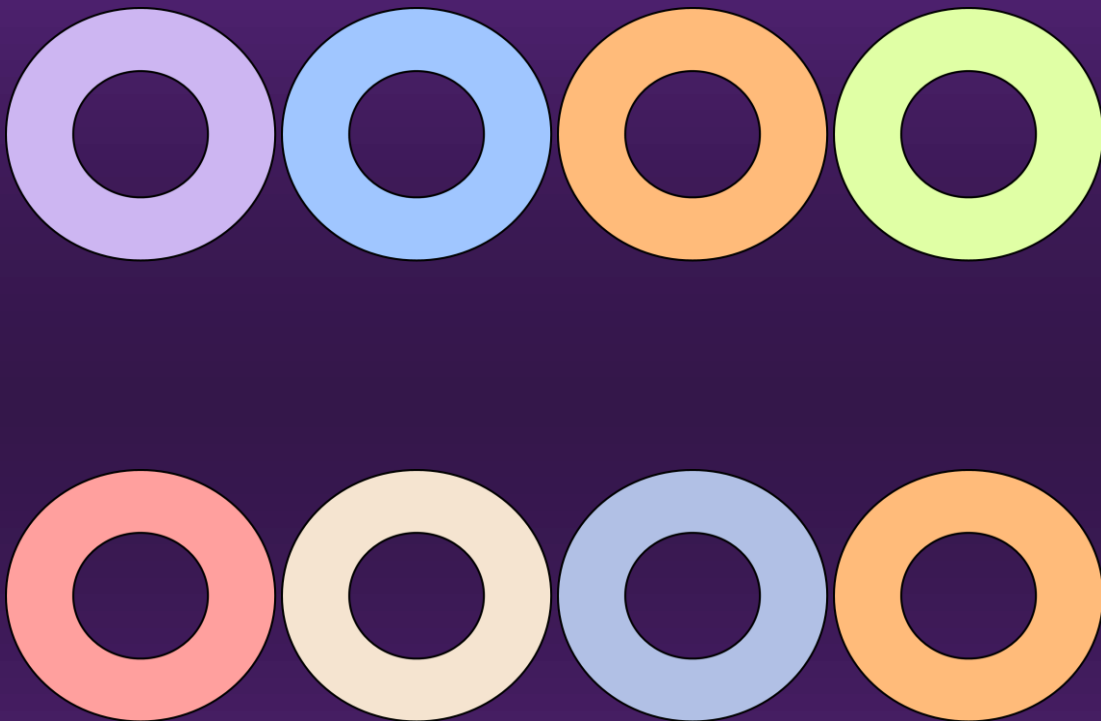


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Foreword

Paolo Niño Valdez

De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines

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Foreword

Through the years, the TESOL profession has gone through profound change brought about by globalization. Though many experts claim that globalization goes back in the ancient world, its impact is greatly felt in different aspects of life. In the case of the profession, our work has become more of a complex enterprise as some of us have engaged in rich areas of political, socio-cultural and economic dimensions of language teaching.

I must say that the papers featured here are not simply state of the art papers that identify the growth of the profession in the context of globalization. Rather, the authors attempt to find greater meaning through contestation, reflexivity and engagement of aspects of globalization in their respective settings.

Baecher and Thuy's investigation of Vietnamese supervisors' views of ELT unravel interesting tensions which may prove helpful for ELT practitioners and researchers engaged in teacher training. **Ahmed and Narcy-Combes'** research on cultural dimensions of ELT textbooks provide greater points for reflection for materials designers as the role of TESOL in the coming years should be geared towards learner inclusivity. Moreover, **Qian's** work on the development of space and voice among Chinese learners in different socio-cultural contexts may be of interest to scholars engaged in critical work on agency its potentials in articulating learner identity through language. Similarly, **Chen and Li's** work exemplifies the complexities of intercultural communication competence in learning English in China. From a more holistic perspective, **Davari** explores the impact of globalization on ELT practices in Iran. Finally, **Nepumuceno's** reflexive critique of blogging in ELT in the Philippines provides adequate space for debate among practitioners as we embrace the potential benefits and pitfalls of technology integration in our classroom.

Indeed, I am very much thankful for the patience and support of these authors for developing their work for this issue. Likewise, I am indebted to the following scholars who served as readers for the papers featured in the special issue:

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Of course, this would not have been possible with the great support of the Journal's editorial headed by Dr. Carlo Magno, Dr. Ariane Borlongan, and Dr. Paul Robertson.

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Supervision of Instruction in English as a Foreign Language: A Vietnamese Perspective

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Abstract

The City University of New York (CUNY) and the Vietnam-USA Society English Centers (VUS) have engaged in a ten-year relationship in which CUNY faculty visit VUS English language schools in Ho Chi Minh City every six months, observing classes and post-lesson conferences, and providing teacher and teacher supervisor workshops about current practice in English language teaching. In order to more fully understand Vietnamese supervisors' views on English language teaching (ELT) supervision, a web-based questionnaire was developed and administered to VUS and non-VUS ELT supervisors in Ho Chi Minh City. Results showed how these supervisors approach observations, what they chose to observe, how they conduct post-observation conferences, and the challenges they face in their roles, with implications for culturally responsive teacher supervision in EFL contexts.

Key words: Supervision, TEFL, teacher observation, Communicative Language Teaching, Vietnam

Introduction

*Qua sông thì phải lụy đò
Muốn con hay chữ, phải yêu lấy thầy
(To get across the river, you have to build a bridge;
To have well-educated children, you have to respect the teacher)*

The cultural contexts for teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) vary widely, from preschool to university classrooms. Variables such as whether the instruction is for those studying English as a foreign language (EFL), whether this schooling takes place in an English-dominant community, quality of institutional resources, and the philosophic orientations of these programs all influence the type of experiences offered to learners. Cultural expectations on the part of students will shape instructional interactions, as teacher behaviors also reflect local norms. For instance, the expectations of learners of English regarding how to initiate turn-taking, or how to exchange information with their instructors, is likely to differ from setting to setting. Understanding local context thereby

informs instruction. Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), the international professional organization for teaching English as a second or foreign language, counts culturally appropriate pedagogy among its main standards for teacher behavior (TESOL, 2010).

As reflected in the Vietnamese quote above, regard for teachers is a product of deep-rooted cultural values. Although usually explored through the lens of teacher-student interaction, the study described in this paper seeks to better understand those who support and guide the teacher behind the scenes—the workplace teacher supervisor, who has a critical but underexplored role in shaping instruction. While much has been written about the practicum or in-service supervisor, there is a dearth of research on teacher supervisors in the workplace, and none at all in the context of Vietnam. The purpose of this paper is to capture some of the ways in which the supervision of EFL teachers in Vietnam may be informed by cultural beliefs, practices, and experiences, in the context of the burgeoning English teaching field in Vietnam, where Western and Vietnamese notions of pedagogy are interacting. It is hoped that this investigation may be of relevance to both Vietnamese and non-Vietnamese teacher educators, school administrators, and teacher supervisors working to preserve local norms while accommodating new approaches against the backdrop of the globalization of English language teaching (ELT), as well as to the study of cross-cultural teacher study generally.

Context for the Study

The City University of New York (CUNY), a large, multi-campus urban university located in New York City, and the Vietnam-USA Society English Centers (VUS), a large, multi-campus urban private English language school located in Ho Chi Minh City, have engaged in a ten-year relationship in which CUNY faculty visit VUS English language schools on a twice-yearly basis, in order to provide teacher and teacher supervisor workshops about current practice in English language teaching. As part of these visits, 3-5 CUNY faculty members observe classes and a post-observation conference between a VUS teacher and teacher supervisor. In order to more fully understand Vietnamese supervisors' views on supervision for ELT, a questionnaire was developed and administered to active supervisors in Ho Chi Minh City. All of them had taught at least five years prior to becoming supervisors, and all engaged regularly in classroom observation and post-observation conferencing at all levels of ELT.

The research questions guiding this inquiry were:

- What are the key instructional practices Vietnamese supervisors look for when observing?
- How do they conduct the post-observation conference?
- What, if any, cultural aspects are present in the supervisory conference?

Vietnam as Context for English Language Teaching

As English instruction continues its spread across Asia, research has begun to investigate its development in Vietnam. Historically, the instruction of English directly parallels socio-political realities, with 1986 ushering it in as a foreign language of choice, in lieu of Russian. More recently, the Ministry of Education and Training introduced large-

scale reforms for education across Vietnam, and one of its main objectives is the improvement of English language education (Nguyen & Truong, 2007).

For the past twenty years, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been given top priority, yet there have been several researchers who claim that Vietnamese teachers have struggled to make sense of it. Viet (2008) suggests two reasons that CLT has met with resistance among Vietnamese teachers. First, many teachers were trained to teach through a grammar-translation approach; therefore teacher-centered and teacher-led lessons are expected norms, by which language is learned through rule memorization and through repetition rather than creative output. Second, since Vietnamese students may have been predominantly interested in becoming proficient in English only to pass national grammar-based tests, teachers question the appropriacy of fluency vs. form-focused instruction, and therefore may resist CLT in favor of more grammar-based instruction. Dang (2008), in a review of three Vietnamese universities of education, found opportunities to develop learner-centered curriculum severely curtailed by the lack of current training materials, course program requirements, and the lack of modeling of CLT practices by teacher trainers. Dang observed that EFL students at these universities reported very little pair or group work, a lack of ownership in the learning process, and a product rather than a process orientation. Pham (2001) cites the rapid growth in the demand for English teachers, which led to the hiring of many untrained teachers, as one reason teachers may not have developed methods in CLT. Since the low salary of these English teachers generally requires them to teach additional hours, this hinders opportunities for professional reflection and planning. Additional constraints for typical Vietnamese teachers cited by Pham include lack of authentic English language teaching resources, pre-determined syllabi and textbooks, large class sizes, and the limitations of their own English proficiency. Nunan (2003) stated that in Vietnam as well as other Asian countries, CLT “is the rhetoric rather than the reality” (p. 606).

Other researchers have challenged this view, suggesting that CLT in many instances is indeed being implemented. For instance, Dang (2006), in a case study of a Vietnamese university level class, showed CLT operating successfully, due to multiple conditions working together, namely highly motivated and proficient students, a teacher with high English proficiency and a strong orientation to learner-centered classrooms, and an institution that supported them in their efforts. Another challenge arises from the concern that Western researchers’ notions of what constitutes successful implementation of CLT are culturally biased (Ellis, 1996; Holliday, 1994). In Kramsch and Sullivan’s (1996) research, CLT took place in ways that differed from Western norms. In the Vietnamese EFL classrooms observed, they found that typical Western CLT criteria, such as pair work, small group negotiations, or authentic tasks, were not displayed. Instead, students often responded chorally or in a collective interaction with the teacher as facilitator, thus enacting local norms of classroom as “family”. Kramsch and Sullivan found that Vietnamese traditions of the classroom as a family, the teacher in the role of moral leader and coach, and the oral traditions of being playful with language carried over and were responsible for the unique form of CLT they observed. Kramsch and Sullivan state that, “appropriate communicative language teaching in Hanoi, for example, might use the same pedagogic nomenclature as in London, but look very different in classroom practice...the question is not how to control this local appropriation, but how to let a thousand flowers bloom” (p. 201).

That CLT may be on the surface at odds with cultural norms in Vietnam has been discussed in other literature. Le (1999) describes the English language teacher in Vietnam as “a cultural island where the teacher is expected to be the sole provider of experience in the target language” (p.10). As CLT places an emphasis on students as the center of the classroom, this upends the traditional Vietnamese view of teachers as the center of the classroom. Viet (2008) also points to this as a source of conflict for Vietnamese teachers. The Confucian ideology, which views the teacher as the center of learning, is cited as being in contrast to the “learner-centered” approach of CLT. In their study of teacher educators in Hong Kong, Katyal and Pang (2010) question the idea that “best” teaching practices must contradict traditional, Confucian notions, and caution against the imperialism of any methods which claim supremacy. Against this backdrop of English language teaching in Vietnam, what role do teacher supervisors play? Are western ideals infused into methods for ELT supervision as well?

Vietnam as Context for Teacher Supervision in ELT

Supervision of instruction is a universally accepted means of assessing the classroom performance of the teacher, supporting the curricular goals of the institution, and monitoring student learning. How this supervision occurs is also common across settings: a supervisor observes a classroom lesson, then discusses this lesson with the instructor soon afterwards. The nature, however, of these observation cycles may reveal cultural norms and practices that highlight how we differ in our views about instruction, student learning, and how to develop teachers’ skills.

While an abundance of literature exists regarding supervision of in-service or trainee teachers enrolled in certificate or teacher education programs, there is little regarding the role culture plays in the style of supervision, and little in terms of supervision of ESL/EFL teachers in the workplace. Kullman (1998) questions this in his investigation of supervision of EFL teachers:

The lack of consideration of contextual factors in mentoring and, more generally in English language teacher education, is surprising in light of the attention given to such factors within ELT methodology, which in recent years has placed considerable emphasis on the learner's sociocultural background and previous learning experience. This has led to debate on whether ‘self-direction’, ‘learner-centredness’ and ‘autonomy’ are appropriate concepts which can be applied to all contexts, with the humanistic aspects of learner or learning training in ELT receiving the greatest attention (p. 481).

Many supervisors of EFL instruction have received their TESOL credentials from Western institutions, and the most widely available texts in supervision for ESL/EFL instruction are written by British, Australian or American authors (e.g. Richards & Nunan, 2000). Western approaches to professional teacher supervision tend to value supportive rather than authoritative approaches to supervision, and generally suggest the use of collaborative models, in which teachers from the same institution work together to explore and innovate their teaching, using each other’s expertise as resource. Gebhard (1984) sorted styles of supervisory behaviors into several categories: directive, alternative, collaborative, non-directive, and creative, with the first considered least supportive of

teacher professional growth by the author.

There are at least three problems with directive supervision. First, there is the problem of how the supervisor defines "good" teaching. Second, there is the problem of negative humanistic consequences that may arise from using a directive model of supervision. And third, there is the problem of who is ultimately responsible for what goes on in the classroom (p. 502).

Gebhard proposed a mixed use of all supervisory styles, cautioning that an overly directive style can make teachers feel threatened and defensive, and therefore least likely to accept or initiate professional learning. How this directive style might manifest in an observation cycle is organized in Table 1. Here, *directive* is contrasted with the other *non-directive* approaches.

Table 1
Direct and Indirect Styles of Supervision

| Direct Style of Supervision: Supervisor tells teacher what to look for to "fix" teaching | |
|--|--|
| Pre-observation conference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisors may not let teachers know they are coming • Lesson plan is not discussed in advance • Teacher does not know what the supervisor is going to be looking at in the observation |
| During observation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor takes notes • Teacher is unsure of the target of observation |
| Post-observation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor begins by telling the teacher what was noticed in the lesson • Teacher takes notes |
| Alternative observation techniques | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisors may tell teachers whom to observe |
| Indirect Style of Supervision: Supervisor supports teacher in professional learning | |
| Pre-observation conference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisors always let teachers know they are coming • Lesson plan is discussed in advance • Teacher and supervisor mutually decide on what is going to be looked at in the observation |
| During observation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisor takes notes, video records, and other teachers may be observing as well • Teacher has determined the target area of instruction they wish to focus on in the lesson |
| Post-observation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher begins by telling the supervisor what was noticed in the lesson • Both supervisor and teacher take notes, examine video, or analyze student work samples |
| Alternative observation techniques | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers suggest whom they wish to observe • Use of video to conduct self-observation |

Several Vietnamese researchers have found that collaborative approaches, which might include class observations, seminars, workshops and informal talks, are uncommon in Vietnam, where teachers tend to work independently from one another (Dang, 2006; Pham, 2001). One challenge for Vietnamese teacher supervisors cited by Viet (2008) is the very concept of collaboration in teaching, which is an unfamiliar practice to many. Viet posits that Vietnamese teachers may approach their positions with a sense of competition, and believe that by keeping their best ideas and methods to themselves, they protect their positions. Peer observation, while somewhat common among Western teachers, is highly unusual for Vietnamese teachers, who may “feel uncomfortable or reluctant when their colleagues attend their class” (p. 170).

Another difficulty inherent in implementing imported models of teacher supervision is that teachers will be less likely to attempt practices that they believe will run counter to their students’ expectations. Pennington, et al. (1986), in examining the teaching of writing in Australia, Hong Kong, Japan, New Zealand and Singapore, found that the process and product approaches to writing somewhat paralleled western vs. eastern traditions of schooling. Australian teachers were most likely to employ process-oriented techniques, while Japanese teachers least likely. Results from surveys of participant teachers indicated that while all the teachers accepted the process approach theoretically, many did not believe they could implement it successfully because it was foreign to their learners’ experiences and expectations. Le (1999) also claims that even after active participation in professional development, Vietnamese teachers did not alter their teaching and did not actually believe that the methods being presented would be relevant to their Vietnamese classrooms.

Likewise, Potcharapanpong and Thongthew (2010) discuss the implementation of teacher development programs in the Thai context, where they determine “most EFL teachers tend to be passive participants in the training contexts. They just listen to the instructors with little attempts to adapt to their real practices” (p. 39). In their teacher development approach, it was therefore determined that a site specific, culturally relevant style of professional development was needed, as was also the case in Korea (Howard & Millar, 2009). This sort of negotiation may take place in the work of teacher supervisors, as they balance their beliefs about how supervision should occur with the constraints of their contexts and cultures.

Vo and Nguyen (2010) investigated how one Western model of teacher professional development, the “Critical Friends” approach, would be applied in the Vietnamese context. This model involves 4-10 colleagues who meet regularly in a democratic collaboration. The lack of authority to guide the group, and the control of the member teacher to shape the focus of their group, likens it to the learner-centered model of EFL teaching, also an import from the West. Like introducing CLT to learners, there was some discomfort and lack of familiarity with the approach, but Vo and Nguyen found the participants enthusiastic and positive about it, although they admit that it was attempted with young, first year teachers. Pham (2001) cautions that in Vietnam, the ways professional teachers develop their skills on the job, for instance by viewing colleagues teach, engaging in inquiry meetings, planning and reflecting on lessons collaboratively, or organizing in-service seminars, is still not the norm.

As programs and institutions offering English language instruction rapidly expand in Vietnam, how professional development of teachers is organized and conducted needs to

be better understood. The scant literature on both teaching and teacher supervision in Vietnam surface more conundrums than understandings. While some research seems to indicate resistance to CLT, other studies suggest that it has been adapted and shaped by local conditions, and other settings, adopted fully. The few studies on teacher professional development also seem divided between a discomfort with non-hierarchical forms of supervision on the one hand, and a desire for innovative structures, on the other. The research is unclear as to how Vietnamese norms, preferences, and styles of interaction shape approaches to the observation of teaching. The confluence of Vietnamese cultural values and expectations with Western approaches to teaching, teacher observation and professional development create a context rich for investigating the role of culture in teacher supervision. While teachers have been participants or subjects of previous research, teacher supervisors have not been the focus of investigation. By inviting their perspectives, the role of supervision will be better understood both in Vietnam and in other EFL settings.

Method

After visiting Ho Chi Minh city with a CUNY faculty delegation and working with Vietnamese teacher supervisors and teachers, as well as observing lessons and post-lesson observation conferences during the summer of 2010, the first author asked the co-author, the academic advisor at VUS, to collaboratively investigate how supervisors approached observations, what they chose to observe, how they conducted post-observation conferences, and the challenges they faced in their roles. As we began to seek out literature on supervision of instruction in Vietnam, we found ourselves pioneers in virtually uncharted territory. Together, we developed questions and interpreted responses to a questionnaire completed by 13 teacher supervisors, who all were currently supervising ELT in Ho Chi Minh City, at VUS and other English language schools. After these were completed, we returned to one key informant with 4 years of supervisory experience of EFL in Vietnam for further, in-depth questions and to provide triangulation on the responses from the initial survey.

Data Collection

“Survey Monkey” (www.surveymonkey.com), a web-based, online survey instrument, was used to enable participants to respond anonymously and outside of temporal and geographic constraints, since the data was being collected and analyzed through internet communications between the U.S. and Vietnamese researchers. The questionnaire consisted of both closed and open-ended questions, the scope of which was to elicit supervisors’ beliefs and practices regarding the components of effective supervision and the role of culture in supervision in their Vietnamese school context. The closed-ended questions involved forced ranking as well as multiple-option responses. Open-ended questions could be answered by writing into a text box.

Data Analysis

The closed-ended questions are summarized using descriptive statistics. Open-ended questions were analyzed according to the traditions of content analysis (Bogdan &

Biklen, 1998). From the categories and themes that emerged, a second set of in-depth, structured questions were developed and both the VUS co-author and one participant supplied further details and confirmatory explanations of responses, via multiple email exchanges.

Findings

Preparation for the Role of ELT Supervisor

While all of the participants had at least 5 years of teaching English as a Second/Foreign language prior to becoming a supervisor, fewer had that amount of experience as a teacher supervisor. Out of those who responded, 3 had less than a year of experience, 4 had between 2-3 years, 2 had 4-5 years, and 4 had more than 5 years of experience as a supervisor of teachers. Most supervisors received TESOL credentials in Australia, followed by the USA and Singapore. Only one participant reported training during university studies to act as a teacher supervisor. Participants reported that the training that had prepared them to be supervisors of EFL instruction mostly came through formal on-the-job training or informal, one-on-one mentoring by a more experienced supervisor. When asked about the age group of English language students for whom they felt most prepared to supervise instruction, adult learners were rated highest, followed by adolescents and children (see Figure 1). Supervisors commented that this was a result of more years of teaching experience with adult learners and fewer years of seeing ELT in classrooms with young learners.

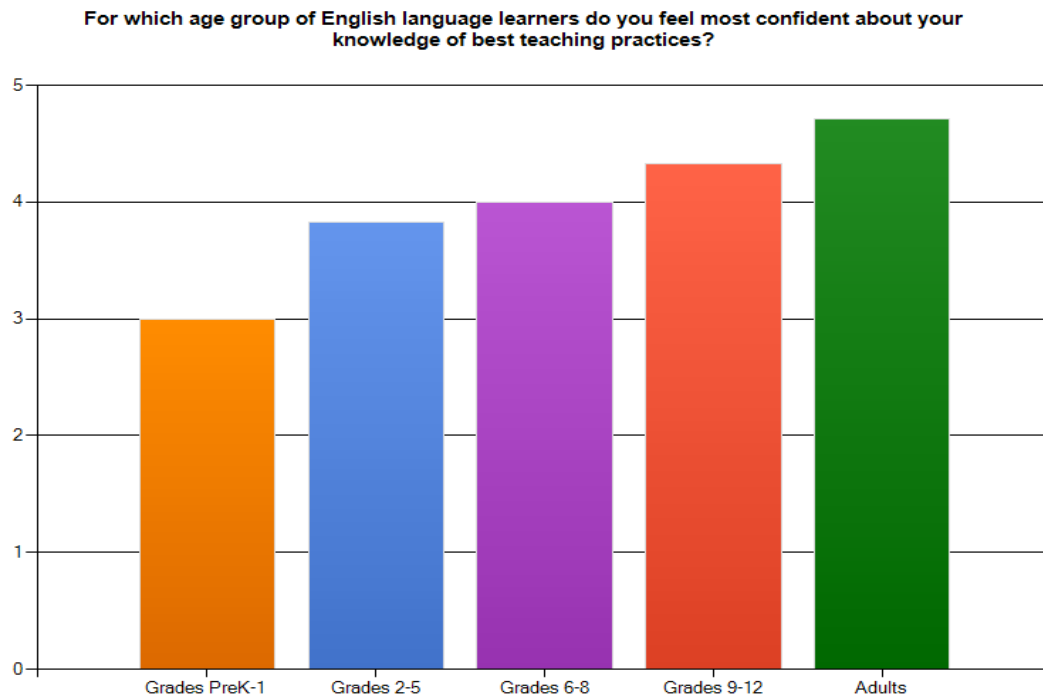


Figure 1. Age of EFL learners and Supervisor Confidence

Procedures for Supervision

Participants were asked both closed and open-ended questions about the procedures they tended to follow over the course of an observation cycle. Participants were first asked about pre-observation conferencing, and while they reported that teachers were aware of when observations would occur, for the most part, reviewing lesson plans and pre-observation conferencing did not take place (see Figure 2). Most supervisors reported only occasionally discussing the focus of the observation in advance of the observation, and that this was an issue of limited time to work with teachers. Responses were almost evenly divided between two seemingly opposed items: whether the supervisor set the agenda for what to observe, or whether the teacher was asked to.

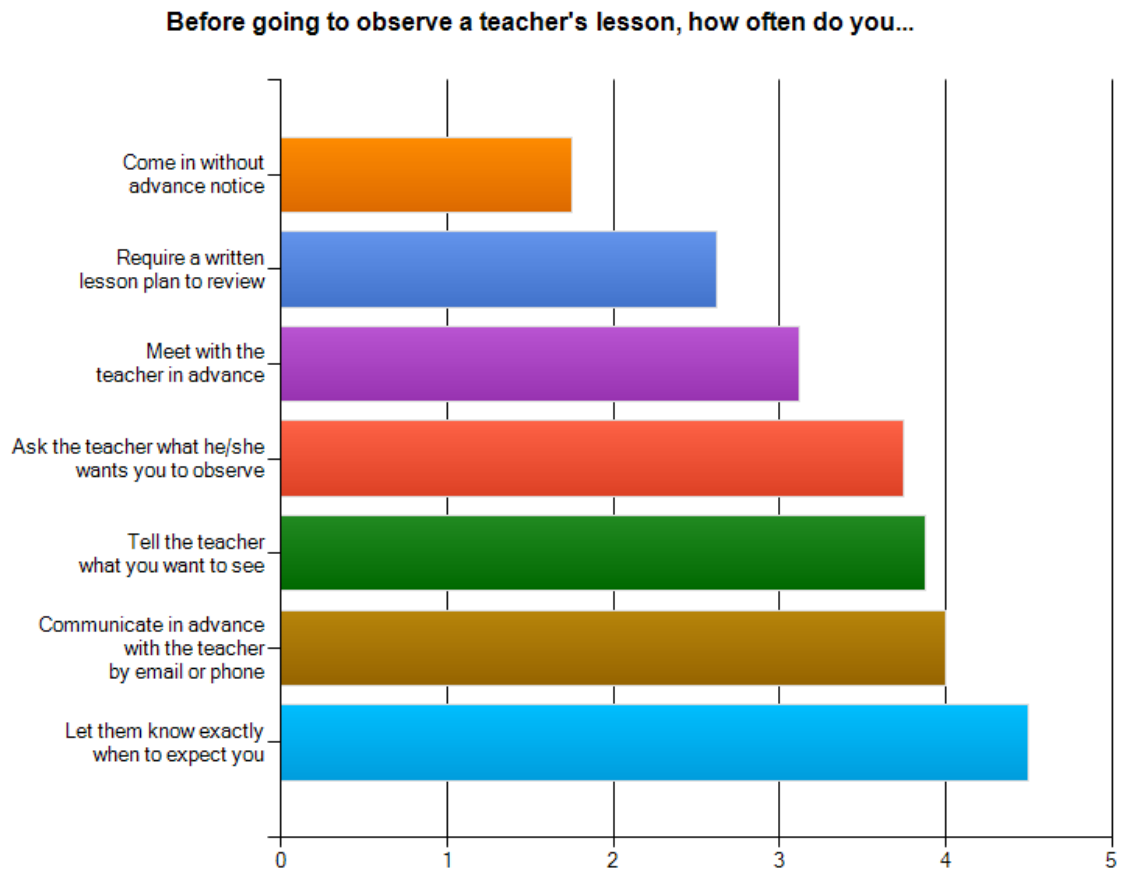


Figure 2. Procedures Involved in Pre-Observation

These two avenues of communication with the teacher—in one case, asking the teacher what he/she wishes to focus on in the lesson, and the other, to tell the teacher what the supervisor wishes to see, may not have been either/or options. In conducting the post-observation conferences, participants stated they began by asking the teacher what he/she thought of the lesson, and then shared their impressions of the lesson. In the words of one participant, “The teacher supervisor would ask teacher how they feel about the class, and to comment on their own teaching performance. The teacher supervisor would begin by

giving positive feedback. The teacher supervisor would mention and discuss teachers' areas of improvement by suggesting alternatives in certain teaching stages or steps that need improving." Another frames it as, "Sharing experience rather than 'teaching', I prefer 'coaching' than evaluating, being helpful to teachers any time they need help"; another participant describes the post-observation as, "The teacher knows they will be observed and will have a clear idea of what areas the observer will focus on. After the observation the observer will provide feedback that is concise that highlights the teacher's strengths and areas that the teacher can continue development on."

