin, 2016). Similar to Thang et al. (2014) study, where their participants' digital literacy was improved after creating their group stories on Photo Story 3 for a semester, the present study also saw the enhanced overall digital literacy. Nevertheless, unlike the study above by Thang et al. (2014) in which the participants' language literacy, connection literacy, and media literacy were all enhanced, the current study only found a significant difference in reproduction/visual literacy. As explained earlier, the nature of Storybird and the tasks involved might be the possible reasons to account for the non-significant, pre-post difference in the sub-category of information, language-based, and connection literacy.

The non-significant finding in language-based literacy appears to be in contrast to Robin's (2016) assertion that engaging in multimodal DST facilitates the enhancement of digital storytellers' language literacy, oral ability, and cross-cultural competence. In his study, the participants used audio or other media to compose digital storytelling, and their language

literacy was substantially improved. On the contrary, the current study did not see such a positive outcome in language-based literacy although the 18 participants had written and revised several English paragraphs and essays on Storybird during the two semesters. The plausible reason may include that the digital writing tasks on Storybird did not ask the participants to focus on spotting grammatical errors, paraphrasing or summarizing information and/or deciphering the content of websites. The only item under language-based literacy that has reached significant difference states, “I can identify English information that is not correct.” As the participants composed on Storybird, they had to search for an outside source to back up their writing assignments. This may account for the significant difference identified in this item. Another interesting finding surfaced as the connection literacy was on the brink of reaching a significant difference ( $P = .051$ ). This may be due to the fact that the participants were only provided with limited opportunities to engage in peer sharing/commenting with their partners in the nearby colleges. There were only three times that the participants reviewed and commented on others’ Storybird writings as well as being reviewed and commented on throughout the entire school year. Should the cross-institutional collaboration have lasted longer, the connection literacy might have further developed. In light of the enhanced overall digital literacy, it is also essential to find out if the integration of Storybird has boosted the participants’ sense of confidence in speaking and writing in English as an International Language.

### **Research question 2: How does DST affect participants’ self-efficacy as EIL users after taking part in Storybird-mediated digital storytelling?**

There is no significant difference in the overall self-efficacy of being an EIL user among the 18 participants before and after the intervention; nevertheless, a significant difference was identified in the aspect of writing-related self-efficacy. To investigate the effects of Storybird-mediated DST on self-efficacy, the questionnaire of self-efficacy as EIL user was administered to 18 participants in the beginning and the end of the school year. Table 3 provides a summary of the mean scores and standard deviations of the overall and the three domains in the pre and post self-efficacy scores for 18 participants. Table 2 indicates that the participants’ self-efficacy as EIL user were boosted in their overall and the three domains. The reliabilities of the pretest and posttest were calculated with satisfactory Cronbach’s ( $\alpha = 0.861$  for the pretest and 0.854 for the posttest).

Table 3: Summary of pretest and posttest of self-efficacy as EIL user questionnaire

	Pretest		Posttest	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Overall	7.67	1.00	8.00	1.24
I: Communication	2.67	0.48	2.76	0.51
II: Writing-Related	2.49	0.41	2.64	0.49
III: Purpose-Driven	2.54	0.35	2.63	0.44

(N=18)

Four paired-samples t-tests were performed to examine the effect of Storybird-mediated DST on the participants’ self-efficacy and its three domains before and after the intervention. Table 4 shows that there is no significant difference in overall, communication, and purpose-driven self-efficacy. Nevertheless, a significant difference was identified in writing-related self-efficacy, which suggests that the participants’ writing-related self-efficacy was significantly enhanced at the end of this study ( $t = 2.43$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = .54$ ).

Table 4: Paired-samples t-test of pre and post-test of self-efficacy of using English as an international language

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Overall (Post-Pre)	0.33	0.88	0.21	1.60	17	0.13
Communication (Post-Pre)	0.09	0.35	0.08	1.14	17	0.27
Writing (Post-Pre)	0.15	0.29	0.07	2.28	17	0.04*
Purpose (Post-Pre)	0.08	0.43	0.10	0.83	17	0.42

\*P<.05

Different from the insignificant difference identified with the current participants, Yang and Wu (2012) reported that DST had significant effects on senior high school students' English proficiency, critical thinking, and self-efficacy. Although Yang and Wu focused on high school students' English learning motivation, they did include five items for self-efficacy in their motivation questionnaire. Their research results indicate that the use of DST in the English class positively influenced their students' learning motivation, and their writing self-efficacy, a domain in writing motivation, was significantly improved at the end of the study. For the present study, lack of practice might be the main reason accounting for the non-significant findings with the overall, communication-related, and purpose-driven self-efficacy after year-long engagement in Storybird-mediated digital storytelling. The participants did not get sufficient opportunities to communicate with their cross-institution partners via digital storytelling; neither did they have enough practices to accomplish specific tasks through digital storytelling. As a result, their sense of confidence was not cultivated. Given ample practices, their self-efficacy of using English for communication and purposes might be elevated, as in the case of their writing-related self-efficacy, the primary focus of this study. The statistic findings suggest that self-efficacy in one language skill cannot collude to others unless there are a compatible amount of practices evenly allocated for other language skills.

Unlike the insignificant statistical difference in the participants' overall self-efficacy, the qualitative analysis from the open-ended survey indicates that the majority of the participants considered their sense of confidence being promoted as a result of partaking in the Storybird-mediated digital storytelling. Every participant affirmed the statement that their sense of confidence had been enhanced after year-long writing training. When asked if the integration of Storybird writing has somehow contributed to their enhanced confidence, the majority responded positively, with only 4 out of 16 respondents answering with ambivalence. Many participants attributed the compliments from other Storybird writers as the leading cause for their elevated confidence. For example, Erica recalled, "I have received some compliments on my stories from other writers, which has made me feel more confident in my writing." Similarly, Jessica pointed out that Storybird not only has made English writing more exciting but also removed her apprehension towards it, which in turn increased her confidence in English writing. This finding is consistent with the previous research results (Robin & McNeil, 2012; Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009; Yang & Wu, 2012). Robin & McNeil (2012) postulated that students' self-efficacy was promoted after implementing DST in the classroom. Interestingly, Sylvester and Greenidge (2009) noticed that the students' motivation to write increased after they were informed that their writing assignments would be published on the Internet and viewed by other people other than their teachers, which echoes precisely what some of the participants stated in the survey. For instance, Elaine mentioned, "Somehow, I feel more motivated and confident to write when I knew that some real readers are out there on the Storybird to read and appreciate

my writing,” as she contemplated on her overall experience with Storybird. When the EIL students have the opportunity to publish their written work on the Internet and receive genuine comments afterward, their sense of confidence in English writing can be fostered.

### **Research question 3: What are the participants’ perceptions of integrating Storybird into their L2 writing class?**

Storybird-mediated DST was well-received as an integral part of their composition class by the participants. Analyses of the responses from the end-of-year survey indicate the overwhelmingly positive reaction to the integration of Storybird among the present participants. The survey consists of 16 questions probing into the participants’ views on integrating Storybird-mediated DST into their regular composition class, commenting/receiving comments from other Storybird writers, and operating on the Storybird platform. Three major themes are presented and illustrated with the participants’ responses, including preferring Storybird-integrated over conventional writing classes, benefiting from the interaction with other Storybird writers, and wanting some modifications on the Storybird platform.

When asked to choose between the Storybird-integrated and the traditional composition class, the entire cohort except for one student opted for the former for several reasons. The foremost reason identified by the participants is that Storybird makes English writing more exciting and less inhibiting when compared with the conventional writing class. The participants not only enjoyed writing on Storybird but also benefited from interacting with other Storybird writers. Emily pointed out, “It’s delightful to write on Storybird with so many pictures to choose from. My writing became more interesting and vivid after being illustrated with pictures”. Many participants mentioned that receiving feedback from people other than the instructor also makes the writing process worthwhile because having a real audience brings purpose and meaning to the writing. Most participants found the comments they received helpful in revising their piece of written work. For instance, Vicky recalled the comments she got from the other Storybird writer and asserted that “I have never thought my story could be developed that way until I saw the suggestion from the other Storybird writer. It’s always beneficial to have an additional read to give my writing a fresh look”. Besides receiving helpful comments from others, the participants enjoy reading others’ Storybird writings as well. With the considerable advantages stemming from the Storybird integration, the majority of the participants recommended the continuous use of Storybird for next year’s students. Nevertheless, when asked if they would continue to use Storybird as a writing platform after the current class ended, only 4 participants said “Yes” while the rest replied with uncertainty.

Most participants acclaimed the vivid and artistic pictures offered by Storybird as the primary feature that instilled fun into the writing process. Teresa mentioned, “I really enjoy illustrating my story with the Storybird pictures. This process helped me relax and become less concerned about my imperfect English”.

Many other participants also acknowledged that when they write on Storybird, they pay more attention to the content instead of the grammatical accuracy of their English compositions. For example, Alisa mentioned that “While I am writing on Storybird, I pay less attention to grammatical accuracy and vocabulary usage; instead, I focus on my contents. On the contrary, when I am writing with the other way, I will pay more attention to them. I think the difference is that for me, my works in Storybird are like stories; however, when they are in a traditional way, they are essays.” In addition to the eye-catching pictures provided on the Storybird platform, many participants applauded the opportunity to interact with other Storybird writers via reading and commenting on each other’s stories. When asked what they mostly focused on

while commenting on others' Storybird writing, fourteen out of the 18 participants said that they mainly focused on the content, two on the language accuracy, and the remaining two on the structure. They believe that the content is the core of any story and deserves the most attention. Therefore, when the participants commented on others' Storybird writing, they usually thought of themselves as a reader and a language learner. The participants voiced their preference for constructive comments advising how they can revise their stories. Emily explained, "With this kind of comment, I would know what to do with my story. As for those comments with only compliments, I welcome them, but I think I learn little from them". Although the participants held very positive views of Storybird, they identified some limitations of this platform, such as no flexibility of mixing illustrations from various artists, no spelling checker, the difficulty of locating matching pictures, and difficulty of modifying the story. The participants would like to see some of the aforementioned problems being addressed with the updated version of Storybird.

The main reasons accounting for the participants' positive attitudes toward the Storybird-integrated digital writing are similar to the previous study (Dogan, 2012; Hett, 2012) where the subjects enjoyed writing with the artistic pictures and interacting with their peers. Hett (2012) postulated that the technologically enhanced images and audio made DST captivating for young writers. Although Storybird is not equipped with audio recording, the participants in the current study were drawn enchantedly to writing a story with pictures. In addition, most participants believe that they have made substantial progress in English writing as a result of taking part in this project, which echoes Yoon's (2013) argument that DST can improve students' language growth in reading, writing, speaking and listening. In sum, integrating Storybird into a conventional composition course has been perceived as a motivating, stimulating, interactive, and facilitating innovation by the current participants who fervently suggested the continued use of the platform for the upcoming freshman class.

### **Pedagogical Implications and Conclusion**

The overall findings of this study suggest that DST can be a practical and empowering pedagogical addition to the existing EIL writing course. Different from the previous studies which relied on a single survey result to report the potential effects of DST on cultivating digital literacy (Karakoyuna & Kuzub, 2013; Thang et al., 2014), this study pointed out the differing outcomes among sub-categories of digital literacy. The differing outcomes suggest that merely integrating a technologically advanced approach will not automatically develop all aspects of digital literacy. The type of digital literacy mainly cultivated hinges upon the nature of the adopted platform and the characteristics of instructional task design. Explicit instructions on verifying the source reliability and identifying the media bias are needed to cultivate students' information literacy. With the unprecedented overflow and preoccupation of social media among youth, cultivating their information and connection literacy became far more crucial than before. To help adult EIL students become prudent consumer of social media rather than being consumed by social media, the English language teachers ought to educate their students about how to "use technology as a tool to engage in creative, productive, lifelong learning rather than simply consuming passive content" (Thomas, 2016, p. 18). This study offers some guidelines for EIL teachers to integrate multimodal DST as an empowering pedagogy.

The quantitative results suggest that integrating Storybird with the conventional EIL writing course has positive effects on cultivating adult EIL students' digital literacy and promoting their writing-related self-efficacy. The current participants not only rated their overall digital literacy but also reproduction/visual literacy higher after their year-long engagement in

Storybird writing. Higher reproduction/visual literacy is often associated with proficient synthetical and multi-faceted thinking (Labbo et al., 1998), two essential prerequisites to skillful writing. In other words, the current participants' writing might also have improved. For future study, it will be of significance to investigate whether this engaging in DST will also help EIL students improve their academic writing. Besides higher digital literacy, the participants also developed a stronger sense of self-efficacy as an EIL writer, which in turn will help them conquer more challenging writing tasks in the future. The boosted self-efficacy in writing suggests that confidence cultivated in one language skill cannot transfer onto other skills. In other words, when EIL students became more confident in one language skill (e.g., writing) via specific training, the influence of the training would not get carried over into other language skills (e.g., speaking, listening or reading). Therefore, it will be ideal for engaging EIL students in multimodal DST in which they can orally contribute to the digital story. As such, the participants' communication-oriented self-efficacy might be promoted. In the present study, the collaboration was mainly conducted in written form.

Apart from the statistical analysis results, the qualitative findings indicate that Storybird was well received by the cohort of 18 students who have expressed enthusiasm toward writing with artful pictures. Despite some difficulties in locating suitable pictures to illustrate their writing, many participants wanted to write more and practice more on Storybird. DST contains not only traditional literacy but also new literacies as it involves multimedia texts. Students who struggle with traditional literacy may have a stronger motivation and a better grasp of traditional literacy when they create digital stories. Thus, new literacies have the potential to scaffold students' traditional literacy (Sylvester & Greenidge, 2009). In both reading and writing, DST is a new medium for struggling students (Hett, 2012). Interestingly, students' motivation to write increased after they were informed that their writing assignments would be published on the Internet and viewed by other people besides teachers. Therefore, the current study suggests that teachers can use DST to motivate reluctant students and stimulate them to revise and complete writing assignments for a broader audience out there on the Internet. According to Pop (2012), students of higher education are often considered self-efficacious learners. Their self-efficacy on learning is often underestimated. However, students' motivation and engagement are two essential elements for successful learning (Pop, 2012; Yang & Wu, 2012). The current study shows that DST enhanced the students' engagement in English learning and their productivity in English writing. The results of the open-ended survey also affirmed the positive effects of Storybird-mediated DST on digital literacy and self-efficacy among adult EIL students. Despite the overall positive findings, some participants voiced their frustration toward choosing the suitable artworks to illustrate their more complicated pieces of writing. Some expressed their tiredness of finding the right pictures to match their writings over the course of one school year. Based on these negative feedbacks, it is advisable for any teacher who intends to introduce a DST platform to his/her students that sticking to one single platform throughout the entire year may not be the best practice. It's worth trying more than one platform to gauge its instructional affordance and sustainability.

Albeit the theoretical and pedagogical implications, the generalizability of the current study to other L2 contexts is limited in the following aspects. First, the differences identified from the paired-samples t-tests do not denote the interaction among digital storytelling, L2 digital literacy/writing self-efficacy, and time. Second, the number of participants is not significant enough to warrant the predictability of similar outcomes when the study is replicated. Third, the current study did not investigate the effects of DST on L2 writing gains. The development of L2 writing can only be inferred from the participants' self-reported data. In light of the above limitations, the future study may recruit more participants and randomly divide them into the



experimental group with DST and the control group with conventional L2 writing pedagogy to explore the potential differences in digital literacy, self-efficacy, and L2 writing competence. Also, the future study should look into the effects of DST on writing development among L2 learners.

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**Proficient Speakers of English as a Foreign Language:  
A Focus-Group Study**

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### **Abstract**

Although English is the de facto language of communication across nations in today's world, a limited number of foreign language learners are able to communicate well in English and perceive themselves as competent speakers. Investigating traits of proficient speakers of English and understanding the reasons behind their speaking skills can guide language teachers in creating supportive language learning contexts for their students. This study explores what proficient speakers of English do to gain success in speaking, and it sheds light on how to improve speaking skills in language learning. The study examines what factors play an important role in the language development of proficient speakers of English. Sixteen English as a foreign language (EFL) students who had the highest scores on English speaking tests volunteered for this study; four focus groups were created with four participants in each group. Content analysis results indicate that contextual factors – including self-practice, teacher factor, experience abroad, Turkish context, out-of-class technology use, and affective factors, including motivation and anxiety – are important for speaking enhancement. Findings clearly reveal that language learning should go beyond the confines of the school and be supported with technology-enhanced extracurricular exercises in EFL contexts. Moreover, what motivates language learners to study English and how they feel while speaking should be considered while teaching or planning their speaking lessons.

*Keywords:* speaking skills, proficient speakers, contextual factors, motivation, anxiety

With two billion-plus speakers, including native and non-native speakers with different competencies, the English language has become a fundamental need for individuals in this globalizing world (Crystal, 2008; Ethnologue, 2019; Graddol, 2006). As a result, the number of English as a foreign or second language speakers (L2) is growing (Crystal, 2008). Since knowing a language is equated with speaking that language fluently, speaking English has become a primary goal for most L2 learners. However, a limited number of English learners can be categorized as competent speakers of the language. According to the recent EF English Proficiency Index (English First, 2019), only 14 countries have a very high proficiency index and many countries (30) fall into the shallow proficiency index among 100 non-English speaking countries under investigation for adult English proficiency with standardized tests. It is commonly accepted that many EFL instruction programs strive to provide appropriate conditions for learners to gain high proficiency in English. However, despite the importance of fluent spoken language, scant research attention has been given to strategies that can be employed to enhance speaking (Pawlak, 2018). With its specific focus on the experiences of proficient speakers in achieving success, this study used a qualitative approach to understand the nature of those proficient speakers and aimed to provide rich data on the influential factors about speaking enhancement.

