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# Understanding the Technology Enhanced Learning Environments from A Cognitive Perspective

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## Abstract

This conceptual paper discusses some principles for powerful learning environments based on a cognitive perspective. Throughout the paper, it is argued that the accommodation of different individual cognitive preferences is crucial for its alignment with the human cognitive architecture. The paper concludes that in order to be aligned with the human cognitive architecture, TEL (technology enhanced learning) environments should provide supportive visual and interactive multimedia, self-assessment tools, instructional guidance about the purpose of the learning environment and how to operate it. Based on the prior research undertaken in this area, the paper concludes that a more evidence-based model for deriving the positioning would allow the learning professionals to move from a framework to a genuine taxonomy.

**Keywords:** Powerful learning environments, Cognitive, TEL

## 1. Introduction

With the proliferation of ICTs (information communication technologies) in the educational settings, radical changes have already taken place in the design and delivery of the learning experience. Contrary to the popular belief, one of the main challenges in this new era of learning is how to bridge the divide between technology and the learners themselves rather than the divide in terms of access to the ICTs. In order for technologies to be useful, effective, cognitively demanding and engaging the underlying cognitive and psychological mechanisms should be taken into consideration.

The problem addressed in this paper can be summarized as follows:

“How can the design principles for powerful learning environments be integrated into TEL (technology enhanced learning) and make it aligned with the human cognitive architecture?”

The paper first provides an overview of the TEL environments along with its potential benefits and underlying architecture and then discusses the design principles of powerful learning environments by taking into account the cognitive load theory.

## 2. Definition and Potential Benefits of TEL Environments

TEL refers to the use of technology to support and enhance learning practice. TEL environments enable access to a range of materials, learning tools and communication facilities, so they can be ideal constructivist learning environments that enable the students to become more actively involved in developing their understandings. From a constructivist perspective, a learning environment can be defined as ‘a place where people can draw upon resources to make sense out of things and construct meaningful solutions to problems’ (Wilson, 1996). Long-term understanding can be fostered through meaningful contexts and interactions that reflect how knowledge is developed and used in the real world. Increased learner responsibility, opportunities for reflection, a focus on realistic tasks, purposeful collaboration with tutors, exposure to multiple perspectives and going beyond purely abstract definitions of a subject domain are the main characteristics of constructivist learning environments (Grabinger & Dunlap, 1995; Jonassen, 1999).

## 3. Importance of Cognitive Architecture for TEL

As Dror (2008) asserts, computers have augmented the computing power of our brains to such an extent that being deprived of one's computer may feel like the loss of one's own cognitive capacity. Similar to the non-cognitive technology's (cars, planes...etc.) impact on our lives cognitive technology will affect our brain development and capacities (Dror, 2008) so that our minds may eventually be reshaped and consequentially, how we think and learn may be changed. Indeed, the human mind seems to work like the World Wide Web in a dynamic, creative and unpredictable way.

With regard to the area of educational technologies the critical question to be asked is whether technology can enhance learning given these potential harms and benefits. For learning to be successful, it must conform to the architecture of

the mind and take into account the information processing capacity. By using the correct mental representations and engaging the cognitive system, information must be conveyed in such a way so that it can be easily acquired. A major challenge is how to translate the theoretical and academic research into practical ways to utilise technology so as to enhance learning. By bridging research about the brain into ways of using learning technologies sophisticated learning programs can be created and by taking into account the architecture of cognition efficient TEL can be facilitated (Dror, 2007). To exemplify, one should recognize that there is a trade-off between the ability to build knowledge according to the learner's cognitive structures and the extra cognitive load associated with giving learners more control. Intrinsic cognitive load arises from the complexity of the learning material which is not an inherent property of the material, rather it arises from the interaction between an individual's domain knowledge and the information content. On the other hand, extraneous cognitive load is generated by the representational format of the learning material (text or diagram). So, while text-based format may cause a high extraneous load a diagrammatic format would require lower extraneous loads. As Dror (2008) suggests, when designing for e-learning, restricting the navigational freedom could free up cognitive resources for knowledge acquisition. Besides, information content should be kept as simple as possible to facilitate learning.

As is the case with every technology, there are some benefits and harms referred as "gold mines" and "land mines" by Dror (2005) in cognitive technologies. In terms of gold mines, active learning can be facilitated via TEL by maximising the interaction between the material and the learner. By activating the cognitive mechanisms of learning such as attention, depth of processing the learning goes beyond a mere exposure to information. Besides, by giving the learners control over the presentation of the material- different preferences for visual, auditory, text may exist- higher levels of engagement and participation may occur. In terms of land mines, reduced mental effort and work in learning due to providing too much to the learner may decrease the depth of processing of the learners and result in reduction of the memory of the learned material (Dror, 2008).

As both human cognition and technology have their own weaknesses and strengths the key to constructing the most efficient systems would be through understanding the characteristics of human cognition and technology and then integrate their advantages. For instance, psychological and cognitive contextual elements may distort the judgements of human beings whereas technologies are non-biased. In this way, technology and human beings can cooperate rather than being overestimated. As Dror (2008) suggests, rather than conceptualising both technology and human cognition as competing, we can give consideration to the weaknesses and strengths of both and how they can complement each other.

Moreover, as Clancey (1995) asserts, in order to change the practice of TEL a better understanding of how models relate to human knowledge must be achieved. The insights of the cognitive, computational and social sciences can be related to each other if the thoughts of managers, scientists and trainers regarding the models and computer tools can be changed.

The widespread use of TEL is being launched without an adequate theory to relate perceptual processes to conceptual learning. As Clancey (1995) asserts we cannot assume that problems are merely texts and diagrams as problems may consist of much more than comprehending text. We must not assume that the world is given as objects with inherent properties and that concepts are named properties stored in a memory. To understand the learner's point of view better, we must focus on how people create representations, perceive symbols, and attribute meaning (Clancey, 1995). In terms of lesson planning, the focus has been so far on logical prerequisites based on the idea of composition and refinement of descriptions. To step out of this "representational flatland", we must understand learning as a process of multimodal recoordination during interaction with physical materials (Clancey, 1995).

According to Clancey (1995), equating human knowledge with descriptions eliminated the grounds and origin of belief, and greatly oversimplified the complex processes of coordinating perception and action. The dialectic process of the learner's participation can be modelled by schema transformations of assimilation, refinement in which descriptions are combined in an individual mind. Yet, such a theory may not account for individual differences as it assumes that there is one objective world of features perceived by everyone. Knowledge consists of more than descriptive models and successful teaching consists of more than manipulating descriptive models (Figure 1.0).

So, according to Clancey (1991), the focus should be on the physical mechanism that supports learning, in other words how the brain works. He states the following answers regarding this question:

- Human memory is not a place where representations are stored.
- Human learning does not consist of retrieving and applying structures and then storing back modifications that remain unchanged until their next use.
- Knowledge cannot be reduced to presentations, descriptions of the world or of behavioural routines.
- Although cognitive science representations are necessary and useful they should not be identified with the mechanisms inside human brains. These knowledge-level theories are necessary for describing the combined system of

people behaving in an environment. Yet, this is different from describing the neurophysiological system inside individual heads.

- Representations are inherently perceptual and given meaning by a subsequent perception of them.
- Perception is not a peripheral process, but integrated as one process with behavior and learning.

#### 4. Conceptual Frameworks for Aligning TEL with Cognitive Architecture

Cognitive theories and design models play a crucial role in the discussion of the powerful learning environments. The most relevant notions are the cognitive modes and the most commonly used design models. Since there is a variety of design models used commonly and all of which cannot be explained in one single paper the 4C/ID model and the model-framed learning model has been selected as most relevant ones concerning this topic.

##### 4.1 Cognitive Theories

Within the cognitive perspective, the cognitive load theory claims that working memory includes independent auditory and visual working memories that have a limited capacity (Chandler & Sweller, 1992). Human-beings have separate systems for representing verbal and non-verbal information and meaningful learning occurs when a learner selects relevant information in each store, organizes the information in each store into a coherent representation and makes connections between corresponding representations in each store (Figure 2.0).

In terms of design principles, the cognitive view emphasises interactive environments that support the construction of understanding, the experimentation of broad principles and reflection. An ownership of the task, scaffolding, guided discovery, opportunity for reflection, ill-structured problems are the main design principles for constructivist learning. So, TEL environments can be seen as an activity system where coordinated learning can be automated by a computer-based tutorial or created by the learners themselves depending on its design.

Although the following list is not exhaustive these principles should mainly be taken into account to achieve this purpose (De Corte, 2003):

- *Scaffolding learners to decrease their cognitive load:* A simple-to-complex sequencing of categories of learning tasks can reduce the intrinsic aspects of cognitive load. Besides, meaningful learning can be promoted by stimulating learners to compare the solutions to the different learning tasks and to abstract more general knowledge for solving a wide range of problems (high variability).
- *Making high element interactivity information easily accessible in long-term memory:* To help novice learners construct the necessary mental models and cognitive strategies supportive information should be presented before learners start working on the learning tasks. A cognitive schema may be constructed in long-term memory that can be activated in working memory during task performance. Retrieving this schema during task performance is less cognitively demanding than activating the externally presented complex information in working memory during the task performance.
- *Making low element interactivity information directly available in working memory:* For novice learners to automate schemata for recurrent tasks they need to practice in a learning process known as knowledge compilation where the information which is active in working memory is embedded in highly domain-specific representations. Presenting procedural information precisely when it is needed so that it is fully integrated with the task environment may also prevent spatial split attention effects. Such effects arise when multiple sources of information must be mentally integrated to follow procedural instructions.
- *Freeing up processing resources for non-recurrent tasks:* After a consistent skill is introduced in a learning task repeated short practice sessions are used to automate the performance of the consistent skill and free up cognitive resources that can be deployed by the learner to cope up with the learning task.

##### 4.1.1 The 4C/ID model

The following TEL design principles should be taken into account for each of the four components of the 4C/ID model:

- *Fidelity principle:* A high-fidelity environment refers to an environment that is very close to the real task environment whereas a low-fidelity environment merely offers the opportunity to perform tasks with no attempts to mimic the real environment. For novice learners, a high-fidelity task environment contains irrelevant details that may deteriorate learning.
- *Training-wheels principle:* In order to support learners, their performance is constrained to make sure that they cannot perform actions that are not necessary to reach the performance goals.
- *Completion-strategy principle:* This principle states that novices benefit more from studying worked examples while experienced learners profit more from solving the equivalent conventional problems.
- *Redundancy principle:* The presentation of redundant information has a negative effect on learning because finding out that the information from different sources is redundant is a cognitively demanding task for learners.
- *Self-explanation principle:* For meaningful learning to occur multimedia should be associated with deep processing and invite learners to self-explain information.

- *Self-pacing principle*: Giving learners control over the pace of the instruction may facilitate elaboration and deep processing of information.
- *Signaling principle*: Learning may be improved if the learner's attention is focused on the critical aspects of the learning task or the presented information. As this reduces the need for visual search and frees up cognitive resources that may be devoted to schema construction and automation.
- *Modality principle*: Auditory text and narration techniques to explain visual diagrams, animations, or demonstrations, result in better learning than single mode presentations.
- *Component-fluency principle*: Drill and practice on one or more routine aspects of a task may have positive impacts on learning and performing the whole task.

So, powerful learning occurs when a learner is involved in both verbal and visual processing as well as integrating the corresponding components of the verbal and visual models. Multimedia presentations should not contain too much extraneous information in the form of words or sounds, should represent the verbal and non-verbal steps in synchrony and should present words and pictures using modalities that effectively use available visual and auditory working memory resources (Mayer, Moreno, 1998).

#### 4.1.2 Model-framed Learning (MFL)

Another learning model that shares the view that learning should be associated with multiple representations and examples to promote generalization and abstraction is the model-framed learning (MFL) model suggested by Milrad, Spector and Davidsen (2003).