In the post-observation conference, both asking the teacher for their impressions of the lesson and sharing their observations were rated highly, but the most selected option of all was "Tell the teacher the aspects of the lesson that were ineffective" (see Figure 3).

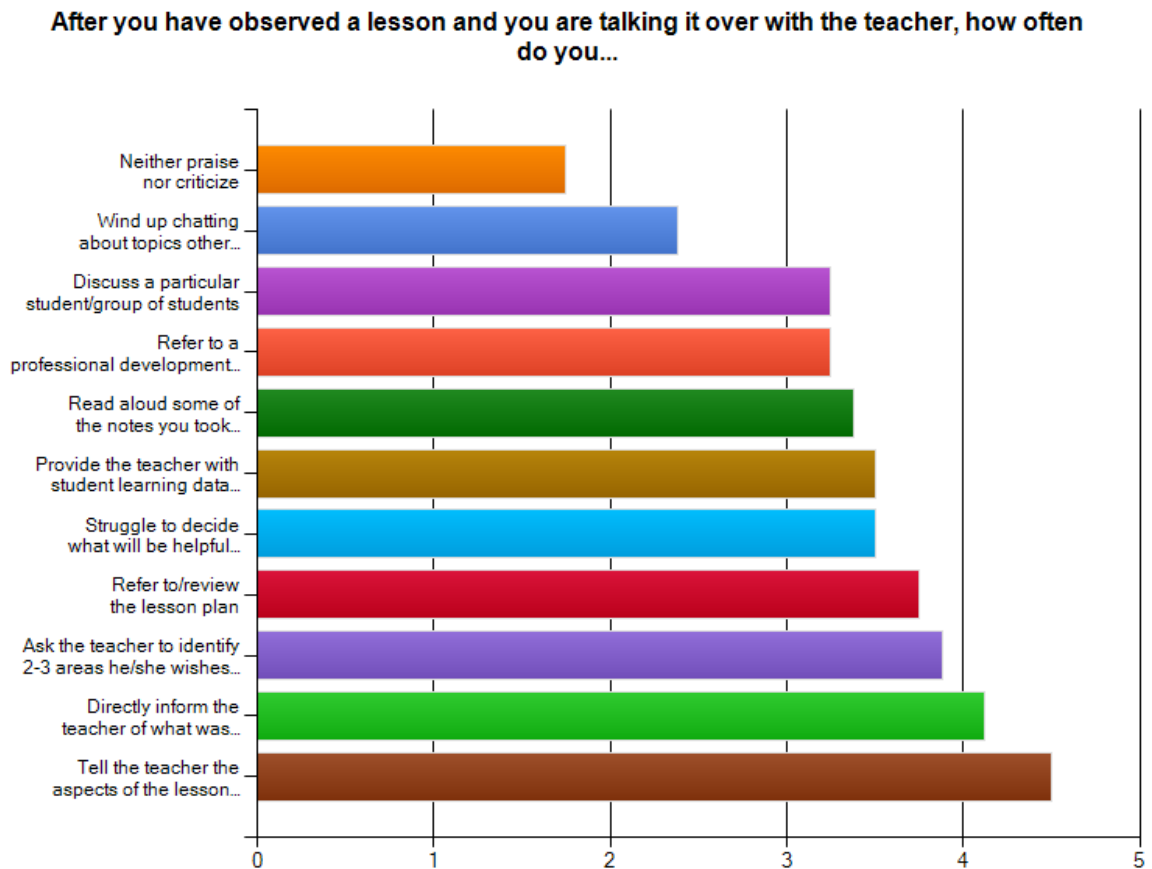


Figure 3. Components of the Post-Observation Conference

Focus of Supervision

Supervisors were asked to rank order a number of features of EFL instruction in terms of its importance to them when observing a lesson. Of primary importance were methods associated with CLT, such as "lots of student-talk", "pair work", and "teacher rapport", while the items not associated with CLT were rated as least important during

observation visits, such as “clear grammar point”, “use of assigned textbook” and “individual work” (see Figure 4).

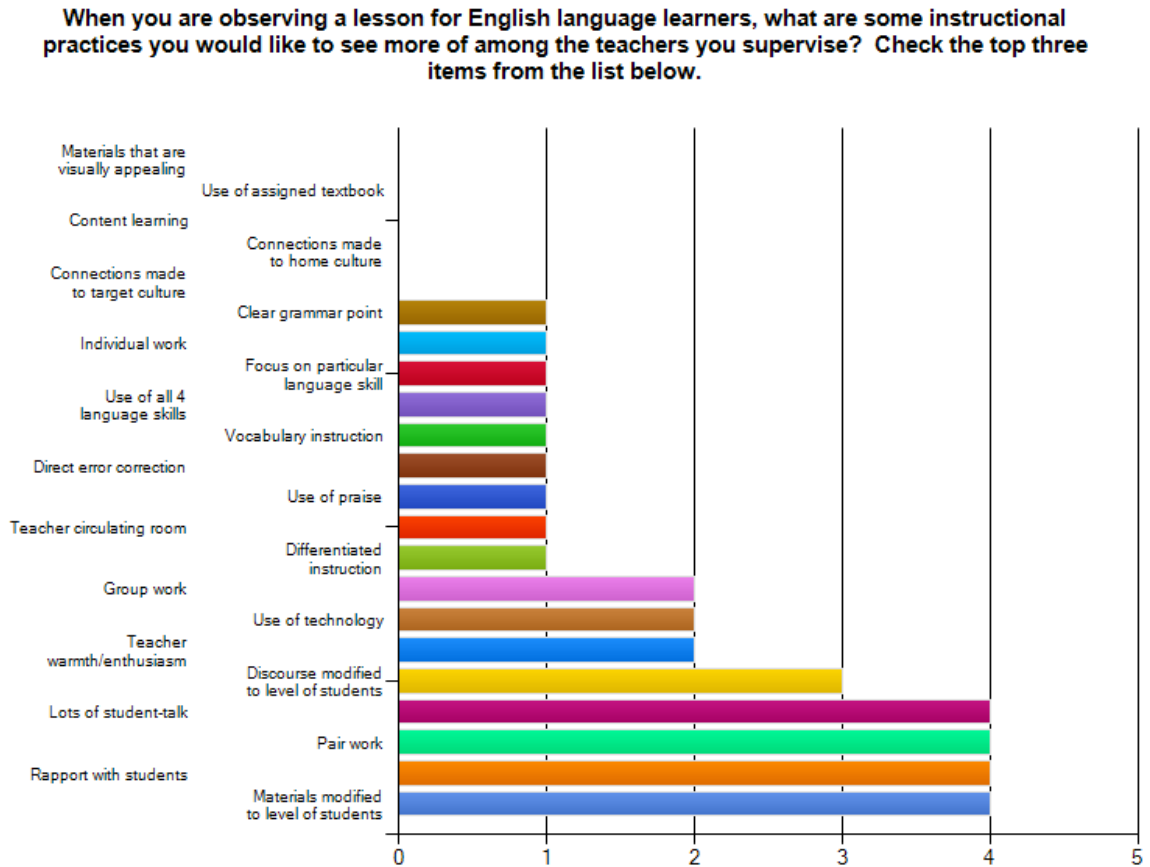


Figure 4. Features of ELT Instruction Supervisors Seek to Observe

One participant comments that an ideal lesson would be one in which “Students can fully understand the target language and use them appropriately in their own situations. At the same time, students find learning enjoyable”. Another participant reports, “since VUS aims at teaching communicative English, CLT is actualized in many classes here...Efforts have been made to make the classroom more communicative and less teacher-centered. Teachers are expected to use CLT in all class levels, including exam prep classes. Monthly workshops on classroom management and teaching methodology, conducted by VUS teacher supervisors, are held for Vietnamese and ex-pat teachers to make the classroom more communicative and less teacher-centered.” Materials being modified to meet the level of the learners was also highly ranked, and one participant stated, “[good teaching is] teaching to the student level, not teaching the book.”

Challenges of Supervision

Participants reported on the main challenges they faced as teacher supervisors, and the types of teachers they felt most challenged by. Overall, the greatest challenges reported

were their lack of time to talk with teachers in pre- and post-observation conferences, teachers' lack of background knowledge in TESOL, and teachers' resistance to change and defensiveness (see Figure 5).

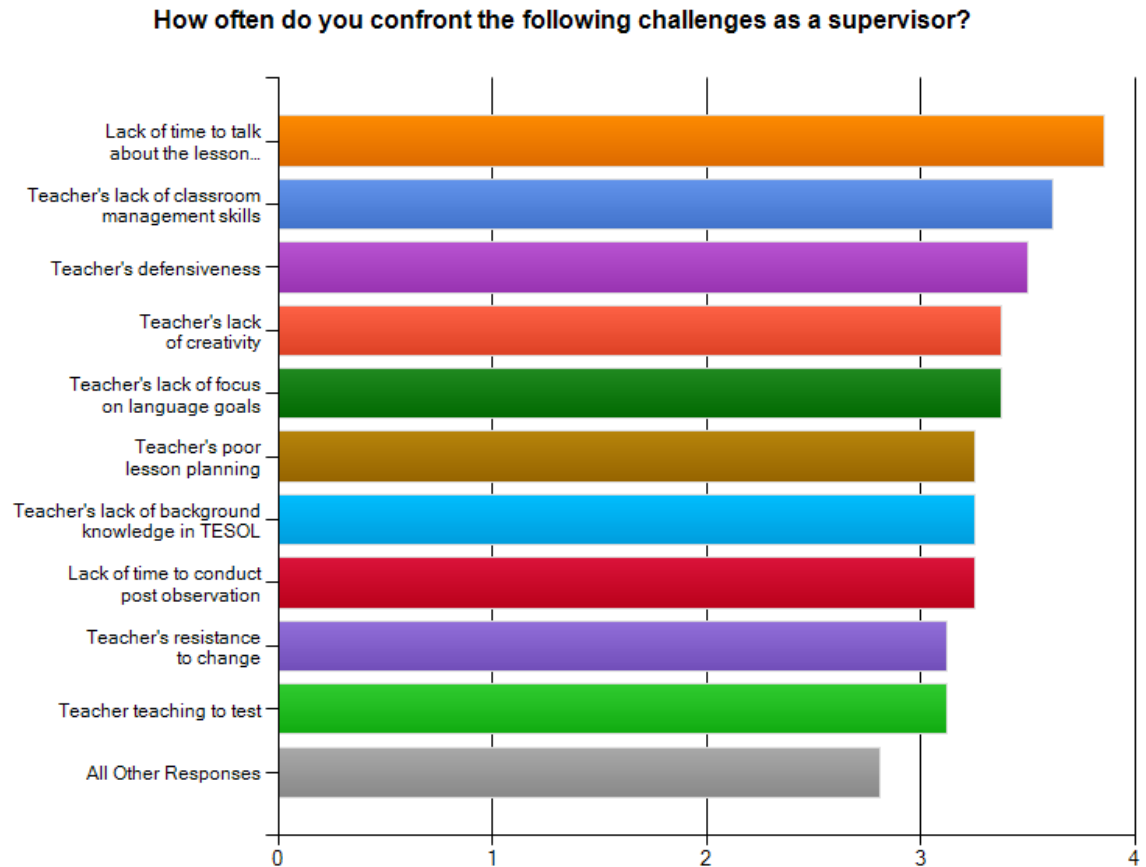


Figure 5. Challenges of Supervision

Lack of time is likely due to the high ratio of teacher/teacher supervisor in these settings. For instance, at VUS, there are 20,000 English language students, 500 teachers, and 10 teacher supervisors. A participant reports:

The need for qualified teachers also increases with the booming of English language centers. With the heavy workload, teachers find it hard to have adequate time for lesson planning and for self-reflection. In English language schools where a range of programs are taught, teacher supervisors have to struggle with a heavy workload, blending administrative paperwork and teacher mentoring.

Supervisors felt most confident working with teachers who were younger and less experienced, and whose native language was Vietnamese rather than English (see Figure 6).

How would you rate your confidence in your skills when supervising the following types of teachers?

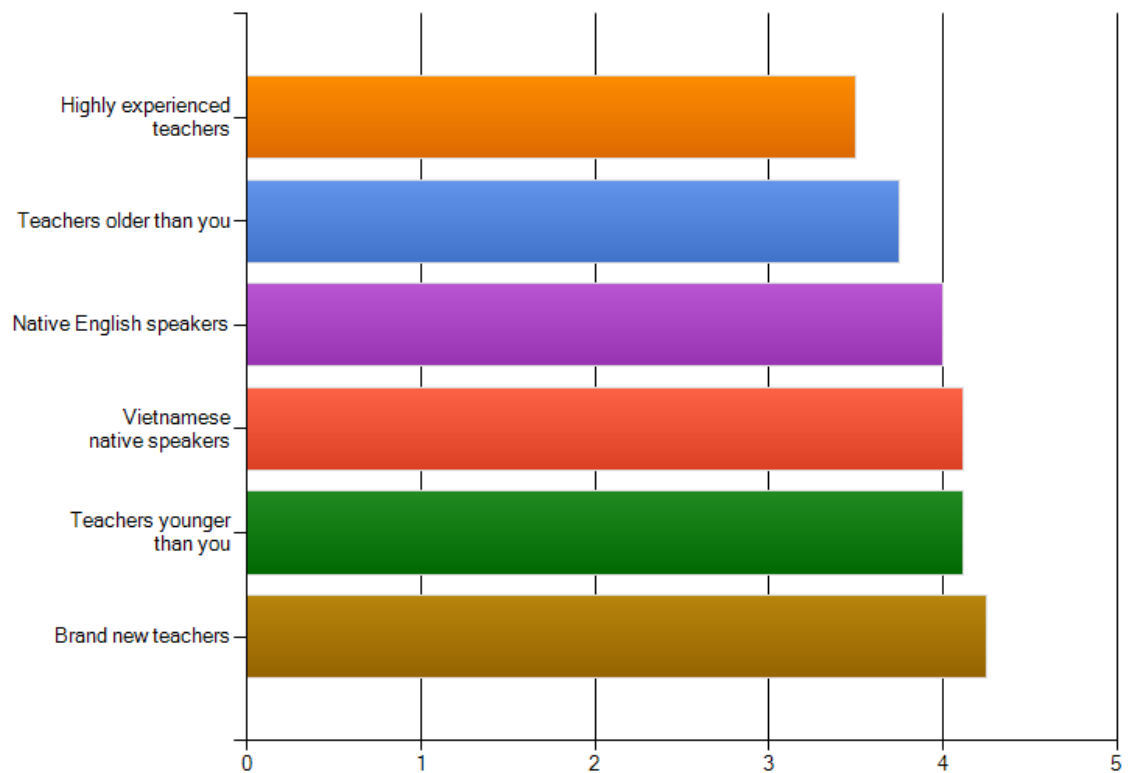


Figure 6. Supervisor Confidence and Teacher Type-(1=least confident, 5=most confident)

This led to the question of whether supervisors believed there was a cultural aspect to the supervisory interaction, and whether their interactions with native English speaking versus Vietnamese teachers would differ. One supervisor states, “The Vietnamese teachers of English are quite enthusiastic about developing related skills whereas the ex-pat teachers are a bit more circumspect. I attribute this mainly to their relative lack of classroom experience as compared to the Vietnamese teaching staff.”

When asked about how the role of culture, 100% of participants strongly agreed with the statement, “There are clear cultural aspects to the Vietnamese style of supervision”, yet responses were split in terms of whether this style could be termed “direct” or “indirect”, with about 40% of responses in accordance with each view, and the remaining 20% choosing neither to agree nor disagree. However, the open-ended responses seemed to imply a more direct style. For example, one participant states that the supervisor should, “Discuss what has been done and what *should* be done in a lesson to make students benefit more” and another states, “Teachers should know exactly what they are expected to achieve and their strong points as well as the areas of improvement.”

When asked to interpret the fact that all of the participants agreed that there was a cultural aspect to the Vietnamese style of supervision, yet were split as to whether this style was direct or indirect, one participant explained:

I do agree that, for the most part, Vietnamese supervisors are indirect. The cultural aspect has to do with the Vietnamese desire to reach a consensus on issues both personal and professional...As the Vietnamese people strive to maintain harmony in both their working and personal relations, disagreement raises anxiety levels and is seen as a direct challenge to the desired consensus. Of course, this is a generalized notion but the following illustrates this point: Whereas Americans have little difficulty separating personal aspects of a relationship from business, (“Business is business.” or “Let’s get down to business.” are familiar phrases in the American lexica) the Vietnamese would never be so direct in this fashion. It would be common for a business deal to include many meetings that were strictly personal in nature (friendly meetings for lunch, dinner, karaoke, etc.) before any business was actually discussed. The purpose of these types of personal meetings is to establish consensus on a whole range of points (e.g. likes in music, beer, food) and building on that sense of harmony...[However,] employing these tactics would be an inefficient and time consuming way to de-brief an observed teacher without any assurance that the observed would know what the observer wanted to share...Vietnamese supervisors are either concerned (and as a consequence hesitant) about appearing to be critical or are so assertive as to be considered overbearing. In both cases, well-intentioned supervisors can come across as either ineffectual or confrontational thereby closing off opportunities to exchange information.

Another possible explanation for the split view is that some of the supervisors worked in public and others at a private institution. One participant explains:

Despite the cultural norm, teacher supervisors from private schools or English language centers tend to be more direct than their counterparts from public schools and universities when giving feedback to teachers since they have to deal with students’ feedback and complaints more often. Clarity is needed to get the message across and make changes in the classroom.

Alternative forms of supervision, such as observing peers or the use of video, was seen as unlikely to occur in public schools, but possible in private ones. One participant states:

In public schools, peer observation is so infrequently applied as to be almost non-existent. VUS has recently instituted peer observation with head teachers conducting the observations. There was coaching provided to the head teachers before implementing peer observation. Video observation...will be used during de-briefing to highlight both what the observed is doing well in the class and highlight areas they can focus on for further development. The video will be theirs [the teachers’] to keep.

This indicates the possibility that video-based observations may be a tool to bring about the use of peer observation in the near future, primarily in private contexts with access to the technology.

Discussion

While the literature review suggested an inconsistent implementation of CLT in teaching English in Vietnam, the findings from this study resoundingly confirm the pre-eminence of CLT, as evidenced in the observation foci of supervisor participants. It was clear that supervisors in this study were keen to see student-teacher rapport and a high degree of student talk in their observation visits, and that these were elements stressed in their observation conferences with teachers. Supervisors know that they wish to see teachers in dynamic interaction with students involved in language use with their peers, as opposed to students working independently on grammar-based tasks. This is still more likely to occur in a private versus a public school. For instance, whereas public school language classes can range from 35-50 students, VUS class sizes are limited in size to 22 students and CLT is continuously reinforced through both formal workshops and through informal sessions conducted by head teachers at each campus.

Filling the gap in the literature on English language teacher supervision in Vietnam, findings from this study indicated that the supervisory cycle is organized according to processes familiar in the West. In their observation visits, supervisors let teachers know they are coming in advance, take into account what the teacher wishes to focus on in the lesson, and in the post-observation conferences move through the well-known pattern of asking teachers first to share their thoughts about the lesson, before sharing their own observations. All of this is done under tremendous time constraints and with a large caseload of teachers, which leaves these supervisors wishing to have more time to discuss the lessons in advance and afterwards. Vietnamese teachers usually have more pedagogical training than expat teachers, and they also have first hand knowledge and experience with English language acquisition and learning as Vietnamese learners of English themselves. Supervisors also uniformly expressed confidence about their ability to support teachers working with older learners, rather than younger ones. Since the age of learning English has also more recently dropped to younger children, this is also an area understandably less familiar to supervisors.

What is more complex and perhaps still emerging, is how cultural norms of interaction play out as supervisors perform two roles: that of evaluator, and that of collaborator. These opposing roles are perhaps made more difficult where the art and science of supervision is still newly developing as an area of teacher learning. While teacher supervisors noted teacher defensiveness, lack of creativity, and resistance as top concerns, the connection to how they conducted their observation conversations was not clear. For instance, teacher supervisors ranked telling teachers what was deficient in their lesson as their top choice in feedback, which may be a part of why teachers are reacting defensively. Supervisors feeling they needed to tell teachers what was not working in their lesson may be a result of a number of factors, such as (1) a lack of time to spend on eliciting teacher's ideas; (2) concern about the teacher's ability to notice key features of the lesson; (3) the EFL teacher's lack of training, and hence inability to scaffold/plan/organize a lesson; (4) a lack of training in alternative approaches as to how to give supervisory feedback; (5) a belief that stating these observations directly will change teacher behavior; or (6) a sense of pressure to get "results" from teachers they supervise. While the "what" to talk about in the feedback sessions seemed very clear to supervisors, the "how" to give feedback was less so. Culturally responsive supervision may then involve a recognition of

how one's own patterns of communication might influence how we share feedback in this very specialized speech event, and second, exposure to a number of options that can promote teacher autonomy and professional growth, that is meaningful within a cultural context.

Conclusion

In Vietnam, the demand for learning English is increasing rapidly. English is required for recruitment purposes, for socializing, for the workplace, for schools and universities. As publishers recognize the growing market for teaching English in Vietnam, Vietnamese educators are updated with new EFL catalogs, full of new textbooks and teaching ideas, introducing the latest developments and trends in ELT. Alongside changes to English language teaching, language teacher supervision in Vietnam has undergone changes over the last ten years. In many English language schools, surprise observations and inspections have been replaced by announced observations and post-observation discussions. Evaluation criteria, checklists, and report forms have been introduced, allowing more transparency in the observation and evaluation process. Peer observations are also implemented to encourage teachers' reflection and collaboration.

Possible future directions for exploring teacher supervision in Vietnam could include:

- Introducing the role of “teacher leader” to offer effective teachers the opportunity to develop observation and coaching skills, in order to share responsibility for conducting observation visits. This could lighten the large caseload of supervisors and provide professional learning for experienced teachers.
- Developing professional learning communities or inquiry groups in which teachers of mixed experience levels could discuss key instructional practices, share lesson plans, and observe videos of teaching as stimulus for discussion. These groups could be led by a teacher supervisor or responsibility could be rotated on a weekly basis, thus allowing for more interaction and exchange of ideas among teachers.
- Utilizing “walk-throughs”, brief visits of 15 minutes or less which are designed to provide the observer a glimpse of a particular practice, student level, or teaching strategy. These can be done by a teacher supervisor and a teacher in a paired walk-through.
- Carefully introducing video-based observation into the supervisory cycle, by inviting volunteer teachers to video-record their own lessons for review and analysis, sharing excerpts from these videos with peers or small groups, and applying the institution's observation rubric to videos. When done in a manner that respects the teacher's sense of vulnerability, video-mediated observation can be a powerful tool in teachers' professional learning.
- Using cases, simulations, and role-plays in the preparation of teacher supervisors which specifically outline scenarios involving cultural, age, and experience differentials to elicit discussion and awareness among supervisors as to how these variables impact their interactions with teachers.

Deepening our understanding of the complex act of teacher supervision requires both respect and familiarity with the context in which it occurs. As English teaching materials, methods and language continue to intersect traditional Vietnamese classrooms and teachers, the call to proceed with caution and be sensitive to pedagogical imperialism has been clearly made. How and in what manner teacher supervisors may be placed in the

role of cultural mediators is one that is worth exploring, and how the highly sensitive and complex interaction that is the post-observation conference can support supervisors' and teachers' sense of efficacy can be further explored through the lens of culture. Affiliation and cooperation in training between English schools in Vietnam and those in the world can provide opportunities to explore teacher growth, but with an eye to mutual, rather than imperialistic, development.

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An Analysis of Textbooks from a Cultural Point of View

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Abstract

The article analyses textbooks from a cultural point of view. It stresses upon the needs for cultural sensitivity on the part of authors. The research has also highlighted some cultural views which exist in one culture but, at the same time, may not be acceptable to the members of another culture. The research further investigates whether the authors of textbooks who belong to a specific culture can represent C1 and C2 in an appropriate way in a textbook. The analysis also focuses on cultural reflection both in text and visual material used in the textbooks. The research suggests that a textbook based on C1 and C2 culture representation should include the authors from both cultures.

An Analysis of Textbooks from a Cultural Point of View

Language and culture are interrelated. Kramsch (1998) describes language as a 'principal means' whereby the people conduct their social lives. She states that language in relation with 'context of communication' is interrelated with culture in 'multiple and complex ways'. Culture is present whatever the language discussion is. Language learning can be facilitated by having a careful selection of culture related material in textbooks. Textbook evaluation can help both learners and teachers to achieve their goal of language and culture learning. The previous study (Giaschi, 2000; Lesikin, 2001; Ndura, 2004; Nemati, 2009) shows that the textbooks have been evaluated from different perspectives (such as on the bases of textbook graphics, grammar, culture bias and vocabulary) but the present investigation makes an analysis based on culture representation in the textbooks used in Pakistan. There are a great number of L2 learners in Pakistan who have no direct connection with the target language speakers. Their cultural awareness mainly depends on textbooks available to them. Referring to the role of culture, Cortazzi and Jin (1999) explain the following three factors which play their role.