### **Literature Review**

Mastery of speaking in another language is a complex process: the speaker must learn a variety of skills including both linguistic and non-linguistic elements, and should be able to conduct a free-flowing conversation (Dincer, 2017; Richards, 2008; Shumin, 2002; Tarone, 2005; Zhang & Head, 2009). A number of factors affecting speakers' oral performance, including maturation constraints (i.e., age), aural medium factors (i.e., listening skills), sociocultural factors (i.e., cultural elements), and affective factors (i.e., L2 anxiety, L2 motivation, self-esteem, confidence) can be listed in addition to linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse competence (Kawai, 2008; Shumin, 2002). With its complex nature hindering proficiency, spoken English is arduous; language learners must spend significant time and effort on mastery (Dincer, 2017; Kawai, 2008). Spoken English is also a skill in high demand, as knowing a language is frequently equated with speaking a language at a communication level (Pawlak, 2018). Most learners in today's globalized world study English to obtain speaking proficiency; it is considered the most demanding among the four main language skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking (Dincer, 2017; Zhang & Head, 2009). Although speaking is the most challenging skill, most English language learners have limited opportunities to practice the language outside the classroom, despite today's technological advances (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2013; Kawai, 2008; Pawlak, 2014, 2018; Ruixue, Zejun, & Yijing, 2012). Teaching the spoken language has long been a challenge for EFL teachers because some national exams neglect communicative competence (Ruixue et al., 2012). As limited numbers of students can conduct a conversation in English at the desired level, a proficient speaker may be perceived as a privileged person in society (Dincer, 2017). Additionally, success in oral communication has always been the ultimate goal for language learners (Dincer, 2017; Pawlak, 2018).

How one successfully learns a language has been of great interest in the L2 research domain, and a list of shared traits of these learners can be found in the literature (Brown, 2001; Griffiths, 2015; Reiss, 1985; Rubin, 1975; Takeuchi, 2003). Among those shared features, linguistic mastery of English and oral communication skills is listed. However, specific details regarding the characteristics of advanced speakers of English have gained little attention (Pawlak, 2018). In this limited research, Takeuchi (2003) ascertained the strategies of successful language learners in terms of language sub-skills by investigating the experiences of Japanese EFL

learners. According to Takeuchi (2003), proficient language learners develop their speaking skills by memorizing some basic sentences and reciting them repeatedly. They also emphasize accuracy more than fluency. In another study (Takeuchi, 2003, cited in Kawai, 2008), Takeuchi investigated language learning development of proficient English speakers from different vocations, including professors and simultaneous interpreters, and listed some strategies for mastery of speaking. Similar to his previous research, he found that memorizing formulaic expressions, practicing listening using dictation, engaging in read-aloud activities, utilizing context and multimedia for vocabulary enhancement, conducting intensive self-study, and finding opportunities to talk with native speakers are commonly employed strategies for these learners.

In her two-step action-research, Kawai (2008) first investigated the role of task-based strategy instruction with an electronic chat program in students' speaking performance with the idea that it might ease intimidation in face-to-face interaction. Later, she gathered the viewpoints of two proficient speakers of English about the class discussion activities. She found that the use of electronic chat programs can be useful for reserved learners to let them practice English without fear of making mistakes and appearing foolish. The proficient speakers also suggested that reading aloud, singing songs, making comments while watching TV, speaking with natives, and simulating conversation with peers are helpful for reducing anxiety and building confidence in their speaking skills. They also pointed to precautionary measures in communication breakdowns and learning from their failures as speaking-enhancement strategies.

Marzec-Stawiarska (2015) investigated the relationship between anxiety and speaking proficiency in advanced learners of English as the literature on this relationship is not unanimous. She found that although language learners may have an adequate level of English proficiency, they experience stress and worry in a speaking context. They are anxious about their fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and the content of their oral performances and are afraid of talking with native speakers. In another study, Pawlak (2015) investigated the communication strategies of advanced learners and found that students use non-verbal strategies, negotiation for meaning, social affective strategies, accuracy-oriented strategies, and fluency-oriented strategies in their communication. These learners attempt to make eye contact when they talk, provide examples if the listener does not understand what they say, enjoy the conversation, correct themselves when they notice that they make a mistake, and attempt to speak clearly and loudly to make themselves understood. He also found that learners' answers are quite varied; for example, "I give up when I can't make myself understood," "I think first of what I want to say in my native language and then construct the English sentence," and "I ask other people to help when I can't communicate well."

In a more recent study, Lee and Heinz (2016) grouped the effective and ineffective strategies of advanced learners for speaking with unstructured essays. In parallel to Takeuchi's findings (2003), they discovered that memorization and repetition activities are effective for the development of speaking skills. Students repeatedly practice language, memorize English expressions and collocations and incorporate them into their conversation, read aloud, listen to English, practice creative writing, increase their exposure to English, and mimic native speakers. They also said passive activities such as simply listening to native speakers, watching them, or reading books without studying them and placing emphasis on grammar are not effective for them. In his follow-up study, Pawlak (2018) investigated the speaking strategies that advanced learners of English used before, during, and after the performance of two communication-based tasks in pairs. According to the written responses of students, learners



most frequently used metacognitive strategies in all stages of task performance. Specifically, they engaged in planning their contribution in terms of searching for details for content, finding appropriate vocabulary, monitoring their performance concerning language-related issues, and paying attention to their partner's speech. They also used social strategies such as cooperation, asking for clarification, or verification in all stages of task performance.

Although relevant literature is somewhat overlapping in terms of speaking enhancement activities, it offers various strategies based on individual success stories and teacher-assigned, task-based communication activities. The literature also includes semi-structured, question-based written answers of learners with a limited focus on out-of-class experience. Focus-group interviews are advised in literature for a more thorough understanding of strategies employed by a specific group of students (Chamot, 2004). Additionally, in today's digital era, it is undeniable that successful language learning is not limited to in-class activities; out-of-class activities have a significant impact on language learning (Lai, 2017). However, many questions about how proficient language learners develop their speaking skills remain to be unanswered, and there is a call for more research with successful learners to uncover experience-based working suggestions for enhancement of speaking skills (Dincer, 2017; Kawai, 2008; Lee & Heinz, 2016; Marcos-Llinas & Garau, 2009; Pawlak, 2018). To this end, gaining an understanding of proficient learners' successful journeys might shed light on the improvement of speaking skills in language learning for learners and provide pedagogical insights for language teachers.

### **Aim of the study**

Given the limitations of literature and the scarcity of research on this subject, this study aims to explore how high achievers succeeded in their speaking proficiency and which factors played a role in their achievement with a qualitative focus-study approach. The study answers the following research question: What are the factors that contribute to the success of proficient speakers of English as a foreign language?

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

This study was conducted as a qualitative case-study approach for an in-depth systematic examination of a case, subject, or study group within its real-life context (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Different designs of case studies can be found in the literature (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). For a holistic understanding of the study phenomenon, this study adopted Yin's (2009) single-case design, which focuses on an extreme group (i.e., advanced learners' speaking English) that was relatively under-researched in L2 literature. Therefore, a focus-group discussion data-collection strategy was employed for an in-depth understanding of proficient speakers' viewpoints.

### **Study Group**

Sixteen advanced learners of English (including 10 males) participated in the study. They are the freshman students in the English Language and Literature Department. Their proficiency is expected to be somewhere between B2 and C1, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). In their first year, they enroll in skill-based language courses – such as advanced writing skills, reading skills, speaking skills, and listening skills – as well as some courses in their native tongue. They were recruited with a purposive sample strategy, extreme case sampling. According to Cohen et al. (2018), with this strategy, participants are selected because of their extreme characteristics within the group to provide a

clear understanding of the central phenomenon. The students are high achievers in four advanced learners' speaking classes (with a total enrollment of 120 students) and were chosen for the study group based on their speaking exam scores (ranging from 90 to 96 out of 100) and the personal opinion of the course instructor. A total of 20 students were invited to participate in the study and 16 of them volunteered to do so. Their ages ranged from 18 to 22 years of age ( $M = 19.31$ ;  $SD = 1.25$ ). According to self-reports, they had more than seven years of experience in English ( $M = 7.38$ ;  $SD = 2.16$ ). Three students had traveled to English-speaking countries for a few months. Only six students know a foreign language other than English but at a beginner level.

### **Data Collection and Analysis Procedure**

As a data-collection methodology, a focus-group interview was chosen for an in-depth investigation of learners. According to Lew, Yang, and Harklau (2018), this data-collection strategy is one of the least-used approaches and limited research exists on qualitative focus-group interviews in L2. In this method, participants discuss a topic that is determined by the moderator, and reliance is given to the interaction within the group (Cohen et al., 2018). In focus groups, participants interact with each other and work together on the topic at hand. A focus group differs from a straightforward interview, which relies heavily on the researcher's agenda and provides more data than individual interviews (Morgan, 1996). As the interaction within the group is crucial for data and outcomes, the researcher should put much importance on the creation of the groups and the role of the facilitator or moderator of the discussion (Cohen et al., 2018). According to Morgan (1996), group size and the moderator's involvement depend on the goals of the research.

In this study, the primary goal was to generate significant data on the characteristics of proficient speakers within an anxiety-free context. Four focus groups with four students in each were created so as to provide adequate speaking time for students and moderators involved in the lightly structured discussion. The participants were first informed about the study, their anonymity, and their right to withdraw anytime during the interview. After their consent was secured, each participant completed a short questionnaire about their demographic details and English learning experience. Then, they were invited to a focus-group session at their convenience. The second researcher of the study served as the moderator of the sessions, following an interview protocol and taking some field notes. Each session began with an introduction of the participants, continued with discussion of some semi-structured questions, and concluded with a summary of key issues by the researcher. In discussions, students were free to enter and add their remarks after others had spoken. Additionally, they were asked whether they wanted to add any information to the concluding remarks. The sessions were in English and audio-recorded. The average interview session lasted 18 minutes.

For trustworthiness of the study, four commonly cited approaches – credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability – were considered in the data-collection analysis process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1998). Audio-recorded data was transcribed first for analysis and was verified by the researchers. Qualitative content analysis was conducted to identify patterns that emerged and to build relations among the patterns by the researchers. In this process, researchers first independently worked on creating initial codes in the raw data analysis, step by step, following the procedure of the general inductive approach (Thomas, 2006). They later worked together to group the codes after discussions. After finalizing the creation of groups and deciding the main themes, a third researcher's opinion about the groups was taken concerning the final themes with a diagram of relationships. For the member check, the diagram of relationships was sent to the participants for verification; all students agreed on

the findings without adding any major changes. In the presentation of the analysis, the main categories were illustrated with figures. The categories with sub-themes were supported with sample student excerpts. In this manner, numbers indicate interview sessions and letters were used to distinguish participants (i.e., 1-A = first interview, first participant; 4-D = fourth interview, fourth participant).

## Findings

Two main categories emerged from the focus-group interview sessions. Both contextual and affective factors are important in enhancing speaking skills and gaining proficiency. These factors and their sub-themes are presented, respectively.

### Contextual Factors

The first category, named “contextual factors,” has five themes: self, school, abroad, country, and technology. These themes also have sub-sub-categories and codes. The details are provided in Figure 1.

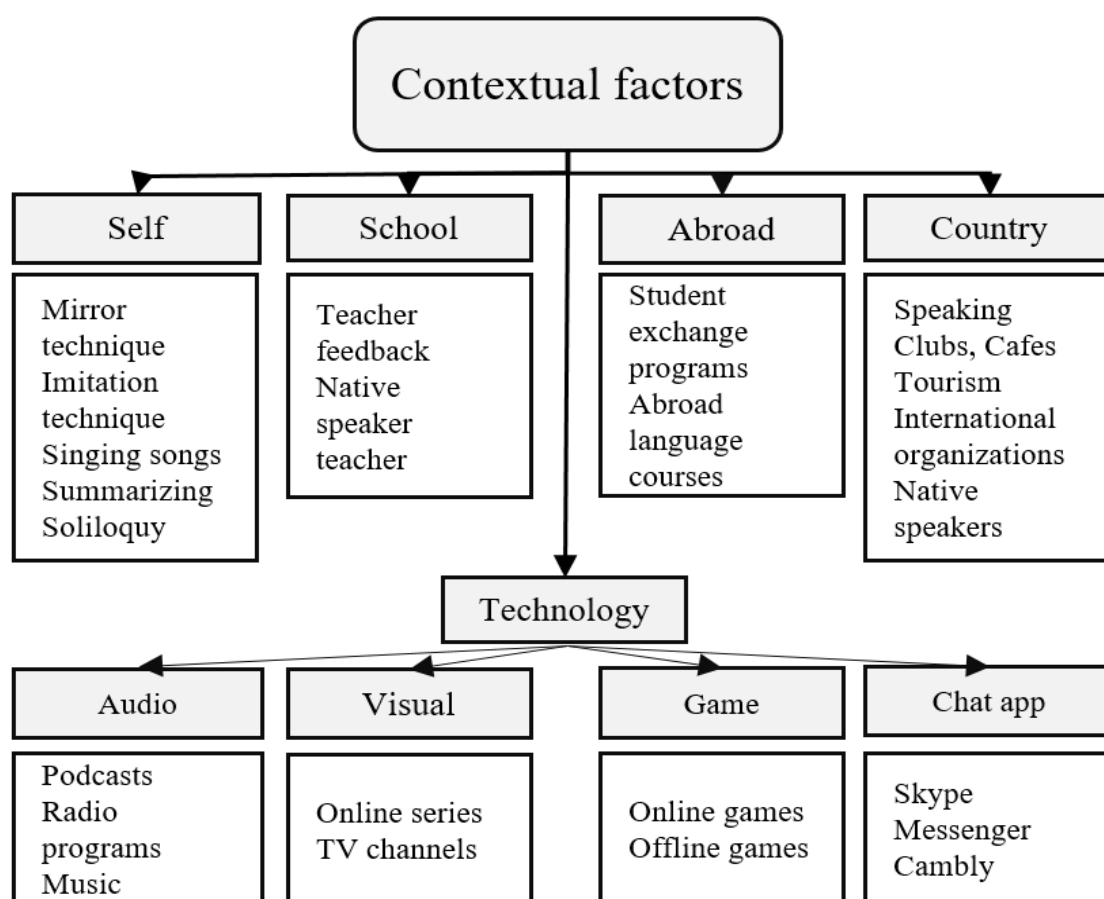


Figure 1: Contextual factors to superiority in speaking English

Self as the first theme in the figure expresses students’ self-initiated strategies for speaking enhancement. Students stated that they attempt to improve their speaking skills with self-practice techniques. For instance, they watch themselves while speaking in the mirror and imitate the speech of some well-known native speakers. They also said they use English a great deal, even if they have limited opportunity to practice with someone. They also love English songs and recite those songs as well. They summarize aloud in English what they have listened

to or watched, and they imagine a situation and talk to themselves in that situation in English when they are alone. Emphasizing these issues, student 4-A said: *“There are not enough chances to practice English with natives, so I talk to myself and summarize the videos I watch aloud.”* Other students agreed with this statement and shared their own similar learning experiences via self-talking.

The second theme, school, included language teacher feedback and the importance of a native-speaker teacher. The theme demonstrated that the teacher’s being a native speaker of English has a positive impact on students and that teacher feedback is important in the development of speaking skills. Since the students have a limited opportunity to practice English with native speakers in daily life, to speak with a native-speaker teacher and be understood by the teacher gave students additional motivation. Moreover, the students highlighted the teacher’s role in language learning and said that positive feedback about their speaking skills plays a significant role in their willingness to practice speaking. Emphasizing the role of teacher feedback in language development, student 1-B said: *“Teachers’ feedback motivates me to develop my skills. Actually, it is the most motivating thing. I can tell every student gives a lot of importance to teachers’ comments.”* The constructive feedback given by teachers seems to constitute an essential part of teaching strategies.

The third theme is related to experience abroad. One of the learners said she traveled to England to take English language courses. However, this type of learning activity is quite expensive and is not common among students who enroll in state universities. Instead, most students gain experience in a foreign country through exchange programs such as Erasmus, Grundtvig, and the European Voluntary Service (EVS). In fact, the number of students who participate in exchanges has grown exponentially in recent years. One of the former exchange students, 2-D, shared his experiences as, *“In my hometown, you cannot see tourists, so I went to Europe with a Comenius project and I made friends there. I occasionally talk to them on the internet.”*

The fourth theme, country, signifies home country experience and is directly linked to the English-speaking context in Turkey. Some learners are fortunate to have native speakers in the neighborhood, such as brides from England or retired English neighbors. They also seize the opportunity to attend English clubs and participate in discussions in English-speaking cafés. Some learners also become volunteers at international organizations such as the European Youth Olympic Festival (EYOF). They take advantage of significant speaking practice time during the competitions and communicate on the Internet with the friends they have made during these events. Some learners, especially those who live near tourist attractions, have taken jobs that involve speaking practice. Student 2-A said, *“I worked as a tour guide in Bursa (a historical Turkish city); I made many foreign friends, I speak to them on Skype whenever I get the chance.”*

The fifth and last theme, technology, has a relatively strong influence on speaking development. To meet their need for practice, learners said they utilize audio and audio-visual materials, make use of chat apps, and play video games. Downloadable podcasts on language-learning websites, radio programs, and foreign music are popular audio files for listening practice. Online television series and English television channels are two popular audio-visual sources for language development. Student 3-C argued that watching television not only develops one’s language skills but also one’s general knowledge: *“By watching TV series, you do not only learn a language but also their culture, social life, and movements (body language).”* Indeed, communication is both verbal and non-verbal. The role of video games in improving speaking skills is arguably one of the most-discussed issues in the L2 domain. Some

learners said they developed their speaking skills by playing online games in which they speak with players around the world and single-player games that require English competency to understand the tasks assigned in the game. Student 2-B highlighted the contributions of playing computer games by saying, “*I began to play computer games not for fun but for language. I owe a lot to games in which you need to talk just like in real life.*” Some video games enable players to create their own characters or avatars and to live and speak in a simulated world. Chat apps such as Skype and Facebook Messenger are used for chat and video calls. Cambly, an app for practicing English with native English speakers over video chat, and similar applications that enable learners to have a video call for speaking practice are becoming popular. Social networking sites such as Facebook and Instagram make it possible for users to make friends around the globe. Thanks to these social networking sites, learners are able to keep in touch with people they meet in real-life settings such as tourism.

### Affective Factors

The second category addressed “affective factors” in speaking enhancement. It examines what motivates students to improve their speaking skills and how they feel when they begin communicating with others in English.