MFL is a realization of the cognitive flexibility theory (CFT) through system dynamics and distributed technology and provides learners with the opportunity and challenge to become model builders, to exchange and discuss models with peers, and to experiment with models to test hypotheses and explore alternative explanations for various phenomena (Milrad, Spector and Davidsen, 2003). CFT shares with situated and problem-based learning the view that learning is context dependent, so multiple representations and examples must be provided to promote generalization and abstraction processes (Milrad, Spector and Davidsen, 2003). In MFL, there are three stages of learner's cognitive development (Table 1.0):

- *Problem-orientation*: Learners are presented with typical problem situations and asked to solve them.
- *Inquiry-exploration*: Learners are challenged to explore a complex domain and asked to identify causal relationships and underlying structures.
- *Policy-development*: Learners are immersed in the full complex system and asked to develop rules and heuristics to guide decision-making.

MFL advocates learning with models as an instructional approach to introduce learners to a new domain. According to this model, learners are usually presented with a problem scenario and asked to construct diagrams, which may serve to center thinking around meaningful problems and facilitating small group collaboration (Milrad, Spector and Davidsen, 2003). As learners become more competent in a subject area they can make the transition from learning with models to learning by modelling. The two principles for making this transition is that learners need to appreciate that there exists connections between the system structure and system outcomes and that they should fill in parts of an existing model which is consistent with the observed behavior. This linking of structure to behavior and creating structures to account for behavior are important stages of powerful learning (Davidsen, 1996). By allowing the construction of such models, TEL environments enable the learner to hypothesizing about potential causal relationships and then test these hypotheses so that they can build up their understanding. Representing causal relationships, formulating hypotheses about those relationships, identifying the key factors in a system, developing policies to guide decision making all represent patterns of expert behavior (Milrad, Spector and Davidsen, 2003).

Both 4C/ID and MFL (Table 2.0) fulfil the following principles for instruction (Merrill, 2001):

- *Principle of problem centeredness*: Learning is effective when learners are engaged in solving real-world problems.
- *Principle of learner activation*: Learning is effective when existing learner knowledge is activated as a foundation for new knowledge and skills.
- *Principle of demonstration*: Learning is effective when desired knowledge applications and skills are demonstrated for learners.
- *Principle of application*: Learning is effective when learners are required to apply new knowledge and skills.
- *Principle of integration*: Learning is effective when new knowledge and skills are integrated into the learner's world.

## 5. Conclusions

In order to be aligned with the human cognitive architecture, TEL environments should provide supportive visual and interactive multimedia, self-assessment tools, instructional guidance about the purpose of the learning environment and how to operate it. Identifying the kinds of online leaning support that may be required for different types of learners and clearly communicating the tasks and activities of students with regard to their online participation may further enhance the effectiveness of TEL environments.



In order to design powerful learning environments, instructional designers should also thoroughly explore and interpret the problem and combine a wide range of possible solutions with a wide range of factors while using context knowledge. Besides, more time should be taken for prototyping and evaluation. Use of a highly interactive and collaborative design approach involving a cooperation with stakeholders is also essential for a successful design. Designing should be viewed as a social process and should be communicated with users and stakeholders.

The main goal of this paper was to describe the design principles in order for TEL environments to be aligned with cognitive architecture. It has been attempted to show how these design principles have been derived from the cognitive perspective and also to frame this account within the familiar 4C/ID design model. Yet, a more evidence-based model for deriving the positioning would allow the learning professionals to move from a framework to a genuine taxonomy.

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## Appendix

Table 1. Computational media to support deep learning (Milrad, Spector and Davidsen, 2003)

<b>Complex thinking component</b>	<b>Cognitive skills</b>	<b>Learning tools &amp; strategies</b>	<b>Computational media Support</b>
<i>Problem-orientation</i>	Identifying main ideas Inferring Hypothesizing Reflection	Mental models Concept mapping Modeling  <i>Problem-based learning</i>	Model builder
<i>Inquiry-exploration</i>	Planning Determining criteria Concretizing Group discussion Collaboration	Construction Manipulation Visualization  <i>Inquiry-based learning</i>	Software such as Lego Robotics
<i>Policy-development</i>	Hypothesis formulation Identifying causal relationships Inferring Synthesis Predicting Group discussion	Model building Simulation  <i>Decision-based learning</i>	Web based simulations

Table 2. Important stages in MFL and 4C/ID models with regard to cognitive development (Milrad, Spector and Davidsen, 2003)

<b>Learning Activity</b>	<b>MFL</b>	<b>4C/ID</b>
Introduction to the domain	Problem-orientation	Whole task introduction
Familiarizing with the system	Problem-orientation and learning with models	Part- or whole-task practice with prerequisite knowledge
Identification of causal relationships	From problem-orientation to inquiry exploration	Part-task practice and algorithmic methods
Elaboration of causal relationships	Inquiry-exploration with learning with models and by modeling	Whole-task practice and heuristic methods
Reflection on the whole system	From inquiry exploration to policy development with learning with models and by modeling	Heuristic methods
Understanding and solving new problems	Policy-development and learning by modeling	Whole-task practice and heuristic methods

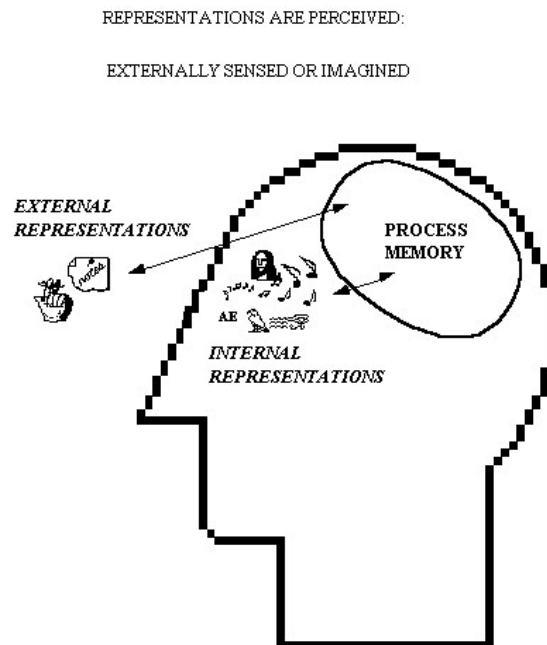


Figure 1. The Meaning of a Representation (Clancey, 1991)

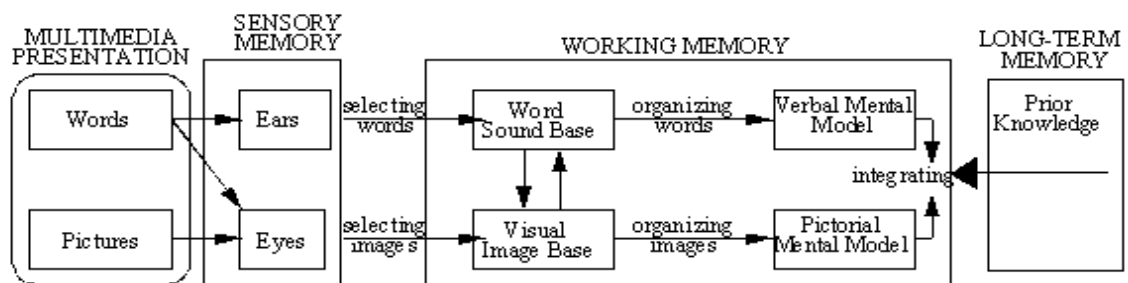


Figure 2. Depiction of Cognitive Load Theory (Mayer, Moreno, 1998)



## Effects of Students' Approaches to Learning on Performance in Two Pedagogical Environments

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### Abstract

This paper investigates various approaches to learning and their effect on performance of a cohort of international students in two different pedagogical environments. The effect of approaches to learning on performance was determined by using Cohen's  $d$  with Hedges  $g$  correction. Coe's spread sheet was used for the purpose. The study showed that the magnitude of difference in the effect of approaches of learning on performance varied from *very small* to *medium*. Teaching international students from diverse educational, linguistic and cultural backgrounds is a complex task. Students from different cultural backgrounds tend to exhibit greater diversity in their approaches to learning. Appropriate teaching strategies are suggested to use to enhance the learning process of international students. An understanding about the magnitude of difference in performance of students with various approaches of learning helps to optimize the learning environment.

**Keywords:** International Students, Approaches of Learning, Teaching Methods, Effect Size

### Introduction

Understanding student approaches to learning and learning preferences, the interaction between learning and teaching practices and the effect such interactions have on student performances were the area of interest of this research. Students from different cultural backgrounds tend to exhibit greater diversity in their approaches to learning than students from relatively same or similar cultural background (Bennett, 1999). This study investigated the effect of students' approaches to learning on their performance under two different methods of teaching and learning for a cohort of international students in Foundation Studies (FS) Biology classes at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) University, Australia. The two methods used in this study were the Traditional Teaching and Learning (TTL) and Problem-Based learning (PBL). Learning style is a personal quality that influences students' ability to acquire information and participate in learning experiences (Grasha, 1996). The learning style of each person is based on the mode of how information is gathered, processed and applied when it is needed. It is well established that students' individual differences influence both their learning and their academic achievement (Riding, 2005). It is a challenging task to accommodate all individual differences and optimize the learning environment. Several research studies have demonstrated that students score higher on tests when exposed to a teaching style that matches their learning style (Felder, Felder, & Dietz, 2002). However, no study has measured the magnitude of the difference in performance due to approaches to learning or teaching style differences. Secondly, there is a dearth of such research on international students at the post-secondary level. Thirdly, there has been no research into how well international students who are not very proficient in English can cope with PBL and its associated activities. It is on these three counts that this study is unique and differs from other educational research in this field.

Foundation Studies (FS) is a two semester course for preparing International students for their tertiary education in Australian universities (RMIT, 2006). Most of the Biology FS students proceed with their higher education in Health Science areas. Health education in Australian universities is increasingly using the Problem-Based method of teaching and learning. It is in this context that this study seeks to examine whether International students from vastly different educational, cultural and linguistic backgrounds are able to carry out their studies in the PBL method. PBL is an approach to education and is both a curriculum and a process (Barrows & Tamblyn, 1980). It is an instructional method that challenges students to learn how to learn, work cooperatively in groups to seek solutions to real world problems (Duch & Norton, 1992). TTL views teaching as a transmission of knowledge and learning as acquisition of knowledge. Programs are designed and organised around disciplines and students are taught through lectures and discussions. However, in TTL students are passive recipients of information and teachers often make assumptions about what their students should know. Sometimes such assumptions do not address students' abilities or needs (Knowles, 1975).

### Research Participants

The participants of this research were the whole population of Foundation International Biology students at RMIT during the 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006 academic years. There were two intakes in each year with an average of 14 Biology students in each intake. The first intake runs from January to November consisting of two 18-week semesters with five contact hours per week for Biology. The first semester for this intake runs from February to June and the second semester from July to November each year. The second intake runs from June to January and consists of two 14-week semesters with six contact hours each. The first semester for the second intake runs from June to September and the second semester from October to January of the following year. The total participants were 116 students over four academic years.

### Data collection

The data collection commenced in the second semester of 2003. In each intake thereafter, the data collection was conducted during the second semester. The Paragon Learning Style Inventory (PLSI) (Shindler, 2003) was administered to measure students' learning style preferences. The PLSI is a self-administered inventory based on the personality test called the MBTI, which in turn is based on Jung's theory of personality (Yeung, Read, & Schmid, 2005). Shindler and Yang developed this instrument and it has shown excellent reliability and stability (Shindler, 2002). It was developed specifically for use in educational settings and has been previously used in determining the learning styles of tertiary students (Yeung & Read, 2006). Foundation students at RMIT are all international students and the majority has difficulties learning in English during their first year in Australia. Hence the PLSI was used to determine their learning styles because of its simple language and structure of questions. Furthermore the easy self-assessed scoring system facilitated a reliable classification for educational purposes. The PLSI uses Jungian/Myers-Briggs dimensions, *Extroversion/Introversion*, *Sensing/Intuiting*, *Thinking/Feeling* and *Judging/Perceiving* (Shindler, 2002). Sixteen Learning Style Types (LST) are formed from these four dimensions. Each dimension has two traits and each student has one or the other as a preferred trait. Owing to the small number of participants in some of the LST, learning style traits have been considered for the analysis purpose. This provided a much better representation of each trait category of each dimension.