1. Teachers
2. Students
3. Textbook Authors

According to Cortazzi and Jin, a textbook is useful if learners, teachers and textbook authors share the same cultural values. If they do not share the same cultural values, then at least they should be familiar with the cultural norms of one another. The present study is intended to investigate the cultural representation in the textbooks used in Pakistan. In Pakistan, most of the schools follow the textbooks, composed by the foreign textbook authors whose detail will come later. As a result of that the ESL learners and the teachers in Pakistan share the same cultural values but not the

textbook authors. The foreign textbook authors do not belong to their culture. Due to this situation, there exists a cultural gap between the Pakistani ESL learners and the foreign textbook used in Pakistan. The research study will focus on the cultural unfamiliarity between the ESL learners and the foreign textbook authors in Pakistan.

Research Problem

The present study involves the problem which occurs between the foreign textbook authors and the ESL learners in Pakistan. These problems are based on cultural unfamiliarity on the part of textbook authors. The ESL textbooks, written by the foreign authors and used in Pakistan, basically reflect the two layers of cultures:

- a) The learners first culture (C1)
- b) The Anglophone cultures or the target language cultures (C2).

The present study addresses to the cultural gap which exists between the ESL learners in Pakistan and the foreign textbook authors. The core issue arises when the foreign textbook authors reflect the learners' first culture (C1) in a way that is not interesting to them. As a result of that a textbook may lose the learners' motivation in learning a second language. The present study has chosen the three following areas to address the research problem in the ESL textbooks in Pakistan:

1. The representation of the learners' culture through pictures in the textbook by foreign authors
2. The cultural stereotypes pertaining to the learners' first culture
3. The cultural sensitivity on the part of textbook authors

Research Questions

1. How does the cultural unfamiliarity appear when the foreign textbook authors reflect the second language learners in their textbooks through pictures?
2. Do the foreign textbook authors reflect cultural stereotypes in their textbooks because of having less cultural familiarity with the learners' first culture?
3. What are the cultural contradictions caused by the foreign textbook authors with respect to the learners' first culture?

Literature Review

The research study has focused on cultural reflection in ESL textbooks being used in Pakistan and written by foreign authors. Therefore the literature review reveals the theme of cultural representation in textbooks. Regarding cultural reflection, Ndura (2004) provides valuable information about cultural reflection in the ESL textbooks taught in the US. She highlights the cultural aspects (such as religion, national history etc) which are missing in the ESL textbooks. Her research also points out stereotypes as well (Ndura, 2004). Lesikin's (2001) research goes forward from the idea of cultural representation and relates the importance of cultural background with the power of the learners' decision making process. His analysis of four ESL grammar textbooks focuses on textbooks grammatical tasks, activities and the learners' decision making process. Lesikin's research provides the idea that learners' decision making process works better if grammatical tasks and activities are coupled with learners' cultural background information. His research proposes the solution for cultural differences in ESL textbooks. He explains that 'with a more open lesson format in ESL textbooks, created by teachers, even better teachers and students together, cultural differences might be

mediated' (Lesikin, 2001). Lesikin in his solution to cultural differences only considers students and teachers but another aspect which is of equal importance is the textbook author. Therefore the idea of cultural mediation should include the textbook authors, the teachers, and the learners as well. Lazaraton (2003) works provides the idea of culturally acceptable forms of behavior. Lazaraton emphasizes that 'cultural competence for L2 teachers involves knowledge not just about the L2 culture but culturally acceptable forms of behavior within the culture' (Lazaraton, 2003). The term 'culturally acceptable forms of behavior' refers to the cultural aspects which are acceptable in one culture but not favorable in another culture. Baker (2003) views the cultural awareness as 'understanding not only of the culture of language being studied but also of the learners' own culture' (Baker, 2003). Baker's research is limited to the concept of 'culture awareness' with respect to ESL/EFL learners and does not talk about the cultural awareness on the part of textbook authors, especially the foreign textbook authors whose textbooks are used by the learners, who belong to a different culture. Lesikin (2000) provides another aspect of culture representation on the basis of graphic devices and the comprehension of these graphics on the part of learners. Lesikin analyses two ESL grammar textbooks. He explains that 'the use of think-aloud protocol with students from a range of educational and cultural backgrounds could reveal the accessibility of a textbook's pedagogical knowledge and might supply clues to the kind of strategies needed to comprehend typographic and linguistics features characteristic of its complex text (Lesikin, 2000). His research stimulates the idea that a range of graphics based on cultural information can prove helpful for learners' comprehension of text. Jiang (2006) analyzes six ESL textbooks on the basis of contextual sensitivity. Through his research he suggests that linguistic structures should be included in ESL textbooks in combination with socio-cultural contexts. He associates the 'appropriate realization' of speech act and the 'level of directness' with the sensitivity of socio-cultural contexts (Jiang, 2006).

Lazaraton's (2003) idea of culturally acceptable forms of behavior and Lesikin's analysis of pictures and graphical devices for learners' comprehension have aided the current study. Lazaraton's research provides an insight to analyze ESL textbooks on the basis of cultural sensitivity. Similarly Lesikin's research concerning graphical analysis raises the concept of relating images in the textbooks to learners' cultural background. All the above studies provide one or the other aspect of culture, but none talks about the cultural gap which may exist between learners and textbook authors in different ESL language learning contexts. None of them talks about the cultural harmony between the textbook authors and the learners or the possible difficulties which can occur on the basis of cultural differences. Therefore, the present study aims to investigate how the foreign textbook authors reflect the ESL learners and their culture in the textbooks, used in Pakistan.

Method

The investigation has been made in order to analyze the ESL textbooks being taught in Pakistan. As it has been explained in the earlier section (Research Problem) that these textbooks include information about the target language culture (C2), and the learners' first culture (C1). The research study aims to investigate the representation of learners' first culture (C1) in the textbooks, written by the foreign authors. Three ESL textbooks have been analyzed which are used at the middle school level in Pakistan.

The ESL Textbooks in Pakistan

The ESL Textbooks written by Foreign
Authors

The ESL Textbooks Written by Local
Authors

The ESL textbooks, written by the foreign authors, are taught in private schools. These private schools are run by the private owners and the selection of the textbooks is at their disposal. These foreign textbook authors belong to the UK or the US. On the other hand, the ESL textbooks, written by the local authors, are used in government run institutions. For research purpose, only the textbooks, which have been written by the foreign authors and which are used in private schools, have been analyzed. The rationale behind this selection is that through these textbooks, the research study can investigate the cultural disharmony which may exist between the foreign textbook authors and the ESL learners in Pakistan. The following are the textbooks which have been analyzed:

- *English Alive* by John Seely (Seely, 2002) (2008 ed.)
- *New Oxford Modern English* by Nicholas Horsburgh (Horsburgh, 2001) (ed.2009)
- *Oxford Progressive English* by Rachel Redford (Redford, 2005) (2009 ed.)

For the analysis of ESL textbooks some of the previous checklists presented by researchers (Dary, Campo, & Zuluaga, 1999; Garinger & Alberta, 2002; Miekley, 2005) have been examined and then on the basis of those a final checklist has been devised out of them. Each textbook has been analyzed in the light of the following aspects.

1. Does the textbook reflect learners' preferences in terms of layout, design and organization?
2. Is the textbook sensitive to the cultural background and the interest of students?
3. Does the textbook contain enough variety of visual culture concerning first language culture?
4. Does the textbook contain cultural stereotypes?
5. Does the textbook contain learners' socio-cultural life?

The above checklist has been confined according to the research questions which have been discussed in the earlier section. Both the checklist and research questions aim to investigate about the cultural gap that exists between the foreign textbook authors and the ESL learners in Pakistan. Only those aspects of the checklist have been discussed, which are not in accordance with the aspects described in the checklist.

The second part of the research method concerns with a questionnaire (see Appendix A), which was managed at the school level (7th and 8th grade students) in

Pakistan. The questionnaire basically provides an answer to the first research question. It contains the pictures and close ended questions. The pictures describe the ESL learners' culture, and they have been selected from the three textbooks, mentioned above. Moreover, a total number of 275 students from three schools (OPF School & College, Islamabad, City Public School, Rawalpindi, Siddique Public School, Rawalpindi) responded to the questions in the questionnaire. The survey was basically aimed to know about cultural representation with respect to learners' first culture.

Findings

The section regarding findings consists of three subsections. These three subsections have been given in the table along with the data source where from it comes. Therefore, the table explains the source of data with respect to the sections in the first column.

Table 1
Sections and Data Source

| Sections | Data Source |
|--|---|
| The Representation of Learners' Culture through Pictures | The pictures from three textbooks and the questionnaire concerning these pictures |
| Stereotypes | Examples from the texts/lessons/units inside the textbooks |
| Cultural Sensitivity | Examples from the texts/lessons/units inside the textbooks |

The Representation of Culture through Pictures

The textbook pictures have been analyzed in order to know how the textbook authors, who belong to C2, display C1 in their textbooks and is basically related to the first research question. The analysis in this part has also focused on the principal of whether the ESL textbooks reflect the learners' preferences in terms of layout, design and organization. The three ESL textbooks cover a wide range of pictures. . Before going into further detail it is better to discuss the purpose of pictures in the textbook. Many textbook proposed checklists (Dary, et al., 1999; Garinger & Alberta, 2002; Miekley, 2005) recommend the learners' preferences in terms of layout design and organization. The three ESL textbooks which have been analyzed have included the front page pictures from the learners' native culture. These pictures exist well inside the textbooks along with the text. The question arises from what kind of message they carry. For this purpose the three ESL textbook pictures have been analyzed in the light of Giaschi's critical picture analysis of ESL textbooks. Giaschi (2000) describes the seven parameters for picture analysis in textbooks.

1. What is the activity of the picture(s)?
2. Who is active (the "protagonist") in the picture?
3. Who is passive (the "receiver") in the picture?
4. Who has the status in the picture?

5. What does the body language communicate?
6. What does the clothing communicate?
7. Where are the eyes directed? (Giaschi, 2000)

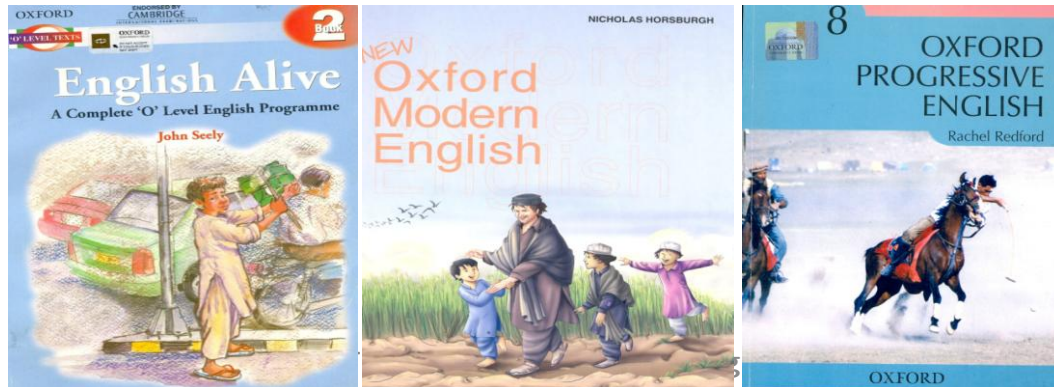


Fig: 2 The Three Textbooks Images

In light of the above parameters, the pictures of the textbook 'English Alive' and 'New Oxford Modern English' do not seem to reflect the learners' preferences. The learners prefer not to be reflected in the way as they have been reflected by the textbook authors. In the picture which has been used as the front page cover in the textbook 'English Alive' the boy, the clothes and his overall picture reflects his condition of extreme poverty. In order to know the fact, students at 7th and 8th grade were shown the same picture and were asked the questions in the table below.

The results in the table reveal that the boy has been portrayed as a member of a poor family, whose poverty is cleared out of his appearance and surroundings. The last question in the table reveals that the learners do not want to be represented in the way as the boy has been presented in the picture. The last question in the above table reveals the gap between textbook authors and the ESL learners. The cultural awareness of a community also involves the knowledge about the likes and dislikes of the members of that community. Pramono (2005) relates the picture designs in the ESL textbooks to the construction of the mental model. According to him, "The proper picture designs may contribute much to the construction of an intended mental model of the depicted situation" (Pramono, 2005).

In the second picture (see Figure 2) which has been used as the front page of the textbook 'New Oxford Modern English' shows a scene from a typical village in Pakistan. In the picture, there are three children and one man. They all have been portrayed in a very happy way. No doubt the picture reflects the learners' cultural background but the clothes the three children wearing are full of patches. A close view of the picture makes this thing clear. From a Pakistani cultural point of view, the patches on clothes are a symbol of extreme poverty, and no one wants to be portrayed in that situation. Therefore, the clothes of these types are culturally unfavorable. The other thing in the picture which is questionable is that the two children have been shown without shoes. This again is a type of situation, which cannot be considered as the learners' preference. The children were shown the picture of one boy, who is at right in the picture and were asked the following questions.

Table 2
Picture Design

| | | | |
|--|----------------|---------------|------------------------------|
| 1. What is the boy doing in this picture? | selling flags | Waving flags | Celebrating the Pakistan Day |
| | 165 | 42 | 68 |
| 2. The boy is wearing | a clean dress | a dirty dress | neither clean nor dirty |
| | 246 | 18 | 11 |
| 3. The boy belongs to a | rich family | poor family | I don't know |
| | 15 | 197 | 63 |
| 4. How do you know that the boy belongs to a rich family or a poor family? | By his clothes | By his face | By his surroundings |
| | 148 | 90 | 37 |
| 5. Do you like the dress the boy is wearing? | yes | no | |
| | 40 | 235 | |

The results in table 3 reveal that the boy in the picture has been considered as wearing a dirty dress, and belonging to a poor family. The last question in table reveals that all these things are visible out the dress what the boy is wearing in the picture (see Appendix A & B). The second question in the table 3 relates to the learners' preferences, and which show that the learners do not want to be represented in that way.

The third textbook front picture is about a famous game polo which is a famous regional game in Pakistan. The same picture was shown to the students along with the following questions in table 4.

The learners are able to guess what is going on in the picture, because it is about a famous game polo which is played northern part of Pakistan.

The results in the table 2 and 3 reveal that the cultural differences of these type occur when textbooks are designed by foreign authors. Even if the foreign authors understand the language demands very well, they need to be aware of the two cultures in regard of C1 and C2. This problem can be resolved if L1 and L2 textbook authors work together to design ESL textbooks. The cultural unfamiliarity appears in the textbooks, if there exists a gap between ESL learners and textbook authors.

Table 3
Front Picture of Textbook

| | | | |
|---|----------------|---------------|---------------------|
| 1. What type of dress the boy is wearing in the picture? | a clean dress | a dirty dress | Don't know |
| | 82 | 180 | 13 |
| 2. Do you like the dress the boy is wearing? | yes | | No |
| | 24 | | 249 |
| 3. What do you think the boy belongs to a | rich family | Poor family | Don't know |
| | 15 | 220 | 40 |
| 4. How do you know that the boy belongs to a rich or poor family? | By his clothes | By his face | By his surroundings |
| | 198 | 32 | 45 |

Table 4
Front Picture of Textbook

| | | |
|--|------------------------|------------------|
| 1. What is going on in this picture? | They are riding horses | They are playing |
| | 35 | 240 |
| 2. If they are playing, then which game is this? | Horse racing | Polo |
| | 32 | 243 |

Stereotypes

The findings regarding cultural stereotypes are based on the texts and pictures included in the textbooks. The three textbooks have been thoroughly examined, and only those examples have been included which relate to the learners' cultural background. The investigation of three textbooks, in the perspective of stereotypes, provides answer to the second research question raised in the earlier section.

Do the foreign textbook authors reflect cultural stereotypes in their textbooks because of having less cultural familiarity with the learners' first culture?

'Stereotyping is portraying one set of people exhibiting one set of values, behaviors and roles' (Ndura, 2004). In this perspective, it can be said that stereotyping is showing only one side of a picture and at the same time keeping the reality at the back of it. 'Humans often make assumptions about other people and stereotype them based on superficial cues' (Alvarez-Torres, Mishra, & Zhao, 2001). The stereotypes in three ESL textbooks have been differentiated on the basis of their themes in table 2.

Table 5
Stereotype Portrayal

| Themes | English Alive | Oxford Progressive English | New Oxford Modern English |
|--|------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Marriage Child birth Professions | Stereotype 1 Stereotype 2 | Stereotype 3 | Stereotype4 |

Stereotype1

The first stereotype carries the theme of marriage. It is a general assumption about eastern women that their main role in life is to marry and then spend their whole life as a house wife. This stereotype has changed to a great extent. Women are playing their roles in many fields of life in Asian societies such as teaching, nursing, journalism etc. The textbook 'English Alive' contains the following stereotype relating the theme of marriage.

'Marry him and may God bless you with **ten children**'. (p.78)

This example has been taken from lesson 'The Watchman' written by R.K Narayan which has been written in the context of Asian culture. The story is about a girl who is unable to continue her studies because of her poverty and then the old man advises her to marry. In this way the old man finds the solution of her life problems in marriage. The stereotype is cultural in the sense that the women in Pakistan tend to have more children. This aspect is clear from the example above.

Stereotype 2

The second stereotype is related to the theme of childbirth. It is generally assumed about south Asian cultures that the people prefer to have a son as compared to a daughter. In other terms it is an assumption that the son is better than a daughter because he will do better in life. This stereotype has been selected from the textbook *English Alive*.

'I prayed to all gods in the world for **a son**. My wife bore me **eight children**. Only one daughter lives now and none of the others saw the eleventh year'. (p.79)The stereotype is cultural in the sense that the families across Pakistani culture prefer to have a son as compared to a daughter, and in the effort for a son, the women in Pakistan bear more children. This stereotype has less importance in Asian educated families.

Stereotype 3

The third stereotype carries the theme of professions. The stereotypes regarding professions have been sought throughout the text/lessons included in the textbook *Oxford Progressive English*. In these texts/lessons, there have been described many characters, concerning male and female professions. The division of these professions in textbook *Oxford Progressive English*, reveals stereotype in which male are considered superior with respect to their professions.

Table 6 shows the division of professions which have been depicted through different male and female characters.

Table 6
The Professions Shown in the Textbook 'Oxford Progressive English'

| Male | Page No. | Female | Page No. |
|----------------|----------|---------------|----------|
| Inventor | 26 | Gardener | 34 |
| School Teacher | 45 | Housewife | 48 |
| Journalist | 51 | Housewife | 54 |
| Scientist | 55 | Fashion Model | 59 |
| Chef de train | 61 | Housewife | 63 |
| Professor | 66 | | |
| Doctor | 68 | | |
| Tailor | 72 | | |

The division of professions in the table 6 reveals that males have been shown with various professions from tailors to inventors and then scientists but the females have not been given due variety. In the whole textbook the female characters have been shown once as a gardener, once as a fashion model and thrice as a housewife carrying household activities. The stereotype in which women are considered dependent and performing household activities is clear in the textbook. This stereotype can be overruled by reflecting the due participation of women in different fields of professional life.

Stereotype 4

The stereotype about the theme of professions is also clear in the textbook 'New Oxford Modern English'. The following table reveals the gender wise distinction of professions in the textbook.

Table 7
The Gender Wise Distinction of Professions in the Textbook 'New Oxford Modern English'

| Units | Male | Page No. | Female | Page No. |
|-------|-----------|----------|-----------|----------|
| 2 | Chauffeur | 6-9 | | |
| 4 | | | Housewife | 18-22 |
| 5 | | | Farmers | 27 |
| 6 | | | Farmer | 32 |
| 8 | Hunter | 46-49 | | |
| 9 | Teacher | 54 | | |
| 10 | Hunter | 59-62 | Housewife | 59-62 |
| 12 | Poet | 71-73 | | |

The number of professions regarding females is very limited in the textbook. In regard of professions women have been portrayed as farmers and housewives throughout the textbook. The pictures in the textbook also display women working in fields or performing household tasks. The following two pictures have been included in the textbook with two poems 'Solitary Reaper' (by Wordsworth) and 'To Autumn' (by John Keats).

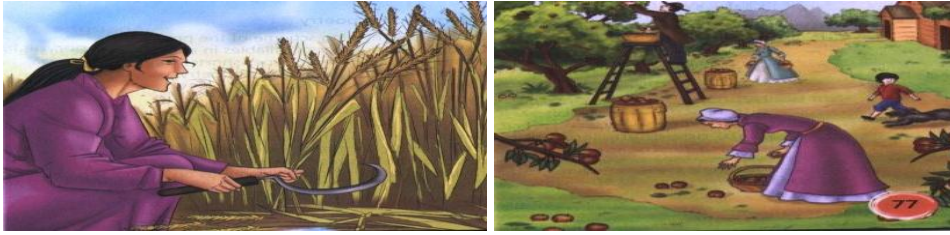


Fig:3 The Women working in fields

These pictures as a whole present a portrayal of typical woman of Asian society in which the women are limited to fields. The women have extended their role to other fields as well.

The above examples concerning stereotypes reveal the textbook authors partial knowledge of the culture of the ESL learners in Pakistan. Stereotypes are general assumptions, which are made on based on limited knowledge about a community. Therefore, the presence of stereotypes in the ESL textbooks, answers to the second research question that the foreign textbook authors reflect cultural stereotypes, because of having less familiarity with the learners' culture.

Cultural Sensitivity

The three textbooks have also been analyzed in the light of the following aspect mentioned in the checklist.

Are the textbooks sensitive to the cultural background and interest of learners?

Moreover, this section responds to third research question, which is as followed:

- What are the cultural contradictions caused by the foreign textbook authors with respect to the learners' first culture?

The three textbooks have been considered in order to find cultural contradictions. Only the textbook *English Alive* contains examples concerning the issue. The data, concerning this section, comes from texts/lessons/units inside the textbook.

Cultural comparison and cultural differences are a source of creating cultural awareness but apart from these differences and similarities there also exists a small number of cultural differences, which become controversial in another culture. These differences are based on religion. The example of this type can be taken from Indian culture. In India the animal cow is regarded as a sacred animal. It is called a holy cow from religious point of view. However, contrary to this in other parts of the world it is a considered a good source of milk and meat. Therefore, an ESL textbook author will have to be culturally sensitive when compiling an ESL textbook for Indian ESL learners. The other example of cultural sensitivity is again based on religion. In Islamic countries, it is a religious obligation not to eat pork meat, whereas in other parts of the world this obligation does not exist. Similarly, the concept of *halal* is also controversial outside Islamic community. Again in the perspective of ESL textbooks, it is the author's responsibility to feel these differences.

The textbook 'English Alive' also contains some of the cultural differences of the above type in the perspective of Asian culture. The examples of these types of expressions are:

Kirks had neither chicken nor **pigs**. (Page 10)

I don't understand anything about **Halal-walal**. (P. 36)

The first expression in the textbook has been used in order to explain the pathetic condition of an English family and the reason for being culturally unfavorable in the first expression is clear from the above illustrations due to the use of pork meat. The second expression has been associated with a Hindu character and the lesson is about the time of separation between Pakistan and India. The expression *halal* reveals the reality that the Muslims usually use *halal* meat but the expression is undesirable when the word *halal* comes in combination with *walal* (a borrowed expression from Urdu language). In Urdu language (First Language of the Pakistani ESL learners) if the word is derogatory or ordinary, then the people use the term like *walal* with it. Therefore, the term '*halal-walal*' carries opposite meaning to the concept of *halal*. The word *walal* in reality does not carry any sense but is used with the word when you express your dislike about a thing.

The above discussion reveals that all the cultural contradictions are based on religious differences, and no doubt religion is the part of culture. The examples discussed above answer to the third research question by pointing out, firstly, what are the cultural contradictions found in the textbooks with respect to the learners' first culture and, secondly, what is their origin? Cultural contradictions vary from culture to culture. Therefore, it is the textbook authors' responsibility to take care of these cultural contradictions which may happen between the target language culture and the learners' first culture.

Discussion

A textbook can be effective and interesting to learners from both culture and language point of view if it brings cultural harmony between C1 and C2. The presence of cultural contradictions is a sign of author's partial knowledge of learners' culture. The solution to this problem is that the textbook authors belonging to C1 and C2 should work in collaboration to represent both cultures. Moreover, most of the L2 learners in Pakistan have no direct contact with the target language community, and they only rely on information which is available to them through textbooks. Therefore, the textbooks designed for L2 learners must reflect a wide range of the learners' first culture and the target language culture.

The most important thing is that before the revision of every edition of textbooks, authors should conduct a survey to know what the problematic areas are for learners and what type of changes can make it more effective. Adopting a student centred approach may prove helpful for the learners. Similarly, the survey should be introduced on the part of teachers. The connection between an author, a teacher and a learner is important for textbook effectiveness both from language and culture point of view, no matter, even if the author belongs to C1 or C2.

Conclusion

The research study concludes with the idea that ESL textbook authors should have an awareness of both C1 and C2. In this way, the textbook authors can realize the similarities and differences between two cultures. The awareness of both cultures on the part of authors can also overcome the problem of stereotypes or general assumptions about a culture. According to Kramsch, intercultural communication helps learners to overcome 'the stereotypes they entertain of each other as individual and as members of

a social group' (Claire Kramersch, 2001). The proposition in this regard is to have a collaborative effort on the part of authors belonging to C1 and C2.

In order to understand the cultural differences, the textbook authors, the learners and the teachers in Pakistan should be brought closer to one another. A textbook that is effective in one community or culture may not show that much output in another community due to the difference in culture. Therefore ESL textbook authors should design one textbook specific to the learners' of one culture. This type of textbook then is better able to concentrate on the learners' language requirements. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) say "A cultural focus on intercultural competence has communicative ends but there are further important advantages: It may not only encourage the development of identity, but also encourage the awareness of others' identities and an element of stabilization in a world of rapid change" (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999). Therefore, the study concludes with the following recommendation, that the authors both from C1 and C2 should work in collaboration, in order to have the culturally familiar textbooks. This can help to overcome the problem of cultural unfamiliarity between the textbook authors and ESL learners.

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Appendix A Learning through Pictures

Thank you for taking the time to review and fill out this survey for my class project. The information gathered will be used for studies and will be completely confidential. You do not need to include your name or any other personal information.

1. Which year of the school are you in?

Please look at the picture and answer the question related to it.