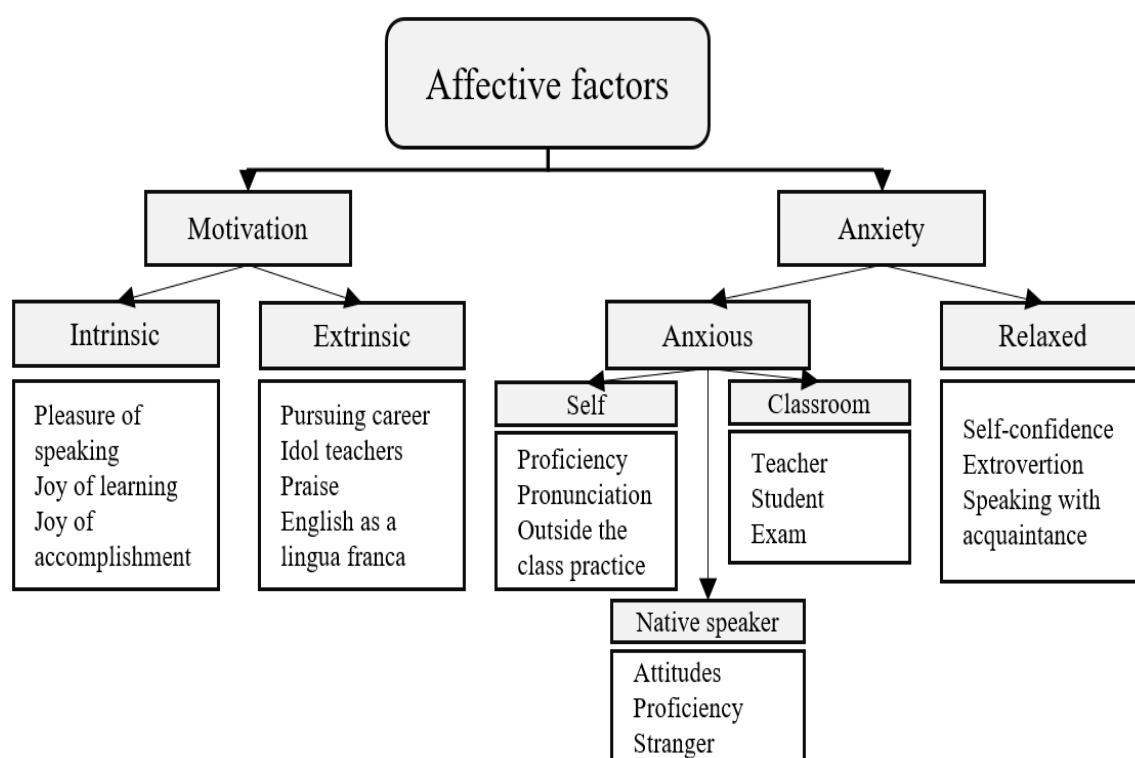


Figure 2: Affective factors to superiority in speaking English

Codes relating to the students’ motivation to speak English were collected under two sub-themes: intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation. The first sub-theme, intrinsic motivation, is a driving force for many learners to develop their speaking skills. Intrinsic motivation reveals itself in various ways. Some learners say they have fun while talking in English. Those students use mirror techniques, or they talk to themselves when they are unable to find native speakers with whom to practice. Other learners enjoy listening to songs or podcasts and watching television series or movies in English. One student described the fun he has when watching and understanding television without any subtitles. Understanding native speakers in real-life

conversations and forming good conversations provide a significant motivational boost. Other learners become motivated when they understand native speakers well and are able to express themselves in English. Emphasizing the connection between the joy of accomplishment and intrinsic motivation, student 3-D said, *“I didn’t understand native speakers in the past, now I can; that motivates me.”*

The second sub-theme explores extrinsic motivation, which pushes students to develop their speaking skills. Although students have reached an acceptable level of spoken skill, they continue to develop their skills so they can pursue a career in English teaching. Some learners say they want to be just like their idol teachers, who have native-like proficiency in speaking. Such learners became more motivated when they spoke to their teachers and earned praise. Their motivation was fueled by teacher feedback. Positive teacher feedback is highly valued by most language learners, as it makes them feel more confident. To express that feeling of motivation and self-confidence, learner 4-C said, *“I get motivated when my teacher states that I am in the right direction. Once, one of my teachers said, ‘I hope one day we will work together’.”* Emphasizing the importance of native-speaker praise, student 2-D said, *“When foreigners say, ‘Your English is good,’ I feel motivated.”* The last reason why learners are motivated stems from the role of English in the world as a lingua franca. Learners know they will be able to communicate with people around the globe thanks to the role of English as an international language.

Students also elaborated on their feelings when they speak English. The first sub-theme was anxiety. Learners feel anxious while talking due to self-driven behaviors and classroom-related factors. Some students state that self-related factors such as low proficiency, lack of proper pronunciation, and lack of practice hold them back. Others attribute their anxiety to the proficiency level of native speakers and the fact that they are strangers. Talking to native speakers of English may have a demotivating effect on learners. Emphasizing the native speakers’ effect on L2 anxiety, student 2-C said, *“Some natives are not eager to talk; that demotivates me. Some of them speak very fast and use slang terms.”* Another factor resulting in anxiety is the language classroom itself. In classrooms, some learners may not find a convenient atmosphere to speak with ease. Immediate error corrections by the teacher are not welcomed by many students. Some learners refrain from speaking in the classroom since they believe their friends will ridicule their mistakes. Focusing on the negative behaviors of the students in the class, student 4-D said, *“I have always felt nervous talking in the classroom. I thought before I spoke since others may laugh at my mistakes.”* Oral exams are another factor that increases anxiety. Some learners said they feel the highest level of anxiety during an exam, which hinders their speaking performance.

Another sub-theme reveals why and how learners feel relaxed while talking in English. Relaxed speakers are generally composed of confident and sociable learners. To gain confidence in the target language, one essential requirement is competency. Competent learners are usually less anxious. Emphasizing the role of competence in dealing with anxiety, learner 1-C said, *“I think most people feel anxious about talking to native speakers since they don’t know the language well, but I don’t. I, in fact, feel confident. I have never been to your country but I know your language, so that makes me feel confident.”* Besides competency, personal traits such as extroversion are highly valued by learners. One learner argues that if one is of a sociable type, he or she is likely to be more relaxed while speaking than a reserved learner. Learners also feel relaxed when they are in a friendly atmosphere or when they are talking to someone they know. Even in their mother tongue, some people may be hesitant to talk to those they do not know well. Emphasizing the importance of the communication partner in the speaking context,

learner 3-B said, *“I feel relaxed talking to my acquaintances but anxious while I am talking in an exam or with a stranger.”*

## Discussion

This study explored how proficient speakers of English become so and used a qualitative focus-study approach to investigate what factors play a role in these learners' success. In parallel with various studies, the findings indicated that both contextual factors related to students' self, school or out-of-school settings, and affective factors such as motivation and anxiety contribute to these learners' success, and these factors are important for the enhancement of speaking skills.

Findings regarding the contextual factors revealed that advanced learners adopt several self-practice strategies and use various contextual factors to improve their speaking skills. It has been proved that the school factor is only a piece of the puzzle and that learners use every opportunity to practice English both in and out-of-class. Consistent with the extensive use of cognitive and metacognitive strategies by advanced learners in the literature (Kawai, 2008; Pawlak, 2018) and studying coping strategies for speaking enhancement in non-native-speaking contexts (Abrar et al., 2018), the students monitored themselves with mirror techniques, imitation techniques, and self-talk. They focused on fluency and accuracy while speaking in terms of vocabulary selection and pronunciation. These types of strategies are useful not only for speaking proficiency engagement but also in creating confidence in learners (Forbes & Fishes, 2018). Although both native and non-native English-speaking teachers have specific advantages and there is no convincing evidence of one group's superiority over another, English native speakers are highly preferred by the institutions and students in EFL settings (Levis, Sonsaat, Link, & Barriuso, 2016). Supporting this belief, the learners in this study mentioned having a native speaker teacher as a privileged and supportive factor of their speaking proficiency and pronunciation, which parallels the relevant research (Lasagabaster & Sierra, 2006). Additionally, positive teacher feedback is a motivator for speaking confidence and proficiency (Forbes & Fishes, 2018).

In connection with the research about studying a target language abroad on learner beliefs (e.g., Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Kaypak & Ortaçtepe, 2014; Surtees, 2016), the learners in this study expressed that experience gained with student exchange programs and language courses in a native English-speaking country are influential in belief systems and English proficiency. In addition to self-practice efforts, teacher support, and foreign country experiences, the students benefited from any opportunity they could find in their home country and attended several events. This finding was expected, as proficient learners are autonomous learners who know their strengths and weaknesses well and make decisions to improve themselves at every opportunity (Cotterall, 2008; Kawai, 2008). Proficient language learners also make significant use of technology and find positive connections with language learning outcomes (Lai, Zhu, & Gong, 2015; Reinders & White, 2011; Sylvén & Sundqvist, 2012). Supporting these thoughts, the learners in the study used various technological tools to improve their speaking skills, such as playing video games online and offline, participating in chat apps to connect with native speakers, and watching television series or listening to radio to enhance their pronunciation and understanding. All of these findings reveal that proficient English speakers are actively engaged in the language learning process both in class and outside of class, engage in self-directed strategies to improve their proficiency, and create significant opportunities for practicing their English.

Affective factors, including motivation and anxiety, also emerged in the focus-group discussions. These two themes correspond to psychological factors that take place while studying English and starting a conversation in English. Motivation is one of the strongest predictors of L2 learning success (Dörnyei & Csizér, 1998). Within the framework of self-determination theory (SDT), (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017), L2 motivation ranged from the least self-determined to the most self-determined orientation. Consequently, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational orientations are significant for boosting motivation to speak English. Connected with previous research (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2017), intrinsic motivators include the joy and pleasure of language, and extrinsic motivators include pursuing career goals, praise, reward, and English being a lingua franca. Regarding the second affective factor, anxiety, it seems that although language learners are high achievers and enjoy a relatively high level of mastery in speaking English, they feel anxious when doing so. Consequently, an advanced level of language learning does not guarantee anxiety-free or stress-free conversations. Corroborating the results of a number of research studies (Abrar et al., 2018; Gan, 2013; Kitano, 2001; Marcos-Llinas & Garau, 2009), the main stressors even for competent English speakers are self-imposed and school-related factors such as linguistic competence, lack of opportunities to speak English, underestimation of their own capacity, comparisons with classmates, oral proficiency exams, and negative teacher behaviors. It is known that affective factors are closely connected with self-concept, which plays an important role in determining students' motivation to speak and see their actual competency levels (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2017; Eccles & Wigfield, 2002).

It should also be noted that although anxiety is accepted as an indicator of poor speaking performance and the cause of failure in speaking in the literature (Horwitz, 2001; Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986; Liu, 2006), the case might be different for advanced learners of English. Since these learners are much more aware of the importance of the activity and the resulting higher expectations, they might place significant self-imposed pressure on their speaking ability. Sometimes, higher proficiency means higher anxiety as well (Kitano, 2001; Marzec-Stawiarska, 2015; Marcos-Llinas & Garau, 2009). Significant anxiety does not equate with limited proficiency, as there is no positive relationship between success and anxiety among advanced-level learners (Marcos-Llinas & Garau, 2009). As Marzec-Stawiarska (2015) hypothesizes, L2 anxiety might have a more facilitative nature for speaking engagement. Emphasizing the connection among self-concepts, students in this study are relaxed while speaking as they have great self-confidence and sociable characteristics. They are also more relaxed while speaking with their acquaintances than while speaking with a foreigner. This finding corroborates the findings of Dewaele (2007).

## Conclusion

The study findings presented above provide further understanding about the nature of proficient speakers of English and help explain why some students outperform others while speaking. The findings also provide a basis for some teaching implications for language teachers and educators. They reveal that proficient speakers of English are autonomous learners who take responsibility for their own learning and seize every opportunity to practice both inside and outside class. While self-practice strategies and school-related factors are influential, these learners also practice their English in experiences abroad and in their home country. They use technology for practice and acknowledge that language learning should go beyond the confines of the classroom to ensure better oral communication. Additionally, they have revealed affective factors for speaking proficiency enhancement. Considering these findings, it is clear that language teachers should create opportunities for learners to practice speaking within an



autonomy-supportive L2 context and move language learning beyond the classroom with technology integration. Based on the literature (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2017; Lai et al., 2015; Reeve, 2012), teachers should first acknowledge students' interests and care about students' needs and interests during the teaching process. They should let students be physically, emotionally, and cognitively engaged in their learning and support language learners' autonomous motivation to study English with authentic language learning experiences. It should also be noted that this study, with its pure qualitative design, is not flawless, and one should approach its findings with caution. First, the study was conducted with a small sample of advanced learners of English. Second, one type of data collection methodology was adopted in the study. Then, further research could be conducted with larger sample size and diversified data collection strategy to yield stronger results. Although focus-group interviews provide rich data and strengthen the results, adopting student observation techniques, allowing students to keep language-learning diaries, and encouraging them to write a reflective journal on their daily exercises for further research might add much to the understanding of proficient speakers. Additionally, as L2 anxiety painted a different picture for proficient speakers in this study, further research might focus on this issue and examine more closely the links between anxiety and language proficiency level. In sum, understanding the nature of proficient English speakers is a less charted-terrain of language learning research, and examining why proficient learners outperform others remains a promising area of study waiting for answers.

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**Tertiary Learners' Motivational Intensity and Desire to Learn the French Language:  
Evidence from a Non-Francophone Country**

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### **Abstract**

Motivational intensity is fundamental for any language learner in order to succeed. This research addressed motivational intensity in the context of French language learners in a non-francophone country, Yemen. It also investigated the level of desire to learn French among university students. The present research answered the following questions: Do undergraduate learners of the French language have a high or a low level of motivational intensity in their learning of French? How much do undergraduate learners of the French language desire to learn French? Among the undergraduate learners of the French language, is there any gender difference in the level of motivational intensity and their desire to learn French? A stratified random sample of 69 students was sampled out of a population of 145 enrolled students from different levels in the Department of French Language and Literature at Sana'a University. The survey was comprised of 11 questions that were selected and modified from Gardner's Attitude, Motivation Test Battery Questionnaire (1985a). The items for this survey addressed two specific variables: motivational intensity and desire to learn French. The findings of this research showed that Yemeni undergraduate learners of French have a high level of motivational intensity and a significant amount of desire for learning the French language and culture. The findings also implied that male learners have a slightly higher level of motivational intensity and desire to learn French than their female counterparts.

*Keywords:* motivational intensity, learning French as a foreign language, gender difference



The French language in Yemen has progressively become more prestigious and more popular, especially among the younger generations. Nowadays, due to the consequences of war, Yemenis are suffering because of the unstable and threatening conditions under which they live daily. Most of the university graduates are seeking new opportunities for a better and safer life outside of Yemen. Thus, these youth are increasingly encouraged to learn French and discover the French/Francophone culture, so French speaking countries such as France and Canada can become for them a destination for employment and study. The objective of the present research was to address the motivational intensity of the French language learners in the context of a non-francophone country. The level of desire to learn French among university students was also investigated. This research aimed to answer the following specific questions:

**RQ1** Do undergraduate learners of the French language have a high or a low level of motivational intensity in their learning of French?

**RQ2** How strongly do undergraduate learners of the French language desire to learn French?

**RQ3** Among the undergraduate learners of the French language, is there any gender difference in the level of motivational intensity and their desire to learn French?

For the purpose of this research, Yemen was chosen for the data collection as a case study to address the research questions. This research contributes to the body of knowledge for the variable of motivational intensity in learning French in a non-francophone country. In addition, it is one of the very few studies that focuses on Yemeni learners of foreign languages in general and Yemeni learners of the French language specifically.

The present article is organized into four sections. The first section presents the theoretical lens on which the researchers based their analysis. The second section discusses the methodology the researchers used in carrying out the research. In the third section, the statistical analysis of the data is presented with discussion of the obtained results. Finally, the study findings are concluded with suggested recommendations.

## Literature Review

Research has identified motivation as one of the most substantial factors that has a great impact on learners' success and achievement. Nevertheless, motivation is closely related to another important concept which psychologists refer to as "motive". Therefore, psychologists have always included the notion of motive or goal in their multiple definitions of motivation. For example, Parham (1988) defines motivation as "The internal source, cause, or explanation of voluntary behaviors – the forces and processes that initiate, maintain, direct, and influence the strength of a behavior. Motives are the specific needs, desires, and wants that motivate" (p. 296). Likewise, Pintrich and Schunk (1996) see a powerful factor in the "goal" that is "impetus for and direction to action" (p. 4). The field of learning a foreign/second language is no exception in this regard. Gardner and Lambert (1972) were the first to highlight the crucial role of motivation in language acquisition; their empirical research affirmed that the degree to which learners successfully study a language is not related only to the learners' language capacity and intellectual aptitude but also to their motivation in learning the language and their attitudes towards that language and to the people who speak it. Since then, researchers have extensively investigated motivation and its different variables (e.g. Crookes & Schmidt, 1991; Dörnyei, 2003; Gardner, 1985b, 2001, 2010; Liu & Zhang, 2013; Noels, 2005; Spolsky, 1989). According to Gardner (1985b), a pioneer researcher in the field of second language learning

motivation, the latter is a combination of three components: effort, which refers to motivational intensity, desire to reach the goal of learning the language, and positive attitudes towards learning the language as well as towards the people who speak that language. “The concept of motivation ... is a multi-faceted construct in that it involves effort (motivational intensity), cognition (desire) and affect (attitudes)” (Gardner, 1985b. cited in Nakata, 2006, p. 55). Two components are addressed in the present study: motivational intensity and desire to learn.

Motivational intensity refers to the level of effort and persistence that learners apply consistently during their language learning process. Otherwise, it is seen as the goal-directed effort that learners expend to learn a foreign language and their persistence in learning (Ellis, 2004; Gardner, Tremblay & Masgoret, 1997). Motivational intensity has been identified as fundamental for any language learner in order to succeed (Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). Ely (1986) stressed the importance of investigating the strength of the learner’s motivation or, in other words, his/her motivational intensity, “it also seems important to investigate the strength of that motivation” (p. 28). Along the same line of thought, Dörnyei (1998) implied that motivational intensity can explicitly translate the learner’s motivated behavior, “The proof of motivation is in displaying it in action -hence the importance of the “desire” measure, which directly taps into the individual’s wish to perform the action; and, even more directly, the “motivational intensity” measure that explicitly focuses on motivated behaviour” (p. 122). Other research suggested that among the three components of motivation, desire and attitude are two interrelated variables that can significantly impact learners’ motivational intensity. However, the latter is pivotally responsible for language learning success (Gardner & Smythe, 1975; Masgoret & Gardner, 2003).