Of the ten topics in semester 2, one topic (Topic 1) was taught under the TTL method and the second topic (Topic 2) was taught under PBL method for the intake one (*Group 1*) of each year. For the intake two (*Group 2*) of each year, Topic 1 was taught under PBL method and Topic 2 was taught under TTL method. At the end of each topic a test was conducted to assess students' understanding in these particular areas. The test that was given after TTL method of teaching was named TTL test and the test after the PBL method of teaching was called the PBL test for the analysis purpose. Thus each participant took both TTL and PBL tests.

Each test consisted of two sections, Section A and Section B. Section A of each test consisted of 20 multiple-choice questions worth 20 marks. Section B of both tests consisted of four short questions worth 10 marks each. Hence the total mark for each test was 60. The learning issues in Topic 1 were DNA, RNA, genes, chromosomes, genotype, phenotype, the significance of meiosis in variation, monohybrid cross, dihybrid cross, polygenic inheritance and pedigree analysis. The learning issues of Topic 2 were mutation, types of mutations, diseases such as Sickle cell anemia, Cystic fibrosis, Down syndrome as examples of diseases caused by various types of mutations and protein synthesis (Varughese, 2002).

### Procedure for the Study

The *Group 1* of 2003 was taught Topic 1 in TTL. A test was conducted after the TTL to assess students' understanding of this topic. The same students were facilitated by the researcher to learn Topic 2 by PBL method. For this purpose, the students of Group 1 were divided into small groups, and each group was seated separately in the same classroom. A Case Study in the form of an analysis worksheet was given to each student of all the groups by the researcher. The case was prepared in such a way that students could derive the required learning issues from Topic 2 after group discussions

and deliberation about the case. The case was designed in three sections. After each section, there was a discussion time of about 10 minutes in which students within a group could identify and come to a common consensus about the key information, the problem mentioned, the hypotheses and rationale of the hypotheses. Each student wrote this information in the given space of the worksheet. In this group discussion the researcher was the facilitator and encouraged each student to participate actively. Then students in each group read and discussed the second section of the case. More information was added and hypotheses and rationale were added or modified according to the student reflection and deliberation about the case. The same process was continued with the third section. At the end of the three sections, students were able to derive the learning issues and each group identified a few learning issues. The researcher checked the learning issues derived by each group and made sure that all the required learning issues were covered. For this exercise two periods of approximately 50 minutes were used. The next two biology periods were used for collecting information about the learning issues and organising them by referring to library books, journals, videocassettes and Internet facilities. This section was conducted at RMIT library. Each group undertook the task separately. This information gathering session was used to build on existing knowledge of each group to enable them to solve the problems in the case study and learning issues. In this process students worked as a team helping each other to find the solutions for most of the learning issues. The researcher was helping and guiding the students to gather information at the appropriate level. The next two Biology classes were used for the presentation, discussion and deliberation by each group. At the end of the session all learning issues were summarized by the students and the researcher made sure that all the required information at the appropriate level was discussed and explained. A test was conducted after the PBL to assess students' understanding of this topic.

The same process was undertaken with Group 2 of 2003. However, the PBL method was used for Topic 1 and Topic 2 was taught by TTL method. The researcher prepared another PBL case study for Topic 1, so that students could derive all of the required learning issues for this topic. The same process was repeated in 2004, 2005 and 2006 using the same case studies and the same tests. The researcher marked both TTL and PBL tests of each group.

### Data Analysis

The analyses were mainly carried out using the statistical package SPSS 13.0 and an Excel spreadsheet. This included preliminary analyses of frequencies of data grouped according to the learning traits of the participants. This was followed by an investigation of the variations observed by determining the magnitude of the differences or effect sizes in performance by learning traits. Effect sizes were calculated by using Cohen's *d* (Cohen, 1988) with Hedges *g* correction (Hedges & Olkin, 1985). Coe's spreadsheet (Coe, 2006) was used for the purpose. Effect size measures the treatment effect (Glass, McGaw, & Smith, 1981). Descriptors for magnitudes of effect sizes include *small*, *medium*, *large* (Cohen, 1969) and *very small* (Izard, 2004). An effect size of  $\geq 0.8$  has been classified as *large*, any value  $\geq 0.5$  and  $< 0.8$  as *medium*, a value  $\geq 0.2$  and  $< 0.5$  as *small* and anything  $< 0.2$  as *very small* or negligible. In effect this provides an assigned range on either side of the endpoints for decimal rounding. For example any effect size from 0.45 to 0.74 is the assigned range for *medium* effect size.

### Results and Discussion

The effect of learning traits on performance in TTL and PBL was measured by the effect size (magnitude of difference) of the difference in means between pairs of learning traits in each dimension of PLSI. The results are given in Table 1.

The magnitude of difference in performance of *introvert/extrovert* traits was *small* in TTL and *medium* in PBL and both are in favour of students with *introvert* trait. It indicates that both *introvert* and *extrovert* students are comfortable in TTL. However, *extrovert* students need additional support in PBL. This could be because *extroverts* were probably less focused in self-directed learning expected in PBL. *Extrovert* students are impatient with long slow jobs, prefer to communicate by talking rather than writing, and like to learn a new task by talking it through with someone. *Introvert* students like to watch before doing, prefer working alone or with one other, set own standards possible, while *extrovert* students learn best from doing, are more at ease and confident socially, like to know how others are doing it and their ideas start from outside in (Shindler, 2003). In PBL students work in groups and they are expected to engage with complex situations presented to them. As a curriculum it consists of carefully selected and designed problems. As a process it needs systematic approaches in resolving problems or meeting challenges that are encountered in life and career. Since PBL is a time consuming process, a well organized approach to the whole learning process is expected from students. So *extrovert* students are recommended to organize themselves in a better way to improve their performance in PBL. Teachers should be aware of this and give additional support for the *extrovert* students in PBL.

The magnitude of difference in performance of *intuitive/sensing* students was *small* in both TTL and PBL, though it was in favour of students with *sensing* trait. This showed that students with these learning traits can perform equally well in both TTL and PBL. However, the effect was lesser in PBL. This could be because *intuitive* students were able to cope better with the demands of self-directed learning expected in PBL. *Intuitive* students are aware of new challenges and possibilities, focus on how things could be improved, dislike doing the same thing repeatedly, work in bursts of energy powered by enthusiasm with slack periods in between, whereas *sensing* students are more realistic, practical,

more patient and steady (Shindler, 2003). So students with these two traits are reasonably comfortable in both TTL and PBL. These students could be supported in their learning process by giving an overall picture of the task without overemphasizing details, providing individual attention when necessary and ensuring a mix of both traditional and Problem-Based methods of teaching.

The magnitude of difference in performance between *Thinking/Feeling* students was *small* in TTL and *very small* in PBL, both in favour of *thinking* trait. The effect was lesser in PBL. This could be because *feeling* students were able to cope better with PBL. Students with *thinking* trait are more interested in fascinating ideas and make decisions based on rational thought but students with *feeling* trait are interested in people than ideas and make decisions based on their heart (Shindler, 2003). However, *thinking* students might need more facilitation in group-oriented activities. This can be done by giving them concrete and regular feedback, convincing them of the necessity for accommodating the feelings of other students and valuing their logical input. In general students with these two traits can perform in a similar manner in both TTL and PBL.

The magnitude of difference in performance between *Judging/Perceiving* learning traits was found to be *medium* in TTL and *small* in PBL, both in favour of *judging* trait. Students with *perceiving* trait were able to cope better with PBL. Students with *judging* trait are more decisive, like planned activities and make decisions quickly where as students with *perceiving* learning trait often do things at the last minute and perform well under pressure of a deadline, adapt well to changing situations and use lists as reminders of all the things they have to do (Shindler, 2003). The performance of these students could be enhanced by providing clear written assignment guidelines and time frames for completion. They might need some help to make decisions and avoid postponing unpleasant jobs.

### Summary

This research study investigated approaches of learning of international students undertaking Foundation Studies at RMIT University under two different methods of teaching and learning. Although the results are modest the study does begin to address the question “are there different teaching and learning practices more appropriate to international students studying in an English dominated study environment?” The globalization of university curricula around the world demands such a consideration. In addition, catering for an ever increasing mobile student body needs to address such a question. Seeking to understand the learning needs of all students is a principal concern for all teaching staff at all level of education. In the light of some trends observed in this study, which involved a relatively small sample of international students, there is need for research on a much larger scale in order to ensure that conclusions may be generalised to other contexts. The study replicated in other universities or other countries may lead to greater insights into the influence of student approaches to learning and other student characteristics on academic performance under the traditional and Problem-Based method of teaching and learning.

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Table 1. Magnitude of difference in performance between learning traits

		n	Mean	sd	pooled sd	Diff in	Effect size Means
TTL	<i>Introvert</i>	71	37.07	11.21	11.46	4.79	0.42
	<i>Extrovert</i>	45	32.28	11.84			
PBL	<i>Introvert</i>	71	37.08	12.22	12.57	6.15	0.49
	<i>Extrovert</i>	45	30.93	13.10			
TTL	<i>Intuitive</i>	50	33.00	11.02	11.54	-3.89	-0.33
	<i>Sensing</i>	66	36.89	11.91			
PBL	<i>Intuitive</i>	50	33.43	12.17	12.88	-2.22	-0.17
	<i>Sensing</i>	66	35.65	13.39			
TTL	<i>Thinking</i>	58	36.12	11.92	11.66	1.82	0.16
	<i>Feeling</i>	58	34.30	11.39			
PBL	<i>Thinking</i>	58	35.57	12.25	12.90	1.75	0.13
	<i>Feeling</i>	58	33.82	13.51			
TTL	<i>Perceiving</i>	30	31.17	10.08	11.45	-5.45	-0.47
	<i>Judging</i>	86	36.62	11.88			
PBL	<i>Perceiving</i>	30	31.40	10.72	12.77	-4.44	-0.35
	<i>Judging</i>	86	35.84	13.40			





## Debunking EHEA Myths: Common ECTS Misconceptions and Why They Are Wrong

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### Abstract

The present article seeks to overcome some of the most common misconceptions which are currently proliferating in the application of the *European Credit Transfer System* (ECTS) at tertiary level. It presents and unpacks seven false myths affecting all the main curricular and organizational levels of the implementation of the new credit system -competencies, types of groupings and learning modalities, methodology, teacher and student roles, evaluation, and coordination-, expounding on why they are wrong and providing concrete examples of how to surmount them. The latter stem from five governmentally-funded pedagogical innovation projects and two investigations into the practical application of the *European Higher Education Area* (EHEA). Perhaps the most significant conclusion at which the paper arrives is that there is a pressing need to overcome misguided conceptions regarding the EHEA and to usher in a new era in the application of the ECTS based on accurate information and findings as opposed to perceptions.

**Keywords:** Higher education, Misconceptions, Pedagogical innovation, European Higher Education Area, European Credit Transfer System

### 1. Introduction

It is an uncontested fact that we are currently living a time of great change in higher education (HE) worldwide. As Ma (2008: 65) puts it, “Higher education in the world has experienced a drastic change in the last few decades”. In Europe, this transformation is being channelled via a specific policy framework: the creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), through the so-called “Bologna Process”. The latter has “effected significant changes in the landscape of Higher Education” (Tudor, 2009: 35) and initiated “a period of immense upheaval” (Lawley, 2009: 197). Indeed, words such a *reform*, *restructuring*, *reframing*, or *renewal* abound at present in the specialized literature on education at tertiary level.