2. What is the boy doing in this picture?

Check one:

- Selling flags
- Waving flags
- Celebrating the Pakistan Day

3. The boy is wearing

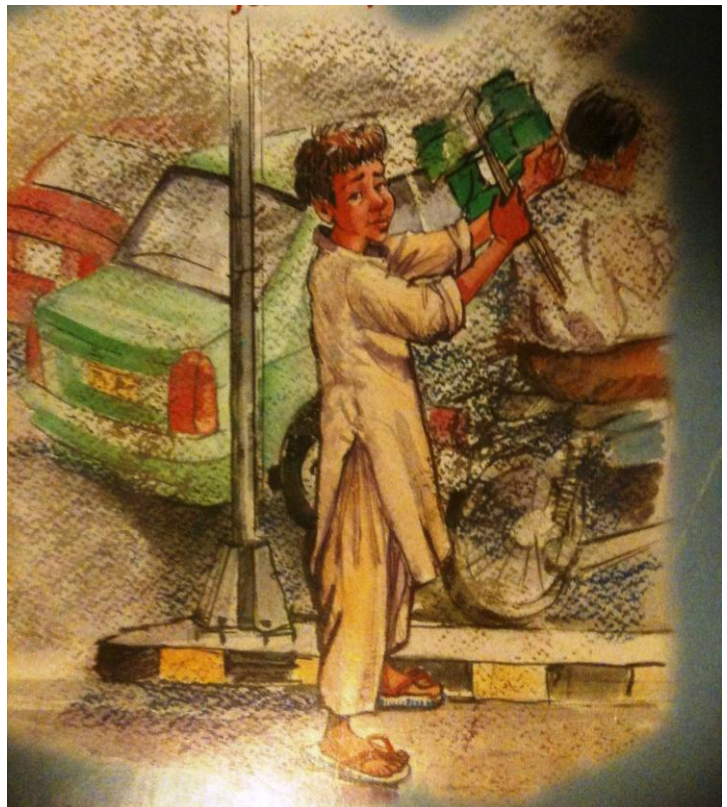
Check one:

- a clean dress
- a dirty dress
- Neither clear nor dirty

4. The boy belongs to a

Check one:

- rich family.
- poor family
- I don't know



5. How do you know that the boy belongs to a rich family or a poor family?

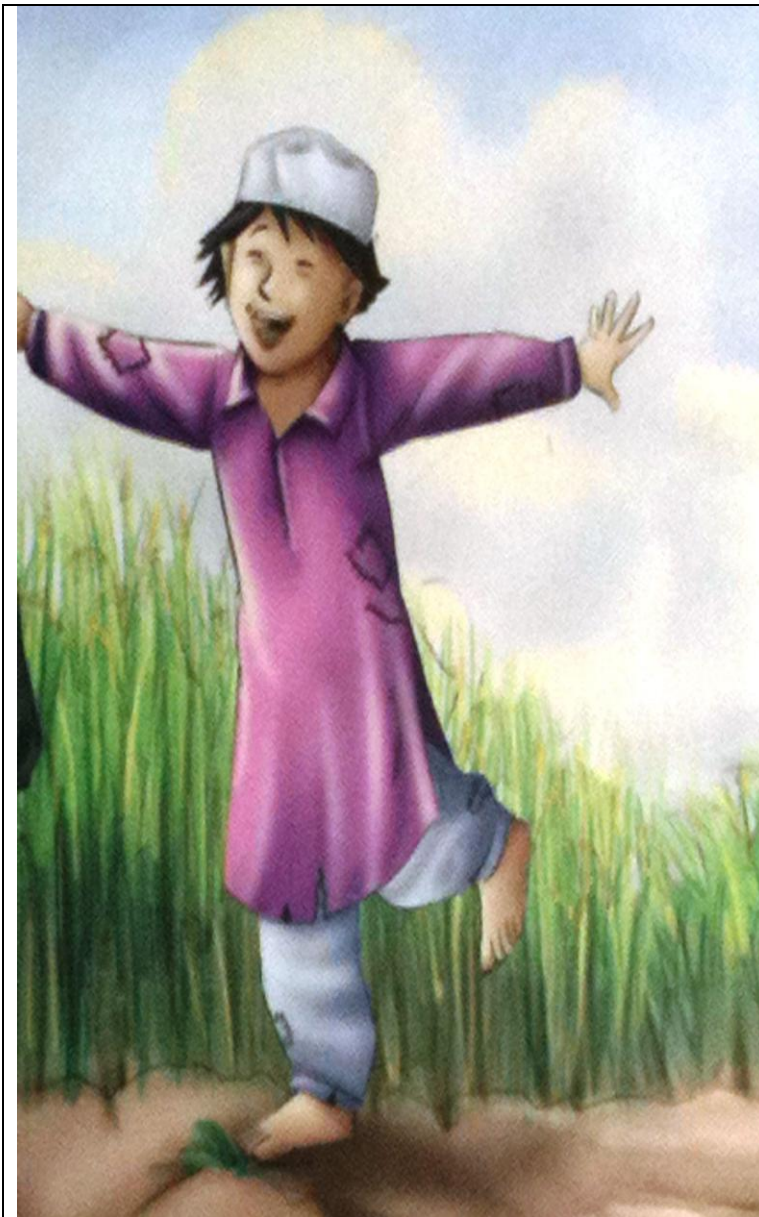
Check one:

- By his clothes
- By his face
- By his surroundings

6. Do you like the dress, the boy is wearing?

Yes

no



7. What type of dress the boy in wearing in the picture?

Check one:

- a clean dress
- a dirty dress
- don't know

8. Do you like the dress the boy is wearing?

Check one:

- yes
- no

9. What do you think the boy belongs to a

Check one:

- rich family
- poor family
- don't know

10. How do you know that the boy belongs to a rich or poor family?

Check one:

- by his clothes
- by his face
- by his surroundings



11. What is going on in this picture?

Check one:

- They are riding horses.
- They are playing.

12. If they are playing, then which game is this?

Check one:

- Horse Racing
- Polo

**Appendix-B
Results**

| | | |
|---|-----|-----|
| 1. Which year of the school you are in? | 7th | 8th |
| | 145 | 130 |

| | | | |
|---|---------------|--------------|------------------------------|
| 2. What is the boy doing in this picture? | selling flags | Waving flags | Celebrating the Pakistan Day |
| | 165 | 42 | 68 |

| | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|---------------|-------------------------|
| 3. The boy is wearing | a clean dress | a dirty dress | neither clean nor dirty |
| | 246 | 18 | 11 |

| | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|
| 4. The boy belongs to a | rich family | poor family | I don't know |
| | 15 | 275 | 63 |

| | | | |
|--|----------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 5. How do you know that the boy belongs to a rich family or poor family? | By his clothes | By his face | By his surroundings |
| | 148 | 90 | 37 |

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| 6. Do you like the dress the boy is wearing? | yes | no |
| | 40 | 235 |

| | | | |
|--|---------------|---------------|------------|
| 7. What type of dress the boy in wearing in the picture? | a clean dress | a dirty dress | Don't know |
| | 82 | 180 | 13 |

| | | |
|--|-----|-----|
| 8. Do you like the dress the boy is wearing? | yes | no |
| | 24 | 249 |

| | | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|------------|
| 9. What do you think the boy belongs to a | rich family | Poor family | Don't know |
| | 15 | 220 | 40 |

| | | | |
|--|----------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 10. How do you know that the boy belongs to a rich or poor family? | By his clothes | By his face | By his surroundings |
| | 198 | 32 | 45 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------|------------------|
| 11. What is going on in this picture? | They are riding horses | They are playing |
| | 35 | 240 |

| | | |
|---|--------------|------|
| 12. If they are playing, then which game is this? | Horse racing | Polo |
| | 32 | 243 |

Space and voice: A comparative study of Chinese adolescents' English use in China and Canada

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Abstract

Sociocultural theory stresses the nature of language as a mediation tool between learners and the society. In this regard, learning a language by nature is learning a symbolic tool assisting in achieving learners' goals (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). Thus, the significance of context needs to be identified in ESL/EFL study to understand language learners' English learning and identity construction (Norton, 1995). This qualitative study investigates the impacts of social context on language learners' experiences with English learning and their identity construction, respectively in EFL and ESL contexts. Participants were two groups of adolescents, of which one group was the first year university students in China, and another group was high school students resided in Canada for the average of 1.5 years. Open-ended questions were asked with regards to their perceptions of contexts, in which they were embedded, on their English use. This study found that both groups of participants preferred English to their first language in their daily life. Perceiving constant contacts with English-speaking counterparts as a legitimate strategy in learning English, both groups showed deliberate efforts in affiliating with English-speaking communities. However, participants in China created their own English-speaking community among themselves, within which they practiced, and even dreamed, in English (Zhao, Qian, Liu & Chen, 2011). On the other hand, participants in Canada explored chances to approach their English-speaking counterparts, in the process of which they hesitated and questioned. A discussion in light of the impacts of English globalization on language learners' identity in ESL and EFL contexts will conclude this article. This article will also suggest a re-identification of ESL and EFL contexts, which have been altered as a consequence of an increasing wave of global migration between nations for the sake of symbolic capital.

Keywords: Symbolic space, mediated action, ESL and EFL context, symbolic capital

Mediated Action with Language as Mediation Means

A major aspect of Vygotsky's (1978, 1986) theory is that tools and signs mediate human's actions. Such mediational means (Wertsch, 1991) include not only physical objects, but also signs, inclusive of language (Wertsch, 1985, 1991) and culture (Cole, 1996). Mediation connects individual's mental developments with the society (Wertsch, 1991; Vadeboncoeur, Hirst & Kostogriz, 2006). Mediation is stimulated by external social interactions, and realized from "participation in and appropriation of, the forms of cultural mediation integrated into social activities (Lantolf & Beckett, 2009, p.459)".

Thus, the nature of language as mediational means links learners and the society. Learning a language is learning the changing meaning of sign systems emerging from social interactions (Wertsch, 1991). It is learning mediational means which assists in achieving learners' goals (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). In other words, it is a process of understanding the tension between mediational means and social-cultural settings (Wertsch, 1994), and a form of social practice (Fairclough, 2001). Learning a language cannot be merely considered as individual efforts; rather, it is both individual and social. It is individual in that it is usually oriented by individual goals (Wertsch, 1985); it is social since motivation and goals are socially and culturally rooted (Cole, 1996). One major outcome of such mediated actions is to have an access to and maintain a relationship with a certain group of people (Bourdieu, 1977). To emphasize the social-cultural aspects of language learning, this study will employ *English use* interchangeably with *English learning*,

Space

In recent years, there are growing interests in using "space" for its weight on situationality and dynamics (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007). In this study, *space* will be used instead of *community* or *world*. However, it is necessary to start with definitions of those terms in order to depict the nature of *space*.

Lave and Wenger (1991) defines *community* as a group of people sharing the same interests or goals. People in this community have varied level of expertise facilitating members of the community zone of proximal development (ZPD). Hymes (1974) defines *speech community* as a group of people considering their language use different from others. This community defines its membership by language that people use. *World* (Phelan, Locke, & Hanh, 1991) is referred to a group of people sharing the same cultural norms. People in the same world share similar cultural knowledge upon which they act. Crossing different worlds means adapting to different cultural norms.

While *community*, *speech community* and *world* all stress a sense of affiliation through either interests, goals, language or cultural norms, people engaged in a mutual activity in the real world do not always have the same perception regarding affiliation (Gee, 2004). In other words, people involved in the same activity can have different interests, goals, and backgrounds of language or culture (Coughlan & Duff, 1994). Consequently, they do not necessarily consider each other affiliated to the same community, speech community or world. Neither do they intend to maintain such affiliation. For example, even though people are engaged in the same project, they do not necessarily consider each other as a member of a community, nor do they consider such interactions representative of a community.

In this article, *space* will be used instead of three aforementioned terms in order to stress the divergent perception of interactants: Interactants do not necessarily have the same view toward their status in relation to each other or to a community. They do not necessarily share the same interests or goals even when they are engaged in the same task. More importantly, they do not always share the same language or cultural background.

A space is an activity system (Kostogriz & Peeler, 2007; Gutiérrez, Baquedano-López & Tejeda, 1999). It stresses the connection between the geographical context and sociocultural development. It is socially, culturally and historically structured (Kostogriz, 2006), shaping individuals' experiences. It identifies the dialectics between the locality in which individuals live and their mediated actions.

For the study of space, there are many dimensions for specific interests: symbolic space (Brockmeier, 2001), natural space (Comber, Nixon, Ashmore, Loo, & Cook, 2006), classroom space and imagined space (Brown & Renshaw, 2006; Firth & Wagner, 2007). In this study, I will focus on participants' out-of-class space with their friends in regard to English use.

Voice

This study uses the term *voice* instead of *identity* in order to emphasize the dialectic nature between language learning and space. In this regard, *voice* does not only reveal social relationships that have been constructed from language use (Joseph, 2004). Most important of all, it reveals both social communicative and individual psychological process (Wertsch, 1991).

Voice links individuals' experiences of social communication to mediational means (Wertsch, 1991). It reveals individuals' desire of recognition and association, showing "...the quest for existential meaning and material resources (West, 1992, p.21)" in a space. In other words, voice reflects individuals' mediated actions in response to the social realities structured by a space in which individuals live in (Gérin-Lajoie, 2003, 2005). Thus, voice manifests individuals' mediated actions in accordance with the materiality of mediational means (Wertsch, 1998). In the case of language learning, the materiality of mediational means does not only refer to physical materials, such as curriculum or dictionary; moreover, it includes social network and chances of communication (Minichiello, 2001; Norton, 1995; Toohey, 2000).

The nature of voice reveals a dialectical relationship between learners and the materiality of mediational means. It reveals the perceived roles of mediational means in individuals' real life experience (Curdt-Christiansen & Maguire, 2007), which inform an outcome of linguistic social practice rather than a source (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). In this regard, voice indicates how individuals understand their mediated actions with mediational means in a space (Norton, 1995).

Spaces, Mediated Action, and Voices

This study postulates that learning is situated (Lave & Wenger, 1991), and occurs in social situations (Hanks, 1991). To be specific, learning takes place in learners' social interactions in a space and across spaces through mediated actions with mediational means, from which emerges learners' voice.

Learners act with a language in a space laden with local and situational structures. Using language as mediational means, language learners produce and reproduce local social-cultural norms, meanwhile construct their social networks (Bayley & Schecter, 2003). In other words, language learning is a process of socialization, and the outcome of such learning is a form of social accomplishment (Firth & Wagner, 2007). This study will provide a situated analysis of out-of-class space of two groups of learners, focusing on their mediated actions with mediational means in two different spaces.

English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners are in a homogeneous context in which both teachers and learners share the same cultural and first language background (Barrat & Kontra, 2000; Kriegger, 2005). Thus, EFL learners tend to have more cultural and social supports in learning English (Baker, 2003). Meanwhile, EFL learners showed strong

desires to use English as their daily language (Zhao, Qian, Chen, & Liu, 2011). In out-of-class space, Chinese EFL learners chose to listen to more English materials (Liu, 2007), and read English literacies (Peng, 2002), most of which were related to in-class teaching materials (Deng, 2004). They also watched movies or listened to English songs (Ma, 2010), and studied English through Internet (Ye, 2008). Some practiced their oral English in “English Corner” in which usually teachers or students gathered and conversed with each other. They were also encouraged to write journals after school (Liu, 2007) and memorize words to expand their vocabulary. EFL students encountered more difficulties in learning English out of class. Some studies concluded that it was because of students’ low motivation, therefore structured instruction should be offered to scaffold their learning (Liu, 2007; Peng, 2002; Ye, 2008). Those studies provide insightful understandings on learners’ learning experience. However, few studies look at EFL learners’ learning experience from an emic (participant-centered) perspective (Firth & Wagner, 1997).

English as Second Language (ESL) learners are in a heterogeneous context in which the dominant language and culture is English. Adolescent ESL learners coming to an English-speaking country after age of 15 are usually termed as late-arrivals, as a contrast to those who came at a younger age (Roessingh, 2008). Even though located in an English space, Asian late-arrivals found themselves in an EFL space in that their social space was mostly of their first language (Gunderson, 2007; Miller, 2003). In particular, they had more difficulties in constructing social networks with English counterparts, because of lower English proficiency (Anderson, 2002; Chuang, 2010; Miller, 2003) and the lack of shared life experience with local students (Olsen, 2000). The aforementioned research has identified difficulties that this group has encountered in accessing a local space and their voices. However, more studies are needed to understand how they mediate with mediational means in response to such difficulties in a local space.

Objectives of the study

This study investigates EFL learners’ and ESL learners’ perception of their out-of-class space regarding English use and their voices. Following are the specific points under study.

- a) How do EFL and ESL learners perceive their out-of-class space of English use?
- b) How do EFL and ESL learners act in response to their out-of-class space of English use?
- c) What voice(s) emerge from EFL and ESL learners’ respective mediated action in out-of-class space?

a) A Southern Chinese University in China

The data regarding EFL learners were collected in a Southern Chinese university in 2008. This university is widely known for its communicative language teaching (CLT) approach and the substantial amount of teaching hours assigned for English courses. To reinforce the impacts of CLT, the whole campus has a dominant culture of using English on various occasions. Throughout the academic year, a multitude of extracurricular activities such as debating in English and English pronunciation competitions are designed to create and support such a culture. Research participants in our study were in their second year of a four-year Bachelor of Education program. Their age was approximately between 19 and 20.

b) the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), Canada

Canada has been receiving a large number of immigrants for decades. According to Statcan (2007), 19.8% of the Canadian population was born out of Canada, while 70.2% of them speak a language other than English or French as mother tongue. The GTA has been one of the major areas receiving immigrants and temporary residents. Three participants, Joe, Angle and Amanda, landed on the GTA approximately 18 months ago by the time of the study. And they were all full-time high school students. Joe, 17 years old, was a boarding student in a private school in which the majority of students were from white middle-class families. Angle, 18 years old, was a student in a private international school where the majority of students were from China. Amanda, 20 years old, studied in a culturally diversified public school.

Methodology

The data used for this article were drawn from two broader studies, both of which used qualitative case study method.

Participants in the southern Chinese university were given three sets of questions. To make the questions "understandable" to the participants, wordings of the questions were chosen based on their preferred sets of vocabulary, which may appear less standard. Research participants had one week to answer the questions in details and were asked to email the answers to a shared email address created by the author and two colleagues. Participants were not mandated to reveal their real names to researchers. Since participation in this research was not part of the final evaluation of the course they were taking, participants' response to the research questions was considered valid and trustworthy.

Participants in Canada received a clearly written introduction of the research beforehand. Consent forms were given to participants above 18 years of age whilst distributed to the parents for permission for those under 18. After the researcher collected consent forms, three semi-structured interviews were conducted in Mandarin. Participation in this research was voluntary and participants were reminded of rights to terminate interviews at any time.

Data analysis in qualitative research is generally inductive, which involves data consolidation, combination, reduction and interpretation (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Code analysis (Johnson & LaMontagne, 1993; Krippendorff, 1980) was employed to analyze the data set for this article. Data were first organized topically after Chinese text was translated into English by "back-translation" method (Bracken & Barona, 1991). Afterwards, patterns and regularities were identified, transformed into categories, and made inferences to the research questions of this study.

Findings

This section presents findings related to three research questions.

Question one: How do EFL and ESL learners perceive their out-of-class space of English use?

a) EFL Learners' Perception

EFL participants were identified as three groups in terms of their perceptions toward the focal issue. The first group felt that their out-of-class space for English use was limited. They wished that their out-of-class space could be dominantly English. They wanted to speak English "*as often as possible*", but regretted that "*(there is) no atmosphere*". Other participants wrote: "*speaking and thinking in English all the time is necessary.*" "*I am fond of speaking English all the time.*"

The second group showed a relational attitude. They felt that they needed more spaces for English use out of class. They believed that "*it's cool to speak English*", even though "*I will not speak to those who don't understand.*" However, they showed an awareness of social and cultural space in which they lived. One participant wrote, "*(I) feel weird if (I) has (sic) to speak to someone who does not know English.*"

The third group did not feel that they needed more space for English use out of class. Living in China, they showed resistance to the ideology of using English out of class. They believed that they should preserve spaces for their first language rather than expand spaces for English. One participant wrote, "*English is just a language (sic) communicate with foreigners.*" Another participant wrote: "*We are Chinese. We should not speak English all the time.*"

b) ESL Learners

In the case of ESL learners, all the three participants considered their out of class space of English use insufficient, in that their social network after the class was mostly Mandarin or Cantonese speaking youth. In other words, their perception toward the space of English use was based on their social networks with local youth who spoke English as the first language.

Angle felt that all the friends she knew were Chinese, who speak either Mandarin or Cantonese as the first language. Amanda said in an interview: "*I feel that my social network is not big enough.*" Joe felt uncertain regarding his space of English use. Studying in a white-dominant middle class private school, he did not feel embedded in an English-speaking space. Joe said: "*If I have chance to approach them, they would be kind of friendly to me. Otherwise, I don't get the chance to talk to them.*"

Question two: How do EFL and ESL learners act in response to their out-of-class space of English learning?

a) EFL Learners

The groups of participants which craved for more space of English use showed deliberate efforts to expand this space. They incorporated English into their daily life, and talked to their friends in English instead of the first language. One participant wrote: "*(we*

should) try to find an English environment for ourselves. Try to speak English in our daily life.” Other participants wrote: *“the key to grasp a language is to be in it. The dorm decides to speak English every night”*. *“(Eventually we should) dream in English.”* Some participants said that they managed to find a partner with whom they spoke English in their daily life.

b) ESL Learners

Joe, Angel and Amanda all managed to affiliate to English speaking space. In other words, they showed purposeful endeavors to expand spaces for English use after class. They explored opportunities to converse with local youth, purposefully familiarized themselves with “hot” topics of local youth, and joined in various social activities.

Joe was a boarder who lived at school. In order to practice English, he purposefully sat at a “mixed table” in which a group of people from diversified backgrounds chose to dine together at school canteen. If sometimes there was not any mixed table, he would prefer to sit with Cantonese-speaking youth instead of Mandarin-speaking youth. Thus his friends had to speak English with him, since he could not understand Cantonese. Amanda purposefully shortened her time with her Chinese friends in order to expand her space of English use. During the daily one-hour lunch time, she decreased her social time with Chinese friends to 20 minutes, and went right to the school library in order to talk to English-speaking counterparts. As she said, *“I don’t want to waste any second of my time. I want to make full use of it (to improve my English).”* Angel registered several ESL courses in Toronto. The standard that she adopted to evaluate an ESL course was the number of Chinese students in the course. As she said in an interview: *“It (this ESL course) is good. There is no Chinese at all. I am the only (Chinese) there. Classmates are all over the worlds, mostly from Brazil, South Korea and Japan.”*

Other than aforementioned strategies, three participants all managed to expand their space of English use with their strengths in Maths and Physics. Joe and Amanda tutored Maths to their English speaking counterparts, and Angle worked as a voluntary Maths tutor at a summer school for more than 200 hours.

Joe tried to familiarize himself with local hot topics. After realized that the local youth were mostly fans of football games, he started to learn more about this game and found he liked it too, As he said: *“ You have to try new things in order to get acquainted with them....for example, ...I never played football before I came to Canada. ...after I tried football, it’s actually one of my favorite sports right now.”*

Question three: What voices emerge from EFL and ESL learners’ respective mediated action in space?

a) EFL Learners

In accordance with three categories of perspectives regarding their spaces of English use, three types of voices emerged as well.

The majority of participants in this study felt happy if their space after class was dominantly English. They believed that, as a result of expanding space of English use, their English would achieve a higher level, and their life should become happier.

The second group showed conflictual voices. They wanted to have more space for English use after class, however they show reluctance in pursuing this goal. Some explained

that it was because of their limited English proficiency, while some claimed that they should not speak English to Chinese friends.

The third group showed stronger voice in defending a space for the first language after class. They were resistant to the idea that English permeated their out-of-class space. As students wrote: *“I am Chinese”*. *“Chinese is my native language”*. *“(it is) ridiculous to forget Chinese.”* *“Chinese is the most beautiful language in the world.”*

b) ESL Learners

All three participants believed that expanding the space of English use was necessary since it was in Canada. They all showed frustration in accessing English space. When asked what caused such frustration, they felt that it was because of their low English proficiency. As Amanda said in an interview, *“local kids usually speak very fast. If you said ‘pardon me’ more than twice, they would become impatient. Next time they will not talk to you anymore.”* Moreover, they believed that it was also because of different life experience that caused such difficulties. In one interview, Joe asked, *“How do you talk to local kids? What topics should I start?”*

Also, they felt that their true inner voice had not yet been heard in the space of English. When in dispute with others, they felt incapable of defending themselves. Amanda said, *“I am all fine when I speak Chinese, making friends, expressing my deep thoughts, no problem at all. But when I have to speak English, the level of my confidence decreases.”* Joe did not pass the final test of a swimming course. However the reason he was told by the instructor did not convince him. Feeling incapable of defending himself, he quitted the course afterwards.

Discussions

ESL and EFL: Space, Actions, and Voice

Both ESL and the majority of EFL learners in this study consider their space of English use insufficient in that they feel they do not have enough chances to use English. However, the claimed reasons are different. ESL learners’ understanding of opportunities of use English is using English with people whose first language is English. On the other hand, EFL learners perceive their chances of using English as the possibilities of co-creating opportunities with their peers. In the light of space, EFL learners are with their peers of the same ethnics who do not necessarily share the same vision and goal regarding English use. They are insiders of the space thus their attention is on English use per se. ESL learners are in a space of diversified ethnics who do not unanimously consider each other insiders of the space. Accordingly, ESL learners make every endeavour to socialize with the members in the space by expanding chances of socialization, such as tutoring Maths and science.

ESL and EFL learners’ actions of expanding English use space in this study are dissimilar. Even though both groups believe that practice makes perfect, ESL learners explore resources other than language itself while EFL learners focus on language.

In the light of voice, while EFL learners question the needs and purposes of using English all the time, ESL learners are more concerned with approaches to access English-speaking counterparts. Moreover, ESL learners manage to avoid the social network of Chinese, which they consider a necessary step prior to entering into an English space. To

them, to expand the space of English use means discarding the space of Chinese and becoming a member of English use space.

ESL and EFL: English as Mediational Means and English as Mediated Actions

Language learning is contextual and situated. Learning is dependent on the social and cultural structures in which a space offers (Norton & Toohey, 2001). However, it does not mean that language learners are subject to such structures (Norton, 1995). In this study, ESL learners and the larger group of EFL learners felt insufficient space for their English use. They preferred English to their first language, and explored opportunities to expand the space for English; however, the nature of such mediated actions is different.