Regarding the difference in gender when it comes to language learning motivation, research has explored the role of gender variables for a better understanding of learners’ motivation in learning a foreign/second language. Most of the research has confirmed the importance of gender in this regard, especially that it has become an “interdisciplinary area of linguistic inquiry” (Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013, p. 134). Still, some research findings showed no difference in language learning motivation with respect to gender (e.g. Akram & Ghani, 2013; Al Othman & Shuqair, 2013; Bacon, 1992). However, most of the research reported the existence of a significant difference in language learning motivation depending on the gender variable. Some research found that male language learners are more motivated than female learners (e.g. Abdilah & Chowdhury, 2013; Yeung, Lau, & Nie, 2011), whilst the majority of the research affirmed that female language learners are more motivated than the male learners (e.g. Adach, 2015; AL-Khasawneh & A Omari, 2015; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2014; Azarnoosh & Birjandi, 2012; Bećirović, 2017; Csizér & Dörnyei, 2005; Heinzmann, 2009; Narayanan, Nair, and Iyyappan, 2007; Netten, Riggs, & Hewlett, 1999; Xiong, 2010 Coskun, 2014).

## **Methodology**

### **Participants**

For the purpose of this research, a stratified random sample of 69 participants/students was surveyed out of a population of 145 enrolled students from different levels in the Department of French Language and Literature at Sana’a University. There are four levels at the Department of French Language and Literature for the bachelor’s degree (freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior). This sample represents 47.59% of the targeted population, which is comparably a high percentage for similar studies. The participants were informed

about the purpose of the study and that participation was voluntary. Students were also reassured of the anonymity of the results of the given survey.

### Research Instrument

The researchers developed a quantitative assessment using a survey as a measurement tool. The survey format consisted of two parts. The first part of the survey contained general demographic information of students with three subcategories: age, gender, and study level. The second part of the survey addressed students' motivational intensity and desire to learn French, which consisted of eleven questions that were selected and modified from Gardner's Attitude, Motivation Test Battery Questionnaire [AMTB], 1985a). Among the eleven questions, seven questions addressed the variable of motivational intensity, while four of the questions focused on the students' desire to learn French. The questions were translated to Arabic by the researcher and distributed to five college professors for their feedback, to minimize the redundancy-translated questions. After the review, two questions were modified and rephrased based on the comments received from the reviewers. In addition, a pilot study was conducted with ten randomly selected students. As a result of the pilot study, two instructional sentences were added to clarify for students how to answer some of the survey questions. The answer to each question was coded on a scale from 1 to 5, depending on the number of choices under each question. The scale conversion helped in conducting the statistical analysis for the collected data. For the purpose of this research, the IBM SPSS statistics software was used to statistically analyze the data.

### Results and Data Analysis

Based on the data collected from the questionnaire, Yemeni French language learners' motivational intensity and their desire to learn French were both analyzed. The data analysis also aimed to demonstrate whether gender impacted the Yemeni learners' motivational intensity and their desire to learn French, or it had no significant impact on the mentioned two investigated variables. In the following sections, the analysis of the two survey parts, general demographics and motivational related questions are presented as follows:

#### Demographic Information

Table 1 & 2 present the distribution of the participants in this research with respect to their age and study level. As it can be noticed, the percentage of female participants (62%) is higher than male participants (38%). The tables also indicate that most of the participants are in their second, third and fourth years of study (31%, 23% & 33%), which is in line with the results for age (59% of participants are between 22-25 years old).

Table 1: Gender distribution of participants

Gender	Percentage	Number
Male	38	26
Female	62	43
Total	100	69

Table 2: Distribution of participants in percentage with respect to age and study level

Age	Percentage	Study level	Percentage
18-21 years	29	First year	13
22-25 years	59	Second year	31
26-29 years	8	Third year	23
30 and above	4	Fourth year	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>

### Motivational Intensity and Desire to Learn French

In this section, the motivational intensity and desire to learn French related questions are discussed under two separate sub-subheadings and based on the summarized results in Table 3.

Table 3: Percentage for motivational intensity (questions 1-8) &amp; desire to learn French (questions 9-11)

Question #	Answer	Percentage	Male percentage	Female percentage
Q1	A.	48	38	53
	B.	38	46	33
	C.	14	16	14
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Q2	A.	30	50	17
	B.	37	19	49
	C.	33	31	34
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Q3	A.	45	62	35
	B.	42	31	49
	C.	13	7	16
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Q4	A.	39	31	44
	B.	42	46	40
	C.	19	23	16
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Q5	A.	25	27	23
	B.	54	65	47
	C.	21	8	30
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Q6	A.	54	50	56
	B.	10	4	14
	C.	36	46	30
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
Q7	A.	54	62	49

	<b>B.</b>	30	23	35
	<b>C.</b>	16	15	16
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Q8</b>	<b>A.</b>	62	62	63
	<b>B.</b>	12	12	12
	<b>C.</b>	26	26	25
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Q9</b>	<b>A.</b>	7	6	7
	<b>B.</b>	55	58	53
	<b>C.</b>	38	36	40
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Q10</b>	<b>A.</b>	42	38	44
	<b>B.</b>	51	54	35
	<b>C.</b>	7	8	21
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Q11</b>	<b>A.</b>	51	42	56
	<b>B.</b>	16	8	21
	<b>C.</b>	33	50	23
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

**Motivational Intensity (Questions 1-7).** As the results in Table 3 show, for the statement in Question 1, “I actively think about what I have learned in my French class...,” the highest percentage for both male and female students was given to answer A, “Very frequently” (48%), while the lowest percentage was given to answer C, “Once in a while” (14%). However, female students scored a higher percentage (53%) than male students (38%) on answer A and a lower percentage (14%) than male students (16%) on answer C. The results for the statement in Question 2, “If French were not taught in university, I would...,” revealed that the majority of the participants (37%) would “not bother learning French” (Answer B), while answer C, “try to obtain lessons in French somewhere else,” got the second highest percentage (33%). The lowest percentage is given to answer A with (30%). Still, female learners had a higher percentage for answer C (34%) than their male counterparts (31%).

For the Question 3 statement, “When I have a problem understanding something we are learning in French class, I...,” a small percentage (13%) was given for answer C, “just forget about it,” while answer A, “immediately ask the teacher for help,” recorded the highest percentage among all the three answers with 45%. Nevertheless, results for the male learners on answer A marked a significantly higher percentage (62%) in comparison to the females (35%). The results for Question 4, “When it comes to French homework, I...” indicate that 42% of the participants agreed with answer B, “work very carefully, making sure I understand everything.” However, the male students had the larger part of this result (46%) than their female counterparts (40%). On the other hand, the lowest percentage (19%) for Question 4 was given to answer C, “just skim over it,” with (16%) for the female learners and (23%) for the male learners.

On the statement for Question 5, “If my teacher wanted someone to do an extra French activity, I would...,” answer B, “definitely volunteer,” got the highest percentage (54%). Yet, male

student results (65%) indicate their higher level of motivation in comparison to the female students (47%) in regard to volunteering to do any extra French activities.

The results for Question 6 are similar to those obtained for the previous question (Q5) in proving the participants with a high level of motivation in their learning of French. In fact, the results revealed that the majority of the participants (54%) agreed on rewriting and correcting the mistakes in their assignments when the teacher returns them back to the participants (answer A). Also, the least percentage was given to answer B (10%) where the student would just throw the assignment in the desk and forget about it. Nevertheless, this time female participants' percentage (56%) for answer A was higher than the male participants' percentage (50%).

As the results indicate for Question 7, "When I am in French class, I...", the highest percentage was accorded to answer A "would volunteer answering as much as they can" with (54%), right after it came answer B "would answer only the easier questions" with (30%) and the lowest percentage was given to answer C would never say anything with (16%). Yet, for the highest percentage answer (answer A), the male participants' percentage (62%) was still significantly higher than the percentage of the female participants (49%).

**Desire to Learn French (Questions 8-11).** The results indicate that the highest percentage of participants (62%) agreed that "During French class" they would prefer to have a combination of French and Arabic spoken (Question 8). However, it is noticeable that the proportion of males (62%) was very close to the females' proportion for this answer (63%). Whereas, the lowest percentage (12%) was scored for answer B "to have as much Arabic as possible spoken." Here too, the proportions of female and male participants were very similar (12% for males and 12% for females). For Question 9, "If I had the opportunity to speak French outside of my department," the results, as with the previous question, reflected the participants' significant desire to learn French. Accordingly, the highest percentage (55%) was given to answer B, where the participants would "speak French most of the time, using Arabic only if really necessary." Same as the results for question 8, the proportions for male and female participants were close. Yet, the percentage of male participants (58%) was higher than their female counterparts (53%). On the other hand, the results revealed a very small percentage (7%) of participants would "never speak French."

For Question 10 "If I had the opportunity to see a French play," the findings show the enormous willingness of Yemeni French learners to discover the French language and culture. In fact, most of the participants shared their desire to go and see a French play with a percentage of 51% for answer B, "definitely go." However, male participants had a higher percentage (54%) than female participants with 35%. Still, a remarkably low percentage was accorded to answer C (7%), where participants chose not to go to the play even if they could do it.

Similar to the responses for Question 10, the results for Question 11 also reveal how eager Yemeni undergraduate students are to learn French. According to the results, (51%) of the participants chose answer A and agreed, "If I had the opportunity and knew enough French, I would read French magazines and newspapers as often as I could." For this answer, female participants had the highest percentage (56%) whilst male participants recorded (42%) for this answer. Same as in the results for Q 1, 3 and 6, the justification of this gap between male and female participants' percentages may be because of the males' social and familial duties, which can make it harder for male students to spend more time on reading.

## Discussion

From the obtained results, it can be noticed that the percentage of female participants in this research is considerably higher than male participants. This large gap between male and female participants is representative of the fact that the highest percentage of students enrolled in the French Department has always been females. In this regard, it is worth underlining that the high percentage of female students enrolled in the Department of French Language in comparison to the male students reflects the traditional and cultural assumption in Yemeni society, according to which the fields that are related to education, arts, and languages are generally considered to be more suitable for females, while other fields such as engineering, business, and law are seen as more male-oriented. However, this perception of the male and female major of studies has changed over time and does not hold anymore as many female and male students are enrolling in the different mentioned fields with no consideration of gender.

The results generally indicated that the majority of the participants (males and females) agreed that when they are in their French class, they volunteer, answering as much as they can, and they do their best to finalize all the tasks and improve their level in French. In addition, the results confirmed that Yemeni undergraduate learners of French, generally, accord a significant amount of effort in their learning process even when they are not in classes. Hence, the results provided positive answers to the first two research questions inquired through the present research. As for the third research question about the difference in gender when it comes to the learners' desire to learn the French language, some of the results confirmed that the female students' enthusiasm and motivation to learn French is significantly higher than their male counterparts, such as the case for question 1, 2, 5 and 6 where female students appeared to think more frequently about what they learn in their French classes and search for all opportunities to learn French even if they would have to enroll in classes out of the university's curriculum. Similarly, the results of some of the questions showed that the female learners are more willing to spend extra time studying and reviewing for their lessons more than the male learners. It is very possible that the justification for the gap in percentage between male and female learners for some questions is due to social and familial responsibilities. In fact, Yemeni female students at universities are, most of the time, dependent on their families. Thus, usually female students can afford to have more time to study and review at home, while male university students, besides their classes, are supposed to work in order to support themselves and sometimes to support their families.

Some of the results can reflect the difficulties and challenges that Yemeni tertiary learners face in their studies because of the war. This is the case for question 2 where the majority of the participants affirmed that they would not be able to learn French if it was not offered by the university. It is possible that their answer is influenced by the fact that all means of interaction with the French language, people and culture are in the present time hardly, if ever, reachable because of the war.

On the other hand, although most of the time the means for the learners to practice their French outside of the university's setting is very difficult, if not impossible, due to previously mentioned factors, the results revealed that Yemeni tertiary learners have a high amount of desire to use and learn French. Thus, the majority of the students are willing to read and speak in French and even to attend French theater plays if they can.

Overall, the aggregate percentage of the male learners implied that they have higher motivational intensity and desire to learn the French language than female learners. This

implication could be driven by the Yemeni males' social and familial responsibilities, which dramatically increased because of the burden of the war, which played a considerable role in their motivation and desire to learn the French language so they can find better job opportunities for living. In summary, Figure 1 highlights the highest representative and significant findings of the survey's eleven questions as already presented in the sections above.

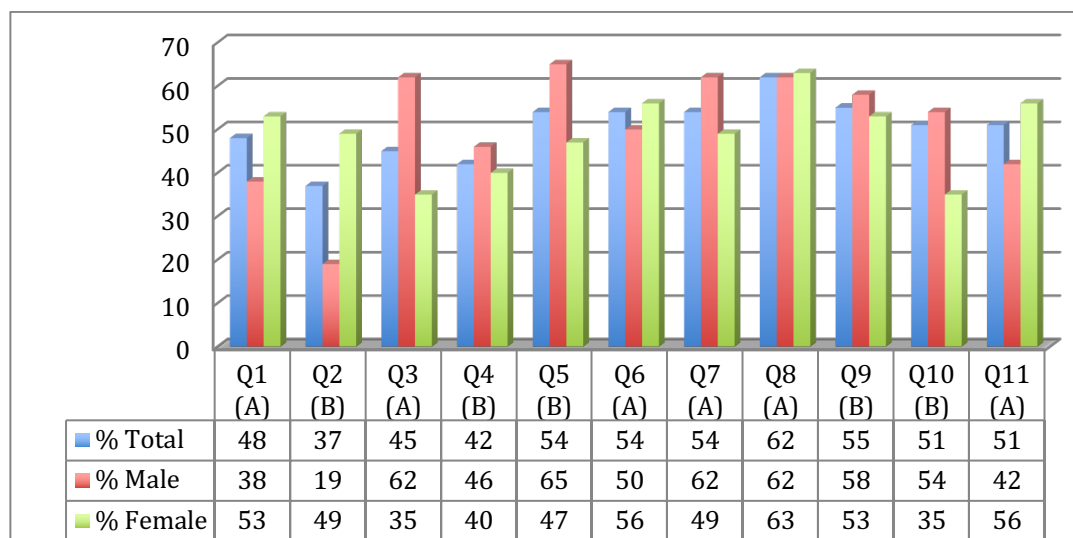


Figure 1: summary findings of the survey's eleven questions

### Conclusion

In conclusion, motivational intensity in the context of French language learners in a non-francophone country was addressed in this research. The researchers investigated the level of desire to learn French among university students. In doing so, answers were provided to the following questions: Do Yemeni undergraduate learners of the French language have a high or a low level of motivational intensity in their learning of French? How much do Yemeni undergraduate learners of the French language desire to learn French? Among the Yemeni undergraduate learners of the French language, is there any gender difference in the level of motivational intensity and their desire to learn French? The findings reported in this study show that, in general, Yemeni learners have a high level of motivational intensity and a significant amount of desire for learning the French language and culture. With regard to gender difference in the level of motivational intensity and the desire to learn French among the Yemeni learners of French language, the findings of the current study implied that there is a slight difference between males and females in their motivational intensity and desire to learn French. Thus, male learners are found to have a higher level of motivational intensity as well as more desire to learn French than their female counterparts.

The presented research had some limitations that should be taken into consideration. On the national level, the research was conducted in the French Language Department of Sana'a University, which is only one of the five Yemeni universities that have French language departments. The limitation of the surveyed sample was due to logistical issues and difficulties in collecting data from the other universities because of the ongoing war. In a wider context, the discussion in this research focused on one of the non-francophone countries, Yemen, which could be one of the limitations. Hence, considering the previously mentioned limitations, the following recommendations may be addressed for similar future research. It is recommended to address the same questions using the same methodology in other non-francophone countries.



It would be interesting to compare the motivational intensity of the French language learners and the level of desire to learn French in other non-francophone countries among university students in different cultures, or even of similar cultures in the same region.

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## **L2 Vocabulary Acquisition through Narratives in an EFL Public Elementary School**

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### **Abstract**

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has exponentially grown in the past decades as it has become part of the curricula from kindergarten to higher education. In many countries, governments have conducted initiatives that resulted in the implementation of English classes in public education settings. The use of narratives in language teaching has been regarded as an effective way to teach vocabulary as stories provide a natural context for language input. However, there is a need to assess the effectiveness of narrative instruction. This study investigated the effect of using stories and pre-teaching vocabulary in a public elementary school in northwestern Mexico. A total of 167 students from third to sixth grade participated. A narrative intervention was conducted in the experimental and comparison groups. The experimental groups were pre-taught vocabulary in the stories through visuals and stories in the participants' native language (L1), Spanish. A vocabulary assessment was administered three times (pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest) to determine if there were statistically significant differences within and between groups. The tests scores were analyzed using Friedman and Mann Whitney U statistical tests. The results showed that narratives overall helped in developing vocabulary for EFL young learners. Furthermore, the experimental group obtained slightly higher scores at the delayed posttest showing that pre-teaching vocabulary and using the L1 may contribute to increasing vocabulary knowledge in the second language (L2). In EFL public education contexts, using effective teaching strategies promotes acquisition and retention that ultimately lead to communicative competence in the L2.

*Keywords:* EFL, SLA, young learners, narratives, vocabulary

Recently many governments around the world have implemented educational policies to incorporate teaching English in the elementary school (Copland, Garton, & Burns, 2014). In the past two decades, teaching English to young learners has had an impact on millions of English teachers, students, and parents in numerous countries (Emery & Rich, 2015; Rich, 2014).

In Mexico's English as a foreign language (EFL) context, developing vocabulary is one of the curricular components of the national program. The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) has been used to establish the language learning targets (Council of Europe, 2001). By sixth grade, students should be at level A2 (basic user). In other words, students should be able to talk about situations that are familiar to them, and offer basic descriptions of themselves, their context, and others. English instruction has been introduced in the educational system "for students to get the necessary knowledge to engage in social practices with spoken and oral language to interact with native and non-native English speakers by means of specific competencies with the language" (Secretaría de Educación Pública, 2011, p. 67). The national curriculum indicates that English will be taught in three sessions of 50 minutes each per week. English instruction begins in kindergarten and continues for nine years with the purpose of achieving a B1 proficiency level in the CEFR. That is, the goal is that after completing basic education, the students should be independent users of the language who can understand and express themselves at a basic level in topics that are familiar to them such as school, work, and social life (Council of Europe, 2001).