We are precisely at that crucial moment in Europe of moving from theorizing to practice, of translating the general European agenda into a successful local one in order to meet Bologna standards by 2010. As the Graz Declaration (2003: 5) states, “the main challenge now is to transform the multitude of legislative changes that have been taking place across Europe in the past few years into meaningful academic aims and institutional realities”. In order for this goal to come to fruition, one of the greatest hurdles we currently face is lack of precise information on the practical application of the EHEA framework and its new credit system: the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). Misinformation has plagued initial attempts at implementing the new European credit system and led to misconceptions or false myths regarding what Bologna is implying in the practical arena. It is these misguided perceptions that the present article strives to overcome by targeting seven of the most common misconceptions which are currently proliferating in European higher education at all curricular and organizational levels and by expounding on why they are wrong and how they can be surmounted.

### 2. The backdrop: our projects and studies

In doing so, we shall allude to evidence stemming from five pedagogical innovation projects and two governmentally-financed investigations carried out by the research group ESECS (*English Studies in the European Credit System* – www.esecs.eu). The latter has been working for five years to furnish empirical evidence on the functioning of the ECTS through a pilot programme for its implementation which has been put in practice at the University of Jaén starting in the academic year 2004-2005.

The pedagogical innovation projects have consisted in using ICT and new methodologies to favor student-centered learning approaches. In this sense, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), data-driven learning (DDL) (*Note 1*) (cf. Pérez Cañado and Díez Bedmar, 2006), telecollaboration (*Note 2*) (cf. Ware and Pérez Cañado, 2007; Pérez Cañado, 2008; Pérez Cañado and Ware, 2009), virtual learning environments (*Note 3*) (cf. Pérez Cañado et al., 2008), podcasting (cf. Torralbo Jover, 2008), Internet texts (*Note 4*) (cf. Sánchez Ballesteros, in press), and cooperative learning through

peer tutoring (*Note 5*) (cf. Pérez Cañado et al., 2007) have all been employed to promote greater autonomy, involvement, and participation within the studentship, in accordance with the underlying rationale of the EHEA (CIDUA, 2005; Pérez Gómez et al., 2009a).

In turn, the research projects have allowed us, on the one hand, to carry out a qualitative investigation into the way in which the ECTS is being applied in *Language Studies* degrees across Europe (*Note 6*). To this end, four sets of questionnaires have been designed, validated, and applied in order to carry out a detailed analysis of ECTS piloting and which involve both agents of the teaching-learning process (students and teachers). These surveys have analyzed whether and which competencies are being developed and evaluated in language degrees across Europe, estimated the real amount of work put in on the part of both agents, determined the main methodological aspects involved in the teaching-learning process under the ECTS, and measured the degree of satisfaction of professors and students.

On the other hand, our second investigation (*Note 7*) will enable us to complement these data with outcomes from a quantitative study which will compare ECTS and traditional methodologies using experimental and control groups. Global and specific subject results and disciplinary competencies are being contrasted in both language teaching approaches to gauge their differential effects. These results will be completed through in-depth focus group interviews with source triangulation (students – teachers – ECTS coordinators) which will allow us to arrive at a detailed diagnosis of the functioning of the ECTS in the degree of English Philology at the University of Jaén.

We will refer back to these projects and studies in illustrating how to debunk common ECTS misconceptions and promote a precise understanding of what the application of this new methodology entails. The thrust of our argument is that fostering an accurate interpretation of the Bologna Process is a necessary starting point to guarantee smooth sailing in the successful application of the EHEA framework.

### 3. Debunking ECTS myths: seven common misconceptions and why they are wrong

We now examine each of the main misconceptions which are affecting all curricular and organizational levels in the implementation of the ECTS, explain why they are wrong, and provide suggestions deriving from the afore-mentioned projects and studies to overcome them. We offer direct quotes actually uttered by professionals from different university degrees (languages, education, applied sciences, engineering) who are in the process of adapting to the ECTS in European universities.

*3.1. “Of course I’m adapting to a competence-based model – I not only teach contents; I also play a movie in class from time to time”.*

This initial misrepresentation clearly points to a novel and largely unfamiliar concept which European universities have now incorporated as an integral part of their new degree structures: *competencies*. Objectives are now formulated in terms of competencies and learning outcomes, which involve not only contents or cognitive knowledge, but also skills, values, and attitudes (OECD, DeSeCo, 2003). Competencies represent an initial attempt to overcome the traditional European university model based on transmission of knowledge through ex cathedra lecturing (Tudor, 2006) in favor of a student-centered, meaning-based one where critical thinking skills are promoted (Pérez Gómez et al., 2009a). They also strive to bring classroom learning closer to the problems and situations of real-world contexts (Humphreys, 2005; Pérez Gómez et al., 2009b) and to ensure that students can adapt the “skills learned in one situation to problems encountered in another: in a classroom, the workplace, their communities, or their personal lives” (AACU report, 2002: 21). The ultimate aim is to form flexible and adaptable professionals who can apply competencies to the varied, unforeseeable, and complex situations they will encounter throughout their personal, social, and professional lives (Pérez Gómez et al., 2009b) and who can thus become active and useful citizens in our democratic society.

However, in making the necessary qualitative leap and mind shift required to teach competencies and not merely contents, many educators mistakenly associate the other components of a competence with unsubstantial activities –e.g. movies or games–, failing to realize that teaching competencies requires considerably greater effort than transmitting contents (Martín Ortega, 2008). To take a case in point, it is much easier to teach students the basic features which have characterized the diverse language teaching methods which have proliferated since the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century until our days than to, in addition, enable them to critically appraise, compare, and counter-examine such methods in terms of their merits, pitfalls, and contributions to the language teaching panorama. Competencies involve not only traditionally taught procedural knowledge, but also general instrumental (e.g. oral and written communication or basic abilities in computing), systemic (e.g. critical capacity or creativity), and personal (e.g. teamwork or leadership) abilities (Tuning Project, 2006). However, many HE professors are still unfamiliar with the notion of competence and important questions continue to arise regarding its definition, methodology, and evaluation, largely due to the fact that we are still sorely lacking in empirically-validated proposals for the implementation and assessment of competencies, an area which is in urgent need of research and will undoubtedly open new avenues for future investigations (Pérez Cañado, coord., 2009).

In this sense, what is being done at the University of Jaén to overcome this initial misconception? When designing the new plans of study or degree programs at our University, there has been much awareness-raising of the full implications of competence-based learning. A conscious effort has been made to include a feasible number of competencies in the new undergraduate degrees –normally around 40– and, to ensure they are adequately mastered, each one has been worked on at three different levels (beginner – intermediate – advanced) across the diverse subjects. Furthermore, specific student-centered methodologies have been assigned to each set of competencies covered in a subject and concrete evaluation procedures have been specified to assess their achievement. Finally, a realistic estimate of the number of hours required to master each competence has been made; that is, its *notional learning time* has been calculated to ensure careful thought is put into the requirements for its mastery. Through this detailed examination and planning of all the elements which factor into competence achievement, teachers will hopefully become aware that this new concept goes well beyond mere content instruction or inane activities and requires time and effort for adequate mastery.

3.2. *“Students are supposed to learn other things in addition to contents at university (e.g. critical thinking skills), but we don’t need to teach them explicitly”.*

This second misguided comment is directly related to the previous one, as is also affects the teaching of **competencies**. This quote, while correctly acknowledging what competencies imply (e.g. certain essential skills and abilities such as critical thinking), is, however, misguided in the methodology it associates with their instruction. Competencies need to be explicitly addressed and incorporated into HE teaching (especially cross-curricular generic ones), as, otherwise, we run the risk of not covering them at all. If left to be implicitly picked up –as has largely been the case prior to the creation of the EHEA–, competencies will most probably not be developed at all (Martín Ortega, 2008). And this is a chance we cannot take, given the current importance which potential employers attach to competencies: as De Miguel Díaz et al. (2006) underscore, employers not only look for professionals who are content-specialists in their respective areas of study, but who can work in a team, think creatively, demonstrate leadership abilities, or solve problems in the workplace, all generic competencies which now need to be overtly developed in the new EHEA degree programs.

Regrettably, this is still not the generalized case in Europe, as one of our very recent studies has revealed (Pérez Cañado, coord., 2009). According to the over 300 European students in our sample, these systemic competencies which employers foreground and which involve critical thinking skills, creativity, problem-solving, or capacity to adapt to new situations are precisely the ones they consider to be least developed and evaluated in HE language degrees.

Thus, fully aware that this is a glaring lacuna in our current education system, we have set up an ECTS seminar system at the University of Jaén during the academic year 2008-2009 in order to overcome it. These seminars have taken place once a month, from November to January and from March to May, and have consisted of six-hour monographic sessions which have focused on and developed certain cross-curricular generic competences previously diagnosed as particularly problematic for our English Philology undergraduate students (e.g. written and oral communication in English, the use of Internet resources to foster learner autonomy, or research techniques). Original materials for each session have been drawn up by teaching teams (Michavila, 2007) or clusters (Zabalza Beraza, 2004), thereby fostering coordination across subjects and interdisciplinary dialogue (Bousquet, 2008; Brantmeier, 2008; Pratt et al., 2008; Schechtman and Koser, 2008; Wellmon, 2008), and subsequently uploaded onto the virtual learning platform of our University (ILIAS) for unlimited student and teacher access (cf. Figure 1).

**Insert Figure 1 here.**

This initiative, which has proved extremely successful in its initial year of piloting (cf. Pérez Cañado, in press, a), has ensured the explicit coverage of essential generic competencies in our language curriculum, thereby contributing to debunk our second ECTS myth.

3.3. *“I have no objection to devoting an hour a week to ‘seminars’, but when I’m getting behind in my program, I use them as another theoretical class”.*

This third quote clearly points to an ECTS misconception related to **types of groupings** and **learning modalities**. According to the current official EHEA literature (CIDUA, 2005; Pérez Gómez et al., 2009a), the traditional theory/practice dichotomy observed in most European universities needs to be superseded by a bevy of different classroom organizations and learning modalities. There is still ample work to be done on this front, as many professors have trouble letting go of an almost exclusive reliance on traditional lockstep lecturing (Pérez Gómez et al., 2009a) and in understanding what types of activities can be carried out in smaller seminar groups. Indeed, in this sense, a recent study carried out within our FINEEES research project (cf. Pérez Cañado and Casas Pedrosa, in press) revealed that, according to the 218 students interviewed in focus groups, these seminars still have “fuzzy limits”, as they are simply used to continue advancing with the theoretical contents of the program or are not taught at all, thereby being used as a sort of study hall period for autonomous student work.

In order to foster this greater variety of groupings and modalities, at the University of Jaén, we now work with three main types of classroom arrangements: the whole group (comprising all the students in a particular subject), the basic group (with a maximum of 25 students), and the work group (from 4 to 6 students). These types of groupings intersect with another set of varied learning modalities:

- *Theoretical sessions*, which transmit knowledge through expositive and explanatory classes.
- *Practical sessions*, which put the theoretically transmitted knowledge into practice.
- *Seminars and workshops*, which favor student interaction for knowledge-building and assimilation of concepts.
- *Tutorials*, which offer personalized attention to optimize the learning process. In this sense, not only is the traditional *bureaucratic-functional tutorial* employed to revise exams or solve doubts related to assignments, but *academic tutorials* are also used (to offer academic orientation and bibliographical guidance), together with *teaching-learning tutorials* (where contents are reinforced and feedback on different projects is provided), and *personalized tutorials* (to offer professional orientation or personal advice).
- *External training*, which completes the students' formation in a professional context.
- *Group work*, which promotes social interaction and cooperation in order to consolidate knowledge and improve understanding.
- *Individual work*, which aims at developing self-directed learning.

Below is an illustration of how these diverse types of groupings and learning modalities intersect at our University, thereby overcoming the traditional theory/practice dichotomy and fostering an adequate use of seminars:

**Insert Figure 2 here.**

#### 3.4. *"If I don't explain the contents of the subject to the students, they are incapable of passing the exam".*

Our fourth false myth addresses perhaps the most patently affected curricular level in terms of ECTS changes: **methodology**. This quote clearly reflects the European university view of teaching at tertiary level and harks back to a traditionalist stance which sees teaching as transmission of knowledge and learning as reproduction of contents (Pérez Gómez et al., 2009c). This understanding of teaching at tertiary level often leads to what we have come to term "bulimic learning", where the students receive vast amounts of theoretical information from the professor, which they then proceed to memorize and regurgitate in an exam, quickly forgetting it due to its lack of recency or applicability to new contexts (Pérez Gómez et al., 2009a). It also induces the belief that university students need to be spoonfed the contents of the subjects they are taking, a tendency which can frequently be observed at European university.