In the case of EFL learners, English becomes a mediational means and using English is mediated actions. Their mediated actions reflect their goal: to improve English. Therefore, English is “about action (Roth & Lee, 2007, p.208)” of which the object of attention is on English language itself. With the materiality of mediational means in a Chinese space, EFL learners encounter structured insufficiency. In other words, their life experience and social network are dominantly socially and culturally Chinese, which makes all-English-after-class ideology strenuous. This also explains why most studies found that EFL students could not insist in using English all the time after the class. Such phenomenon cannot be merely interpreted as the lack of motivation. Rather, it is because of local situational space that structures individuals’ mediated actions.

Moreover, mediational means evolve from tool to praxis (Cole, 1996). Since the space has its local and situational knowledge of Chinese, mediated actions with evolving mediational means will eventually add new cultural and social norms to the current space. Thus, this mediated action in the current space cannot be considered neutral, in that mediational means will eventually evolve from a sign to praxis (Cole, 1996), where English will be used for and of action (Roth & Lee, 2007). To be specific, to expand the space of English use in a Chinese space is to change its situationality and locality of a Chinese space. This explains why some EFL learners are resistant to the expansion of English space, in that mediated actions eventually will bring changes to their life experience, i.e., praxis. Thus, using English in EFL out-of-class space is not merely neutral mediated actions, or a neutral replacement of one mediational means over another. Rather, it is to change the praxis of a local space.

In the case of ESL learners, even though they share the same goal as EFL learners: to improve English, their mediated actions have more layers and their mediational means are more complicated. Their mediated actions include constructing social networks with English speaking peers, and the mediational means contains English, Maths, sports and other “hot” topics.

The three ESL participants in this study show deliberate efforts in approaching and affiliating themselves with English space; however the outcomes are not as ideal as they desire. They believe that it is because they have not tried hard enough. However, expanding the space of English as ESL learners is more complicated than we have imagined. They do not just enter into an English space; rather, they also enter into a space of English praxis. In other words, ESL learners in this study do not simply use English language as a mediational means. For example, they make use of their excellence of Maths in helping local youth. Moreover, they also attempt to live a life of English inclusive of a wider range of mediational means. For instance, they familiarize themselves with sports or

other popular topics among the local youth in order to have common interests. In this case, sports or other popular topics become mediational means, understanding local culture is mediated action. As can be seen, mediational means are more than English language; rather, it is local life experience which is structured by this space. Further, it includes a speech genre that is closely related to the local experience yet dominant in this space. In this regard, ESL learners are using English for action, about action and of action (Roth & Lee, 2007).

The Implications on ESL and EFL Learning in the Global Wave

The globalization of English has permeated both local and global spaces. This explains why both EFL and ESL learners in this study all perceive English as a dominant symbolic capital in their respective lived space. However, when ESL and EFL learners are considered as one category, the distinct sociocultural spaces in which learners are embedded are underestimated (Firth & Wagner, 1997). In this regard, this study suggests a reconsideration of EFL and ESL as respective categories due to their particular social spaces. From the sociocultural perspective, learners learn through mediated actions with mediational means in response to local situations they live in. Thus it is important to pay attention to different social and cultural situations in which ESL and EFL learners live. In other words, dissimilar social and cultural situations in which ESL and EFL learners live become a critical factor in understanding learners' experiences of English use and voices.

As other studies identified (Gu, 2010; Yokisawa, 2010), EFL learners create an imagined space intertwined with existent L1 spaces, within which they act in accordance with perceived social norms of English. Therefore, the nature of using English out-of-class all day is to build a globally dominant yet imagined social space of English within local L1 space within which their failure and resistance are silenced and repressed. In this study, EFL learners believe that the failure of incorporating English into daily social interactions is largely due to their lower proficiency and motivation. In other words, the failure of using English after-class is ostensibly due to EFL learners' lower English proficiency and lack of preservation, which is obvious supported by studies from different perspectives. Aligned with this belief, strategies aiming to increase their motivation and proficiency are constantly discussed and put into practice by studies aforementioned. This study attempts to point out that the study on the lack of engagement should be linked to the nature of social interactions in EFL learners' local social space. In other words, their voices of frustration, anxiety and resistance should be discussed in the light of their conflictual experiences of daily social interactions in imagined and local social spaces.

ESL learners also experience frustration and anxiety, yet their social interaction is by nature different in comparison with EFL learners. As linguistic minorities, ESL learners' English use in a multilingual social space are complicated and their identity of conflicts arise in the course of negotiation with and in dominant language social space. Thus, the nature of ESL learners' is to enter into a dominant English social space, in other words, another field of power in the society (Bourdieu, 1989). As linguistic minorities, their difficulties and frustration lie in the course of accessing the social space of English, which they believe should be achieved at the cost of their L1 social network.

In the end of the article, it is very important to point out that the author never intends to imply that ESL learning is for survival while EFL learning is for social prestige. Instead, the author wants to stress that both are social achievement (Firth & Wagner, 2007)

and active reaction to and participation in globalization (Watson-Gegeo, 2004). Expanding the framework of who does what with mediational means (Wertsch, 1991), this study adds the dimension of space into analysis, in order to explore the leverage of symbolic relations on language users' social space and their voices. With an anti-reductionistic frame, this study suggests that EFL learners mediate mediational means external to a space of theirs, while ESL learners mediate mediational means internal to the existent space of others.

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Cultivating Intercultural Communication Competence under Chinese Higher Vocational College EFL Teaching Context

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Abstract

With burgeoning research on language and language teaching, people have obtained a better understanding of the relationship between language and culture, especially in the context of EFL teaching and learning. This paper presents a discussion on intercultural communication skills in Chinese higher vocational college English teaching. Through the questionnaires and interviews with Chinese teachers and students, the authors identify the blocking factors in the acquisition of intercultural communication competence among students, which include teaching methods, teaching materials and teachers' attitudes towards intercultural communication. It concludes with implications for EFL teaching at higher vocational colleges in China. The authors of the paper hope to enlighten the need for Chinese English teachers to attach more importance on cultivating their students' intercultural communication competence in EFL teaching.

Key words: EFL teaching; intercultural competence; blocking factors in the acquisition of intercultural communication competence

Introduction

Since Hymes (1972, see Xu Li-sheng, 2000) proposed the concept of communicative competence, Chinese and foreign scholars (Ruben, 1976; Imahori & Laniga, 1989; Gudykunst, 1997; Kim, 1992; Spitzberg, 1994; Lam Tai-chun, 1996; Jia Xin, 1997; Hu Wenzhong & Gao Yihong, 1997; Xu Lisheng, 2000; Gao Yongchen, 2005) have not stopped the discussion on communicative competence, especially cross-cultural communicative competence (intercultural). Communicative competence in general has been characterized as communication behavior that is both effective and appropriate (Spitzberg & Cupach, 1984). A competent communicator is effective in one's ability to achieve one's goals, and appropriate in one's ability to exhibit behaviour that is accepted as well as expected in a given situation. Needless to say, expected and accepted behaviour depends on cultural/relational context, and therefore these factors have to be taken into consideration when extending this definition of communication competence to intercultural contexts. In previous research, there is a general consensus that intercultural communication competence (ICC) can be characterized in terms of three dimensions, namely cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Cui & Van den Berg, 1991; Sercu, 2004; Spitzberg, 1991). Attempts at measuring ICC have usually revolved around these dimensions, with a few other variations.

One of the earlier measures of ICC evident in literature is Ruben's (1976) Intercultural Behavioral Assessment indices. The instrument is designed to evaluate a participant on seven dimensions, namely tolerance of ambiguity, interaction management, display of respect, orientation to knowledge, relational role behavior, interaction posture, and empathy. This instrument has been successfully used in past studies (Chen, 1989; Ruben & Kealey, 1979), but has not been extensively used in recent years. Further, the applicability of this instrument to participants from multiple cultural backgrounds is not clear.

Another instrument in use is the Intercultural Developmental Inventory (Bennett & Hammer 1998), constructed based on Bennett's (1986, 1993) theoretical framework of a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. The instrument is primarily designed to measure intercultural sensitivity, defined, "the ability to discriminate and experience relevant cultural differences" (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003, p.422). The authors argue that one's intercultural sensitivity is indicative of one's potential for intercultural competence. The inventory has been used in empirical studies (Greenholtz, 2000). There needs to be, however, more research on establishing the extent to which intercultural sensitivity is a predictor of ICC. Additionally, though intercultural sensitivity may be a predictor of ICC, it is conceptually different from ICC.

The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2000; van der Zee, Zaal, & Piekstra, 2003) evaluates a person on five dimensions, namely, cultural empathy, emotional stability, open-mindedness, flexibility, and social initiative. Though the instrument has been successfully used in empirical studies (van Oudenhoven & van der Zee, 2002); van Oudenhoven, Mol, & van der Zee, 2003; van der Zee & Brinkmann, 2004) and has proved to be stable across different cultures (Leone et.al., 2005), the measure is primarily a psychometric instrument designed to evaluate multicultural orientation and adaptability, and does not necessarily address the communication aspect of intercultural competence.

Overall, the above studies attempt at measuring ICC and the insights gained from the studies reviewed above are invaluable, but they also suffer a certain weakness. The studies did not follow a common theoretical framework, and most of the studies were mainly based on multiple cultural backgrounds.

It is now widely accepted that the aim of foreign language learning is to acquire the ability to perform a repertoire of cross-cultural acts (Hu Zhuanglin, 2001) and the desired purpose of foreign language teaching is to cultivate the learners' intercultural communication competence. In other words, the acquisition and mediation of effective intercultural communication skills is a new objective in modern language learning and teaching. Since language is inextricably tied to culture while culture is an inevitable element in language understanding, To carry out the research on intercultural communication skills in Chinese higher vocational college English teaching, three research questions are put forward. These are:

1. What kind of situations is the intercultural communication competence of Chinese higher vocational college students in?
2. What are the main blocking factors affecting the cultivation of their intercultural competence?
3. How can Chinese students effectively strengthen their intercultural communication competence with in-depth reform of EFL teaching?

With these questions in mind, the authors conducted a study on Chinese vocational college students' intercultural communication competence using the results of a questionnaire amongst 234 non-English majors and 32 EFL teachers. On the basis of the data collected from interviewing teachers and students, the authors of the paper analyze the factors affecting Chinese vocational college students' intercultural communication competence and provide some guidance for EFL cultural teaching in Chinese higher vocational colleges.

Methods

Participants

The participants of the study are 234 students and 32 English teachers from a higher vocational college in China. The students in the higher vocational college are randomly selected from 8 different classes in 3 different grades with 8 different non-English majors in Accounting, Logistics, Marketing, E-commerce, Laws, Software Technology, Computer Application as well as Computer Control. They have studied English for more than 8 years and a total of 266 participated in this study. Incompletely answered questionnaires were discarded. As a result, 263 respondents (among students 231, teachers 32) (98% of 266 cases) were used as the basis for data analysis.

Of the 266 subjects, 65.1% are males, and 34.9% are females. The age/grade distribution of the subjects is almost even, around 33% of each grade.

Instrument

ensure the study's reliability, the authors collected data based on the two forms: the questionnaires on 32 English teachers and 234 Chinese English learners and the interviews with 10 English teachers and 24 EFL learners, who were chosen amongst 32 English teachers and 234 Chinese English learners. The questionnaires and the interviews aimed at the analysis of the students and the teachers' attitudes towards the cultivation of EFL learners' intercultural competence. The interview questions on the students vary a little from those on teachers. Through interviews with teachers and students, we can better understand their attitudes towards EFL learners' intercultural communication, identify the blocking factors affecting EFL learners' intercultural communication competence, and explore possible ways and means to solve.

The questionnaires and the interviews employed in this study were developed by the researchers based on the studies by Gao Yongcheng (2006) and Pan Shuai (2007). The questionnaires employed in the study are 9 multiple-choice written questions. There are five open questions in the interview with the teachers and seven open questions in the interview with the students. The questionnaires are conducted mainly based on motivation of EFL learners' learning English, the competence EFL learners should have, content as well as added content teachers teach in class, teaching methods teachers commonly employ, and main reasons students have difficulty in communicating with foreigners, psychological factors affecting EFL learners' intercultural communication competence, mastery of western communication practices, main obstacles EFL learners meet while communicating with foreigners and main ways and means to enhancing EFL learners' intercultural communication competence..

Data analysis

The responses of each individual respondent were encoded using computers. Descriptive statistics were used to describe and compare responses of the subjects. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, were reported in order to understand the EFL learners' intercultural communication competence.

Results

Findings from the nine tables concerning the questionnaires on students and teachers are as follows:

Table 1
Motivation of EFL Learners' Learning English

| Type Description | Total cases | | Subcases | | Percentage (%) | |
|---|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | students | teachers | students | teachers | students | teachers |
| A. Communication with foreigners | 231 | 32 | 49 | 7 | 21.35% | 23.15% |
| B. Getting a Diploma & Finding a good job | | | 182 | 25 | 78.65% | 76.85% |

Table 2
Competence EFL Learners Should Have

| Type Description | Total cases | | Subcases | | Percentage (%) | |
|---|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | students | teachers | students | teachers | students | teachers |
| A. Intercultural communication competence | 231 | 32 | 19 | 3 | 9.14% | 10.39% |
| B. Listening & speaking Skills | | | 161 | 22 | 68.94% | 67.26% |
| C. Mastery of grammar | | | 51 | 7 | 21.92% | 22.35% |

Table 3
Content as well as Added Content Teachers Teach in class

| Type Description | Total cases | | Subcases | | Percentage (%) | |
|--|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | students | teachers | students | teachers | students | teachers |
| A. Vocabulary, text, dialogue, sentence patterns, grammar | 231 | 32 | 31 | 23 | 13.46% | 69.56% |
| B. Text background knowledge, listening material | | | 182 | 6 | 78.67% | 17.97% |
| C. Western customs, manners, and other cultural background | | | 18 | 3 | 7.87% | 12.47% |

Table 4
Teaching Methods Teachers Commonly Employ

| Type Description | Total cases | | Subcases | | Percentage (%) | |
|---|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | students | teachers | students | teachers | students | teachers |
| A. The communicative language teaching | 231 | 32 | 34 | 4 | 14.79% | 15.68% |
| B. The traditional grammar-translation method | | | 197 | 28 | 85.21% | 84.32% |

Table 5
Mastery of Western Communication Practices

| Type Description | Total cases | | Subcases | | Percentage (%) | |
|------------------|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | students | teachers | students | teachers | students | teachers |
| A. Very good | 231 | 32 | 12 | 3 | 5.34% | 10.56% |
| B. Medium | | | 28 | 5 | 11.98% | 15.76% |
| C. Good | | | 36 | 9 | 15.57% | 28.23% |
| D. Bad | | | 155 | 15 | 67.11% | 45.45% |

Table 6

Main Reasons Students Have Difficulty in Communicating with Foreigners

| Type Description | Total cases | | Subcases | | Percentage (%) | |
|---|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | students | teachers | students | teachers | students | teachers |
| A. The traditional teaching methods | 231 | 32 | 50 | 14 | 21.65% | 43.75% |
| B. Inappropriate teachers | | | 9 | 1 | 3.76% | 3.13% |
| C. Lack of intercultural communication atmosphere | | | 149 | 12 | 64.50% | 37.50% |
| D. EFL learners | | | 23 | 5 | 10.12% | 15.62% |

Table 7

Psychological Factors Affecting EFL learners' intercultural communication Competence

| Type Description | Total cases | | Subcases | | Percentage (%) | |
|--|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | students | teachers | students | teachers | students | teachers |
| A. Being afraid of making mistakes | 231 | 32 | 125 | 15 | 54.31% | 49.35% |
| B. Lack of self-confidence and courage | | | 58 | 9 | 24.93% | 25.76% |
| C. Inferiority | | | 48 | 8 | 20.76% | 24.89% |

Table 8

Main Obstacles EFL learners Meet while Communicating with Foreigners

| Type Description | Total cases | | Subcases | | Percentage (%) | |
|--|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | students | teachers | students | teachers | students | teachers |
| A. Chinglish, lack of the sense of thinking in English, cultural differences | 231 | 32 | 85 | 7 | 36.78% | 21.87% |
| B. Poor listening and oral English and Lack of enough vocabulary | | | 146 | 25 | 63.22% | 78.13% |

Table 9

Main ways and means to Enhancing EFL Learners' intercultural Communication Competence

| Type Description | Total cases | | Subcases | | Percentage (%) | |
|------------------------------|-------------|----------|----------|----------|----------------|----------|
| | students | teachers | students | teachers | students | teachers |
| A. Studying abroad | 231 | 32 | 62 | 4 | 26.84% | 12.50% |
| B. Teaching culture in class | | | 40 | 5 | 17.31% | 15.62% |
| C. Self-study | | | 15 | 19 | 6.49% | 59.38% |
| D. Having foreign teachers | | | 114 | 4 | 49.36% | 12.50% |

From the tables above, the researcher finds that EFL teachers pay little attention to the cultivation of EFL learners' intercultural communication competence and EFL learners don't care about intercultural communication competence. Most of EFL learners learn English so as to find a job instead of communicating with foreigners. Most of them hold they can't master western practice because of the EFL teachers' teaching method and the teaching materials. They believe the reasons why they have difficulty in communicating with the foreigners are that they lack intercultural communication atmosphere and self-confidence and courage and they are afraid of making mistakes. They hope they can enhance their intercultural communication competence by studying abroad, having foreign teachers and EFL teachers introducing cultural differences instead of self-study.

From the results above, most of the EFL teachers' answers are similar to the EFL learners', which also shows the EFL teachers attach little importance to the cultivation of EFL learners' intercultural communication competence. However, the idea on the main ways and means to enhancing EFL learners' intercultural communication competence between teachers and students are different. Most of the teachers hold students can improve their intercultural communication competence through self-study instead of studying abroad, teaching culture in class as well as having foreign teachers.

Analysis on the Interviews with EFL learners

Numerical analysis then appears to be helpful in understanding EFL learners' intercultural competence. However, the qualitative analysis drawn from interviewing the individual L2 learner' attitudes towards intercultural competence can be also revealing. The main content of interviews with the EFL learners are: the input channels of EFL language cultures, the actual state of EFL language teaching and cultural input and EFL learners' attitudes towards intercultural communication.

The results show that most EFL learners have fewer opportunities to contact with foreign cultures. First of all, 24 students, only five individuals has communicated with foreigners before, but it was less than 40 minutes, and two students at the junior high school had foreign teachers, which to some extent, increased the contact with foreign cultures, but they often felt nervous to communicate with foreigners. Although a number of foreign films are exposed to EFL learners, however, owing to lack of guiding, EFL learners tend to only remember the plot, and do not see the cultural factors embodied in the plot. EFL learners lack intercultural communication practices and experience. In addition,

Students felt in the classroom teaching, teachers and teaching materials can not meet the needs of their cultural learning. Many teachers themselves know little about foreign cultures, so they can not teach EFL learners cultural background knowledge in EFL teaching. On the other hand, EFL learners demonstrated a positive, enthusiastic attitude towards cultural learning. They believe that cultural knowledge is more interesting than language points and they are willing to develop their intercultural communication competence.

Analysis on the Interviews with EFL Teachers

After interviewing EFL learners, the researcher interviewed 10 EFL teachers. They are the teachers of different ages, the oldest one is 54 years old, the youngest is 28 years old. In general, the ten teachers can be representatives of Chinese higher vocational college teachers. When asked "In your teaching, do you focus on cultural differences in the teaching materials and consciously cultivate EFL learners' intercultural communication competence?", a lot of teachers had a similar answer: "Because EFL learners' intercultural communication competence tests are not required, it's unnecessary for us to teach intercultural knowledge. What's worse, it would affect the process of teaching." Only two young teachers paid a little attention to the cultivation of EFL learners' intercultural communication awareness, but did not attach great importance to it. There are three teachers saying that they also knew what the function of language and the purpose to learn a language were. But in reality, they are not allowed to do so, because the teaching tasks are packed in each lesson. There are four teachers stressed it was even more difficult to achieve this goal, and never considered it as a teaching content. Their reasons are as follows: it's difficult for EFL learners to grasp English words and basic grammar and structure, and it's impossible for EFL learners to have a lot of time to improve their intercultural communication competence. However, many of the teachers in the study have shown great interest in cultivating EFL learners' intercultural communication competence, and they have made many valuable ideas and suggestions and hope to attract the attention of the people concerned so as to promote the reform of the existing examination system and develop English innovation in teaching methods and content.

Discussions

The main factors affecting the cultivation of Chinese higher vocational college EFL learners' intercultural communication competence may be teachers, teaching materials and examination system, which was also concluded in Pan Shuai's research in 2007.

The above results of the questionnaires and interviews show that teachers pay little attention to cultivate EFL learners' intercultural communication competence.

In the questionnaire on teachers, a very small number of teachers chose the students should have communication competence, and few teachers believed it was because of EFL learners' less exposure to Western culture, language differences as well as Chinese influence that EFL learners had difficulty in communicating with foreigners.

The teachers disapprove EFL learners can't communicate with foreigners due to Chinglish, no sense of thinking in English and cultural differences, which shows that many teachers are still teaching language points according to the syllabus as well as the teaching materials.

The ultimate goal of EFL teaching in Chinese higher vocational colleges is to cultivate EFL learners' comprehensive competence such as listening, speaking, reading and writing skills as well as intercultural communication competence. The teaching materials should be helpful in this regard. However, in spite of an increase in content and cultural background knowledge, the teaching material lacks the systematic arrangement, which affects the improvement of EFL learners' intercultural communication competence.

At present, in the majority of English examination papers in Chinese higher vocational colleges, grammar and structure knowledge and reading comprehension tests are the most important, 100 points of which, grammar and structure and reading comprehension test scores are more than 80%. This is contrary to the required examination standards by the communicative approach. Since the syllabus and teaching materials in Chinese higher vocational colleges do not explicitly require cultivating EFL learners' intercultural communication competence, teachers attach great importance to grammar and structure and reading comprehension test based on the outline of the requirements. Furthermore, the tests are much simpler and ignore intercultural background knowledge test, which will make the teacher neglect the cultivation of EFL learners' intercultural communication competence.

The Basic Countermeasures are Necessary for Improving EFL Learners' Intercultural Communication Competence

The English teachers play a vital role in cultivating and improving EFL learners' communication competence. Only teachers with strong intercultural communication competence can effectively cultivate EFL learners' intercultural communication. Teachers without a higher intercultural communication competence and intercultural awareness are bound to lead students to the lack of intercultural communication competence. The teachers' intercultural communication competence can be improved by going abroad for training, attending cultural lectures, theory seminars, academic exchanges and other means to build a high level of intercultural communication levels (GaoYongcheng, 2006) .

A comprehensive reform and innovation for the content of the college English teaching must be carried out to cultivate EFL learners' intercultural communication competence, which is a systematic project, including the teaching philosophy, teaching models, teaching methods, teaching art, teaching evaluation mechanism and so on.

A series of major transformation should be conducted. A teacher-centered, examination-based teaching should be transformed to student-centered and improving EFL learners' intercultural communication competence-based teaching. A reading comprehension-based teaching should be shifted to engage in the actual intercultural communication in listening and speaking. The EFL teachers should take advantages of the computer (network) and educational software. The personalized as well as active learning model should be employed in EFL teaching and learning. The evaluation mechanism should be transformed from the original assessment on grammar, reading comprehension to the evaluation of EFL learners' listening and speaking and using English competence, which gradually shifts the original results of a single evaluation of teaching to the overall monitoring and evaluation of the entire teaching process.

In Chinese higher vocational college English teaching, due to the impact of unified teaching methods, teachers often overlook the cultivation of EFL learners' intercultural communication competence and only focus on teaching EFL learners' English language

points. In order to change this situation, we must improve teaching methods, both quantitative and qualitative aspects of the cultural teaching in class and make full use of modern teaching methods (such as film, projectors, Internet, etc.) to enhance EFL learners' intercultural competence. For example, EFL learners can watch English movies, through which EFL learners can learn authentic English language. Therefore a cross-cultural language and cultural environment can be created, which can help students change long-established ways of thinking by the nation and Chinese cognitive models and make a conscious cultural empathy and cultural identity.

It's very helpful to develop extra-curricular activities to enhance EFL learners' intercultural communication competence. For example: EFL teachers can require EFL students to collect some of the foreign cultural information, such as picture books, magazines, photos, newspapers and then to study the costumes, decorations, hairstyles, etc. of the different peoples, so that they can better understand different cultures, customs, aesthetic standards, and more intuitively understand the foreign art, sculpture, architectural styles and customs. Furthermore, the use of films, televisions and videos can guide students to observe what happens in the English-speaking countries. Then EFL learners can know what people eat, what people wear, what house people live and how people make friends, what festival people have, how people celebrate festivals, as well as people's facial expressions, gestures, etc. Also EFL teachers can allow EFL students to familiarize themselves with the text dialogue, and then students perform role play. In addition, EFL learners can read literatures, which is also a non-neglected element to improve EFL learners' intercultural communication competence.

Conclusion

The study highlights the problems on Chinese vocational college students' intercultural communication competence, which shows the importance and urgency to reform college English teaching. It is necessary EFL teaching quality in the Chinese vocational colleges should be improved and EFL learners' intercultural communication competence should be cultivated. EFL learners' intercultural communication competence can be promoted if the colleges, teachers and students attach great importance to and actively involved in EFL teaching reform.

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Liberalist or Alarmist: Iranian ELT Community's Attitude to Mainstream ELT vs. Critical ELT

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Abstract

In the era of globalization, the worldwide spread of English especially through English Language Teaching (ELT) is known as one of the most controversial issues in the field of applied linguistics. While in this era, the mainstream ELT or so-called the liberalist position publicizes the spread of Center-created methods and materials as well as linguistic and cultural norms and practices and introduces itself as a value-free trend, the emergence of an outstanding critical standpoint known as linguistic imperialism theory, so-called the alarmist position, introducing English spread and the mainstream ELT as inherently problematic phenomena, has led to forming some notable debates and controversies in this arena. Conceiving the importance of this conceptual shift in the field of applied linguistics, this research is an attempt to study the Iranian ELT professionals' and university teachers' attitudes on these two opposing positions to find out to which position the Iranian ELT community tends. To gain insights into this issue, a mixed-method including both qualitative and quantitative methods was designed and conducted. In the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview was conducted with nine ELT professionals and applied linguists. A content analysis of the data gathered in this phase along with the available literature on the topic yielded a 10 item Likert-scale questionnaire seeking ELT professionals' and university teachers' attitudes about the hotly debated opposing beliefs and tenets around the topic. To check the Iranian ELT community's perspective at large, in the second phase a questionnaire survey was conducted on 158 participants. Presenting the findings obtained from both phases, this research attempts to discuss the findings both qualitatively and quantitatively under four categories including (a) methods: nature and function, (b) materials and curriculum development, (c) native vs. nonnative teachers, standards and variations, (d) English, ELT and cultures. The analyses of the data reveal that the Iranian ELT community tends mostly to this critical conceptual shift and linguistic imperialism standpoint carries special weight in Iranian ELT community's perspective.