The purpose of this study is to investigate the effectiveness of using stories in EFL teaching and the impact of pre-teaching vocabulary as an instructional strategy, particularly at the beginning stages of the L2 acquisition process of young learners. The setting for the study was a public elementary school in northwestern Mexico. In this school, Spanish is the predominant language for communication among teachers, staff, and students. All the classes, except the English class, are completely conducted in Spanish. The students are rarely exposed to other languages other than Spanish. This linguistic context limits the amount of exposure to and practice of English.

The importance of this study is that it analyzed a teaching strategy that may help develop EFL students' storytelling with topics that are familiar to them. This study could provide a foundation for materials development, teacher training, improved outcomes, and further research of teaching and learning processes in an EFL context. Also, researching the use of stories in second or foreign language development strengthens its purposeful employment in the classroom. From the research methodological stance, this study contributes to advancing the field of applied linguistics with regards to the participants (young learners) and the research design (pre, post, delayed post-test). It is a quantitative study assessing the impact of an intervention over time as measured through tests (Martin & Bridgmon, 2012).

This study is part of a larger study conducted to investigate the effectiveness of a narrative intervention to promote speaking adapted to suit the context of an elementary public school in Mexico. The larger study looked at narrative retell skills, listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. The main research questions driving the study reported in this article are the following:

1. Is a narrative intervention effective in increasing English vocabulary acquisition of EFL elementary school students?

2. Does pre-teaching vocabulary increase vocabulary acquisition among EFL elementary school students?
3. What are the perceptions of the EFL elementary school students regarding the instruction of vocabulary in the narrative interventions received?

## Literature Review

### Narratives in Language Development

In educational contexts in general, “stories play a crucial role in human learning” (McDonald, 2009, p. 112). In teaching a second or foreign language, stories provide a meaningful context where grammar and vocabulary interact in a cohesive manner (Pinter, 2006). Stories help in the “development of vocabulary and grammar, and of oral and literacy skills” (Cameron, 2001, p. 179). Stories stimulate imagination and creativity in language learners whose attention is placed in understanding the meaning of the story in general (Wright, 1995).

There are different purposes for using stories in the EFL classroom. Stories have been used primarily as a teaching technique to present grammar and vocabulary in context, introduce a topic, and develop plays for non-native speakers learning English as a foreign language (Bland, 2014; Dujmović, 2006; Ellis & Brewster, 2014; Pinter, 2006; Srinivas, 2009; Vale & Feunteun, 1995). It is common to find stories in textbooks in order to provide context for English language learners when a specific grammatical point is being taught. Stories are also found in EFL teacher training courses because their use is regarded as a teaching strategy that aids in language development (mainly reading and listening comprehension) and classroom management (Phillips, 1993; Vale & Feunteun, 1995). Interestingly, despite having an important role in language teaching, Garton, Copland, and Burns (2011) conducted a survey of practices when teaching English to young learners around the world and found that 42% of the teachers reported frequently telling stories in class, while 17% of the teachers reported never using stories in class. Also, children telling stories was reported as one of the least frequently utilized activities. The researchers noted that despite being considered one of the major pedagogies, stories were not among the more commonly used strategies by teachers or students. This insight may form the basis for needing research to determine their effectiveness as an instructional technique to aid in vocabulary development.

In Gutierrez Arvizu (2017), the effectiveness of a narrative intervention with sixth graders in an EFL public school was investigated. The results showed that the experimental and comparison groups increased the length of time speaking English after a narrative intervention using the *Story Champs* curriculum where story grammar was taught explicitly, although the experimental group showed a greater improvement. *Story Champs* is a language curriculum that uses narratives with situations that children may easily identify to teach vocabulary and complex language structures (Spencer & Petersen, 2012).

### L2 Vocabulary

Undoubtedly, vocabulary is a key component in second language acquisition and learning. In any model for communicative language competence vocabulary is regarded as one of the elements that is necessary in communication activities (Council of Europe, 2001). In EFL educational settings, the development of vocabulary has consistently been present in the curriculum, sometimes in the form of lists and other times embedded in conversations, reading, and projects. Pavičić Takač (2008) compiled a list of the most commonly used schemes to present new vocabulary: connecting an L2 item with its equivalent in L1, defining the meaning, presentation through context, directly connecting the meaning to real objects or phenomena,



and active involvement of learners in presentation. Vocabulary crucial to understanding the story might be pre-taught or taught during the lessons to ensure full comprehension of the story (Cameron, 2001). Also, Gutierrez Arvizu (2017) recommended pre-teaching vocabulary in the stories in order to ensure that the students would comprehend the content presented in the stories.

Acquiring vocabulary in a second language for beginners involves making connections between the word in the L2 and its equivalent in L1 (Paviéciâc Takaéc, 2008). This could be an advantage particularly in the case of languages that share similarities in linguistic features. EFL teachers may use the L1 as a strategy to explain vocabulary (Alshehri, 2017).

Current research in vocabulary acquisition has overlooked young learners of English, specifically the age range of elementary school children. This is particularly relevant because great efforts are being made in countries where English has been part of the curricula since elementary school, and research should be conducted to inform decisions in policy making. Overall, it can be noted that the use of stories as a teaching strategy and vocabulary development is intrinsic to language learning; however, there is a need for research regarding these topics in teaching and learning in EFL contexts to make the best use of the resources at hand. Resources such as time and materials are limited in public elementary schools in the educational context previously described. Therefore, investigating the effectiveness of teaching strategies leads to possible curricular adaptations and improvements. Even more rarely, research to this point has reported findings showing the effects of intervention in the long term. Hence, the importance of conducting a study that analyzes the impact of a narrative intervention after its conclusion is significant.

## Method

### Participants

A total of 167 children between the ages of nine and 12 years participated in the study. They were enrolled in grades third to sixth in a Mexican elementary public school. Two intact groups from each grade were recruited and randomly assigned to one of the treatments (experimental or comparison). For the purpose of the statistical analyses, the participants were divided in experimental and comparison regardless of their school grade. There were 90 female and 77 male participants in the study. Table 1 shows the distribution of participants by treatment received (experimental or comparison) and gender in each of the grades (third, fourth, fifth, and sixth).

Table 1: Participants' distribution by grade, treatment, and gender ( $N=167$ )

Grade (approx. age)	Treatment				Gender				Total	
	Experimental		Comparison		Female		Male			
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Third (9 years old)	17	10.18	18	10.78	22	13.17	13	7.79	35	20.96
Fourth (10 years old)	17	10.18	18	10.78	18	10.78	17	10.18	35	20.96
Fifth (11 years old)	28	16.77	21	12.57	27	16.17	22	13.17	49	29.34
Sixth (12 years old)	23	13.77	25	14.97	23	13.77	25	14.97	48	28.74
Total	85	50.90	82	49.10	90	53.89	77	46.11	167	100

Concerning language spoken, all of the participants were native speakers of Spanish. Their overall proficiency level of English, as measured by a standardized English test administered prior to the intervention, was below A1 in the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, 2001).

Permission to participate in the study was obtained from the State's Department of Education, the school officials and class teachers through meetings and project presentations. The risks of participating in this study were the same as those encountered in daily life while attending school. No additional risks were taken.

### **Lessons**

There were twelve lessons of approximately 15 to 20 minutes in length for each of the groups. These lessons were conducted in a period of three weeks during the time allotted for the participants to attend classes at their elementary school. There were four interventionists, one for each grade, in charge of teaching both groups (experimental and comparison).

### **Instructional Materials**

The stories and visuals used in this study were adapted from the multi-tiered curriculum *Story Champs* (Spencer & Petersen, 2012). *Story Champs* is a language curriculum designed to teach specific vocabulary and complex language structures through narratives with situations familiar to children. The stories are a sequence of illustrations accompanied by icons of specific color that represent important aspects of the story: character, problem, problem resolution, feeling, action, and ending.

Based on the results from the work of Gutierrez Arvizu (2017), changes were made to the selection of stories and content. The stories were selected based on cultural relevance and relatability for elementary school students in the Mexican context. Also, character names were changed to facilitate the story retellings. In the following paragraphs, a description of the materials for each group is provided.

**Experimental groups.** In each lesson, two words were pre-taught using visuals and a story in the participants' L1 to provide context. A discussion relevant to the meaning of the new vocabulary was encouraged. Then the story in English was read to the participants as the interventionist would point to the images that illustrated each part of the story. A series of listening comprehension questions around the elements of the story was asked of the participants as a class to reconstruct the story using icons and gestures representing each element. After that, the participants would engage in a paired activity to retell the story.

**Comparison groups.** In each lesson, the participants listened to the same story in the experimental groups. They had a discussion of the story and a choral repetition of the story. The participants were asked comprehension questions from the story but the story grammar was not reviewed or practiced. The vocabulary was not discussed or practiced explicitly.

### **Assessments**

**Vocabulary test.** A multiple-choice vocabulary test with 24 items was designed to measure learning and retention. There were three options for each item. The participants would read and listen to a word as they would be presented with three images. One of the images was the correct representation of the word. All of the words were part of the stories in the lessons. The test items were dichotomously scored. The test was administered three times: pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test (four months after the post-test). The vocabulary test was designed

by the researcher for this specific study. It is not part of the *Story Champs* curriculum. It was reviewed by experts teaching young learners. It was piloted with a small group of students prior to the administration. A Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .76 indicated good reliability (Taber, 2018).

**Young learners' perception survey.** An eight item 5-point Likert-scale survey was administered along with the delayed post-test with the purpose of allowing the participants to express their views on the intervention they experienced (Pinter, 2014). The experimental and comparison groups answered survey questions tailored to the intervention that was provided (see Appendix A and Appendix B for the surveys administered). In other words, the experimental groups were asked about the use of visuals, native language, pre-teaching vocabulary, story in their native language whilst the comparison groups were asked if they would like the aforementioned strategies. The instruments used language that the participants would comprehend easily. Each item was translated into Spanish, the participants' native language. It is important to mention that the researcher developed the survey. It was adapted from Gutierrez Arvizu (2017) to suit the purposes of the present study. It was piloted with a small group of children in the same grade.

### Procedures

First, two groups of each grade were recruited to take part in the study. The groups were randomly assigned to an experimental or comparison treatment. After that, the participants were pretested using the vocabulary test designed to measure previous knowledge of vocabulary in lessons. Once pretested, 12 lessons for each group were delivered over a period of 4 weeks. Immediately after that, the participants took a post-test to measure their learning of vocabulary in the lessons. After a wait period of four months without lessons, a delayed post-test was administered to measure vocabulary retention. All the collected data was deidentified for confidentiality purposes. It is important to mention that this study was conducted with the authorization of the school teachers, principal, and senior officer for the English National Program at the Secretariat of Education and Culture of the State of Sonora, Mexico. The participants were always treated with utmost respect and were safely guarded by the research team during the lessons and assessments.

### Statistical Analyses

After data screening and preliminary tests for normality, homogeneity of variances, sphericity, and presence of outliers, it was determined that non-parametric analyses were required. In order to answer research question 1 regarding the effect of a narrative intervention to aid in the acquisition of English vocabulary in EFL elementary school students, a Friedman test was conducted to find differences across assessment times (pre-test, post-test, and delayed post-test) (Lund Research Ltd., 2013). The Friedman test is a nonparametric statistical test used to compare multiple paired samples that are not normally distributed. It is the equivalent to the repeated measures analysis of variance. Due to all the participants having received narrative intervention, they were taken as one sample. For research question 2 regarding the effect of pre-teaching vocabulary strategies to increase acquisition, three Mann Whitney U analyses were conducted to find differences between the experimental and comparison groups at each testing time (Lund Research Ltd., 2013). The Mann Whitney U test is a nonparametric statistical procedure that compares two groups that come from a non-normal distribution. It is the equivalent of the independent t-test. For research question 3, regarding the participants' perceptions of the intervention received, descriptive statistics were used to analyze the responses to the survey that was administered. The analyses were done using the responses to the Likert-scale items in the survey. The survey for each group had eight items with five points

for the participants' to indicate how much in agreement they were with the statements provided in each item. The responses were not coded for emerging themes.

## Findings

### Narrative Interventions to aid in L2 Vocabulary Acquisition

Research question 1 was presented as follows: Is a narrative intervention effective in increasing English vocabulary acquisition of EFL elementary school students? This question regarding the effectiveness of narrative instruction in aiding EFL young learners to acquire vocabulary was answered by conducting a Friedman test. The results showed that there was a statistically significant difference in vocabulary knowledge across testing times,  $\chi^2(2) = 74.79, p = 0.000$ . That is, the participants in the study increased their vocabulary from pre-test to post-test to delayed post-test. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics of medians, means, and standard deviations at each assessment point. Vocabulary knowledge tended to increase across time.

Table 3: Medians, means, and standard deviations of three testing times ( $N=167$ )

Assessment Times	Vocabulary Scores
Pretest	
Median	14
Mean	13.60
Standard deviation	4.01
Posttest	
Median	16
Mean	16.07
Standard deviation	4.21
Delayed Posttest	
Median	17
Mean	16.57
Standard deviation	3.93

Stories as an instructional strategy have been regarded as effective since second or foreign language teaching methodology has been documented (Pinter, 2006; Wright, 1995). In EFL contexts, narratives have aided the teaching of young language learners by introducing vocabulary in a meaningful manner, thus making vocabulary acquisition easier and long lasting (Bland, 2014; Dujmović, 2006; Ellis & Brewster, 2014).

### Effectiveness of Pre-teaching Vocabulary

Research question 2 was posed as follows: Does pre-teaching vocabulary increase vocabulary acquisition among EFL elementary school students? This question was intended to explore and analyse the differences between the experimental and comparison groups regarding the effectiveness of pre-teaching vocabulary through visuals, explicit instructions with definitions, and a story in the participants' native language as strategies to increase vocabulary knowledge. A series of comparisons between the groups at each assessment time was conducted to investigate if these strategies were effective. To accomplish the goal of the second research question, three Mann Whitney U tests were conducted. Table 3 presents descriptive statistics of medians, means, and standard deviations for each group.

Table 4: Medians, means, and standard deviations for three testing times ( $N=167$ )

Assessment Times	Experimental Group ( $n=87$ )	Comparison Group ( $n=80$ )
Pretest		
Median	14	13
Mean	13.78	12.41
Standard deviation	3.99	4.05
Posttest		
Median	16	16
Mean	16.46	15.65
Standard deviation	3.93	4.48
Delayed Posttest		
Median	18	16
Mean	17.23	15.86
Standard deviation	3.94	3.87

The results showed a non-statistically significant result for the experimental and comparison groups before the intervention ( $U= 3273$ ,  $Z= -.666$ ,  $p= .506$ ). The effect size was  $r= .051$ , which is considered small. Therefore, the groups were considered comparable at pretest. After the intervention, the results showed a non-statistically significant result ( $U= 3177$ ,  $Z= -.974$ ,  $p= .330$ ). The effect size ( $r= .08$ ) was small. Four months after the intervention was conducted, a delayed posttest was administered to determine if the vocabulary in the stories was retained. The statistical test results indicated a significant difference between the experimental and comparisons groups ( $U= 2733$ ,  $Z= -2.401$ ,  $p= .016$ ). The effect size ( $r= .19$ ) was small. The experimental groups scored slightly higher than the comparison groups at this assessment point.

Graphically, Figure 1 presents a pattern of increased vocabulary knowledge for both groups. Upon further visual inspection and statistical analyses, specific information is revealed. At pre-test, neither group was statistically significant different. That is, they could be considered the same in a practical sense. At post-test, both groups had an increased vocabulary score as measured by the test administered once the narrative intervention was completed. At this point, the results of a statistical test did not show any significant differences between the experimental and comparison groups. However, a significant difference between the groups was found at delayed post-test. That is, the experimental group obtained a higher score at post-test than the comparison group.

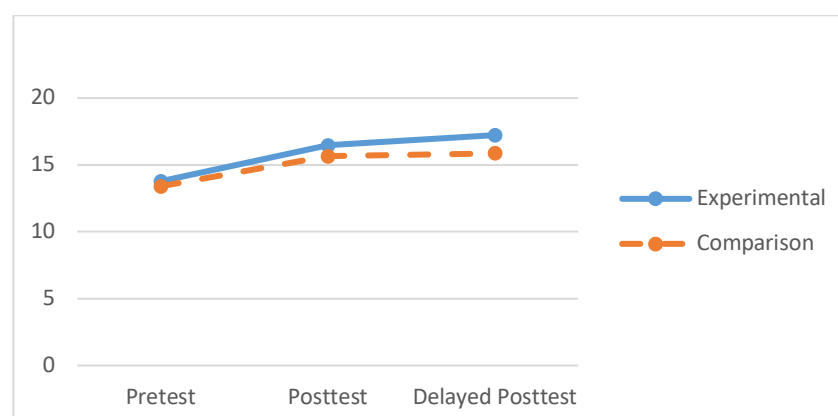


Figure 1: Means plot for scores and testing times

The findings of the delayed post-test suggest that using a variety of strategies to pre-teach vocabulary to young learners in an EFL context allows them to continue developing even after instruction has been concluded. Among the strategies used effectively in this intervention were the use of the native language, visuals, and meaningful context (Gutierrez Arvizu, 2017; Paviéciac Takaéc, 2008).

### Young Learners' Perspective

Research question 3 was stated as follows: What are the perceptions of the EFL elementary school students in terms of the instruction of vocabulary in the narrative intervention received? The purpose of the third research question was to give a voice to the participants regarding their perspective on learning vocabulary in a narrative intervention. To accomplish this, a survey using a 5-point Likert-scale was conducted. The items in the survey for the experimental group reflected the actual teaching strategies used. The items in the survey for the comparison group were written as strategies they would like or prefer not to have. Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations per group on each of the items and topics of the survey.