However, contrary to these beliefs, the underlying rationale of the EHEA maintains that all the information students need is accessible to them through information networks such as the Internet. Thus, post-secondary teaching should be concerned with equipping learners with the tools they need to find, select, use, and interpret the vast amount of data they have within their reach (Pérez Gómez et al., 2009a). Competencies such as critical thinking skills or the ability to synthesize and analyze should be developed, and the move should be made towards a self-directed, autonomous learning where students' independence, involvement, and participation are fostered. As McLaren et al. (2005: 27) put it, the onus should now be "on successful learning rather than on the teaching provided".

This shift can be pushed forward by fostering pedagogical innovation and a "methodological plurality" (CIDUA, 2005: 26, 29) or method synergistics (Canagarajah, 2002). Within the latter, the traditional lockstep lecture does not disappear, but is used alongside other student-centered methods such as problem-based learning (PBL), project-oriented learning (POL), case studies, or cooperative learning (De Miguel Díaz et al., 2006).

At the University of Jaén, this is precisely what we have done through the pedagogical innovation projects mentioned in section 2. Alongside the more traditional focus on form approach (Norris and Ortega, 2000), we have now also incorporated aspects of cooperative learning (via our telecollaboration and peer tutoring projects), CALL (through our DDL experience), blended learning (thanks to the use of virtual learning environments in our sitcom and podcasting projects), the Lexical Approach (since lexical chunks have been the prime vocabulary aspect targeted in our sitcom, podcasting, and Internet projects), or Neurolinguistic Programming and Multiple Intelligence Theory (as we have worked on the main writing weaknesses of our students appealing to their different learning styles and preferred primary representational systems in the DDL and telecollaboration projects) (cf. Pérez Cañado, in press, b, for greater detail). All in all, with these projects, we have aimed to progress from a teacher-dominated to a student-centered paradigm, where both agents assume new roles and the professor ceases to be the exclusive source of information.

#### 3.5. *"My students still need me to do some teaching; I can't forego it in order to hand over the responsibility to them".*

**Teacher and student roles** are precisely what this next misrepresentation targets. The newfound advocacy of the afore-mentioned student-centered methodology could be mistakenly construed as involving the disappearance of the

teacher. This view is completely off-base; teachers and students merely have to be prepared to adopt new roles within the new credit system (McLaren et al., 2005; Martínez Lirola, 2007).

In the novel ECTS context, professors continue to be *directors* or *orchestrators*, *instructors* or *expert transmitters* of knowledge; that is, *sources of information* or “*pozos de ciencia*” (Note 8), in Medina’s (2004: 44) words. However, we are now also *motivators*, *dynamizers*, *stimulators*, and *creators* of a positive classroom atmosphere through the numerous pedagogical innovation projects we are putting into practice in the classroom. We become *counsellors*, *tutors*, and *advisers* in the personalized tutorials. We act as *guides*, *helpers*, *facilitators*, and *resources* in the seminar activities and in providing the students with references and guidelines for their autonomous work. We turn into *observers* and *participants* in the learners’ debates and peer tutoring sessions. We *plan*, *monitor*, and *supervise* the on-line telecollaboration exchange, peer tutoring project, and VLE lexical activities. We, of course, *assess* the outcomes of both the formative and summative work. We also turn into *investigators* of the findings yielded by our pedagogical innovation projects via the empirical studies which accompany them. And we equally need to engage in a greater *collaboration*, *communication*, and *transparency* (Giménez de la Peña and López Gutiérrez, 2006; Miedes Ugarte and Galán García, 2006; Pozuelos et al., 2006) with our colleagues in setting up joint projects (e.g. in the peer tutoring experience) and in ensuring smooth transitions between related subjects. In this sense, Giménez de la Peña and López Gutiérrez (2006: 10) stress that “[...] *una de las innovaciones que plantea el nuevo modelo docente es la apertura a la colaboración entre profesores y asignaturas para favorecer la comprensión de distintos puntos de vista o la intervención en diferentes ambientes.*” (Note 9)

All in all, the university teacher assumes a crucial role as *catalyst of change* (Miedes Ugarte and Galán García, 2006; Pérez Gómez et al., 2009c). This, not surprisingly, is entailing a greater amount of work, preparation, dedication, and change of mindset on the part of the teacher (Ron Vaz et al., 2006), which is not being achieved without difficulty (Jiménez Reina et al., 2006) and which sometimes verges on overload (Martos Montes et al., 2006; Pozuelos et al., 2006; Pérez Cañado, coord., 2009). In our specific case, the elaboration of original material (e.g. in the VLE project), the set-up, monitoring, and evaluation of the telecollaboration and peer tutoring experiences, or the investigations undertaken to determine the effects of our innovation are certainly involving a noteworthy effort on our part, though an undoubtedly worthwhile one.

A similar difficulty in the transformation of student roles is being perceived in the new system (e.g. Díaz Negrillo and Valera Hernández, 2006). Students now have to take responsibility for their own learning and to undergo an academic and personal maturation process. They are no longer passive recipients or empty vessels who accumulate and repeat the information received (Domingo et al., 2007), but, rather, the protagonists of the learning process. In Martínez Lirola’s (2007: 36) words, “[...] *el alumno, estimulado por la voluntad interactiva del profesor, ha de participar activamente en el aula, tomando las riendas cuando el profesor o la actividad se lo exija. Debe cambiar ciertos hábitos acomodaticios y pasivos, convencerse de que es, en realidad, el centro del proceso y afrontar con decisión ese reto.*” (Note 10)

This learner-centered education has induced significant changes for the studentship. The learners are more *autonomous* and *independent* (McLaren et al., 2005; Ron Vaz et al., 2006; Martínez Lirola, 2007) (e.g. through the telecollaboration tasks and lexical activities they have to complete in their personal work hours); more *active* and *participative* in classroom activities (Giménez de la Peña and López Gutiérrez, 2006) (e.g. by means of the “jury” system established to evaluate their classmates’ presentations in the peer tutoring project); more *creative* (Martínez Lirola, 2007; Domingo et al., 2007; Pérez Cañado, 2009); and more *involved in the decision-making process* (Taibi, 2006) (e.g. through our choice of DVDs for the VLE project based on their preferences). This clearly leads to an increased *personalization* of the learning process (Ron Vaz et al., 2006) and to a heightened *contact* and *closer relationship* between teacher and student (Martos Montes et al., 2006).

Handing over responsibility to our learners therefore does not entail the disappearance of the figure of the teacher, but rather, a reconfiguration of the roles of both agents in the teaching-learning process, something which has numerous assets. According to Martos Montes et al. (2006) and Felder and Brent (1996), all these changes are favoring more significant learning, greater retention of knowledge, and processing at a deeper level on the part of the student.

### 3.6. “There’s nothing like a final exam to provide information about the students’ progress and what they have learnt”.

Just as the ECTS is advocating an increased variety of teacher and student roles, of methodologies, and of learning modalities and groupings, so is it bolstering a more diversified range of *evaluation* techniques and strategies. Thus, the final exam as the sole source of assessment is fast being outed. As Pérez Gómez et al. (2009d) underscore, the final test is a frozen snapshot of the contents mastered by the students at a certain time and it favors the development of lower-order competencies (such as memorization and reproduction of information) vs. higher-rank ones (like analysis, synthesis, or reflection).

Thus, it should be combined with more formative or ongoing assessment techniques and should become one more evaluation procedure, albeit not necessarily the most significant one (De Miguel Díaz et al., 2006). The ones we have

incorporated in the ECTS pilot experience at our university range from short answer objective tests to oral interviews and presentations (e.g. in the peer tutoring project), reports and/or diaries on practical activities (e.g. after each telecollaboration task), portfolios (e.g. of the students' written production in the telecollaboration exchange), self-assessment systems (e.g. in the peer tutoring project), attitude scales (at the end of all our pedagogical innovation endeavors), or global assessment sessions (e.g. in the focus groups interviews within the FINEEES Project).

And this positive turnaround in evaluation techniques has been acknowledged and valued by our students, since they claim to be aware of this greater diversification in assessment procedures. They appreciate that the final exam is now one more evaluation strategy and consider that the formative assessment promoted in the ECTS more fairly reflects the amount of work and effort they put into each subject (Pérez Cañado and Casas Pedrosa, in press).

3.7. *"We're really going to advance with coordination this year, because the same person is teaching two complementary subjects".*

However, these positive results obtained with regard to evaluation are not sustained when it comes to **coordination**, the crucial organizational aspect of the ECTS targeted in this final misconception. Both the FINEEES (Pérez Cañado and Casas Pedrosa, in press) and ADELEEES (Pérez Cañado, coord., 2009) research projects have revealed that coordination still remains a niche to be filled with future ECTS initiatives. Indeed, in the former, the students detected lack of coordination between subjects and assignments, and even within the theoretical and practical parts of the same subject. In turn, in the latter, it transpired that teachers and students had a radically different view of what is happening in the application of the new credit system in language degrees, the teachers' outlook being significantly more positive than the students'. Thus, coordination between and within both participants in the teaching-learning process needs to be intensified and brought to the forefront, so that coordination with oneself—as this final quote portrays—is not the only type being deployed in the new credit system.

This need is foregrounded in the official EHEA literature, with the importance of coordination running through the Graz Declaration (2003) and Berlin (2003) and Bergen (2005) Communiqués. In Spain, the creation of "clusters" of teachers and subjects or "teaching teams" is also strongly advocated by Zabalza Beraza (2004) or Michavila (2007). As Martín Ortega (2008) puts it, Spanish university is at present one of the worst examples of individualism in teaching endeavors and nothing significant can be achieved in this context if not undertaken cooperatively.

In order to promote this coordination and cooperation amongst teachers at our university, we have established a campus-wide system of ECTS seminars for professors. The latter have taken place roughly once a month and have consisted in three- to four-hour sessions where teachers from different Spanish, European, and North American universities have shared innovative ECTS experiences which they have successfully implemented in their classrooms. Dialogue, debate, and reflection have been promoted, as well as teacher communication and coordination, and learning from others' best practices (Michavila, 2009). A further beneficial spin-off of these seminars has been the creation of teaching teams amongst professors from related disciplines, who have drawn up the programs for the new degree structures in a coordinated fashion, establishing similar methods, groupings, and evaluation techniques to guarantee a smooth transition across years and courses for the studentship. Fostering this coordination is essential, as it could well become the lynchpin of the new European Credit Transfer System.

#### 4. Conclusion

The present article has sought to overcome some of the most common misconceptions which are currently proliferating in the application of the European Credit Transfer System at tertiary level. It has presented and unpacked seven false myths affecting all the main curricular and organizational levels of the implementation of the new credit system—competencies, types of groupings and learning modalities, methodology, teacher and student roles, evaluation, and coordination—, expounding on why they are wrong and providing concrete examples of how to surmount them. The latter have stemmed from five governmentally-funded pedagogical innovation projects and two investigations into the practical application of the European Higher Education Area.

Perhaps the most significant conclusion at which we can arrive after the examination of these misguided assumptions is that there is a pressing need to overcome them and to usher in a new era in the application of the ECTS based on accurate information and findings as opposed to perceptions. To guarantee the success of the Bologna Process, we need to reengineer these misconceptions. Perhaps, as Martín Ortega (2008) ventures, 15 years from now we will be surprised that these questions were even spawning misinterpretations, but at present, we need to start generating change and continue forging new ground in the creation of our common European project. And the first step in doing this is to dislodge entrenched ideas which are misguiding the convergence process in order to wedge in new models of thinking and teaching in tertiary education. As Keynes (1936) put it, "The difficulty lies, not in the new ideas, but in escaping from the old ones, which ramify [...] into every corner of our minds".