Keywords: English language teaching, linguistic imperialism, globalization, Iranian context

Introduction

Today, there is no doubt that an unparalleled language, namely English, is encircling the world in such a way that for many the term globalization is crucially linked with the rise of this language (Kumaravadivela, 2009; Pennycook, 2010; Salverda, 2002; Yano, 2004). In this case, the increasing ubiquity of English as a global language, which in Brutt-Griffler's

(2002, p. 182) words," stands in an interesting relation to the field of ELT", has roused many reactions and raised many questions for those active in this field (Yildirim and Okan, 2005).

Certainly, the growing importance and increasing presence of English and its usage as a world language, a global language, a lingua franca or an international language (see Brutt-Griffler, 2002; Crystal, 1997; Jenkins, 2007; McKay, 2002) as well as the huge enthusiasm for learning this language in virtually all societies and its increasing status in educational arena throughout the world have added much weight to its standing.

As a result of this situation, it is obvious that the current status of ELT has led to a number of challenging questions not directly limited to purely pedagogical ideas and issues (Anderson, 2003; McKay, 2002; Zacharias, 2003). In this regard, while firstly the spread of English especially through ELT was considered as a favorable development or as a purely instrumental advantage from Inner Circle countries (where English is generally the L1 including USA and UK) to Outer Circle countries (where English plays an institutional role as a L2 such as India and Singapore) and Expanding Circle countries (where English is learnt as a foreign language like China, Russia and Iran), the advent of some outstanding critical views and theories about the spread of English especially through ELT, as the most systematic way of English spread in the world, has aroused sensitivity, criticism and awareness among scholars, language planners, ELT professionals and applied linguists. In this regard, Anderson (2003) maintains that in 1990s, the publication of Phillipson's *Linguistic Imperialism*, not the first publication to raise the issues it does, but qualitatively seems to have had the most impact, has been the symbolic birth of an ongoing intellectual shift in applied linguistics. While this dominant trend has been introducing the ELT mainstream pedagogy and its Center-produced practices, methods and tenets as the best effective and beneficial trend which helps engender global communication which brings benefits to nation-states as well as individuals, the newly-emerged intellectual shift known as linguistic imperialism theory has attempted to challenge the unquestioned givens of the mainstream ELT pedagogy.

In the process of globalization, as Iranian society has become part of the globalizing and globalized world, on the one hand, with the changing role of English and ELT and with the increasing presence of English in different aspects of the society and on the other hand, with showing huge enthusiasm for learning English as well as with raising awareness and resistance toward the current status of English and ELT in this society which its dominant ideology is known as an anti-imperialistic ideology, certainly, the study of ELT professionals' and university teachers' attitudes on the tenets and claims of these two opposing positions can provide significant insights in any language planning and decision-making. In this respect, the present paper, as part of a broader study, is a contribution to the field in revealing and studying the Iranian ELT community's attitudes on four notable aspects of this controversial issue, namely (a) methods: nature and function, (b) materials and curriculum development, (c) native vs. nonnative teachers, standards and variations, (d) English, ELT and cultures to find out to which position it has much tendency.

The present paper is divided to three major sections. First, the theoretical basis of the study is introduced. Secondly, the methodology of the study including the participants, data collection procedure, data analysis and the results are presented and finally, the findings are discussed.

The Global Spread of English

"For better or worse, by choice or force, English has traveled to many parts of the world and has been used to serve various purposes. This phenomenon has created positive interactions as well as tensions between global and local forces and has had serious linguistic, ideological, sociocultural, political and pedagogical implications" (Sharifian, 2009, p. 1). Such a recent growth in its use and presence in many aspects, its unprecedented expansion, and especially its consequences and implications in some fields of study including applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, etc. have led to calling this language with terms which each one, by and large, reveals, on the one hand, the rise, importance, and the new status of English and on the other hand, shows the inseparable association established between English and globalization.

Reviewing the current status of English as well as the available literature on the topic shows that English seems to work almost everywhere and its presence is obvious in most aspects of the human's life including education, business, diplomacy, communication, media, science, entertainment and the internet. In other words, such expansion reveals that English continues its triumph as a worldwide language.

The Globalization of ELT

Like almost everything else, languages have been affected by the globalization and according to Pennycook (2007) among the languages, it is English which is closely tied to processes of globalization. In other words, the presence of English in formal education systems in different societies is so tangible which for many an equation between 'foreign language' and 'English' is taken for granted (Kubota, 2002). As Altbach (2007) writes, English is the world's most widely studied second language. This gives it a significant advantage in many non-English-speaking countries simply because of the number of speakers and the fact that it is by far the most widely distributed language. There are, for example, more students studying English in China than are studying English in the US, and more speakers of English in India than in Britain.

In such conditions, Shin (2007) observes that the impact of globalization on English education is essentially pervasive in ELT practices in different parts of the world. Wilson (2005) maintains that the globalization of ELT practices involves the spread of similar Center-created teaching methods and materials and the imposition of native speaker linguistic and cultural norms across the world. The proponents of such a globalization believe that the best teaching materials, methods and expertise come from countries in the Inner Circle (Yildirim and Okan, 2005), thus the transfer of pedagogical expertise and personnel from the developed English-speaking countries to other contexts is followed. In this perspective, native or near-native oral competence is a goal and the mainstream pedagogy provided by the Center should be the only source.

Two Opposing Camps of Thought

As noted, the appearance of a conceptual shift known as linguistic imperialism in the field of applied linguistics has seriously challenged the mainstream ELT. From a broader perspective, as a working definition, Phillipson (1992) regards English linguistic imperialism as "the dominance of English which is asserted and maintained by the

establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages "(p. 47).

In this sense, Phillipson introduces English linguistic imperialism as a sub-type of linguisticism. He defines linguisticism as "the ideologies and structures where language is the means for effecting and maintaining an unequal allocation of power and resources" (p. 55). Phillipson believes that there is no reason to restrict linguisticism to matters of ideology alone, thus he tries to shed light on the relationship between ELT and imperialism. Concerning the scope of such imperialism, he states that it operates globally as a key medium of Center-Periphery relations (p. 56) and in such relations, most of the benefits and spin-offs accrue to the Center, while the Periphery remains in a dependent situation (p. 57). In this regard, concerning the relationship between ELT and linguistic imperialism which involves the central theme of his famous work, Phillipson attempts to crucially challenge some key tenets and principles of the mainstream ELT including monolingual tenet, native speaker tenet, early start tenet, maximum exposure tenet, etc., which were accompanied and reinforced by some new critical ideas from his proponents.

Crystal's *English as a Global Language* (1997) took a position in contrast with Phillipson's. Contrary to him, Crystal contributes much of the success of this language to having "repeatedly found itself in the right place at the right time" (p.110). In more accurate words, Crystal attributes the spread of English to luck (Hellinger, 2005). In fact, while Phillipson (1992) regards English as a threat to other languages and cultures throughout the world, Crystal (1997) appears optimistic and even characterizes this situation as one of opportunity and regards English as a neutral and beneficial tool for global understanding.

Reviewing the happenings in this field reveals that the presence of these two conflicting theoretical camps has led to creating a continuum of theories and stances which each one has gained some weight in this arena. In this newly-emerged critical conceptual shift known as the alarmist position, Phillipson (1992 and 2009) and other theorists and scholars including Canagarajah (1999), Kelly Hall and Eggington (2000) and Pennycook (1994, 1998 and 2001) maintain that the global spread of English especially through the current English teaching policy is more or less a direct continuation of the imperialist or hegemonic practices. What these views and theories has in common as Anderson (2003) asserts, is this belief that the global spread of English is inherently problematic, related to wider political and ideological issues; and most importantly, ELT practices are neither value-free nor always culturally, socially and pedagogically appropriate.

In contrast, the mainstream ELT or so-called the liberalist position emphasizes that ELT in its mainstream is a tool for global understanding. In their views, English as a neutral vehicle for communication is a functional tool for pragmatic purposes and does not carry cultural, political and ideological baggage. In this regard, Wardhaugh (1987) maintains that since no requirements are tied to the learning of English, it belongs to everyone or no one. In his terms, "no cultural value tied to learning of English and it is tied to no particular social, political, economic or religious system, or to a specific racial or cultural group (p.15). Seaton (1997) introduces "English as a neutral means for global communication"(p. 361). Crystal (1997) characterizes this situation as one of opportunity and regards English as a neutral and beneficial tool for global understanding.

Specifically, regarding the ELT, this position has been introducing native speakers as the ideal language teachers (Beardmore, 1993; Genesee, 1987). According to Anderson (2003), as noted, in the mainstream professional-academic discourse of ELT, there are certain unquestioned givens which have been produced and reproduced by academics,

institutions, publishing companies as well as teachers. In his words, according to these givens the best teaching methods, materials and expertise originate from institutions in Inner-Circle and these institutions and their personnel should therefore help the development and running of English language curricula and programs globally. Moreover, the ideal teacher is the English native speaker from English speaking countries. In this regard, one of the important tenets used in Commonwealth conference on the Teaching of English as a second language held in Makerere, in 1961 and has repeatedly produced and reproduced by mostly Center academics and publishing companies is "the ideal teacher of English is a native speaker"(cited in Phillipson, 1992). Thus, the presence of teachers, academics, curriculum developers, institutions such as the British Council, and publishers in the teaching of English globally is part of a mutually beneficial transaction between Core and Periphery. These givens as some of the most important tenets of the mainstream ELT are those which have been criticized, challenged and problematized by linguistic imperialism theory during the recent years.

Having provided a brief review of the relevant literature, here the context in which this study was conducted is introduced. Then, the findings are presented. As mentioned, this study was designed to explore the attitudes and tendencies of Iranian ELT community to the claims and tenets of these the two opposing stances. In this respect, it is believed that the present study contributes to ELT profession by revealing the attitudes of Iranian ELT community about the conflicting issues of methods, materials, curriculum development as well as native speaker norms and cultural aspects of English and ELT. The results of this study are believed to suggest important implications for ELT in Iran in terms of development of language teaching methods, materials, curriculum development, etc.

Methodology

The methodology applied in this research was mixed-method including both qualitative and quantitative methods and among the current typological approaches in mixed methods, QUALITATIVE → QUANTITATIVE was used. It is worth mentioning that regarding this procedure, Dörnyei (2007) considers it as a frequently recommended procedure for designing a new questionnaire which involves conducting a small-scale explanatory qualitative study first to provide background information on the context, to identify and narrow down the focus of the possible variables and to act as a valuable source of ideas for preparing the item pool for the purpose of questionnaire scale construction. So, to follow this procedure, in the first phase, we used a qualitative method, i.e. conducting interview, to richly describe Iranian ELT professionals' attitudes toward some notable controversies and claims around the ELT norms and practices such as methods, materials, nativity and cultural aspects. In the second phase, we utilized a quantitative method, i.e. questionnaire administration, in order to identify and examine ELT professionals' attitudes among the population. As a matter of fact, the qualitative findings not only were used in preparing the questionnaire, but were used to assist in explaining and interpreting the results of the quantitative study and give additional insights into the issue.

Qualitative Part

The strategy of inquiry used in the qualitative part was interview. To get their attitudes, the participants took part in a face-to-face semi-structured interview with one of

the researchers. As Dörnyei (2007) regards, this type offers a compromise between structured and unstructured interviews. In his words, although there is a set of pre-prepared guiding questions and prompts, the format is open-ended and the interviewee is encouraged to elaborate on the issues raised in an explanatory manner.

The sampling method in this phase of study was that of criterion-based selection. In this form of sampling, as LeCompte and Preissle (1993) note, the researcher creates a list of attributes essential to the study and then seeks out participants to match the criteria. Our criteria were as follows: a) Ph.D. in TEFL or linguistics, b) Having English teaching experience, c) Having ideas or having published work on the topic. According to these criteria, nine ELT professionals meeting the needed criteria participated in this phase which their characteristics were as following:

Table 1
Participants' Characteristics

| <i>participants</i> | <i>degree/major</i> | <i>gender</i> | <i>levels of teaching experience</i> | <i>Interest(s)</i> |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|--------------------------------------|---|
| A | PhD/ Linguistics | male | BA/ MA/ PhD | discourse analysis |
| B | PhD/ Linguistics | male | BA/ MA/ PhD | discourse analysis/ applied linguistics |
| C | PhD/ TEFL | male | BA/ MA | materials development |
| D | PhD/TEFL | female | BA/ MA | sociolinguistics/ methodology |
| E | PhD/TEFL | male | BA/ MA/ PhD | teacher education/ methodology/ critical pedagogy |
| F | PhD/TEFL | male | BA/ MA | methodology |
| G | PhD/ TEFL | male | BA/ MA | sociolinguistics / methodology |
| H | PhD/ Linguistics | male | BA/ MA | sociolinguistics |
| I | PhD/ TEFL | male | BA/ MA | teacher education / methodology |

For the interview phase of the work an interview protocol was created by the researchers. The schedule was a set of open-ended questions and a range of topics and issues to be covered (see Appendix 1). Here, it is worth noting that after reviewing the available literature on this issue, some of the main areas of controversy including methods, materials and curriculum development, issues on nativity and the cultural aspects of English and ELT were extracted to be specifically included in the interviews. As noted, they were semi-structured interviews, thus in every interview, some new questions were raised. Then, some appointments were made with the participants of the study. The interviews were conducted by one of the researchers. The shortest interview took about 40

minutes and the longest one was about 90 minutes. The language of the interview was Persian. They were recorded by an MP4 player with the permission of the participants and then they were transcribed by the interviewer.

Data Analysis

The data gathered in this phase were used both in both preparing and enriching the questionnaire, in explaining and interpreting the results of the quantitative study and giving additional insights into the issues. In this phase, content analysis was used which yielded the items regarding the ELT professionals' attitudes toward ELT with specific reference to the Iranian context.

Quantitative Part

The participants of the second phase of study were 158 ELT professionals and university teachers throughout the country. The following table presents their characteristics in more details:

Table 2
Participants' Characteristics

| <i>features</i> | <i>N= 158</i> | <i>percentage</i> |
|------------------------------|---------------|-------------------|
| Gender | N= 154 | |
| Male | 90 | 58.4 % |
| Female | 64 | 41.6 % |
| Educational qualifications | N= 158 | |
| MA | 104 | 65.9 % |
| Ph.D. student | 31 | 19.6 % |
| Ph.D. | 23 | 14.5 % |
| Major | N= 158 | |
| TEFL | 113 | 71.5 % |
| Linguistics | 22 | 13.9 % |
| Translation | 19 | 12 % |
| Literature | 4 | 2.5 % |
| Age | N= 150 | |
| 24-35 | 116 | 77.3 % |
| 36-45 | 22 | 14.6 % |
| 46-55 | 10 | 6.6 % |
| 55- -- | 2 | 1.3 % |
| Years of teaching experience | N= 154 | |
| 1-5 | 70 | 45.4 % |
| 6-10 | 33 | 21.4 % |
| 11-20 | 36 | 23.3 % |
| 21-30 | 12 | 7.8 % |
| 31- -- | 3 | 1.9 % |

Based on the data gathered in the first phase and the findings found from the literature in this field, a Likert-scale questionnaire was prepared by the researchers included 10 statements (see Appendix 2). Of them, 5 were related to the principles and tenets of the alarmist camp of thought and 5 were about the ideas and principles of the liberalist camp of thought. It is worth noting that these 10 statements were prepared on the basis of four categories including the nature and function of methods, the nature and features of materials and curriculum development, native vs. nonnative teachers, standards and variations and English, ELT and culture. It is worth noting that before its actual administration, it was studied and revised repeatedly, and then for the purpose of content and linguistic validity, it was piloted with 20 university teachers having the given criteria. The responses to the questionnaire in pilot stage were fed into SPSS to analyze its reliability. The reliability coefficients were calculated repeatedly for each part. Employing Cronbach alpha, it turned out that an alpha coefficient of 0.82 was found for the alarmist position's statements (No. 2, 4, 8, 9, 10) and 0.84 for the liberalist position's statements (No. 1, 3, 5, 6, 7). In addition, on the basis of the feedbacks obtained, some modifications were done and in this stage the questionnaire was finalized.

Procedure

A total of 392 questionnaires were administered through face-to-face contact or email by the researchers themselves. Of the 201 questionnaires that were administered through face-to-face contact, 111 were filled out and of the 192 questionnaires that were emailed, 47 were returned. Thus, the response rates to them were 55.5 % and 24.6 % respectively. In each one, namely the paper version and the electronic one, the purpose of the study and a request for participants were stated. The data were collected over an 8-week period.

The Analyses of the Findings

The results of the interviews and the questionnaire can be classified and analyzed under four categories: 1) ELT methods: nature and functions, 2) materials and curriculum development, 3) native vs. nonnative teachers, standards and varieties, 4) English, ELT and cultures.

After providing the findings obtained from two phases, the researchers tried to present and interpret the data obtained through the questionnaires. It is worth noting that to gain more insights on the topic, the relevant ideas presented by the interviewees participated in the first phase of the study are also provided. Then the results are discussed. The discussion is structured around the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study, integrating the findings of each section to create a more interconnected whole. Certainly, using the data from the both sources of inquiry enables us to organize the findings more appropriately and comprehensively.

ELT Methods: Nature and Functions

Along with some pedagogical causes which have challenged the concept and position of methods in the recent years, the linguistic imperialism theory is one of the most notable approaches which has seriously questioned the concept of methods. While the

mainstream pedagogy advocates the Center-created methods and introduces them as some neutral and value-free instruments of language teaching, these notions and beliefs have seriously been challenged by critical linguists including Canagarajah (1999), Holliday (2005), Pennycook (1994 and 1998) and Tollefson (1995).

In this regard, to check the attitude of Iranian ELT professionals, two questions were proposed and the results are presented in table 3.

Table 3
Center-produced Methods as the Best

| | | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 1- Best teaching methods come from the native English speaking countries. <i>(liberalist)</i> | <i>N</i> | 13 | 19 | 43 | 57 | 26 |
| | | Agree | | Undecided | Disagree | |
| | <i>N</i> | 32 | | 43 | 83 | |
| | <i>%</i> | 20.2 % | | 27.2 % | 52.5 % | |

Concerning this question which involves an important given in the field of ELT, namely the best teaching methods come from countries in the Inner-Circle, the findings indicate that only 20.2 % of the respondents agree on the issue and 52.5 % disagree. Regarding the second question which is related to the notion of methods from the linguistic imperialism point of view, the findings show that 70.2 % of the respondents agree with this position. In other words, they do not see methods as neutral and value-free instruments of language teaching.

Table 4
Methods as Non- neutral Cultural Construct

| | | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 2- Methods are not value-free, but cultural constructs. <i>(alarmist)</i> | <i>N</i> | 29 | 82 | 31 | 13 | 3 |
| | | Agree | | Undecided | Disagree | |
| | <i>N</i> | 111 | | 31 | 16 | |
| | <i>%</i> | 70.2 % | | 19.6 % | 10.1 % | |

As shown, the main ideas and opinions of the interviewees are presented in table 5.

Table 5
The Interviewees' Opinions on Methods

| Participants | ELT Methods: Nature & Function |
|--------------|---|
| A | -Methods should not be seen as mere pedagogical tools in language learning. They are cultural constructs which are produced in the social and cultural atmosphere of the West and are prescribed to others. - So far, we have been only the consumers of their methods... we have this ability to be producers. |
| B | -Certainly methods are culturally, socially, and ideologically loaded. It is not deniable.....teachers should make sound decisions to be appropriate to the Iranian context. |
| C | -Methods are prescriptive, produced in the Center, but not appropriate to every situation. For example, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), it emphasizes oral skills and group work. Now I ask this question: can it be appropriate for the Iranian educational system? - We must not confine ourselves to the current methods, it is necessary to face them critically. |
| D | - For the present we have only the consumers of their methods and materials, but we can be more active in this part and even be producer. |
| E | -Methods should be studied in the history of methodology. We are living in the postmethod era. Confining ourselves to methods is absolutely wrong. |
| F | - It is not possible to reject them easily. We should apply the most appropriate and suitable ones according to our conditions. |
| G | - We should not restrict ourselves to their methods. For instance, I have proposed "ETS" (English Teaching Simulator) method as an innovative method applicable in Iranian context. |
| H | -We should follow the appropriate methods according to our needs and conditions. We can modify them. We should not accept them unquestioningly. |
| I | - I agree with you. They are culturally loaded. They are not correspondent to any situation. |

These findings corresponded to the findings from the quantitative phase of study. All of participants, in spite of their different and even quite opposing views toward some issues in question, firstly did not see the current methods as the neutral and value-free instruments of ELT and secondly did not look at the mainstream methods which are produced in the English-speaking countries or the Inner-circle countries as the best

methods. In other words, all of them maintained that we should not limit ourselves to the current methods.

Materials and Curriculum Development

One of the givens of mainstream pedagogy refers to the belief that the best materials come from the Inner-Circle countries (Anderson, 2003). Pennycook (1994) introduces ELT materials as an enormous business worth vast some of money and Alptekin (2002), Canagarajah (1999), Gray (2002) McKay (2003) and Pennycook (2001) challenge the cultural and social and even pedagogical content of the Center-created materials. In this regard, Gray (2002), maintaining that one effect of globalization is the imposition of center materials on the periphery, reveals the "inclusivity" and "inappropriacy" of the global ELT course books widespread through the world.

Along with Canagarajah (1992) who raises serious questions about the relevance and appropriation of the teaching materials developed by the Anglo-American communities for periphery context, others including Pennycook (1994), Holliday (2005) and McKay (2003) believe that the involvement of the ELT professionals of the periphery in developing the ELT materials and textbooks is essential.

According to Anderson (2003), one of the important claims in the mainstream pedagogy is the transfer of the professionals and curriculum developers from the Center to the Periphery. But Toh (2003) asserts that the transfer of pedagogic expertise and personnel from the developed English speaking countries to other contexts is highly problematic especially, as Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994), and Canagarajah (1999) maintain when it comes under the banner of "technical assistance". In this regard, they raise serious questions about the role of English speaking countries' institutions like the British Council. For instance, Phillipson (1992) offers a serious critique of the activities of Western cultural organizations including British Council and United States Information Agency in the periphery.

Thus, to check the Iranian ELT professionals' attitude toward such issues, three questions were proposed and their findings shown in tables 6-8 indicate that 35.4 % of the ELT professionals agree and 45.5 % do not agree on this topic.

Table 6

Center-produced materials and Curriculums as the best

| | | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|----------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 3- Teaching materials developed in native English speaking countries are the best materials for EFL learners including Iranian learners. <i>(liberalist)</i> | <i>N</i> | 11 | 45 | 30 | 55 | 17 |
| | | Agree | | Undecided | Disagree | |
| | <i>N</i> | 56 | | 30 | 72 | |
| | <i>%</i> | 35.4 % | | 18.9 % | 45.5 % | |

This finding is supported by the results of another question which 91% of Iranian ELT community support the involvement of Iranian ELT professionals in preparing and developing the materials and textbooks.

Table 7
Periphery's Involvement in Materials Development

| 4- The involvement of Iranian ELT professionals in preparing and developing materials and textbooks is necessary. | | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|----------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| | <i>N</i> | 84 | 60 | 4 | 7 | 3 |
| <i>(alarmist)</i> | | Agree | | Undecided | Disagree | |
| | <i>N</i> | 144 | | 4 | 10 | |
| | <i>%</i> | 91.1 % | | 2.5 % | 6.3 % | |

As table shows, 91% maintain that the Iranian ELT professionals and material developers should be involved in preparing the ELT materials.

Table 8
Center's Involvement in Curriculum Development

| 5- The development and managing of English language curricula and programs should be done by native countries. | | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| | <i>N</i> | 15 | 30 | 38 | 58 | 17 |
| <i>(liberalist)</i> | | Agree | | Undecided | Disagree | |
| | <i>N</i> | 45 | | 38 | 75 | |
| | <i>%</i> | 28.4 % | | 24 % | 47.4 % | |

As table shows, 28.4 % agree on the issue and 47.4 % do not. In the following table, the main ideas and opinions of the interviewees on this issue are presented:

Table 9
The interviewees' opinions on materials & curriculum development

| <i>Participants</i> | <i>Material and Curriculum Development</i> |
|---------------------|---|
| A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unfortunately, issues like syllabus design, curriculum and material development are neglected in our educational system. As long as this situation exists, we are only the consumers of their biased products. - The books written by the Iranian writers are really disastrous. They are invalid. They have been provided through "cut & paste". Not attractive, not effective. |
| B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is necessary to engage in materials development. We should face the inner- circle produced materials critically. |
| C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing our curriculum should be done by us in accordance with our social and cultural conditions. - our materials and curriculum as well as methods should be adopted and developed on the basis of our needs, goals and our social and cultural features. - We can and we should localize English. Localizing English may begin through materials. Here, we should attend to ethical, cultural and local values. |
| D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Materials and textbooks, even those are prepared for international use, reflect the cultural aspects and values of the providers; the values which do not correspond to our cultural values and they have really negative effects. - We should develop our materials in accordance with our culture and values. Through this trend we are able to present our values. In other words we can localize English. |
| E | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is necessary. We have such potential to develop our materials. In this part, we should localize English as soon as possible. - But, writing bad or insufficient books is more harmful than using center-produced ones. - Our national interests depend on localizing English and to achieve it the first step is to localize the materials. |
| F | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Our involvement in material development is essentially necessary. Sadly, paying much attention to some theoretical aspects of ELT has been detained us from some applied or practical issues like material development. |
| G | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Materials should be developed in Iran, but through a scientific and systematic way. - According to our goals and needs, English should be localized and its first step is localizing the materials. |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Cont. Table 9 | |
| H | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Certainly, they represent their values. But we should be familiar with their values and culture. - Regarding materials development, it is demanding, but it seems necessary to localize them. |
| I | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is necessary to revise the current situation. Concerning the material development we have two choices. Providing them ourselves and it is really difficult because the lack of experienced professionals in this part is obvious and inviting the significant materials developers like Jack C. Richard to develop some books on the basis of our needs, conditions and our cultural, social, historical and geographical features. - We must review and rectify the current syllabuses. We should localize them. |

Reviewing the ideas presented in table 9 showed that all of the interviewees, despite their different attitudes and experiences, believed that, first of all, the materials produced in the Inner-circle were not the best ones, then, the involvement of the Iranian ELT professionals in materials and curriculum development was essential.