Table 5: Means and standard deviations per group for items on survey ( $N=167$ )

Topic	Experimental Groups ( $n=106$ )		Comparison Groups ( $n=105$ )	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. Learning new words in English	4.41	2.73	4.03	1.16
2. Liking visuals for new words	4.15	1.12	4.16	1.15
3. Liking how new words were taught	4.23	1.09	4.02	1.20
4. Understanding words better with visuals	4.04	1.12	3.89	1.22
5. Having stories in native language	4.33	1.03	3.98	1.39
6. Knowing meaning of words in story	4.02	1.14	4.09	1.24
7. Knowing meaning of words in native language	4.26	1.06	4.34	1.13
8. Understanding story better if words were pre-taught	3.65	1.26	4.01	1.24

Overall, it can be observed that the participants in both groups awarded high scores to the topics in the items. The highest score in the experimental group was for learning new words in English ( $m=4.41$ ,  $SD=2.73$ ) closely followed by having stories in their L1 ( $m=4.33$ ,  $SD=1.03$ ) and knowing the meaning of vocabulary in their L1 ( $m=4.26$ ,  $SD=1.06$ ). For the comparison groups, this last topic was awarded the highest scores ( $m=4.34$ ,  $SD=1.13$ ) as a strategy they would like to have. They also expressed they would have liked having visuals for new vocabulary ( $m=4.16$ ,  $SD=1.15$ ) and knowing the meaning of words in the stories ( $m=4.09$ ,  $SD=1.24$ ).

In the comments section of the instrument, the participants expressed liking the lessons and the stories. A few comments included enjoying learning vocabulary and the visuals used. Participants in the experimental group also expressed a positive perception towards having learned the words in their native language, Spanish.

The perspective of young language learners should be considered as they are the ultimate consumers and beneficiaries of the instructional strategies teachers employ (Pinter, 2014). The participants' positive opinion on the use of stories and vocabulary teaching strategies in English provides a basis for possible curricular changes and adaptations (Gutierrez Arvizu, 2017).

### **Recommendations**

Based on the results from the statistical analyses, it can be noted that narratives in general provide context for meaningful vocabulary learning in a foreign language. Therefore, vocabulary may be developed when seen in context with the support visuals, discussion, and the relationship between words in L1 and L2. Interestingly, the results also showed that the benefits of having teaching strategies for vocabulary development may be observed in the long term. After four months, the participants in the experimental group continued slightly increasing their vocabulary. It was at the delayed post-test assessment that a statistically significant difference was found.

In this study, the participants in the experimental groups were exposed to multiple modes of presenting vocabulary (Linse, 2005) such as visuals, definitions, discussions, and narratives in L2 and L1 to promote acquisition of lexical items. Despite the fact that the participants had a beginner level of proficiency in the language, they were able to understand the stories and learn and retain vocabulary used in the stories. Srinivas (2009) stressed the importance of introducing new and key words before using stories through visuals and realia when teaching English to young learners. Moreover, Linse (2005) and Nunan (2011) considered explicit instruction, pre-teaching vocabulary, and multiple exposure to the new lexical items as part of the principles for teaching vocabulary to young learners.

The interplay between materials, content, and teaching strategies to promote communicative competence comes to a realization in the learners' proficiency in the language. Particularly when teaching young learners, these elements should be engaging and varied (Emery & Rich, 2015). The participants in this study enjoyed the stories, materials, and activities. The young learners who participated in the study perceived this intervention as motivating to learn and practice English. When teachers face the task of choosing the stories to be used in class, they should take into account that stories should be engaging from the beginning, be appropriate, provide rich language experiences, and be enjoyable and comprehensible (Srinivas, 2009).

As the field of applied linguistics moves forward, the voice of young language learners should be heard. Pinter (2014) advocated for giving space for young learners to provide their own insights into their second or foreign language learning process. In their perception, the participants shed light into the importance of the L1 when used as a strategy for learning a new language. The L1 should be considered as a resource or strategy (Alshehri, 2017) that language teachers have that allows learners to make meaningful connections.

An observation from the researcher's stance is that an important piece in any curricular implementation to ensure that the guidelines are properly conducted is teacher training. In future studies, the effectiveness of this narrative intervention should be investigated longitudinally while teaching the lessons throughout a school year and delivered by English teachers. It is also suggested that the teachers incorporate lessons that match or aid in the content already established in their course syllabi.

One limitation of this study is that the data were collected in only one research site. This school was located in the center of Hermosillo, Sonora, Mexico surrounded by businesses and middle-class housing. It had all the conveniences of an urban school such as running water, electricity, and internet. Also, the school had a computer room and library. This implies that the findings and conclusions may not be the same if the intervention would be administered in schools with different characteristics regarding English proficiency of the students, amount of time for English classes prior to the study, and characteristics. It is suggested that further studies may be conducted to sustain the results.

### Conclusion

Overall, the results of this research indicated that using stories and pre-teaching vocabulary are effective, particularly over time. The effect of teaching English through stories in EFL contexts allows elementary school students to develop vocabulary in this language. Furthermore, the effects of using instructional strategies such as pre-teaching vocabulary, using visuals, and telling a story in the students' native language, aided in the vocabulary acquisition process. These effects were observed across time, after the intervention was concluded. Adding to these results, the participants' perspective was mainly positive. The young learners of EFL expressed liking the interventions in general as they were exposed to a new method of instruction that allowed them to practice the English language and learn vocabulary.

Teaching English to young learners in foreign language contexts has exponentially grown in the last decades. This tendency will continue in the future as English is widely used in business, academia, science, and culture contexts to mention a few. It is of utmost importance that English language programs, particularly in public education, make the best possible use of the limited resources they have to advance the language learning process and achieve communicative competence. It is clear that this can be done through the implementation of teaching strategies that are effective as research evidence supports to develop the language in meaningful lessons that promote vocabulary acquisition, as well as all the skills. Narratives have been and will continue to be at the core of teaching instruction. It depends on how we as language teachers implement it that our students will benefit the most.

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**Peer Assessment in L2 Pronunciation Instruction in Russia:  
Students' Attitude Research**

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### Abstract

The literature review shows that the current educational paradigm with the shift to a student-oriented model has transformed the roles of both the teacher and the student, where the latter takes a more active and conscious part in educational processes. Peer assessment has proven to have a positive impact on L2 learning and teaching, having various benefits for both the teacher and the student, and its usefulness and efficiency has been supported by various research. While educators are aware of such positive impact, students' attitudes towards peer assessment may vary. This study aims to examine the attitudes towards peer assessment in an L2 phonetics class of first year undergraduate students of the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies at Lomonosov Moscow State University. Thirty-four participants responded to a questionnaire, the main aim of which was to explore their attitudes towards peer assessment and its effectiveness in terms of developing their phonological competence and also their preferences regarding oral and written peer assessment in class. Responses were analysed through JASP software. The results of the study prove students' awareness of the significance of peer assessment and their positive attitudes towards it with approximately 85% of the participants regarding it as a useful component of constructive feedback and approximately 91% of the participants acknowledging the usefulness of peer assessment for the development of their own phonological skills. The study also offers a pronunciation peer assessment scale to contribute to teaching and learning L2 phonetics.

*Keywords:* peer assessment, L2 learning and teaching, phonetics, students' attitudes, Russian students

## Introduction

Teaching phonetics, being interdisciplinary by nature, is inextricably linked to second language acquisition processes, speech sciences and L2 pedagogy (Isaacs & Trofimovich, 2016). Therefore, new studies in the field of L2 learning and teaching, especially from the lingua franca perspective, ignited particular interest to second language pronunciation research, which resulted in publication of special journal issues devoted to pronunciation (e.g. Cardoso & Trofimovich, 2014), a pronunciation-focused conference in the USA (Pronunciation in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 2015) and the foundation of the Journal of Second Language Pronunciation in 2015.

Recently, teaching L2 pronunciation in Russia at the level of higher education has also been receiving close attention. It attracts interest and inspires discussion regarding the contents of curricula and syllabi, requirements concerning L2 phonological competence development (Kolesnikova, 2015; Lavrova, 2017) in the view of worldwide use of English as a lingua franca (ELF) and the re-orientation of L2 teaching (Jenkins, 2005). Additional attention is given regarding the methods of assessment following the changes introduced to the Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR), namely, a new set of descriptors which now focuses not on “nativeness” but on intelligibility of the primary construct of phonological control. Thus, the question of assessing students’ performance in L2 pronunciation instruction is quite urgent, which justifies the need for further research.

## Assessment in Pronunciation

According to Isaacs and Trofimovich (2016), “there is no dedicated book on assessing L2 pronunciation in the foundational Cambridge Language Assessment series” (p. 4). Assessing L2 pronunciation has shown to be highly problematic in terms of designing and implementing pronunciation scales with “descriptors suffering from inconsistencies, vague language, conflated constructs and unclear trajectory” (Harding, 2013, p.14). Investigation into the usability of the CEFR Phonological control scale (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 117) by Harding (2013) explicated its limitations in ensuring valid interpretation and consistent application by raters and thus questioned the effectiveness of the scale for L2 pronunciation assessment.

Therefore, the 2001 scale of Phonological Control, which was continuously applied in Russian linguistic higher education to measure students’ phonological competence development, (Kolesnikova, 2016) appeared to be, according to the Phonological Scale Revision Process Report,

fully unrealistic when it comes to issues such as accent, or progression, ... is not consistent as it mixes such diverse factors as stress/intonation, pronunciation, accent and intelligibility without providing clear indication of progression in any of these factors specifically, ... is not complete which results in jeopardizing its applicability and usefulness (Piccardo, 2016, p. 9).

The Phonological Scale Revision Process Report by E. Piccardo, which was then followed by a series of consultations and validation in 2017, comprised the study of more than 50 publications on L2 pronunciation teaching, learning and assessing over the last 50 years, including the works of Derwing, Harding, Isaacs, Jenkins, Munro, Trofimovich, and others, who have been studying the impact of ELF concept on L2 instruction in general and on teaching phonetics in particular, and whose findings formed the base of the modified phonology

descriptor scales and CEFR spoken language descriptors (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 171). There has been a groundbreaking and long indispensable shift from “nativeness” to intelligibility which “is generally identified by pedagogical specialists as the most important outcome of pronunciation instruction” today (Derwing & Munro, 2005, p. 384). The newly created scales provide the basis for teachers of phonetics to include appropriate objectives for phonology in their teaching and to develop assessment criteria appropriate to the levels concerned and particular students expressing specific needs (Kolesnikova & Maslova, 2019).

## **Peer Assessment**

### **Why Peer Assessment?**

Traditionally, while teaching phonetics, an English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher is supposed to give feedback to students’ performance in the classroom, being viewed as the only competent individual to objectively assess the progress and/or results. However, as the focus has shifted from nativeness to intelligibility, this role of the teacher fades.

On the other hand, Russian federal state educational standards along with European educational documents (Council of Europe, 2018) emphasize the active engagement of students in their own learning, learner responsibility, metacognitive skills and a cooperative, collaborative model of teaching and learning. CEFR

takes an innovative stance in seeing learners as language users and social agents, and thus seeing language as a vehicle for communication rather than as a subject to study. In so doing, it proposes the analysis of learners’ needs ... it also clearly suggests planning backwards from learners’ real life communicative needs (Council of Europe, 2018, p. 25).

Assessment processes in which the teacher holds all the power and makes all judgements limit the potential for learner development in all of these aspects. This is especially true of L2 pronunciation instruction, since teacher-student collaboration might be beneficial not only for mastering one’s pronunciation skills, but also for developing listening and social skills.

There is a strong need to rethink L2 phonetics assessment system that will align more closely with the ideals of collaborative and action learning. In this respect, peer assessment can play an important role, as students’ active participation in assessment design, choices, criteria and making judgments is a more sustainable preparation for subsequent working life (Boud & Falchikov, 2006), which might result in a real paradigm shift in both course planning and teaching, promoting learner engagement and autonomy. The main objective of the process of education has long been the emergence of self-determining persons, who can set learning objectives and self-assessment criteria to assess their own performance and progress to shape their own vector of development. Skilled and flexible learners are formed not by total control of educators but by an inclusive system of assessment where peer assessment would be a perfect model.

### **Peer Assessment in L2 Instruction**

Falchikov (1995) defines peer assessment as “the process whereby groups of individuals rate their peers, who are students of equal status to one another” (p. 176). He also underscores that “peer assessment requires students to provide either feedback or grades (or both) to their peers on a product or a performance, based on the criteria of excellence for that product or event which students may have been involved in determining” (Falchikov, 1995, p.132).

Peer assessment is considered as “an arrangement in which individuals consider the amount, level, value, worth, quality, or success of the products or outcomes of the learning of peers of similar status” (Topping, 1998, p. 250). In this process students have to “reflect upon, and perhaps suggest grades for the learning of their peers” (Roberts, 2006, p. 80), and being judged for the quality of the appraisals made (Davies, 2006). This type of alternative assessment brings teachers and students into close collaboration in the development of critical thinking of the latter. Both teachers and learners being engaged in assessment affords a degree of mutually advantageous control over the assessment methods, outcomes, and their underlying rationale (Cheng & Warren, 2005).

There is much scientific evidence that peer assessment is quite beneficial in L2 teaching and learning, especially in writing. Cheng and Warren (2005) found that peer assessment has been more commonly incorporated into English language writing instruction where peers give feedback to each other's written works. Peer assessment in teaching speaking has also been recognized as being efficient (Luoma, 2004; Matsuno, 2017; Okuda & Otsu, 2010), and it seems to be quite promising to implement in teaching phonetics, a possibility the current research seeks to discover.

### **Benefits of Peer Assessment in L2 Pronunciation Instruction**

According to Matsuno (2017), assessment

is quite a burden for teachers. Especially when they must evaluate their students' oral performances, it may cause some troubles since they can often see those performances only once unless they record them. In those situations, peer assessment can be an additional assessment method. Peer assessment involves students in making judgments of their peers' work. (p.1292)

Peer assessment via providing and receiving feedback seems a rather powerful meta-cognitive tool, which might bring fruitful results in an L2 pronunciation classroom since it can:

- encourage collaborative teaching and learning as required by the modern educational paradigm;
- balance teacher-student control over the learning process, “students thus feel the ownership of the assessment (and learning) process rather than alienated or victimised by it” (Nulty, 2008, p. 3), which ensures stronger motivation and engagement in learning;
- give students “an important sense of responsibility for their fellow students' progress, but also forces them to concentrate on the skills during their own presentations” (Brown, 1998, p. 67).
- ensure a higher level of validity and reliability when structured marking schemes are used (Sadler & Good, 2006);
- develop listening skills along with pronunciation skills, as being engaged in assessing requires much attention and listening effort;
- inculcate the “intangibility conception”;
- develop confidence in one's pronunciation skills and reduce stress levels compared to teacher-centered assessment;
- “allow teachers to be more relaxed during speaking tests as they know that they have the peer assessment to support their own grading.” (Okuda & Otsu, 2010, p. 42)
- encourage reflective learning through observing and commenting on others' oral performances;

- “allow teachers to share some of the rating responsibility with their students, and it is especially useful in speaking assessment, which is time-consuming if rated by one person only” (Luoma, 2004, p. 189).

Thus, peer assessment is a highly productive tool for L2 classes, being beneficial for both the teacher and students when designed and used efficiently by both sides of the educational process.

### **Research Questions**

The studies cited above make it clear that in terms of the new educational paradigm the value of peer assessment in L2 pronunciation instruction cannot be overestimated. However, the students' reaction is not easy to predict. As Azarnoosh (2013) puts it,

The impact of peer assessment on language learning is promising, but its efficacy seems to depend on many factors including students' attitudes, language levels, familiarity with the assessing criteria, the type of skill being assessed, and the possible presence of bias such as gender and friendship (p. 3).

Analyzing students' opinions is a widespread type of research in foreign institutions (Derwing, 2010; Wach, 2011; Coskun, 2011; Chien, 2014) which, unfortunately, has not proved to be as popular in Russia yet. Still, within the learner-oriented approach to English teaching, which has been widespread in Russia since the end of the twentieth century, students were surveyed in order to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1. How useful do the students find peer assessment in terms of providing and getting constructive feedback?
- RQ2. How useful do the students find peer assessment in terms of developing their own phonological skills?
- RQ3. Which form of peer assessment do the students find more convenient?
- RQ4. Which form of peer assessment do the students find more useful?

### **Methodology**

The participants in this study were 34 first-year undergraduate students in the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies at Lomonosov Moscow State University. Of the 34 participants, 19 majored in intercultural communication, 7 in English language teaching, and 8 in cultural studies. All the participants had attended or were still attending compulsory English pronunciation classes, where peer assessment was regularly practised. All the participants were administered an anonymous questionnaire (Appendix 1). Anonymity was ensured due to ethical considerations.

The main aim of the questionnaire was to explore the participants' attitude towards peer assessment and its effectiveness in terms of developing their phonological competence and also their preferences regarding oral and written peer assessment in class.

The questionnaire consisted of four questions. Questions 1 and 2 were based on 7-point Likert scales, as scientific evidence suggests that 7-point scales are “optimal” for measuring most constructs (Krosnick & Presser, 2010, p. 271) and they “seem to be best in terms of reliability, percentage of undecided respondents, and respondents' ability to discriminate between the



scale values” (Schwarz, Knauper, Hippler, Noelle-Neumann, & Clark, 1991). Each scale point was labelled by the researchers in order to minimise inaccuracies stemming from individual interpretation of numbers. One of the possible limitations of a 7-point scale is the existing tendency for participants to choose the mid-point (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). However, in this opinion study the presence of the mid-point with a neutral position was unavoidable, as the respondents would have been pushed otherwise to adhere to a certain viewpoint, not necessarily corresponding to their own, as a result of the absence of the neutral option, which would have influenced the quality of the research data. Questions 3 and 4 presented the respondents with a binary choice. Question 3 enquired whether it was more convenient for students to use the oral or the written form of feedback; Question 4 asked which of the two was more useful.

When the study was conducted, all participants were provided with detailed oral and written instructions as to what was going to happen during the experiment. The participants were asked to give oral consent or choose to opt out of the study. There were no instances of a student who refused to participate, however. The identity of the students was fully anonymized. The questionnaires were securely kept upon submission and access to them was controlled at all times.

## Results

In order to analyse the data, the participants’ questionnaire responses were entered into Jeffreys's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP) software, which is an open-source free platform for statistical analysis (Wagemakers, 2019). Responses for Questions 1 and 2 were treated as scale variables with possible integer values (1 to 7) corresponding to the questionnaire scale points. The descriptive statistics of the gathered data (N = 39) can be seen below in table 1:

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of the gathered data.