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## Notes

Note 1. "Problemas de composición escrita en la universidad española: la utilización de la Enseñanza de Lenguas Asistida por Ordenador para incrementar la toma de conciencia" (Departamento de Filología Inglesa de la Universidad de Jaén, 2004-2005)

Note 2. "Las nuevas tecnologías en el sistema ECTS: un estudio empírico sobre la telecolaboración" (Convocatoria de Proyectos de Innovación Docente, 2006-2007)

Note 3. "Las TIC en el ECTS: el desarrollo de la competencia léxica a través de la enseñanza virtual" (Consejería de Innovación y Ciencia de la Junta de Andalucía, 2006-2007)

Note 4. "Los efectos diferenciales de la implantación del crédito europeo en la asignatura de Inglés Instrumental Intermedio" (Convocatoria de Proyectos de Innovación Docente, 2005-2006)

Note 5. "INNOFIL: La innovación docente en Filología Inglesa en el marco del EEES" (Convocatoria de Proyectos de Innovación Docente, 2007-2009)

Note 6. Project ADELEEEES: "Adaptación de la enseñanza de lenguas al EEES: Análisis del estado actual, establecimiento de redes europeas y aplicación de los nuevos títulos de Grado", financed by the Ministerio Ciencia e Innovación ("Subvenciones de acciones destinadas a la mejora de la calidad de la Enseñanza Superior y de la actividad del profesorado universitario en el año 2008", Programa Estudios y Análisis, Ref. EA2008-0173)

Note 7. Project FINEEES: "La Filología Inglesa en el Espacio Europeo de la Educación Superior" (Evaluado por la ANEP, Universidad de Jaén, Plan de Apoyo a la Investigación, Acción 16, Ref. UJA\_08\_16\_35)

Note 8. "wells of science" (our translation)

Note 9. "one of the innovations of the new teaching model is the openness to collaborate between teachers and subjects in order to foster the understanding of diverse points of view or intervention in different environments" (our translation)

Note 10. “The student, stimulated by the teacher’s interactive will, must participate actively in the classroom, taking control when the teacher or the activity require it. S/he must change certain passive habits, in the conviction that s/he is, in fact, the center of the process, facing that challenge decisively.” (Our translation)

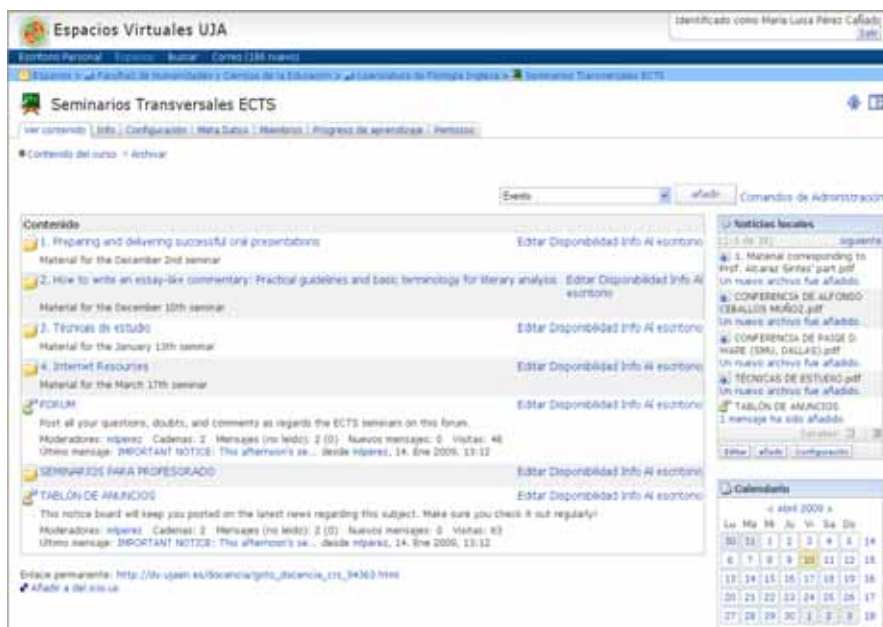


Figure 1

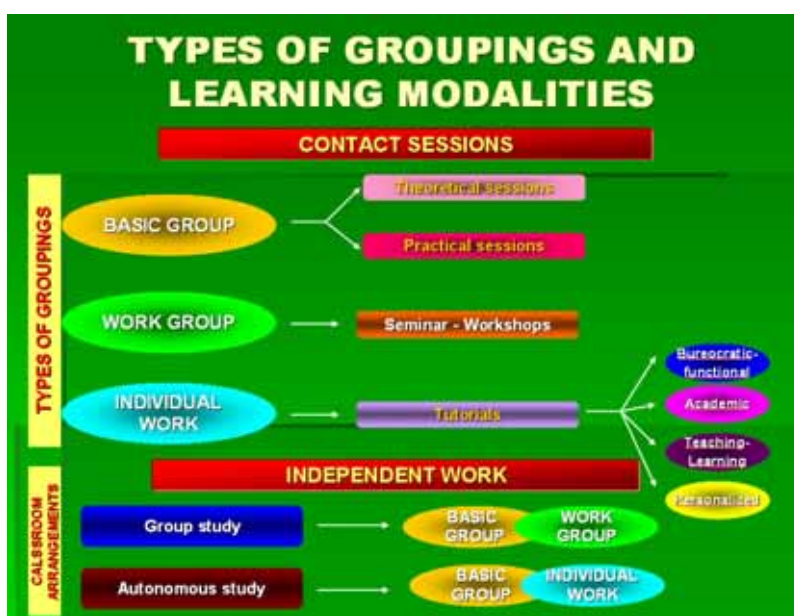


Figure 2



## Stereotypes Communication

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### Abstract

We live in a world, which is becoming a Global Village in which information and communication attract people's attention more than ever before. Our desire to communicate with strangers and our relationships with them depend on the degree to which we are effective in communicating with them. There are so many factors restricting or improving people's communication. This essay gives an analysis based on one factor called stereotypes. In intercultural research, the influence of stereotypes on people's behaviors in communication is a very important issue to take into account. This paper aims to illustrate stereotypes from the aspects of their social and psychological perspectives, great influence on people's communication, the problems they may cause, and some solutions.

**Keywords:** Stereotypes, Communication, Social, Psychological, Problems, Solution

### 1. Definition of Stereotypes

Stereotypes simply mean cognitive representations of another group that influence our feelings toward members of that group. Lippman (1922) refers to stereotypes as "pictures in our heads." He points out stereotypes have both a cognitive and affective component:

Stereotyping is not merely a way of substituting order for the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality. It is not merely a shortcut. It is all these things and more. It is a guarantee of our self-respect; it is the projection upon the world of our own sense of value, our own position and our own rights. The stereotypes are, therefore, highly charged with feelings that are attached to them. (pp. 63-64)

### 2. Two Aspects of Stereotypes

*2.1 If we can make accurate stereotypes, then our cultural-level predictions about strangers' behavior can also be accurate.*

Stereotypes, in and of themselves, do not lead to miscommunication and /or communication breakdown. To some extent, people's assumption to others leads to stereotypes. The accuracy of our predictions depends on whether the traits that we include in our stereotype of another group are similar to the ones in that group's stereotype of its own group (i.e., are our stereotypes valid?). If the traits we apply to another group agree with the traits members of that group apply to themselves, our stereotype should lead to accurate interpretations of the behavior of members of the group who are typical. When we place someone in a category, our stereotype of people in that category helps us predict his or her behavior. In other words, we are able to reduce our uncertainty because we assume that our stereotypes tell us how typical group members communicate (Krauss & Fussell, 1991). If the other person has informed us of his or her category membership, our predictions may be accurate. For example, the distinctiveness of Chinese cultural characteristics has been recognized in these ways. Chinese are often described as: emotionally more reserved, introverted, fond of tranquility, overly considerate, socially overcautious, habituated to self-restraint and so forth. (Young, 1994) If one says that he is a typical Chinese, then we can make some accurate predictions of his or her behavior if our stereotypes of people from China differentiate Chinese from Japanese. If our stereotype does not include this differentiation, then our predictions will probably not be accurate.

*2.2 Inaccurate stereotypes often lead to misunderstanding.*

In Hewstone and Giles' model, miscommunication is framed as the result of inaccurate negative stereotyping, usually the dissolution of group relationship. If our stereotypes are inaccurate, we cannot make correct attributions about

strangers' behavior.

As for this point, we tend to use group identities to crystallize into recognizable patterns of communicative behavior. But very often, features of other's communicative (behavior) styles are judged inappropriately. Ronen (1979) says that one's religion, mother tongue, culture, also one's education, class, sex, skin color, even one's height, age, and family situation are all potentially unifying factors. But the cues we use are not always accurate ways to categorize others (i.e., an inaccurate categorization occurs when we put someone in a category in which he or she would not place herself or himself). Individual members of a group may or may not fit a stereotype we have of that group. If we categorize strangers who do not identify strongly with their ethnic group and who do identify strongly with their culture on the basis of their ethnicity, our prediction will probably be inaccurate. That will cause inaccurate stereotypes. For example, compared with American people, English people are considered cold and not very open; Making friends with them takes a very long time; They like a certain distance when talking, etc. But things usually turn out to be much more complex (e.g. include a large number of traits in the stereotype and differentiate subgroups within the group being stereotyped).

Another source of inaccuracy in our predictions based on our stereotypes is that the boundaries between many social groups are fuzzy (Clark & Marshall, 1981). For example, what is the boundary between educated and uneducated people? Or between young and old? Even skin color may not be a good predictor of category membership. There are, for instance, light-colored African Americans who look like European Americans. These individuals may be categorized as European American solely on the basis of skin color. They may, however, identify strongly with being African American. Similarly, dark-skinned African Americans may not identify strongly with their ethnic group. When communicating with strangers, we might categorize them on the basis of one group membership (e.g., ethnicity) and assume that their social identities based on this category are influencing their behavior. The strangers, however, may be basing their behavior on a different social identity (i.e., social class, gender). For instance, Angela was born in Korea but has been living in Canada for a long time. She thinks two different cultures shaped her a lot. She has two names: Angela and Sun-Kyung. "There are times when I think that I have two personalities. Depending on where I am and whom I'm with. I would wave hello to my teachers, but bow to my parents' Korean friends when they visited our home." Obviously, predictions about their behavior based on skin color, or something else are inaccurate.

To sum up, even if others are typical members of the group in which we categorize them, the inferences we make about them on the basis of their group membership may not be accurate. There are two reasons for it: One is that our stereotypes may not be valid (i.e., our stereotypes of their group are different from their stereotypes of the group); the other reason is that the group membership we are using to categorize them may not be affecting their behavior in the current situation. Furthermore, if we rigidly hold our stereotypes and are not willing to question them, we can never reach the point where we know strangers as individuals (i.e., we can never make psychocultural predictions about their behavior), and our attributions about an individual strangers' behavior will continue to be incorrect.

### 3. Problems of Stereotypes and Solutions

#### 3.1 *Stereotypes may lead ineffective communication when we communicate with strangers.*

Our stereotypes tend to be activated automatically when we categorize strangers and when we are not communicating mindfully (see von Hippel, Sekaquaptewa, & Vargas, 1995). We, therefore, unconsciously try to confirm our expectations when we communicate with strangers. Our stereotypes constrain strangers' patterns of communication and engender stereotype-confirming communication. In other words, stereotypes create self-fulfilling prophecies. We tend to see behavior that confirms our expectations even when it is absent. We ignore disconfirming evidence when communicating on automatic pilot. When we communicate on automatic pilot, we do not cognitively process all the information about others that is available to us (Johnston & Macrae, 1994). Generally, the greater our cultural and linguistic knowledge, and the more our beliefs overlap with those of the strangers with whom we communicate, the less the likelihood there will be misunderstandings. To increase our accuracy in making prediction, we must try to understand which social identity is guiding strangers' behavior in a particular situation. And to be effective in communication with strangers, we must keep our minds open and be mindful.