Native vs. Nonnative Teachers, Standards and Varieties

While the mainstream pedagogy advocates that the ideal teacher is the English "native speaker" and the educational institutions would benefit from employing such teachers and teaching professionals, Phillipson (1992) names this idea as "native speaker fallacy" which in Canagarajah's (1999) words, monopolizes the ELT teaching jobs in the periphery and Pennycook (1994) introduces it as one important aspect of the cultural and economic politics of ELT, which forms an integral part of the industrialization of ELT.

In addition, the mainstream pedagogy strongly insists on native speaker standards especially in pronunciation, while the critical linguists including Phillipson (1992), Brutt-Griffler (2002), Rajagopalan (2004), and Holliday (2005) challenge this notion. Rajagopalan (2004) clearly asserts that English in its current status or as he calls it "World English" cannot be restricted to the native-speaker standards. Moreover, Brutt-Griffler (2002) notes that different varieties of English should not be ignored in ELT. With respect to this issue, three questions were included in the questionnaire. The findings indicate that only 17.7 % agree with "native speaker tenet" and 63.2 % disagree.

Table 10
Native speaker tenet

| | | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|---|----------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 6- The ideal teacher is the English native speaker from one of the English speaking countries. <i>(liberalist)</i> | <i>N</i> | 11 | 17 | 30 | 70 | 30 |
| | | Agree | | Undecided | Disagree | |
| | <i>N</i> | 28 | | 30 | 100 | |
| | <i>%</i> | 17.7 % | | 18.9 % | 63.2 % | |

Concerning the second question which deals with the American and British standards, the results show a tendency toward the mainstream pedagogy:

Table 11
Standard Pronunciation

| | | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 7- British and American native speaker standards especially in pronunciation should be the only standards of ELT in Iran. <i>(liberalist)</i> | <i>N</i> | 29 | 63 | 27 | 32 | 7 |
| | | Agree | | Undecided | Disagree | |
| | <i>N</i> | 92 | | 27 | 39 | |
| | <i>%</i> | 58.2 % | | 17.1 % | 24.6 % | |

As shown, 58.1 % of the respondents believe that the British and American native speaker standards should be the only standards in ELT in our society.

For the third question regarding the varieties of English, 44.8 % believe that English varieties should not be taught in education and only 34 % maintain that they should be taught in ELT.

Table 12
World Englishes

| | | | | | | |
|---|----------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 8- Different varieties of English like Indian English, Pakistani English, Singaporean English and numerous others should be considered and taught in Iran. <i>(alarmist)</i> | | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
| | <i>N</i> | 15 | 39 | 33 | 48 | 23 |
| | | Agree | | Undecided | Disagree | |
| | <i>N</i> | 54 | | 33 | 71 | |
| | <i>%</i> | 34.1% | | 20.8 % | 44.9 % | |

Findings acquired from the interviews are as following:

Table 13
The Interviewees' Opinions on Nateness

| <i>Participants</i> | <i>Native vs. Nonnative Teachers, Standards & Varieties</i> |
|---------------------|---|
| A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It has been proven that non-native teachers are mostly better and efficient than natives. It has been a conscious plan conducted by some organizations like British Council to introduce their ideal teachers to other societies. - It is not necessary to stress only British and American pronunciation, but we should follow some standards. |
| B | -Today, concerning the Kachru's model, the number of non-native-English speakers is more than the natives, so English as an international language should not be confined to specific standards of the natives. "Intelligibility" is more important than "native-ness" or "near native-ness". |
| C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There are some fallacies and "native speaker" is one of them. Even I say that there is no consensus around the meaning of native speaker. We should have a critical view toward such notions. - The superiority of native speaker teachers is an aspect of linguistic imperialism. - Paying much attention to American or British pronunciation is wrong. |

| Cont. Table 13 | |
|----------------|--|
| D | <p>-Certainly, teaching these norms should not be the same for everyone. We should see the needs of the learners. For a student majoring English or for EFL teacher trainees, teaching American and British pronunciation is necessary, but for groups like businessmen or tourists, it is not necessary to insist on these standards.</p> <p>- Paying attention to, for example, "RP" (received pronunciation) is wasting time and money.</p> |
| E | <p>- I strongly insist that in "production" we should only use American and British pronunciation, because they have the most intelligibility, but in "reception" we should be familiar with other varieties like Indian English.</p> <p>- Native speaker superiority is a fallacy.</p> |
| F | <p>- Certainly the American and British English are more preferable.</p> <p>- Personally, I do not believe that native teachers are better than non-natives.</p> |
| G | <p>- English should not be taught as a foreign language. It should be taught as an international language. Today English has turned to an international language in the world and in this situation we should follow the international norms not solely its American or British forms.</p> |
| H | <p>- We should follow American or British. Because they are known as global norms. In addition, we cannot teach all varieties of English, we should teach the ones which are the norms.</p> <p>- At the same time our familiarity with other varieties is good.</p> |
| I | <p>- "Native teacher" is a fallacy. It is proven that a native speaker does not have the enough requirements.</p> <p>- In production we should follow the most intelligible ones, British or American, but we should not emphasize them enthusiastically. In reception we should attend all common forms.</p> |

The findings related to the first question in this category showed that all the interviewees maintained that the ideal teacher could not be a native speaker from the Inner-circle countries. In other words, respecting this question, the findings from both phases were corresponding.

Regarding the second question, while the interviewees B, C and D maintained that the British and American native standards should not be the only standards, the interviewees A, E, F, G and I maintained that, especially in "production", only such standards should be followed. In this part, the interviewees C and D clearly asserted that the needs analysis of the learners should be the main criterion. For example, the interviewee D asserted that those standards should be observed and followed by English trainers and teachers but not necessary to be observed by those like businessmen who learn English for some professional purposes.

The findings from the third question in the qualitative phase tend partially to the liberalist camp. While the interviewees B, C and E maintained that we should be familiar with other varieties and B and C even maintained that they should be taught in our educational system, A, E and H strongly maintained that in "production", it is necessary to teach and learn only the American and British standards and in "reception" being familiar with other varieties might be useful. Of course, D and G, who did not agree with teaching other varieties and mostly tended to English as an international language (EIL), maintained that teaching English as an international language could be a solution to this controversy.

English, ELT and Cultures

One of the most controversial facets of globalization in ELT is the relationship between this language and culture. In this regard, Wilson (2005) states that cultural homogenization or in many cases Americanization, is a controversial aspect of globalization in ELT. While Crystal (1997) clearly asserts that different cultures throughout the world can exist along with the global spread of English, the scholars belonging to the linguistic imperialism camp of thought including Phillipson (1992), Pennycook (1994, 2001 and 2007), Tsuda (1994), Aleptekin (2002) and Canagarajah (1999) maintain that the spread of English threatens different cultures in the world. Alptekin (2002) believes that ELT is "enculturation" in which the learner acquires new cultural frames of reference and a new worldview, reflecting those of the target language culture and its speakers. Pennycook (2001) maintains that education in general and ELT in particular cannot be considered as culturally neutral activities. Canagarajah (1999) demonstrates the cultural load of ELT practices developed in the Center. In this regard, he maintains that English spread especially through ELT strengthens the cultural hegemony of the Center. Pennycook (2007) introduces the impact of English culture so great that clearly asserts that we must rethink the relationship between English, pedagogy and culture within the contemporary world. Dua (1994) writes that the USA looks at the promotion of English as one of its objectives of cultural policy. In his words, the developing countries are responsible for the expansion of English and ELT through depending on the UK and the USA for financial assistance and planning expertise and the failure to take any independent decisions related to language planning. He believes that this unequal relationship with the developed nations has made the developing nations accept cultural and educational dependency as part of their existence and reality.

Thus, to check the Iranian ELT professionals' attitudes toward this important issue, two questions were prepared.

Table 14
English and ELT Threat to Persian Culture

| | | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 9-English and ELT can constitute a threat to the Persian culture. <i>(alarmist)</i> | <i>N</i> | 3 | 13 | 25 | 64 | 53 |
| | | Agree | | Undecided | Disagree | |
| | <i>N</i> | 16 | | 25 | 117 | |
| | <i>%</i> | 10.1 % | | 15.8 % | 74.1 % | |

Looking at the results reveal that only 10.1 % of the respondents agree that English and ELT can threaten the Persian culture and 74.1 % disagree. Regarding the other question, the results seem different:

Table 15
The Expansion of Center's Cultural Influence Through English and ELT

| | | Strongly agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly disagree |
|--|----------|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| 10- ELT and the spread of English play a key role in the expansion of cultural influence of English speaking countries especially US. <i>(alarmist)</i> | <i>N</i> | 17 | 77 | 24 | 32 | 8 |
| | | Agree | | Undecided | Disagree | |
| | <i>N</i> | 94 | | 24 | 40 | |
| | <i>%</i> | 59.5 % | | 15.1 % | 25.3 % | |

As it is seen in this question, 59.5 % of the respondents agree that the spread of English and ELT plays a key role in the expansion of cultural influences of the Center. Referring to the ideas presented in the interviews might be enlightening:

Table 16
The Interviewees' Opinions on English, ELT and Culture

| <i>Participants</i> | <i>English, ELT and Cultures</i> |
|---------------------|--|
| A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English has not been deculturalized. So, it is mostly a tool for Anglo-American civilization to manifest itself. - We should increase our cultural sensitivities or cultural awareness to be immune against English cultural threats. |
| B | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "Critical awareness" is a necessity. It should be penetrated and spread in every aspect of our lives, decisions, and thoughts. In such a condition, we can stand against the cultural threats of English. |
| C | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language and culture are interwoven and English is not an exception. Facing its cultural elements and effects, first of all we should increase our cultural awareness. - They have spread English to spread their political and cultural dominance. - We can localize English. Learning English should be different from Americanization. |
| D | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Its cultural influence is not deniable. Currently only we hide its effects like sweeping trash under the carpet! |
| E | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Different aspects of ELT can threaten our culture.....for example, English institutes.....I strongly assert that they are the most important symbols of linguistic and cultural imperialism in our society. |
| F | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Learning any language involves paying some costs. To learn English we should pay them. Every society pays them, - I cannot deny its effects. But they are not so problematic. There are some tools including media which are more dangerous. |
| G | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The signs of cultural assaults of the West have been completely evident in ELT. - Undoubtedly, ELT has affected our culture. Its signs are now evident. For example, we can see its signs at the private sector. |
| H | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language is not devoid of culture and ideology. - English spread has been more harmful to cultures than languages. - Today, the western culture is interwoven with English. Its spread has not been limited to language, but its culture. - It is necessary to say that knowing western culture is different from following it. Moreover, some aspects of this culture including endeavor, perseverance and creativity are admirable. |

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Cont. Table 16 | |
| I | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - English is filled with western culture; its culture is not independent of English. - Its culture is really affecting us, for example, the private sector does not teach English, but culture. The situation is really unsettled. - Its effects is global. I maintain that the best way to resist against its culture is to strengthen Persian culture. |

Reviewing the ideas obtained from the interviews revealed that all of them maintained that there were different and even opposing cultural differences between the Iranian culture and the Inner-circle's culture. Facing these findings, it was revealed that on the cultural influences of English and ELT on other cultures including Persian there was not any correspondence between two phases of the study. While the entire interviewees saw the English as a threat to cultures throughout the world and agreed on its tie with the Western culture, the participants in the second phase of study mostly tended to the liberalist position. Thus in the following section, its probable causes will be discussed.

Discussion and Conclusion

This study as an attempt to reveal and investigate the attitudes of Iranian ELT community on the current status of ELT in the globalizing world was conducted to fill the obvious gap of studies in this important scope. To do it, we tried to deal with this issue through a mixed-method study and its findings were presented in the former section. Here, to deal with the findings to the point and to present a vivid picture of the Iranian perspective on this issue, the researchers try to discuss and survey the causes.

Undoubtedly, the important position of methods in ELT profession is obvious. As Richards and Renandya (2002) write, for much of the twenty century a primary concern of the language teaching profession was to find more effective methods of language teaching. In addition, the great enthusiasm for Center-produced methods especially in the Periphery has been evident in recent decades (Brown, 2002).

Justifying the respondents' critical views toward the methods, the researchers believe that the explanations of the interviewee E may be really revealing. Borrowing Kumaravadivelu's term, he introduced the present time as the "postmethod era", which the attention has shifted from methods to language teaching pedagogy. It seems that the Iranian ELT society, at least at higher levels, is experiencing such a transition. To deal with this shift, certainly reviewing the possible causes of method demise and its corresponding with our conditions is necessary. Enumerating the possible causes of method demise, Brown (ibid.) classifies them in four cases as follows: (a) being prescriptive, (b) being quite distinctive at the early and indistinguishable from each other at later stages, (c) not being empirically tested by scientific and empirical validation, and (d) being quasi-political and mercenary agendas of the Center and the vehicles of linguistic imperialism targeting the disempowered Periphery.

The analysis of the opinions presented in the interviews revealed that the above-mentioned causes have been noted more or less by the interviewees. In a more precise word, their cultural loads, insufficiencies, prescriptiveness, etc. were among the causes mentioned by them. We can say that they did not see the insufficiency of the methods in a

same way, but among the causes, methods' cultural loads and lack of correspondence to our setting, needs and goals had been the main causes. The common point in their opinions was that the Center methods could not be necessarily the best ones, and it is necessary to deal with the needs, goals as well as our social and cultural conditions. Of course, their teaching experiences and probably the challenges or inadequate results they had experienced, should not be ignored, too.

In fact, facing these findings we can conclude that Canagarajah's(2002) words in periphery the raise of questions about the cultural relevance and appropriateness of the methods is true for the Iranian society as a periphery communities.

Regarding the second category which dealt with the materials and curriculum development, seeing the results which were clearly in line with the critical attitudes on the topic, the researchers tried to deal with its causes. In this part, certainly the opinions presented by the interviewees in the qualitative phase were really revealing. Their main reasons in rejecting this claim of the mainstream pedagogy were the lack of relevance and appropriateness of the Center-produced materials. Almost all of them questioned the cultural and social aspects of those materials. In their views, while such materials are mostly publicized as those appropriate for international use, they are really Center-oriented. In other words, they do not meet the basic requirements of appropriate materials. In this part, the cultural and social differences between the Iranian and the Western society may play an essential role.

It is really noticeable that all of them maintained that our involvement in materials development was necessary. From their opinions, we should not be the mere consumers of their products and we should be the producers of our materials. Their focus on cultural and social inappropriateness of Center-produced materials was remarkable and it could be a warning for our language planners. For example, the interviewee D whose ideas were, in her words, moderate clearly called for a reengineering in this area. In her words, this area can be the first step in localizing English.

Equally worthy of mention is that, in spite of their objection against the Center-produced materials, almost all of them believed that the materials developed so far in our country could not meet our needs and goals at all. Of course, they agreed that, at least at the moment, we could produce our needs ourselves.

Concerning the curriculum development, the researchers faced similar results. In other words, the interviewees were unanimous that we had such ability to develop our curricula in accordance with our social and cultural conditions, needs and goals. In this regard, it was interesting that the interviewee E, clearly criticizing the presence of some curriculum developers in some well-known English language institutes in cities like Tehran, warned us of the threats of such an event.

Undoubtedly, causes including their personal teaching experiences (like A, C, F & D), their studies or expertise in materials development (like C, D, E & G) and their cultural awareness or sensitivities (like B, E & I) have been determinative.

All in all, the findings from the first phase of study correspond to the findings obtained from the second phase of study. In other words, respecting the nature and functions of material and curriculum development, the Iranian ELT community strongly tends to the linguistic imperialism front.

In this regard, it seems that Canagarajah's (2002) belief that "although global coursework are designed for the teaching of English language, they are also highly wrought

cultural constructs and carriers of cultural messages" (p. 151) is believed by the Iranian ELT community.

Concerning the third category, namely native vs. nonnative issues which included three statements, while we saw that regarding the first one, the Iranian ELT community strongly tended to the critical standpoint, with respect to the two other statements the consensus was not as significant as the first one. Facing this situation, the researchers tried to find its causes. In their opinion, being non-native teachers themselves might be an important reason for their tendencies toward the superiority of non-native teachers. Moreover, their experiences can be introduced as another reason. For instance, the interviewee C, providing his experiences in teaching English in two foreign countries in Asia and Europe, tried to show the feebleness of this current idea belonging to the liberalist camp of thought. Four others, namely A, E, G and I clearly called this liberalist tenet as "native speaker fallacy".

Regarding the second and third questions, the researchers think that the expertise and interests of interviewees E, G and I, namely "teacher education" can be the main reason for their native-based view. Of course, the proficiency of the interviewees might affect their views, too.

In fact, findings from this phase of study as well as the quantitative phase indicate that for the Iranian ELT community, the Inner-circle standards in pronunciation as well as the Standard English sound very important. Seemingly, on the one hand, such a tendency can be partly attributed to the position of English in Iranian society as a foreign language (EFL) (see Shirazizadeh and Momenian, 2009) and on the other hand, might be related to this fact that some concepts including World Englishes, English as a lingua franca (ELF), peripheral varieties, etc. do not have any notable position in ELT trend in Iran.

It is necessary to note that regarding these two issues, namely the British or American standards in pronunciation and the position of nonstandard varieties of English in ELT trend, findings of Aghaei (2009) verify the findings of this part of research.

Concerning the fourth category dealing with the influence and interaction of English, ELT and culture, it is worth to discuss the findings in more details. Facing these findings, it was revealed that on the cultural influences of English and ELT on other cultures including Persian there was not any correspondence between two phases of the study. While the entire interviewees saw the English as a threat to cultures throughout the world and agreed on its tie with the Western culture, the participants in the second phase of study mostly tended to the liberalist position.

Before dealing with this issue, it is necessary to note that in this category, among the interviewees, as mentioned, only F partially tended to the liberalist camp. Not denying the cultural influences of English and ELT, he maintained that such an influence is inevitable. In his words, in spite of their cultural impacts they could not be seen as serious threats to Persian culture.

Encountering this situation, the researchers tried to study the effects of the first phase participants' academic degree as a variable on their attitudes on this issue. Regarding the first question in this category, dealing with English and ELT threats to other cultures including Persian, it is notable that of 23 participants with PhD degree, 11 agreed on the issue, 6 disagreed and 6 were undecided. In other words, while 74.1% of the respondents in the second phase of study were opposite to this alarmist position, this rate among the participants with PhD degree was only 20%. In fact their attitudes were correspondent to their counterparts in the first phase of study. Seeing these findings, the researchers were

convinced that the perception of the respondents with MA degree was different from ones with PhD. In a more precise word, the higher the professionals' academic degree, the more sensitive to the cultural aspects and effects of English and ELT.

Professionally speaking, the findings acquired for the purpose of this study suggest that there is a growing critical recognition of ELT among the Iranian ELT professionals. In other words, conducting this research, the researchers can clearly assert that the Iranian ELT community is experiencing a conceptual shift in this arena. The attitudes presented in this study as well as some applied linguists' awareness of dramatic changes and concepts in the ELT profession like World Englishes, linguistic imperialism, localizing English, critical pedagogy, etc. are really promising and can broaden the scope of ELT research in terms of the number and depth of the topics.

Pedagogical Implications

To date, very few large-scale studies on the topic have been conducted in Iran. Thus, this study as a new one covering some important categories enjoys several implications for language policy makers, educational institutions, ELT professionals, practitioners and teachers as well as materials and curriculum developers. In this section we try to briefly deal with them.

As Nunan (2003) writes, the emergence of English as a global language is going to seriously influence language planning and policy making in every society and certainly the Iranian society is not an exception. It seems that regarding this very significant topic which has been the obsession of many countries' authorities throughout the world, the decision and policy makers in our society have taken a passive position. In fact, the current study and its findings may have some important implications for language policy makers and language planners at the governmental level. Understanding the status and role of English in the globalizing world, its impacts on our language, culture and identity, etc., and its challenges and opportunities, the policy makers and language planners should think strategically when setting their priorities and making decisions on the topic.

Educational institutions including schools and higher education institutions should place more emphasis on the issue. Attending to the goals and priorities of English learning in our society, which in turn should be set by the language policy makers and language planners, paying more attention to the needs analysis of the learners especially at the higher education, adopting the suitable methodology and practices, and having a critical review of the principles and methods underlying the current curriculum, etc. can be the first necessary steps in this arena.

ELT professionals, practitioners, and teachers as the key players in the field of English teaching should notice of this fact that they should not restrict ELT to some mere pedagogical issues and must look at it from a very wider perspective. Findings of this study clearly suggest that they should face English and ELT more critically, consciously and comprehensively.

Last but not the least, the material and curriculum developers are among those who can profit the research findings.

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Appendix 1

Interview Questions

(a) *Methods:*

- It is usually said that the best teaching methods come from native English speaking countries. What is your idea?
- Are the current ELT methods neutral and appropriate for our society?

(b) *Materials and Curriculum Development:*

- What is your idea about the in/appropriateness of Center-produced materials?
- What do you think of the Periphery's involvement in ELT materials and curriculum development?

(c) *Native vs. Nonnative Teachers, Standards and Varieties:*

- It is often said that the best or ideal teacher is a native English speaker? What's your idea?
- Should we follow only the standard pronunciations including American or British and neglect other varieties?

(d) *English, ELT and Cultures:*

- Does English endanger Persian culture or not?
- What is the relation between English and western culture?
- Does ELT have any role in spreading Center's culture in the world?

Appendix 2

The Questionnaire

Dear Colleague

We are doing a research on the current status of English in general and English language teaching (ELT) in particular in Iran. Your participation in this survey will help us to complete our study. Please kindly spare a few minutes of your time to fill out this questionnaire. Your responses will be treated with outmost confidence. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Degree: PhD. PhD. Candidate MA.

Major: TEFL Linguistics Translation Literature

Years of teaching experience:

Gender:

Age:

| | <i>strongly agree</i> | <i>agree</i> | <i>not sure</i> | <i>disagree</i> | <i>strongly disagree</i> |
|---|-----------------------|--------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------------------|
| 1- Best teaching methods come from the native English speaking countries. | | | | | |
| 2- Methods are not value-free, but cultural constructs | | | | | |
| 3- Teaching materials developed in native English speaking countries are the best materials for EFL learners including Iranian learners. | | | | | |
| 4- The involvement of Iranian ELT professionals in preparing and developing materials and textbooks is necessary. | | | | | |
| 5- The development and managing of English language curricula and programs should be done by native countries. | | | | | |
| 6- The ideal teacher is the English native speaker from one of the English speaking countries. | | | | | |
| 7- British and American native speaker standards especially in pronunciation should be the only standards of ELT in Iran. | | | | | |
| 8- Different varieties of English like Indian English, Pakistani English, Singaporean English and numerous others should be considered and taught | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| in Iran. | | | | | |
| 9- English and ELT can constitute a threat to the Persian culture. | | | | | |
| 10- ELT and the spread of English play a key role in the expansion of cultural influence of English speaking countries especially US. | | | | | |

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Writing Online: Using Blogs as an Alternative Writing Activity in Tertiary ESL Classes

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Abstract

This paper presents how Blogging may be used as an alternative activity in tertiary writing classes. Particularly, this paper would discuss how Blogs can be included in academic writing class. The discussions will initially revolve on the language learning theories that support the framework of blogs—the characteristics of Blogs that make it an appropriate classroom activity for improving writing proficiency. Then, the paper will further discuss the processes that were undertaken within the Blogging project. Finally, sample Blogs and commentaries to these blogs would be investigated to see some meritorious characteristics and experiences that support Blogging as an effective activity in developing and improving writing proficiency.

Keywords: Blogging, Academic Writing, Teaching Writing

Logging In: Blogs and their Pedagogical Values

Recent technological advancements are usually borne out of merging different things, discoveries, or ideas. These innovations lead to further discoveries that aim to make living more convenient than it was in the past.

In the case of computer technology, merging the internet with the field of communication has produced what has become popularly known as “Blog”—a blending of the words *web* and *log*, which is “a web page that contains a running log of commentaries, multimedia, and hyperlinks” (Armstrong & Retterer, 2008). Early internet websites only showcase photographs and texts that are uploaded by web developers, something that limits potential web authors from writing and publishing articles since these are beyond basic computer skills.

The birth of Blogs opened a lot of opportunities for language learners to express and share their ideas with the boundless internet community. Blogs quietly entered the World Wide Web in the late 1990’s, but because of its rapid popularity among individual writers who wish to share their thoughts online, web designers started to develop blog sites that are easier to create and maintain. Armstrong and Retterer (2008) explains that Blogging software began to appear designed to enable individuals to publish their own weblogs quickly and easily and without the previous HTML coding requirements. As Blood (2002) explained, with the advent of these applications, the weblog, unlike a webpage, required little technological sophistication and was therefore accessible to many different types of audiences.

This innovation further contributed to the rapid growth of interest in blogging. “In a recent survey, the Pew Internet and American Life Project estimated that some 12 million Americans published their own blogs and 57 million read blogs (Lenhart & Fox, 2006 as cited in Armstrong & Retterer, 2008). This trend is further supported by findings from

other studies such as that of DeBell and Chapman (2006) cited in Krashen (2008), which discovered that “81% of high school students use the Internet, [this] indicates that Internet use among the general population will continue to increase.”

The internet’s ability to quickly connect people from different regions of the world and have them share ideas and experiences with each other in real-time may be one of the reasons for its popularity. Aside from this, blog sites have been designed to be “customizable”, allowing the users to modify the presentation of their page—i.e. colors, themes, pictures, among others.

Furthermore, Muehleisen (1997, cited in Fox, 1998) adds that learners become interested with the internet because “students see the Internet as trendy and want to be a part of it, others are also drawn by the practical aspects of job skills acquisition and on learning skills that will be useful in life”

These characteristics of blogging provided the researcher with ideas as to the usefulness of blogs in teaching writing. Indeed, blogs can motivate language learners not just to connect to the internet to view pictures or watch videos, but also to write and share ideas and opinions—something that is usually dreaded by students in language classes.

Writing as a Dreaded Classroom Activity

Among the four macroskills of language, writing appears to be the most difficult. It is unlikely for learners to be enthusiastic and exciting to do writing tasks (which is usually a “desk” activity) as compared to speaking tasks (where they are usually asked to move around the classroom). The fact that writing outputs are documented or recorded makes students think twice (or more) whenever asked to write. It is normal for students to avoid being scorned and criticized because of the errors committed in English. Thus, outputs tend to become mere *requirements* in language classes more than the fact that it should be *a means of expressing ideas and emotions*.

Soven (1999) explains that “By the time most students enter high school, they are beginning to dislike writing.” This may be attributed to the fact that learners begin to realize the demands of writing. As students work with their outputs, they start to notice that there are various factors such as Mechanics (spelling, capitalization, and punctuation) and Grammar that should be carefully checked. Moreover, students begin to shift their attention to other tasks that are assigned to them, in language classes and in other subjects.