Descriptive statistics (1)			Descriptive statistics (2)		
	Q-2	Q-1		q-4	q-3
Valid	34	34	Std. Error of Skewness	0.4031	0.4031
Missing	0	0	Kurtosis	-0.6645	-0.4393
Mean	6.000	5.676	Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.7879	0.7879
Median	6.000	6.000	Minimum	4.000	3.000
Mode	7.000	7.000	Maximum	7.000	7.000
Std. Deviation	0.9847	1.199	Sum	204.0	193.0

### **RQ1. How useful do the students find peer assessment in terms of providing and getting constructive feedback?**

For Question 1, most students stated that they found peer assessment “extremely useful” (n=11), followed by “quite useful” (n=10) and “really useful” (n=8). See figure 1. Three students were not certain about the usefulness of peer assessment and two respondents stated that peer assessment was “more useless than useful”. Generally, on the basis of this descriptive data, it can be concluded that approximately 85% of the participants in this study regard peer assessment as a useful component of constructive feedback.

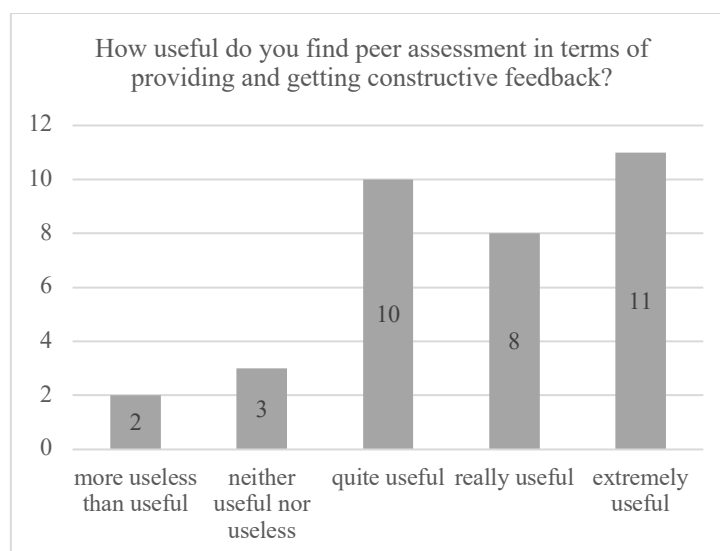


Figure 1: Students' responses to question 1.

**RQ2. How useful do the students find peer assessment in terms of developing their own phonological skills?**

In Question 2, most students stated that they found peer assessment “extremely useful” (n=13), followed by “really useful” (n=11) and “quite useful” (n=7). See figure 2. Three students were not certain about the usefulness of peer assessment. Generally, it can be concluded that approximately 91% of the participants in this study acknowledge the usefulness of peer assessment for the development of their own phonological skills.

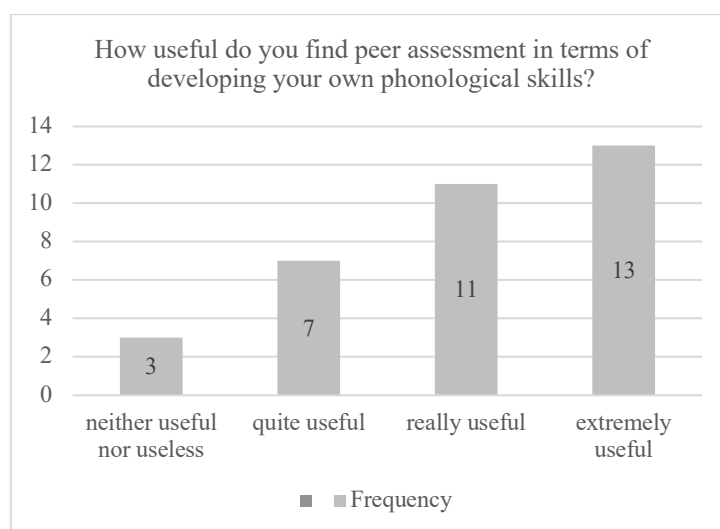


Figure 2: Students' responses to question 2.

**RQ3. Which form of peer assessment do the students find more convenient?**

Most students preferred oral peer assessment (n=21, 61%) to written peer assessment (n=13, 39%) in terms of personal convenience and comfort. See figure 3.

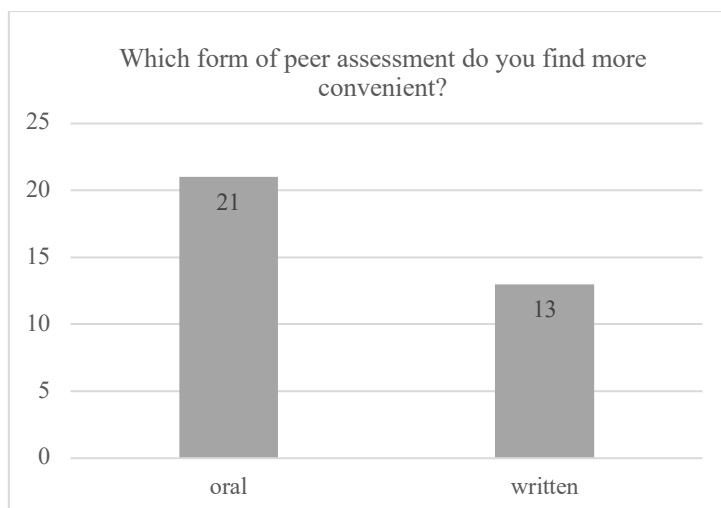


Figure 3: Students' responses to question 3.

#### **RQ4. Which form of peer assessment do the students find more useful?**

Most students stated that oral peer assessment (n=23, 67%) was more useful than written peer assessment (n=11, 33%). See figure 4.

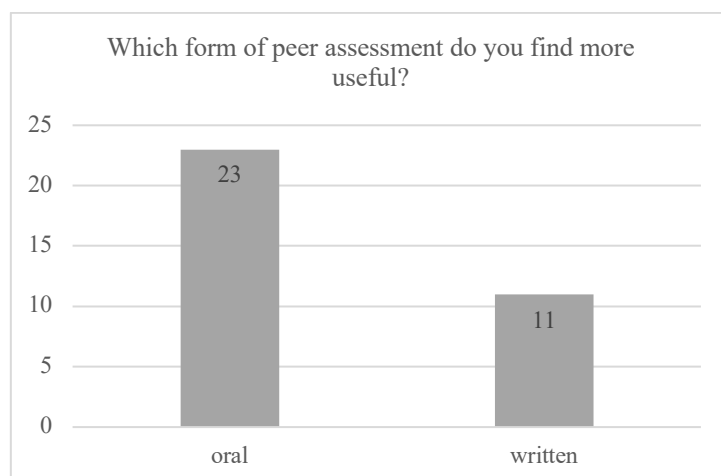


Figure 4: Students' responses to question 4.

### **Discussion and Limitations**

This study set out to explore students' attitudes towards peer assessment in L2 pronunciation instruction. The obtained results showed that most students regarded peer assessment as a component useful both as a means of providing constructive feedback and as an opportunity for developing personal phonological skills. The fact that the participants in this study spoke in favour of the peer assessment means that depriving students of the possibility to comment on the pronunciation of their peers would limit their learning opportunities. Moreover, the fact that most students preferred oral assessment to written assessment seems to be rather surprising, as the study hypothesis stated that providing written feedback to peers might be less friendship-biased and thus considered by students more effective or preferable. Perhaps, the respondents should have been offered more choices, including "both written and oral" and "none". The binary choice might have limited the students and forced them to make a not

completely genuine choice. Moreover, including the qualitative component, that is, giving the respondents the opportunity to verbally explain their choices, could have made the data in this study richer and more informative.

### Recommendations for Further Research

The following assessment criteria can be suggested for the development of peer assessment practices in EFL pronunciation classes (Table 2). The grading system relies on the concept of *English as a lingua franca* and sees an intelligible, rather than a native-sounding speaker, as the model. The criteria might be altered depending on the specialisation of the EFL students, as the students majoring in English teaching, for instance, might want to be assessed against native-speaker pronunciation as a yardstick (Coskun, 2011; Chien, 2014; Maslova, 2017).

Table 2: Suggested pronunciation peer assessment scale

Mark	Criteria	What can be improved	How to improve
5	pronunciation is flawless, no correction needed; all the requirements for the task have been satisfied		
4.5	pronunciation is completely intelligible but needs minor correction (1 mistake*); all the requirements for the task have been satisfied		
4	a few mistakes are present (2-3); the student is showing considerable effort but more work is needed to make speech more intelligible; all the requirements for the task have been satisfied		
3.5	many mistakes are present (4-5); the requirements for the task have been satisfied only partially; the student is showing considerable effort but is not yet intelligible.		
3	many mistakes are present (more than 5); the requirements for the task have been satisfied only partially; the student is showing little effort and is not yet intelligible.		
2	the student is showing very little effort, the requirements for the task have not been satisfied, the speech is almost unintelligible		
1	the student is present but not prepared, the student is showing no effort		
0	the student is not present		

\*A mistake is an act of mispronunciation that makes the word unintelligible / easily confused with another word (e.g. sick/seek, back/bag)

As the generalisability of the study results is subject to certain limitations due to the small sample size, more studies, both in Russia and in other cultural and educational contexts, are needed to explore the question of students' attitudes towards written and oral peer assessment in the L2 phonetics classroom. Students can also be employed to test the peer assessment pronunciation scale suggested by a teacher or develop a new one in cooperation with the teacher, which might result in motivation and a responsibility boost. Moreover, it would be

beneficial to employ data triangulation by including qualitative research methods into similar studies in order to gain better understanding of the matter.

### **Conclusion**

The significance of an objective and effective assessment as an integral part of the teaching-learning cycle is apparent to many educationalists. Assessment has been varying along with the changes of the theories and models of L2 learning and teaching, especially today when the concept of teaching English as a lingua franca has become well-known and well-studied which, in terms of teaching phonetics, has drastically changed the way phonological skills are viewed and assessed.

Constructive teaching and learning, the shift to a student-oriented model and the need to situate collaborative and inclusive life-long learning have brought assessment to the centre of researchers' attention, revealing that the roles and types of assessment have changed. The teacher is no longer the centre of assessment but the students cooperating with teachers and sharing responsibilities can achieve greater results through practising such an interactive type of assessment as peer assessment (Wikstorm, 2007).

The conducted research has indicated students' positive attitude toward peer-assessment and their willingness to cooperate with the teacher in assessment, thus showing an awareness of their active role in educational processes.

### Appendix 1

#### Questionnaire administered to the participants

Answer the following questions by choosing from 1 to 7 (Q 1,2) or choosing one option (Q 3,4):

**1. How useful do you find peer assessment in terms of providing and getting constructive feedback?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely useless	Useless	More useless than useful	Neither useful nor useless	Quite useful	Really useful	Extremely useful

**2. How useful do you find peer assessment in terms of developing your own phonological skills?**

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Completely useless	Useless	More useless than useful	Neither useful nor useless	Quite useful	Really useful	Extremely useful

**3. Which form of peer assessment do you find more convenient? Choose one option.**

- ☐ Oral form (the form of discussion)
- ☐ Written form (writing commentaries)

**4. Which form of peer assessment do you find more useful? Choose one option.**

- ☐ Oral form (the form of discussion)
- ☐ Written form (writing commentaries)

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**Socio-Demographic Factors Affecting Reading Comprehension Achievement Among  
Secondary School Students with Learning Disabilities in Ibadan, Nigeria**

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### Abstract

The study examined the influence that socio-demographic factors (school social environment, type of school and gender) have on achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities. The study employed the correlational design. One hundred and twenty-three (123) Junior Secondary Class 1 (JSS 1) students with learning disabilities from six secondary schools (3 private and 3 public) all located in Ibadan North Local Government Area, Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria participated in the study. Three scales namely: the Pupil Rating Scale (Revised), the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (adapted) and the Test of Reading Comprehension were administered to the participants and the scores derived from these were subjected to Pearson Product Moment Correlation, Multiple Regression and t-test Statistics. The results revealed that the most potent factor in the prediction of reading comprehension achievement of students with learning disabilities is school social environment ( $r = 0.214$ ) followed by gender ( $r = 0.185$ ). The joint contribution of school social environment, school type and gender on reading comprehension achievement of students with learning disabilities was significant. While school social environment could considerably and independently predict reading comprehension achievement among students with learning disabilities, school type and gender could not. Further findings showed a significant difference in reading comprehension achievement between male and female students with learning disabilities ( $\text{Cal.t} = 2.075$ ). Also, there was no observable significant difference in the reading comprehension achievement of students with learning disabilities in private and public schools. Therefore, it was suggested that teachers of students with learning disabilities should ensure that reading comprehension lessons take place in stimulating and conducive classroom environments devoid of unhealthy, risky and distracting stimuli.

*Keywords:* socio-demographic factors, learning disabilities, reading comprehension, achievement

Attainment of academic success and social adjustment are essential learning outcomes derived in schooling. This explains why a learner's future success in life is often attributed to his or her ability to learn effectively. Students' learning is a product of several organised activities and how well students learn at school can be linked to many factors. Among these factors are school social environment, type of school in terms of ownership and administration and gender. School social factor reveals whether the learning environment is supportive or hostile. According to the American Institutes for Research (2019), the school environment includes all services, support systems, school policing policies and related structured practices for the benefit of students and staff. The environment is compared to a hidden chain that connects all the activities of the school in many ways and its influence is felt by all members of the school.

Considering the influence of the environment in the school, it is possible that insignificant details could be seen affecting the ability of students to succeed in their studies. In a supportive school environment for instance, there are healthy and supportive relationships between teachers and students, teachers and teachers, students and students, and students and support staff. There is also less discrimination against students who might be experiencing some emotional, social or academic difficulties such as those with special needs in this type of school. Members of the school community benefit from warmth, security and safety. Excessive resistance, constant student-to-adult conflict in school, and frustration with all kinds of abuse are rare in a supportive school environment.

The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) explained that in a supportive school environment, there are a wide range of opportunities for learner participation and shared responsibility. Group activities are also encouraged in a socially supportive school and students engage in fewer risk behaviours such as non-compliance with school rules and regulations, bullying and aggression, that interfere with teaching and learning. Students with specific disabilities in learning domains, get along well with their peers and teachers in a socially positive environment. The free bond established by the school community promotes academic success and a healthy lifestyle. As reported by Nazir and Mattoo (2012), the formal educational setting and scholarly achievements are correlative and depend on each other. When schools provide stimulating and supportive learning environments, students' academic performance either directly or indirectly is bound to improve.

The type of school, described in terms of ownership and administration portrays whether the school management is controlled by the government/public or private individuals/organisations. By default, public educational institutions depend mainly on local, state or federal government allocations as the case may be. Conversely, private educational institutions depend on different sources of income including tuition fees borne by learners, disbursements, and donations from non-governmental organisations. In Nigeria, it is natural to find more classes and many students in public educational institutions compared to private learning categories. The reason may be that private schools are fee-paying institutions; as a result, many families may be unable to afford the fees so they send their children and wards to public schools.

Despite the increased funds demanded by private school owners and the idea of capitalism in the education sector projected by the private school system, it should be noted that private educational institutions provide learners with opportunities for improved learning outcomes. Similarly, teachers in private schools enjoy a greater sense of community than their counterparts in public schools. These features can have an impact on all learners, especially among those who have difficulty in learning academic tasks.

A demographic factor of interest in this study is gender of learners. The impact of gender on students' learning success has been investigated particularly, with respect to reading achievement among learners without disabilities (Ezeokoli & Ezenandu, 2013). There seems to have been little focus on students with disabilities and their achievement in the aspect of text comprehension. Cekiso (2016) explained that discussion on differences in gender with respect to comprehension of texts is important in the light of growing low reading achievement scores obtained by male and female students in national and international tests and examinations. Certain studies suggest that females have better language abilities than males (Reilly, Neumann & Andrews, 2018). The veracity of this submission particularly among students, who face academic difficulties in Nigeria, is yet to be fully ascertained. Therefore, it would be pertinent to investigate the relationship between the achievement of boys and girls with learning disabilities in reading comprehension contexts.

The choice of reading comprehension as a dependent variable in this study is informed by the fact that it is the most important sub-skill in the continuum of reading skills. Every time a student reads a text with comprehension, he or she crosses a ladder that leads to academic success. Thus, reading comprehension helps learners to explore, explain, understand and interpret the information contained in a text. It involves active, dynamic thinking and thoughtful interpretation of texts by proficient readers. Going by this explanation, this study would be of immense benefit to learners who do not experience difficulties with text comprehension as well as those who have serious challenges with understanding of texts. Learners would also get to realise that the social environment where learning occurs has an effect on school learning. The findings of this study would provide succinct information to teachers, school administrators and policy makers on the impact that socio-demographic factors (school social environment, type of school and gender) have on comprehension of texts among students whose main academic challenges are in the areas of reading and language-related skills.

### **Literature Review**

Difficulties in the acquisition and interpretation of reading-related activities, listening activities, mathematics, and written and spoken language tasks are the major areas of challenge facing students with learning disabilities. Approximately, eighty per cent of these students experience specific difficulties with reading (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). That is, of all academic skills, reading is the one which poses the most difficulty for many students with learning disabilities. Lazarus and Ige (2017) reported that some secondary school students with learning disabilities experience poor reading comprehension sometimes due to their lack of rich vocabulary and their inability to apply evidence-based reading strategies during reading.

In contrast to readers with academic difficulties, learners, who understand texts easily often have good decoding skills, read with ease and understand a large amount of vocabulary. Olu and Abiodun (2013) reiterated that activation of prior knowledge during reading enables readers to construct meaning and understand basic concepts in texts. Also, efficient readers seek to understand the structure of the text. They reflect on the information provided in the text and deduce what the author does not specifically reveal. On the contrary, lack of understanding makes reading a meaningless activity or a simple word calling exercise. Students' inability to understand texts creates difficulties for grasping of information in all school subjects and leads to poor academic results. To reduce the negative impact of academic failure on students struggling with school work, educators are working tirelessly to deepen their scientific understanding of how these students can benefit from reading comprehension tasks.

A study conducted by Shamaki (2015) involving 337 secondary school students studying in Yobe State, Nigeria revealed a significant difference between the mathematics performance of students taught in a stimulating learning environment and that of students taught in a non-stimulating learning environment. Schmitt and Kleine (2010) found that qualitative social relationships within the immediate school community involving children, classmates and teachers led to high performance in school subjects. Schmitt and Kleine (2010) concluded that the quality of pupil-teacher and pupil-student interactions determine school performance. Ayeni, Adeyemo and Olasunkanmi (2014) studied the correlation between school environmental factors and adolescent school performance in Osun State, Nigeria, and found that environmental factors at school were strong indices that correlated with the academic performance of high school learners.