#### 3.2 *Since stereotypes are a natural product of the communication process, they influence the way we process information.*

Stereotyping is the result of our tendency to overestimate the degree of association between group membership and psychological attributes. While there may be some association between group membership and psychological characteristics of members, it is much smaller than we assume when we communicate on automatic pilot. When we communicate on automatic pilot, we interpret incoming messages on the basis of the symbolic systems we learned as children. Besides, our processing of information is biased in the direction of maintaining the preexisting belief systems. We remember more favorable information about our ingroups and more unfavorable information about outgroups (Hewstone & Giles, 1986). So we tend to process information that is consistent with our stereotypes and our stereotypes

do not change.

To have objective cognition on the information of strangers, we can process all the information available to us if we are mindful of our communication. We need for predictability, to avoid diffuse anxiety, to sustain our self-conceptions, and above all, knowledge. When we process all the information available to us, our stereotypes of strangers change.

Our tendency to stereotypes automatically is enhanced when we are highly anxious. Wilder (1994) points out that “when anxiety distracts persons from careful attention to the environment, they rely more on cognitive structures such as social stereotypes in making judgments of others.” (pp. 87-88) Anxiety stems from feeling uneasy, tense, worried, or apprehensive about what might happen. Anxiety is an important motivating factor in intergroup encounters. If anxiety is too high, we avoid communicating with members of other groups in order to lower our anxiety. To be motivated to communicate with strangers, we have to manage our anxiety if it is too high or if it is too low.

The skills necessary to communicate effectively and appropriately with strangers are those that are directly related to reducing our uncertainty and anxiety. Reducing or managing our anxiety requires at least three skills: ability to be mindful, ability to tolerate ambiguity, and ability to calm ourselves.

#### 4. Conclusion

Stereotypes are the content of the categories when we are categorizing people. The stereotypes we hold have a direct influence on our communication with strangers. Our initial predictions about strangers' behavior must, out of necessity, be based on the stereotypes we have about the strangers' culture, race, or ethnic group. To the degree that our stereotypes are accurate, we can make accurate cultural-level predictions about strangers' behavior. If our stereotypes are inaccurate, we cannot make correct attributions about strangers' behavior. Further, if we rigidly hold our stereotypes and are not willing to question them, we can never reach the point where we know strangers as individuals (i.e., we can never make psychocultural predictions about their behavior), and our attributions about an individual strangers' behavior will continue to be incorrect. To avoid inaccurate stereotypes, we should be conscious that the problem of misinterpreting others' behavior is compounded because we tend to interpret strangers' behavior on the basis of our own frame of reference. In addition, with stereotypes, people are likely to estimate the information they get from communication impertinently. Finally, controlling our anxiety, and making it promoting is an effective way enhancing our communication with strangers. In order to increase our effectiveness in communicating with strangers, we need to increase the complexity of our stereotypes (e.g., include a large number of traits in the stereotype and differentiate subgroups within the group being stereotyped) and question our unconscious assumption that most, if not all, members of a group fit a single stereotype (Stephan & Rosenfield, 1982). Anyway, the successful intercultural understanding is based on recognizing the ways in which two cultures resemble one another as well as the ways in which they differ.

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## Methods of Upper Body Training to Increase Overhand Throwing Power

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### Abstract

Those who have taught motor skills would most likely agree that the overhand throw may be the most difficult skill for students to master and for physical education instructors or coaches to teach. The timing involved when generating power to perform the overhand throw begins in the toes/feet and moves up the leg, hip, thorax (core muscles), arm, and ends in the finger tips. The overhand throw requires the coordination of most of the joints in the human body. Another consideration related to the complexity of the overhand throw is that the dominant or throwing side of the body is performing a completely opposite movement than the non-throwing side. The authors have analyzed the overhand throw joint by joint and then suggested methods of increasing power and strength in each area beginning with the fingers and ending in the muscles of the body's core. This paper provides information that suggests various methods of training for increasing power in the overhand throw by developing the core and upper body muscles. Often the overhand throw is performed without the assistance of force generated in the lower body. The focus of this paper is directed toward the development of upper body strength to compensate for situations where the lower body is in a position where it cannot contribute to the process of developing force when executing the overhand throw.

**Keywords:** Core muscles, Motor skills, Muscle analysis, Overhand throw, Rest intervals, Training methods, Upper body plyometric, Work intervals

### Introduction

Those who have taught motor skills would most likely agree that the overhand throw may be the most difficult skill for students to master and for physical education instructors or coaches to teach. The timing involved when generating power to perform the overhand throw begins in the toes/feet and moves up the leg, hip, thorax, arm, and ends in the finger tips. The overhand throw requires the coordination of several joints in the human body. An additional consideration when teaching the overhand throw related to the complexity of the movement is that the dominant or throwing side of the body performs a completely opposite movement than the non-throwing side. However, the soccer kick may rival the overhand throw in some areas. When performing a soccer kick the intricate part of the skill involves balancing on one foot while striking the ball with the opposite foot. From the waist up the body is primarily involved in maintaining balance. A more difficult soccer kicking skill would be to maintain speed instead of slowing down or stopping when kicking the ball. The following information suggests various methods of training for increasing power in the overhand throw by developing the core and upper body muscles. Often the overhand throw is performed without the

assistance of force generated in the lower body.

### **Analysis of the Upper Body Muscles in the Overhand Throw**

The phases involved in the analysis of gross motor skill movements consist of the preparatory, force development, execution of the skill, and the follow through. When analyzing the right arm overhand throwing movement, the purpose of the preparatory phase (eccentric contraction) includes cocking the arm and maneuvering the joints on the right side of the body in the opposite direction of the throw. These movements are the foundation for all plyometric movements, a quick stretch (eccentric contraction) followed by a concentric contraction. The preparatory process aligns the body segments involved in the throw in a favorable position to not only generate and impart force but to facilitate accuracy (Luttgens & Hamilton, 2006). The problem specific to the overhand throw is that often the thrower executes the skill without the luxury of maximum force generated by the lower body. In many gross motor skills the power to perform the skill is generated by a powerful push of the toes, the force developed by the foot, ankle, knee, and hip driving off the throwing surface. Additional power is generated by the core muscles (abdominals and obliques). The classic baseball catcher's stance is an excellent example. It is similar to a full squat with the buttock resting on the lower leg or calf muscles. Many times catchers snap off a quick throw from the squat position using primarily the force generated by the upper body. This paper will focus on the development of power in the upper body particular to overhand throwing.

### **Fundamental Movement Analysis of the Core and Upper Body Muscles When Throwing**

The fundamental movements of the core muscles or trunk utilized in the overhand throwing motion includes flexion of the spine (Rectus Abdominis), rotation (Internal & External Obliques), and lateral rotation of the trunk to the opposite side of the throwing arm (Internal & External Obliques). While in the throwing motion, the upper arm movement involves the muscles that move the humerus of the shoulder joint (Anterior Deltoid, Pectoralis Major). The overhand throwing pattern produces medially rotation (Teres Major, Subscapularis, Deltoid, Pectoralis Major, & Latissimus Dorsi) and extension of the humerus which resembles a whip-like movement of the arm (Latissimus Dorsi, Teres Minor, & Infraspinatus). The elbow joint contributes force by quick extension of the elbow (Triceps & Anconeus). The wrist adds force by flexion and radial or ulnar flexion of the carpals (Flexor carpi Radialis & Ulnaris). Flexion of the fingers is an important function in the last stage of imparting force on the object (Flexor Digitorum Profundus & Superficialis). The phalanges impart force prior to the release of the object by flexing the fingers (Luttgens, K & Hamilton N. 2006).

The training methods were divided into the following areas; fingers, hand, forearm, triceps, shoulder joint, and trunk. All of these areas may require unique training methods due to the demanding skills involved in the overhand throw. The exercises below may be used to develop power in the muscles involved in the joint movements analyzed previously in the throwing motion.

### **Training Fingers, Hand, and Thumb Muscles**

When training the hand muscles, especially the thumb, start by squeezing a racquet ball or tennis ball with your thumb and fingers. This activity may increase thumb and finger strength. Increasing thumb and finger strength in the overhand throw may not only improve the skills related to grasping the object, but increase the amount of force generated in the throw. By squeezing a racquet ball or tennis ball, the number and severity of thumb and finger injuries may be reduced. An additional advantage of increasing thumb and finger strength is the improvement in hand and finger grasping while catching objects. These exercises should be performed to failure with each hand alternating right and left hand exercises while letting the muscles in the free hand recover. These exercises may be completed on alternate days of the week.

### **Training the Forearm and Wrist**

The first exercise recommended for training the forearm and wrist should be performed with an Olympic bar. Place the bar on your backside just below the buttocks, using an overhand grip, relax and contract the forearm by alternating flexion and extension of the wrist. Perform this exercise for three sets at 15-20 reps per/set. Wrist rollers that provide wrist flexion exercises may be effective for these athletes by reversing the direction of a weighted wrist roller to include wrist extension. The next exercise involves filling a bucket or large bowl with rice or kernels of corn and digging toward the bottom of the bucket alternating right and left hands. This exercise strengthens grasping movements. By opening and closing the hand, while digging in rice, the athlete will strengthen both the extensors and flexors of the fingers and thumb. Next, the athlete should post one forearm at a time on a bench while allowing the wrist and hand to extend past the support. The athlete should use a light dumbbell to perform the following exercises: First, with your hand in a neutral position mimic the movements of pounding a nail with a hammer isolating on the wrist action. This movement is ulnar and radial flexion which may be used in throwing and catching motions.

### **Training Triceps Muscles**

The triceps is a major muscle in the throwing motion of the upper arm. Supine overhead triceps extensions, standing kickbacks, triceps pull downs with a rope, overhead dumbbell extensions, and close grip bench are exercises that

strengthen the triceps. The triceps are an important muscle used in throwing. The thrower may not always have time to gather momentum with their legs and throw. The overhand throwing movement is sometimes modified to resemble a dart being thrown at a dart board. The above movement has now been modified into a short and quick movement in the arm, shoulder, and trunk. Standing and supine overhead throws with a medicine ball will activate many of the muscles involved in the upper body. The triceps may be even more stimulated if each overhead throw is started with the elbows flexed. When the focus is on strengthening the upper body of the athlete, it is important to remember to use the leg muscles as little as possible. The following is a list of plyometric exercises to develop upper body power.

### **Medicine Ball Chest Pass**

Hold the medicine ball with both hands in front of your chest. Push-pass the ball to a partner, as in performing chest passes in basketball. The partner should immediately pass the medicine ball back to you upon catching the ball. Try to pass the ball quickly back and forth. Force is generated by horizontal adduction of the humerus, extension of the elbow, and flexion of the wrist and fingers. The core muscles of the trunk are in flexion when the ball is released (Reference #1, #4, #6, & #11).

### **Ballistic Pushups**

Ballistic pushups are simply pushups that launch the body off the ground with each repetition. Upon landing, immediately launch the body upward. Variations of this exercise include clapping hands in mid-air after pushing off the ground, or launching the body with enough force so that both hands and feet are airborne. Another alternative exercise involves a slight lateral movement with each repetition, so that the body traverses in a circle with the feet at the center of the circle spending as little time as possible in contact with the ground (see figure #7 below). Force is generated by horizontal adduction of the humerus, extension of the elbow, flexion of the wrist and fingers. The core muscles of the trunk are in a static state of contraction (Reference # 7).

### **Training the Trunk (Core Muscles)**

Core muscles of the trunk include the abdominal muscles, internal oblique, external oblique and back muscles (Erector Spinae). Overhand throws require the core muscles to contribute force to the movement when the legs are not a factor in generating force. Notice that plyometric exercises were selected over weight training exercises. When training the core muscles for power barbells, dumbbells, and weight plates may not be as safe. Medicine ball plyometric activities will be explained in detail below.

### **Overhead Throws**

1. Stand with one foot in front (staggered stance) with knees slightly bent.
2. Move the medicine ball back behind the head and forcefully throw the ball forward as far as possible to a wall.
3. Catch the medicine ball on the bounce from the wall and repeat according to prescribed repetitions. Keep the time between pulling the ball back and starting the throw (transition phase) to a minimum. This exercise may also be performed with a partner.