Aside from grammar and mechanics, students also begin to encounter important elements of writing such as unity and coherence. They begin to realize that mastery of grammar and mechanics is not enough when writing; that their ability explain grammar rules and identify grammar errors, are insufficient since writing demands context from which these rules will be applied.

Finally, students begin to notice the demands of writing tasks in terms of the content—i.e. information that would be included in the output. Towards the more advanced level of writing, students begin to find out that their technical know-how of writing becomes useless if they don’t have the necessary data or information that would be included in the output. Most students find it difficult to write simply because they don’t know what to put in their paper.

These observations and realizations fuel the search of language teachers and researchers for better and more effective ways of teaching writing.

Teaching Writing: The Search for the Holy Grail

Teachers are normally in a state of dilemma when it comes to teaching writing. Should the teacher prioritize accuracy? Or should the teacher focus on content? These two important considerations when teaching writing have become the central issues in answering the essential question: “How should writing be taught?”

The search for the ‘holy grail’, so to speak, of teaching writing led to the development of various approaches to teaching writing. Related to this search is the growing demand to develop and improve the writing competencies of learners. Thus, it is imperative for language teachers to be equipped, not just with the knowledge regarding the different approaches that have been utilized by teachers, but also with the skills of implementing them, given the variety of learners that teachers may encounter at a given point in time.

Badger and White (2000) presents an overview of the prevalent approaches to teaching writing over the past 20 years. “Process and product approaches have dominated much of the teaching of writing that happens in the EFL classroom. In the last ten years, genre approaches have gained adherent.”

From the label itself, product approaches prioritize the final product of writing or student outputs, e.g. essays, reports, letters, stories, etc. Brown (1994) describes that in product approaches, “Compositions are supposed to (a) meet certain standards of prescribed English rhetorical style, (b) reflect accurate grammar, and (c) be organized in conformity with what the audience would consider to be conventional.”

Badger and White (2000) further explains that in product approaches, learning to write has four stages: (a) familiarization; (b) controlled writing; (c) guided writing; and (d) free writing. The familiarization stage aims to make learners aware of certain features of a particular text. In the controlled and guided writing sections, the learners practise the skills with increasing freedom until they are ready for the free writing section, when they use the writing skill as part of a genuine activity such as a letter, story or essay.

This means that the teaching of writing primarily focuses on training students with the appropriate rules of grammar and have these rules correctly applied in written compositions.

While there is nothing really wrong with giving attention to the linguistic aspects when writing, the greatest criticism against product approaches is its inability to make learners “create” language. Since learners focus on the language rules, they have the tendency to box themselves within these rules and fail to explore other ways to express their ideas and emotions.

On the other hand, process approaches to teaching writing are seen to focus more on content or message rather than the rules of language. “Writing in process approaches is seen as predominantly to do with linguistic skills, such as planning and drafting, and there is much less emphasis on linguistic knowledge, such as knowledge about grammar and text structure” (Badger & White, 2000).

According to Brown (1994), process approaches do most of the following:

- (a) Focus on the process of writing that leads to the final written product;
- (b) Help student writers to understand their own composing process;
- (c) Help them to build repertoires of strategies for prewriting, drafting, and rewriting;
- (d) Give students time to write and rewrite;
- (e) Place central importance on the process of revision;

- (f) Let students discover what they want to say as they write;
- (g) Give students feedback throughout the composing process (not just on the final product) to consider as they attempt to bring their expression closer and closer to intention;
- (h) Encourage feedback both from the instructor and peers;
- (i) Include individual conferences between teacher and student during the process of composition.

Thus, the very difference of process approaches from product approaches is its priority on generating ideas rather than accurately using the rules of grammar when composing.

However, similar to product approaches, process approaches also received a number of criticisms. One of which is its “freeness” which may lead to compositions that are authentically written by learners, but may have too many grammar lapses, since grammar rules are not given as much importance as it receives in product approaches.

Another development in the approaches to teaching writing has been dubbed as the “genre approaches”. Genre approaches have similar characteristics with product approaches in a way that both “regard writing as predominantly linguistic but, unlike product approaches, they emphasize that writing varies with the social context in which it is produced” (Badger & White, 2000). Thus, genre approaches focus on analyzing different texts and finding out essential characteristics of the text such as purpose, situation, relationship between writer and audience, and the pattern of organization used to develop the idea within the text.

Dudley-Evans (1997) as cited in Badger and White (2000) identifies three stages in genre approaches, “First, a model of a particular genre is introduced and analysed. Learners then carry out exercises which manipulate relevant language forms and, finally, produce a short text.” These stages resemble product approaches in a manner that both “manipulate” available language (i.e. from the model text) instead of “creating” language.

A more recent approach to teaching writing appears to have been a product of synthesizing the three previously discussed approaches. This has come to be known as the Process Genre Approach. In this approach, “writing involves knowledge about language (as in product and genre approaches), knowledge of the context in which writing happens and especially the purpose for the writing (as in genre approaches), and skills in using language (as in process approaches)” (Badger & White, 2000).

Thus, the process genre approach trains learners to become “analyzers” and “creators” of texts. They are taught to look into the different characteristics of texts written according to specific purposes and to process these characteristics as they create their own text.

This brief review of the different approaches to teach writing provides a macroscopic view of how writing should be taught and learnt. It provides realizations as to the elements that language teachers should consider when designing programs for enhancing writing proficiency. These are the elements that the researcher considered in the development of blogging as an alternative activity in academic writing classes.

Blogging the Language Classes

Using blogs in classes is innovative and modern, but it is not necessarily “new”. In fact, various studies across the globe have been written to report the observations and realizations gained from using blogs in language classes. These studies present the advantages and disadvantages of blogging as implemented in language classes.

One of these studies is an article written by Izquierdo and Reyes (2009) entitled: *Effectiveness of Blogging to Practice Reading at a Freshman EFL Program*. Primarily, blogs are seen as contributory in the development of reading skills—an essential element in making students write. Language teachers have proven how important reading is in connection to writing. Brown (1994) explains that “Clearly, students learn to write in part by carefully observing what is already written. That is, they learn by observing, or reading, the written word.”

Blogs provide authentic reading texts for learners to observe and analyze, making them aware of the conventions of writing—i.e. grammar, mechanics, unity, coherence, etc. Izquierdo and Reyes (2009) analyzed the characteristics of blogs to explain their potential strengths in practicing and improving reading skills among learners. A synthesis of these characteristics is provided below by the researcher to amplify the analysis of Izquierdo and Reyes (2009).

1. **Relevant**-Blogs allow teachers and students to upload content pertinent to their courses on the web and reach out to people providing opportunities to promote student-teacher, student-student, and student-others interactions.
2. **Accessible**-Blogs are published instantly, without much time investment. Blogs are accessible to all who might be interested in making contributions in a relatively lengthy period of time, without moving physically or attending face-to-face (f2f) classes
3. **Interactive**-Blogs have proven to be of great use in foreign *language* courses because images, songs, podcasts, and videos can be uploaded so students can be exposed to them in a real multimedia environment
4. **Interesting**-Blogs invite participation and have the potential to democratize the classroom since each student is given the chance to participate equally. (Grewling, 2004 as cited in Izquierdo & Reyes, 2009)

Moving on from reading to writing, blogs are perceived as essential in developing writing skills. In an article written by Soares (2008) entitled *Understanding class blogs as a tool for language development*, she studied EFL learners in Brazil particularly to find out if the learners see blogging as a learning tool and to identify how blogs are used in other language teaching context.

Blogs in classes are more than an avenue for writing. They are seen as a “joint effort between students and teacher. It may be seen as a way to foster a feeling of community between the members of a class” (Campbell, 2003; McDowell, 2004; Stanley 2005 as cited in Soares, 2008) Thus, blogging is not just about the activity of writing but it involves the sharing of experiences and information as well as responding to what others have written.

In addition to this, blogs have also been regarded as a “therapeutic intervention” in a sense that it helps learners to release certain emotions, which may lead to “an immediate feeling of relief and initially increase a person’s ego strength” (Nagel & Anthony, 2009). Hence, if programmed appropriately, blogs can potentially boost the affective domain of learners, making them perceive writing not as a dreaded class activity but as a means to help express emotions and ideas. As what Krashen (1982) proposes, in his affective filter hypothesis:

Those whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a high or strong Affective Filter—even if they understand the message, the input will not reach the part of the brain responsible for language acquisition, or the language acquisition device. Those with attitudes more conducive to second language acquisition will not only seek and obtain more input, they will also have a lower or weaker filter. They will be more open to the input, and it will strike “deeper”

Aside from these affective factors, blogging is also seen as a form of a writing exercise that allows learners to increase the quality and quantity of their written outputs through frequent posts and comments. In the study of Armstrong and Retterer (2008) they have found out that their learners, who were involved in an experimental blogging class, wrote more compared to students who were involved in a “traditional” form of writing class.

...our blogging students were writing ten times more than some students at the equivalent level, and in some cases writing as much as those who write in a non blogging format. Data from this study affirms what other researchers have documented about computer-assisted writing. Daiute (1986, p. 3) wrote, “...one of the main observations has been that students of all ages find writing on computers and communicating in cyberspace to be highly motivating—an attitude that has not been reported regarding traditional writing instruction environments.” In another study, Huffaker (2004, p. 63) reported that the average blog posting among his subjects was 2000 words per blog. Lohnes (2003) wrote that a weblog used in a Political Science course at Middlebury College produced over 100 pages of text/student “For many of them, the writing became a ‘fun’ activity rather than something that was seen as drudgery or a hurdle to be overcome” (p. 11). Pennington (2003, p. 189) argued that students working in a computer medium tended to write less self-consciously and were more engaged in the process, which resulted in greater involvement with the task and ultimately led the student to write for longer periods of time and produce longer texts.

On the other hand, despite the advantages, these researchers have also found some “glitches” on the use of blogging in language classes. A summary of their findings is as follows:

1. **Platform-** One of the major problems that beset blogging in class is the platform or the blog site which will be used by the class. Aside from the ease of use and security or privacy issues, the cost of creating one’s own platform may be too much for a language class. “The major disadvantages, of course, were hardware/software and support costs.” (Armstrong & Retterer, 2009)
2. **Learner Competence-** While almost all learners nowadays are adept at using the computer and the internet, not everyone may be familiar with blogging, and this may lead to delay or problems before and during the program implementation. In the study of Izquierdo & Reyes (2009) they found out that “Many of the low *proficiency* students

in this program do not have regular access to a computer and have not worked with blogs before.”

3. **Economic Status of Learners-** In the Philippine educational scenario, not everyone can afford the “luxury” of using computers and connecting to the world wide web. This may potentially hamper the implementation of blog projects in language classes.

These citations on the effectiveness, benefits, and even the disadvantages of blogging in relation to ESL/EFL writing provided the researcher with a number of considerations regarding the design and implementation of the blog project.

Blogging in the Academic Writing Class

Rationale and Objectives

As mentioned earlier, the researcher’s experiences and researches in teaching writing have led to various realizations regarding learners’ difficulties when it comes to writing in English. Thus, to address these problems, the researcher designed and implemented a blogging project as a supplementary writing activity in his Academic Writing classes. The primary objective of the study is to provide the learners with an alternative and additional writing activity that would allow them to practice and develop their writing skills. Moreover, the study aims to identify and explore the possible benefits of Blogging in developing Academic Writing skills.

Blogs are considered as an alternative for journal or diary entries that have been practiced in various language classrooms throughout the years. However, unlike diaries and journal entries that are usually kept confidential between the teacher and the student, a blog is usually broadcasted and shared to different readers in an online community. This becomes advantageous since it allows learners to discover and practice writing outside the class hours and beyond the four walls of the classroom—something that may contribute in motivating the learners to write.

Parallel to the related literatures reviewed in this study, the researcher (who is a blogger himself) recognized the benefits of blogging in the development of a language learner’s writing skills. Aside from the boundless possibilities of customizing and personalizing one’s blog site, one can also increase linkages and networks through blogs, which are often found in social networking sites. These characteristics allow learners to interact with other learners and at the same time allow them to express their ideas and emotions via written mode.

Moreover, blogs provide an avenue for practicing writing because of the frequency of posting blogs. At the same time, comments to blogs contribute in making learners reflect upon their blogs.

These features constitute the rationale for creating a blog project as an alternative and additional writing activity.

Thus, given the rationale of this study, the researcher would like to identify the effects of blogging in the development of the participants’ writing skills. Moreover, the project aims to find out how the participants perceive blogging before and after the study.

Participants

The participants in this study comprise of Sophomore College students enrolled in Academic Writing Classes. They belong to different academic programs, i.e. BSE English, AB/BSE Literature, and BSE General Science. Out of a total of 79 students from these classes, 36 students (6 males and 30 females) volunteered to participate in the blog project after the researcher announced it in all the three classes. Necessary information regarding their personal profiles were gathered through a “Blogger Profile Survey” conducted prior to the implementation of the blog project.

The survey collected important personal information that would contribute in the analysis of how blogs may be used in language classes. The bloggers’ age range between 17 and 19 years old. This entails that the participants are knowledgeable and skilful as regards the use of computers and internet. In terms of their resources, 69.44% of the participants said they have personal computers with internet connection at home, while 30.56% do not have and only connects to the world wide web by renting in computer shops.

The participants’ “virtual profiles” were also checked by identifying the social networking sites that they maintain. The survey revealed that the three most popular social networking sites among the respondents were Facebook (35 out of the 36 respondents), Multiply (34), and Friendster (29). Other sites such as Hi5, Twitter, Plurk, Tumblr, Wordpress, Digg, Flixter, Formspring, Tagged, Badoo, and LinkedIn also surfaced out of the survey. This supports the initial premise that the learners are adept at using the internet together with the features and applications offered by various social networking sites. Having more than one social networking site to maintain reflects how much time and effort these learners devote in using the internet. Moreover, out of these 36 volunteers, 50% or 18 students said that they have been posting an average of one blog every month using their social networking sites. The other half of the group said that this blog project introduced blogging to them.

However, it should also be noted that among the 36 volunteers who signed up to join the blog project, only 27 of them continued with the program and posted blogs.

These data provided the researcher with necessary inputs regarding the participants’ competencies in terms of using and manipulating features of different social networking sites. Moreover, these data helped the researcher to identify which among the various social networking sites would be the most appropriate and useful platform for the blog project.

Platform

Identifying the platform or the blog site which will be used for the blog project is very important in the design and implementation of blogging as an alternative writing activity for language learners. Soares (2008) recommends that teachers who intend to implement blogging in their classes should have “trial blogs before [deciding] on ‘the real thing’ with students, checking if the platform chosen caters for all [the] wants and needs.” The researcher heeded to this suggestion and reviewed a number of social networking sites which will be the most appropriate for the specific needs and objectives of the project.

Prior to the review, the researcher set specific criteria for identifying which social networking site would be the most appropriate for the blog project. Three criteria were considered upon the review of the social networking sites. They are as follows:

- a. **Security**- the ability of the site to secure privacy among the participants, i.e. secure personal information and prevent unsolicited posts or comments which may be defamatory or derogatory;
- b. **User-friendliness**- the ability of the site to offer services conveniently so that the participants would use lesser time in manipulating the features and instead focus on the blogs that they will write and publish; and
- c. **Customizability**- the ability of the site to be customized or personalized according to the preferences of the participants, i.e. themes, colors, graphics, font sizes, font styles, etc. Customizability also involves the ability of the site to be specifically programmed for selected users, i.e. to create groups and sub-groups

After reviewing and analyzing the features of various social networking sites that include blogging as one of their many features, Multiply (www.multiply.com) emerged as the most appropriate platform for the blog project. Although Multiply is not a perfectly designed social networking site, it surpassed other potential platforms in terms of the criteria set specifically for this study. Despite Facebook being the more popular social networking site in the Philippines, Multiply offers more options for securing information, manipulating toolbars and applications, and personalizing its appearance—criteria that are considered essential in the design and implementation of the blog project in language classes.

Throughout the project, the researcher served as the blog administrator who monitors and filters the posts. Primarily, the administrator's task is to identify whether the blogs may or may not be posted. During the first stages of the project, the participants were clearly briefed about the Project Mechanics that would serve as their guide.

Project Mechanics

Implementing a blog project in language classes should be carefully designed. Part of this careful planning is the identification and presentation of the project mechanics among the participants. It is the ethical responsibility of the researcher to inform the participants about the objectives of the study, the roles that the participants will play, the do's and don'ts in the project, and the benefits that they will gain out of their participation.

In this research study, the participants were informed about the project mechanics prior to the implementation of the project. The following are the mechanics that were observed throughout the blog project.

1. Students coming from different Writing classes are **INVITED** to join the blogging community. From these different writing classes, a single "blog-class" will be created online. Once the program has commenced, other members of the classes who did not join are allowed to comment, but not as bloggers anymore. Hence, no incentives will be given.
2. Bloggers are also the monitors of other people's blogs and they are expected to post comments or suggestions.

3. The task of the bloggers is to upload blogs on a regular basis (at least once a week). On the other hand, the commenters' task is to regularly monitor a blogger's entry and comment on it positively or negatively (provided that comments do not defame or disrespect the blogger). Commenters may post comments on more than one blog.
4. Bloggers should take note of the following security/privacy guidelines:
 - a. Do not reveal personal information in the blogsite;
 - b. Immediately report concerns (e.g. uncalled for attitudes, disrespectful comments, etc.) to the moderator, i.e. teacher
5. The blogging project is divided into three phases:
 - a. Phase I: Moderator blogs- during the first two or three weeks, the moderator would post the blog and the task of every member of the blog class is merely to comment;
 - b. Phase II: Personal blogs- these are blogs which tackle anything personal and interpersonal, e.g. latest fashion, fads, trends, movies, TV shows, etc.; and
 - c. Phase III: Opinion blogs- these are blogs which tackle latest issues on politics, school matters, teaching and learning, provided that it does not destroy or disrespect any personality, institution, religion, ethnic or minority groups, gender, etc.
6. Blogs are not graded, but as incentives for participating, bloggers will get additional points in the FINAL grade of the Academic Writing class, depending on the number of blogs that they have published within the semester.

5-9 blogs= +1

10-15 blogs= +2

16-20 blogs= +3

Note: Those who were able to post a particular number of blogs but stopped from participating before the end of the semester will not get the incentive points.

7. A "blog" is considered a "blog" only if it contains relevant, original, and substantial topics. "Pointless" posts, i.e. those that do not really have a focus topic and discussion will not be posted.
8. For ease of use and accessibility, the blogsite that will be used for this project shall be Multiply (www.multiply.com). Hence, participants are expected to create their own multiply site, if they do not have one yet.
9. The Blogging project commences on the 4th week of June 2010 and will be labelled as WEEK 1 in the Blog Log. Blog log is the record keeping tool that the moderator uses to monitor blogs and comments. Blogging project ends on the 3rd week of September and will be labelled as WEEK 12.

Project Outcomes

Throughout the 12-week implementation of the blog project, the researcher yielded important data regarding the quantity and quality of blogs posted and the perceptions of bloggers on blogging as an alternative writing activity.

In terms of the quantity of blog posts, the 27 participants who pushed through with the project published a total of 101 blogs online within the duration of 12 weeks. Among these blogs, the least number of words in a blog post is 146, while the maximum number of words is 1,546. On the average, blogs are composed of 561.36 words. These figures provide important revelations and realizations as to the effects of blogging in motivating learners to express their ideas and emotions through writing. Despite having no provisions regarding the number of words per entry, and despite the absence of any evaluative measure or grading system for each blog entry, the participants, through the frequency of their posts and the quantity of words for each posts, showed significant interest in writing and posting blogs.

Figure 1 presents the blog count for each week. This data shows a significant increase of posts during the 3rd and 4th week of the project (i. e. 2nd and 3rd week of July).

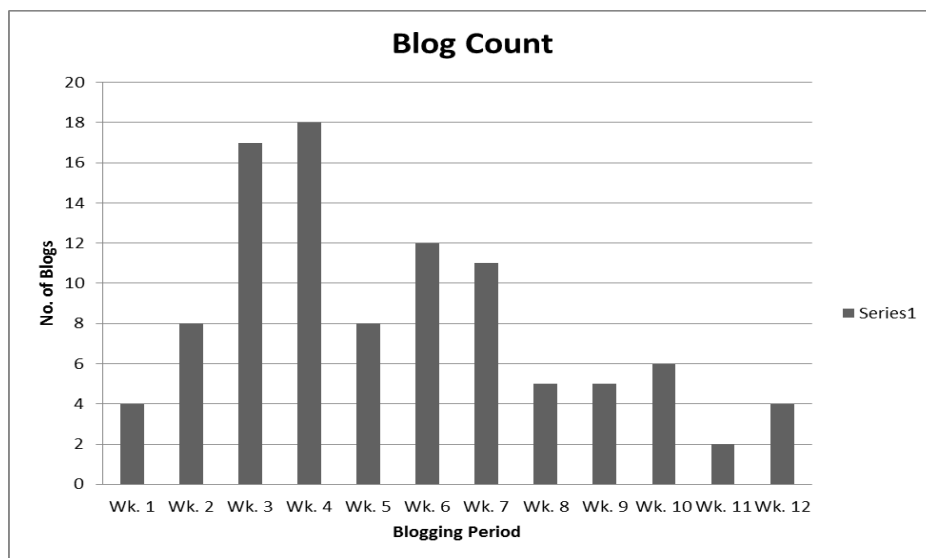


Figure 1. Blog Count per Week

This trend explains that during the first two weeks of implementation, most bloggers did not post their blogs. Perhaps the reason behind is the fact that 50% of the group do not have any experience on blogging. This may have hindered them from writing, or perhaps they wrote but hesitated to post it online for fear of criticisms. However, as presented in the Blog Count, during the 3rd and 4th week, a significant increase may be observed. During the 3rd week, 17 blogs were posted, while 18 blogs were published on the 4th week. This may be due to the growing interest of the participants upon seeing their classmates' posts and comments to each other. This supports the claims that blogging is not merely a writing activity but an avenue for sharing experiences and information.

However, after the 7th week (i. e. 1st week of August), a downward trend may be observed. This may be attributed to the growing number of requirements and tasks that the participants are engaged with. August and September are crucial months in the university since these presage the end of the semester, which is tantamount to deadlines for submitting academic requirements. Since it has been clearly defined in the project mechanics that blogging is merely an additional activity and not a major requirement in the Academic Writing course, some have probably opted to minimize their blog posts and

focus on other requirements. Later discussions on the perceptions of bloggers will further support this premise.

On the other hand, in terms of the quality of their posts, the researcher observed a wide array of topics that the participants chose to write about. It should be noted that the project mechanics did not limit the bloggers on the topics that they may write about. During the first few weeks of the project, most posts focus on narratives about personal experiences that are mostly filled with emotions, e.g. topics on Love, Relationships, Friendships, etc. However, as the blog project progresses, less personal topics began to emerge. Some bloggers began posting about their Interests (e.g. dancing, singing, and acting), Movie or Book Reviews, Critiques and Observations on Society (e.g. politics and individual behaviors), and even General Information topics. This may be attributed to the motivation that the participants gained from observing different topics posted by the their fellow bloggers, including the moderator.

Finally, the perceptions of bloggers regarding their experiences in participating in the blog project were determined by the researcher through a Post-project survey. The survey particularly sought for the bloggers' views regarding the (a) benefits of blogging, (b) their realizations after the project, (c) the problems that they have experienced, and their (d) opinion on having an online writing class as a substitute for the traditional classroom setting.

The participants presented highly positive remarks regarding their blogging experience. Most of them responded positively in the survey and mentioned how enjoyable and challenging the blog project is. Other benefits of blogging according to the participants are as follows:

- a. Gaining new friends
- b. Learning to spend time wisely when using the internet
- c. Having more time to practice writing
- d. Writing with less pressure and more confidence

One blogger specifically mentioned that *“students with all academic constraints and pressures need other avenues to release their ‘stress,’”*.

Regarding the realizations of the bloggers, most of them mentioned about “netiquette” or network etiquette. Since blogs are monitored and filtered by an administrator, the bloggers learned how to think before pushing the button. They have learned how to assess the content of their blogs before posting them and making them accessible to the whole world. This realization of the bloggers is very significant since it provides another benefit for blogging, which is educating the learners about the importance of being careful when posting any content (e. g. blogs, videos, and pictures) on social networking sites. Other realizations are as follows:

- a. Blogging is not just a hobby, it also makes writing classes more interesting for students;
- b. Blogs cannot please everyone;
- c. Blogs can be a “gratifying” medium for writing;
- d. Blogging is a good way to learn and practice writing; and
- e. Internet can be of better use aside from gaming and browsing

Aside from the benefits that the participants gained, the researcher also identified certain problems that were met during the blog project. The most common problems that were revealed through the Post-project survey are the *hectic schedule* and the *lack of*

resources. The former proves the assumption presented earlier regarding the downward trend that was observed after the 7th week of the blogging project. Indeed, the learners had to prioritize other requirements over blogging. On the other hand, the latter shows the constraints of not having a personal computer. Since 30.56% of the participants do not have their own computers and internet connection, they would have to spend extra money just to go online and post their blogs. Other problems that were identified by the bloggers are as follows:

- a. Writer's block or the lack of ideas to write
- b. "Intolerable bloggers" who post derogatory comments outside the blogging community
- c. Distractions, such as online gaming and other applications provided by social networking sites

Finally, when asked about their opinion regarding substituting traditional classroom setting with an online writing class, 83% of the participants expressed positive response. Their specific reason for vouching an online writing class is its convenience, its ability to connect to a wider audience, and its "cool" features (something which may be minimal, if not absent in traditional classroom setting). On the other hand, 17% of the participants said that they do not agree with the proposal of having an online writing class in exchange of the traditional writing class. Particularly, they stressed the negative aspects of online writing such as the risks that it brings to learners (i.e. privacy and security), the inconvenience that it would bring to those without a personal internet connection, and the absence of a "physical mentor" who would guide the learner through the writing process.

These perceptions of learners reveal a lot of important information regarding the viability of blogging as an alternative activity in writing classes. The positive and negative opinions of the participants contribute to the growing body of knowledge regarding the use of technology in language classes.

Logging Out: Blogs and their Contributions to the Teaching of Writing

The discussions in this paper presented how blogs can contribute in developing the writing skills of tertiary learners. In theory and in practice, blogs—at least in this study—have been proven helpful because of its positive characteristics such as its ability to provide an alternative avenue for practicing writing, its authenticity, and its 'interactivity'. Furthermore, despite minimal disadvantages such as accessibility and security, an appropriate project mechanics and platform or blog site can address potential threats in the design and implementation of a blog project in writing classes.

Therefore, blogging can be used as an additional or alternative writing activity which would motivate learners to view writing as a means of expressing meaning and not merely as a requirement in language classes.

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