Similar studies on learning environment in a school system and school success indicated that school environment has a significant impact on student learning (Chepkonga, 2017; Chikezie & Ekott, 2019; Duruji, Azuh & Oviasogie, 2014; Ngene, Quadri, Bamigboye & Tenebe, 2018). In addition, Michalak (2014) found that a school environment that is safe and supportive, where student motivation and classroom diversity are promoted is among the factors that facilitate literacy learning. Byamugisha (2010) found that factors such as school attendance, repeating a grade, parent-teacher meetings, parents paying extra tuition, students taking school lunch, private or public school categories, the school setting, the material and pedagogical resources, and the educational qualifications of school staff, actually predicted reading and mathematics results of sixth grade students in Uganda.

It was also reported by certain studies that students who attend privately owned schools obtained better test and examination scores than those in public schools (Adeyemi, 2014; Bonsu, 2016; Ehigiamusoe, 2012). In 2017, Adeniji explored how school status and gender influenced students' success in mathematics and found that students in private schools were sixty-four percent more likely to achieve better results than their counterparts in public educational institutions. Duruji, Azuh and Oviasogie (2014) revealed that students gain better learning outcomes in private learning environments than in their public-school counterparts. A study by Gumede (2018) involving seventy Grade 9 students from public and private schools was conducted in Bulawayo Central District high schools in Zimbabwe. The findings showed that the reading comprehension performance of students in public schools were significantly lower than the reading comprehension performance of students in private schools. Gumede (2018) therefore submitted that there is need to provide intervention to students who lag behind in reading comprehension to avoid further challenges in the academic area.

The study by Nazir and Mattoo (2012), involved 80 adolescents in Srinagar enrolled in private and public schools. The results revealed that public and private school types strongly influenced the academic achievement of males and females. Other results showed a significant link between the school and university context and academic achievement among women enrolled in private educational institutions. Ocheho, Oke and Lanre-Babalola (2019) found that while students in public educational institutions of higher learning experienced higher levels of learned helplessness those in private educational institutions of higher learning experienced higher school connectedness. The scholars therefore concluded that private educational institutions enjoy a peaceful school environment capable of enabling students to have free and open interactions with school staff without inhibitions.

Furthermore, results showing gender differences in learners' reading scores are inconclusive. For example, Halpern, Straight and Stephenson (2011) reported that in terms of language and

communication, there are obvious gender stereotypes among boys and girls. According to Plante, Sabbonniere, Aronson and Theoret (2013), most studies corroborate the fact that females perform better than men in reading and language-related work. Reilly, Neumann, and Andrews (2018) equally found that females performed better in language-related tasks than their male counterparts. Although no statistical differences in participants' reading scores based on gender were obtained by Ezeokoli and Ezenandu (2013), scores of female participants were higher than reading scores of their male counterparts. This implies that treatment had more a positive effect on females than on males. In contrast, Elui (2015) found that gender did not significantly affect learner average scores in reading and Caplan and Caplan (2016) questioned the existence of gender gaps in verbal tasks.

Based on the foregoing review, it can be deduced that investigation into the impact of environment in the school on learners' achievement mainly utilised participants without specific disabilities in reading. These studies placed an emphasis on students' mathematics learning, English language learning and social skills acquisition. There appears to be few studies that focused on the reading comprehension of learners with academic disabilities. This study therefore, addressed the gap and provided information that will increase the awareness of educators on learners' academic prowess. The study examined a social factor, school social environment, and two demographic factors which are type of school and gender and the connections that exist between these factors and reading comprehension among students experiencing disabilities in learning academic skills.

### **Methodology**

The following research questions guided the study.

- What is the level of relationship existing between socio-demographic factors and the achievement in reading comprehension of participants in the study?
- Do the socio-demographic factors jointly and relatively contribute to the prediction of achievement in reading comprehension of participants?
- Is there a difference in achievement in reading comprehension on the basis of the type of school attended by participants?
- Is there a difference in achievement in reading comprehension on the basis of the participants' gender?

This study used a descriptive survey. McCombes (2019) posited that a descriptive research study describes a population, situation or phenomenon. It can answer "what", "when", "where" and "how" questions but not "why" questions. Participants were selected step by step through a multi-stage sampling procedure. The screening instrument was administered to a total of 951 students who were in JSS1 in the six schools. The results of the projection showed that one hundred and twenty-three (123) JSS 1 students out of nine hundred and fifty-one (951) JSS 1 students selected from the six schools had learning differences. The age range of the participants was 11 to 17 years old. Several reasons account for the variability of age among participants. Students are admitted into secondary school in Nigeria immediately after they complete primary education which is designed for pupils aged 6-12 years. By implication, enrolment age is estimated at 12 years (Section 2, Parts C & D, pp. 9, 12: National Policy on Education, 2013). However, socio-cultural and economic factors could account for the presence of younger or older students in the first year of secondary school. For instance, a student who dropped out of school may re-enter at an older age. Some students might have commenced schooling late or experienced delay in schooling due to stigmatisation and/or



delays in cognitive and concept development. The distribution of participants by demographic characteristics revealed that there were: thirty (30) students (24.39%) from private schools and ninety-three (93) students (75.61%) from public schools. The gender distribution of participants showed that forty-five (45) male students (35.59%) and seventy-eight (78) female students (63.41%) participated in the study.

### **Instruments**

To collect data, participants in this study completed three instruments namely: the Pupil Rating Scale (Revised), the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (adapted) and the Test of Reading Comprehension. The researcher used Myklebust's (1981) Pupil Rating Scale (Revised) for screening purposes. Myklebust (1981) explained that teachers can rate students on the twenty-four items of the scale using a five-point scale (with 1 indicating poor behaviour, 3 indicating average behaviour and 5 indicating good behaviour). Lazarus and Aransiola (2016) obtained Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 for the Pupil Rating Scale. The second instrument was used to collect information on school social environment. An adapted version of the instrument developed by the National School Climate Centre (NSCC) in 2015, called Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) was used. This instrument has two sections. Section A required the participants to supply demographic data on type of school (private or public) and gender. Sixteen questions in Section B focused on participants' experiences in school with an emphasis on safety, supportive learning environment and relationships among individuals in the school. The reliability and validity of the adapted version of the CSCI was further determined by the researcher through a pilot test. The researcher ensured that students who participated in the pilot test were not among the study sample. The Cronbach's alpha statistics was computed. The result of the coefficient of reliability obtained by the researcher was thus 0.72.

The third instrument is an achievement test of 25 items tagged "Test of Reading Comprehension" (TRC). It comprises two reading comprehension passages (a narrative text and an expository text) selected from an online teachers' resource (Language arts worksheets), designed by Teachnology, Inc. (1999-2012). These reading passages were adjudged appropriate for JSS 1 students experiencing disabilities in academics. Each correct answer on the TRC receives 4 marks to give a total of 100 marks. The questions were intended to elicit responses on students' ability to identify significant points/themes, developmental ideas, draw interpretations, recall facts and comprehend the meaning of words in context. The coefficient alpha results from pilot testing the scale on 20 students with disabilities in academics that were not part of the sample were as follows: Reading Passage 1 ( $r = 0.75$ ), and Reading Passage 2 ( $r = 0.73$ ). The researcher engaged three research assistants for ease of test administration in the selected schools. Pearson Moment Correlation; multiple regressions and the independent t-test statistics were used for data analysis.

### **Ethical Consideration**

In order to meet standard ethical consideration for the nature of this study, the researcher applied to the Ethical and Research Committee of the Ministry of Education in Oyo State, Nigeria. A copy of the research proposal was submitted with a parental/guardian consent form. After three weeks, the Ethical and Research Committee approved the conduct of the research. From this point, a letter of introduction and parental/guardian consent form were dispatched through the students with learning disabilities to their parents/guardians. Since the participants were minors, it was essential that confidentiality and fairness were maintained. In all, 123 JSS 1 students with learning disabilities whose parents agreed to their children/wards' participation in this study participated.

## Results

Table 1: Correlation matrix showing the relationship between school social environment, school type, gender and achievement in reading comprehension

Variable	Mean	Stand. Dev.	Achievement in reading comp.	School social environment	School type	Gender
Achievement in reading comp.	57.30	10.47	1			
School social environment	55.56	5.71	0.214* (0.018)	1		
School type	1.76	0.43	0.065 (0.472)	0.056 (0.538)	1	
Gender	1.63	0.48	0.185* (0.040)	0.081 (0.374)	0.080 (0.382)	1

### What is the level of relationship existing between socio-demographic factors and the achievement in reading comprehension of participants in the study?

Table 1 shows a positive significant relationship existing between the school social environment ( $r = 0.214$ ,  $p (0.018) < 0.05$ ); gender ( $r = 0.185$ ,  $p (0.040) < 0.05$ ) and the students with learning disabilities' achievement in reading comprehension. This implies that the more the social environment in the school is conducive, cordial and pleasant, the more students with learning disabilities will obtain high grades in reading comprehension and vice versa. However, no significant relationship between the demographic factor-school type ( $r = 0.065$ ,  $p (0.472) > 0.05$ ) and participants' achievement in reading comprehension was obtained. That is, the status of the school (whether private or public) does not have a positive link to reading comprehension achievement of students with learning disabilities.

Table 2: ANOVA, model summary and coefficients of the multiple regression of the joint contribution of school social environment, school type and gender to the prediction of achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities

Multiple R= 0.275						
Multiple R <sup>2</sup> = 0.076						
Multiple R <sup>2</sup> (Adjusted) = 0.052						
Standard Error of Estimate =10.1949						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1013.530	3	337.843	3.251	0.024
	Residual	12368.340	119	103.936		
	Total	13381.870	122			

### Do the socio-demographic factors jointly and relatively contribute to the prediction of achievement in reading comprehension of participants?

In Table 2, the F-ratio of 3.251 was recorded. This indicates that school social environment, school type and gender when considered as a unit, significantly predict students with learning disabilities' achievement in reading comprehension. The R value of 0.275 and R<sup>2</sup> value of 0.076 were obtained. This means that the combination of the three factors produced 7.6% of the variance in participants' achievement in reading comprehension. Table 3 further illustrates

the relative contributions of each of the three predictor variables (namely: school social environment, school type and gender) to the prediction of the dependent variable-reading comprehension achievement among students with learning disabilities.

Table 3: Relative contribution of school social environment, school type and gender to the prediction of achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	29.502	9.841		2.998	0.003
School social environment	0.363	0.162	0.198	2.235	0.027
School Type	0.998	2.150	0.041	0.464	0.643
Gender	3.596	1.920	0.166	1.873	0.064

From table 3, while school social environment ( $\beta=0.198$ ,  $t=2.235$ ,  $p<0.05$ ) could significantly and singly predict participants' achievement in reading comprehension, school type ( $\beta=0.041$ ,  $t=0.464$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) and gender ( $\beta=0.166$ ,  $t=1.873$ ,  $p>0.05$ ) could not. This implies that school social environment can determine the reading comprehension achievement of students with learning disabilities.

Table 4: t-test indicating the difference in achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities in private and public schools

Achievement in Reading comprehension	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	DF	p value
Private school	30	56.1000	12.2653	1.96	0.721	121	0.472
Public school	93	57.6882	9.8698				

**Is there a difference in achievement in reading comprehension on the basis of the type of school attended by participants?** Table 4 reveals that although students with learning disabilities in public schools obtained 57.6882 mean score in reading comprehension and those in private schools got 56.1000, no observable significant differences in achievement in reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities in private and public schools (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 0.721, DF = 121,  $p>0.05$ ) were obtained.

Table 5: t-test indicating the difference in achievement in reading comprehension of male and female students with learning disabilities

Achievement in Reading comprehension	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Crit-t	Cal-t.	DF	p value
Male	45	54.7556	11.0744	1.96	2.075	121	0.040
Female	78	58.7692	9.8863				

**Is there a difference in achievement in reading comprehension on the basis of the participants' gender?** Table 5 reveals that female students with learning disabilities ( $\bar{x} = 58.7692$ ) performed better compared to their male counterparts with learning disabilities ( $\bar{x} = 54.7556$ ) in the study (Crit-t = 1.96, Cal.t = 2.075, DF = 121,  $p < 0.05$ ).

### Discussion

Regarding research question 1, a significant positive relationship between the social environment of the school and gender (two independent variables) and the reading comprehension scores of students with learning disabilities (dependent variable) was obtained. However, no significant relationship was found between the type of school and the reading comprehension scores of the participants. This finding supports the findings of Nazir and Mattoo (2012) and Ngene, Quadri, Bamigboye and Tenebe (2018). These researchers found that the school social environment was directly related to academic achievement and that a positive social environment played an important role in developing students' academic abilities. When students study in a stimulating and supportive environment, they feel welcome and emotionally stable, indirectly leading to better academic outcomes, including reading comprehension. These findings also support the findings of Ezeokoli and Ezenandu (2013), who reported higher average post-test reading scores for women than men, although these scores are not statistically significant.

Research question 2 results also revealed that the social environment of the school, the type of school and gender of students with disabilities in academics had a significant joint contribution to the reading comprehension scores of students with disabilities. This result is consistent with Michalak's (2014) findings, which indicate that a safe and supportive school environment, classroom diversity and student motivation leads to improved literacy learning among students. Gumede (2018) found that reading comprehension performance among learners in private schools differ significantly in favour of students in private schools. Nazir and Mattoo (2012) found that the type of school (public and private) had a major effect on student success in their studies. Adeniji (2017) found that students in private educational institutions had better scores than students in public educational institutions in terms of academic achievement. Reilly, Neumann and Andrews (2018) corroborated the conclusion that girls' performance in language-based activities was greater than that of boys.

Research question 2 showed that the social environment of the school could independently predict the reading comprehension scores of students with disabilities in academics. This finding is also consistent with that of Byamugisha's (2010) in which both home and school factors predict students' reading and mathematics scores. The present findings also support those of Schmitt and Kleine (2010), who concluded that improved school success is a product of improved student-teacher interactions, pupil-student interactions and parental involvement. In a safe, challenging and reassuring school environment, students learn and achieve better school results.

However, the results for research question 2, also revealed that school type and gender could not predict significantly and independently the scores in reading comprehension among students with learning disabilities. This finding is in disagreement with that of Nazir and Mattoo (2012) regarding the impact that school type has on academic achievement, but corroborates Elui's (2015) view that gender gaps do not exist in reading scores. Reading comprehension is an essential sub-skill of reading that requires a stimulating and supportive teaching and learning environment for optimal results. Therefore, it is not enough to enroll

them in a private or public school. Regardless of the type of school they attend, attention must be paid to the nature of the school environment and the subject taught.

For research question 3, the results showed that the gender of students with learning disabilities is connected to the success of students with learning disabilities in reading comprehension. The female students in this study scored better than the males. This finding supports that of Reilly, Neumann, and Andrews (2018), but contradicts the findings of Elui (2015) and Caplan and Caplan (2016), who found no gender differences in student reading scores.

Results for research question 4, also did not show any significant variance in the reading comprehension scores of students with learning disabilities in private and public schools. This finding does not support Duruji, Azuh and Oviasogie (2014) and Adeniji's (2017) because the researchers maintained that students in private learning environments perform better than their typical peers in public learning environments. However, the present results corroborate the findings of Nazir and Mattoo (2012), which revealed a major impact of school type on student achievement.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

The study was limited to only social environment within the school. Future research could benefit from investigating other components of the environment such as physical, emotional and psychological environments of the school. The influence of these variables can be studied vis-a vis reading comprehension of students with learning disabilities. In addition, participants were only 123 year one students drawn from six secondary schools and one local government area in Ibadan. Further studies can be conducted with larger numbers of students spread across the eleven local government areas in the Ibadan metropolis. By so doing, a wider geographical scope would be covered. Future studies should consider using assessment measures which involve complex grade-level materials in identifying the study participants. It would be advisable if multiple reading comprehension measures could be used as opposed to the use of a single test.

### **Recommendations**

This study has provided clear educational implications and recommendations for stakeholders in the secondary school setting. A rich social environment promotes effective reading comprehension among secondary school students, especially those with learning disabilities. The English language teachers should provide a learning environment that is conducive to reading comprehension instruction. Respectful and friendly social relationships should be maintained while teaching reading comprehension to all secondary school students, especially those with learning disabilities.

Other content area teachers of students with learning disabilities should ensure that classes take place in stimulating class environments that are free of unhealthy, risky and annoying stimuli. They should place emphasis on a safe and healthy school environment for learning. There should be no room for unwholesome relationships in the school community. Students with learning disabilities who struggle in academic classes need to acquire relevant social skills useful for regulating a person's behaviour, understanding one's emotions and those of others, and effectively managing interpersonal relationships for an improved school achievement.

Policy makers and school administrators should be prepared for the challenge of educating all learners, particularly those with learning disabilities, in a supportive and positive school environment. They should ensure that public and private schools provide students with clearly defined rules and regulations, maintain socio-emotional security by eliminating harassment and all forms of physical and psychological violence within the school and provide strong social support to all students. If these measures are maintained, the socio-emotional stability that results will certainly be metamorphosed into better academic outcomes, principally in reading comprehension for those students who struggle to succeed in academic classes.

Parents of learners with learning difficulties must frequently communicate with the school principal and cooperate with that individual on matters relating to the general welfare of their children to ensure that learning takes place in a healthy school environment. Guidance counsellors should conduct routine counselling sessions where all learners, including those with learning disabilities, may be exposed to the importance of maintaining healthy social relationships with teachers and other students. Some students with learning disabilities have difficulty with social skills; therefore, training students in these skills will also strengthen the social environment of the school and indirectly lead to improved outcomes in learning for all students, including those with disabilities.

### **Conclusion**

The study found that students with learning disabilities will perform better in reading comprehension if they learn in a positive and supportive school environment. The results reveal that the positive school social environment has significantly influenced the reading comprehension scores of students with learning disabilities. With respect to the joint and relative contributions of socio-demographic factors (social environment in the school, the type of school and gender) to achievement in reading comprehension of students who experience disabilities with academics, it should be noted that the contributions of these factors may not be isolated but combined by at least two factors. However, only the social environment of the school could predict significantly and independently the achievement in reading comprehension among students with learning disabilities.

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