Tip, when drawing the arms back in preparation for the throw, place the elbows in a flexed position. Force is generated by extension of the shoulder joint and elbow, flexion of the wrist and fingers, and flexion of spine (References #1, #4, #6, & #11).

#### *Side Throws*

1. Stand with feet hip width apart placing the left foot approximately one foot in front of right.
2. Hold medicine ball with both hands with arms slightly bent.
3. Swing the ball over the right hip and forcefully underhand toss the medicine ball forward to a partner or wall maintaining abdominal muscle involvement to maximize proper usage of core muscles.
4. Catch the ball on the bounce from a partner or wall and repeat.

Force is generated by diagonal movements of the shoulder joint, flexion of the elbow, flexion and ulnar/radial flexion of the wrist, flexion of the fingers, while the spine rotations and lateral flexes (References #3, #8, & #13).

#### *Overhead Backward Throw*

1. Stand with feet slightly wider than the hips with a partner or trainer standing approximately 10-15 yards behind you.
2. Grasp the ball and lower ones' body into a semi-squat position. Explode upward extending the entire body releasing the medicine ball up and over the body.
3. The goal is to throw the ball behind you as far as possible generating most of the power with the legs. This movement may improve the coordination of the upper and lower body.
4. Catch the ball on the bounce from a partner and repeat according to prescribed repetitions.



Force is generated by flexion of the shoulder joint, flexion of the elbow, wrist, and fingers while the spine extends (References #10 below).

### **Slams**

1. Stand with feet parallel approximately shoulder-width apart with the knees slightly bent.
2. Pull the medicine ball back behind your head and forcefully throw the ball down on the ground.
3. Catch the ball on the bounce and repeat according to prescribed repetitions.

Force is generated by extension of the shoulder joint and elbow, flexion of the wrist, flexion of the fingers, and flexion of spine (Reference #4).

### **Explosive Start Throws**

1. Stand with feet slightly wider than the hips. Knees should be slightly bent.
2. Pick the medicine ball up to chest level.
3. Quickly jump driving the body upward and simultaneously pressing the ball straight out as far and fast as possible.
4. As the ball is pressed forward, push off hard with either leg so that your body actually moves forward a couple of steps.

Force is generated by horizontal adduction of the shoulder joint, extension of the elbow, flexion of the wrist, flexion of the fingers, and flexion of spine (once an upright trunk position has been established).

### **Single Arm Overhead Throws**

1. Stand with feet slightly wider than hip-width.
2. Grasp medicine ball and bend ankles, knees, and hips into a semi-squat position. Throw the medicine ball up in the air explode upward extending the entire body.
3. The goal is to throw the ball as high as possible generating most of the power in the legs coordinating the movements in the upper and lower body.
4. Catch the ball on the bounce and repeat.

Force is generated by abduction of the shoulder joint, extension of the elbow, flexion of the wrist, flexion of the fingers, and flexion of spine. (Reference#11)

### **Squat Throws**

1. Posture, stand with feet slightly wider than the wide of the hips with the knees should be slightly bent.
2. Hold a medicine ball at chest level and squat down to a parallel position.
3. Quickly explode upward out of the squat position and jump as high as possible. At the start of the jump, begin shoulder pressing the ball to full extension; finish the movement at the peak of the jump. End the movement by pushing the ball as high as possible into the air. It is important to minimize the time spent in the squat position by quickly jumping up as quickly as possible.
4. Catch the ball on the bounce and repeat according to the number of prescribed repetitions.

Force is generated by abduction of the shoulder joint, extension of the elbow, flexion of the wrist and fingers, and flexion of spine (Reference #5).

### **Tire Throw**

The tire throw is performed much like a discus throw. The movement starts by gripping the inside edge of the tire with one or both hands. Then rotate the trunk in the opposite direction of the throw keeping elbows slightly flexed and the lead arm shoulder height. The trail arm is approximately at hip height. Once the arm and tire are behind the body quickly rotate the trunk to the left (for throwing with the right arm) and release the tire at approximately a 45 degree angle in the direction of the throw. Force is developed by horizontal adduction of the shoulder joint, flexion of the elbow, ulnar flexion of the wrist, and flexion of the fingers. Prior to the release of the tire, rotation and lateral flexion of the spine to the opposite side is performed. (Martialarts.jameshom.com) (Reference #3 -13).

When using the above exercises the following work to rest intervals may be used. Work to rest intervals of 1:5 to 1:15 and 3 sets of 3-6 reps are recommended for power activities. One to five (1:5) work to rest intervals are recommended for training the glycolytic system while 1-15 intervals are recommended for the ATP-PCr system. These metabolic systems may be enhanced by plyometric activities (Wilmore & Costill, 2004).

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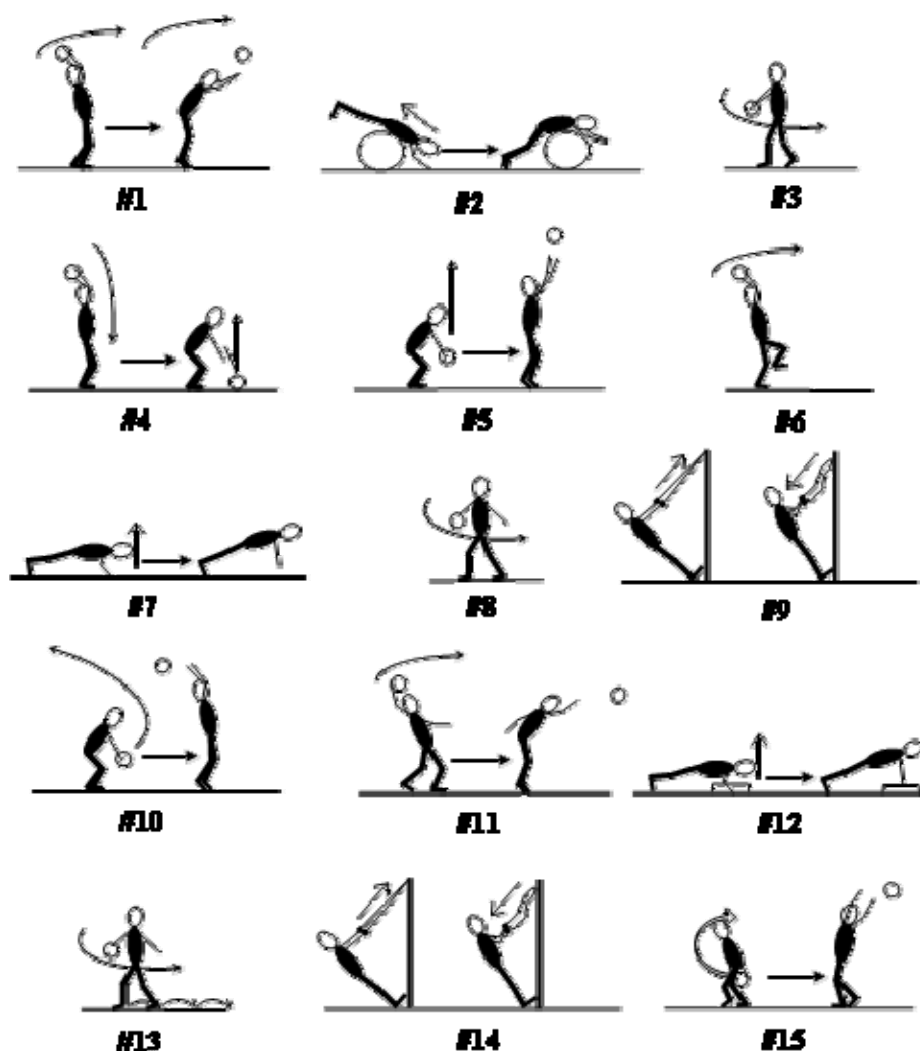


Figure 1. Upper Body Medicine Ball Activities

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## On the Economic Approach to Bilingual Education in China

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### Abstract

In the process of globalization, each country culture retains an independence from the others besides in reality a fusion of several cultures. Bilingual education as an effective means and intangible resource, which have long been neglected, will play an important part in social and economic development in China.

Bilingual education, in this method of language instruction, the regular school curriculum is taught through the medium of a foreign/second language. The foreign/second language is the vehicle for content instruction. The subject of the instruction is to make students master language as well as subject knowledge.

This thesis attempts to expound the necessity of the implementation of bilingual education in China in the process of globalization. Bilingual education is not a unitary language phenomenon and usually displays an essentially economic concern for the languages to be used. Hence, economics can be of service and offer insights and information in the study of language issues that other approaches do not provide so far. Besides, the problems in China's bilingual education are analyzed, followed by a list of suggestions for reference, however, due to a variety of reasons, there still exist several drawbacks like lack of linear research and whatnot. Those are to be dealt with in further researches.

**Keywords:** Globalization, Bilingual education, Economics, Problems

With globalization process and the rapid social and economic development, the need for bilingual talents is ever-increasing. In response, China has begun a new educational reform ----Chinese-English bilingual education. There has witnessed a rapid growth of bilingual schools and classes. However, due to lack of theoretical and practical research, there are a couple of problems which deserve attention, for instance, the shortage of bilingual teachers and materials and the absence of bilingual environment.

Learning a language in wider communication not only can yield benefit to an individual but also add to the benefits of all other members. This generates the economics of language, or language economics, an emerging field of research that is taking an increasing interest in the economic aspects of language matters. Its aim is to provide readers, particularly non-economists, a clear idea of what economics could say about language matters (Grin 1996). Over the past 40 years, the applying of the principles of economic modeling to language issues has shed new light on the explanation of the production and consumption of a language and its effect on the national economy. Indeed, language cannot be adequately studied without being given full consideration to its economic aspect.

This thesis will make reference to the insights of early studies in the economics of language and use some of the mainstream economic theoretical framework to evaluate the cause-and-effect sequence of language issues, especially, language education in China. Chapter two presents a brief review of globalization, Chapter three and four introduces the economic analysis of bilingual education and the costs and benefits of bilingualism in China. Chapter five presents what are the necessary support ways to improve the bilingual education?

### 1. Globalization and new linguistic order

#### 1.1 Definitions of globalization

Wherever in the west or the east, has the globalization become a hot topic, just like the KFC. Jan Art Scholte (2000) has argued that at least five broad definitions of globalizations can be found in the literature. Globalization as internationalization regards globalization as simply another adjective to describe cross border relations between countries. It describes the growth in international exchange and interdependence. Globalization as liberalization refers to

a process of removing government-imposed restrictions on movements between countries in order to create an open, borderless world economy. Globalization as universalization means the process of spreading various objects and experiences to people at all corners of the earth. Globalization as westernization or modernization is understood as a dynamic, whereby the social structures of modernity are spread the world over, normally destroying pre-existent cultures and local self-determination in the process.

### *1.2 The new linguistic order-Bilingualism*

There has never been a time when so many nations need talk to each other so much. There has never been a time when so many people wished to travel to so many places. And never has there been a more urgent need for a global language (Crystal, 1997). However, the spread of English as a global language has not lessened the importance of local language development. Languages of identity need to be maintained. Arguments about the need for national or cultural identity are often seen as being opposed to those about the need for mutual intelligibility. According to Crystal (1997), this situation is the familiar one of bilingualism ---but bilingualism where one of the languages within a speaker is the global language, providing access to the world community and the other is a regional language, providing access to a local community. The two functions can be seen as complementary, responding to different needs. No two languages will compete for the same function, so a world of linguistic diversity can in principle continue to exist in a world united by a common language

### *1.3 What is bilingualism and bilingual education?*

What is bilingualism? According to <<Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English with Chinese Translation>>, a person who speaks two languages is called bilingual. The bilingual does not have to speak both languages with equal fluency to be a bilingual. It is very common for bilinguals, even those who have been bilingual since birth, to be somewhat dominant in one language. We define bilingual simply as using two languages on a regular basis.

What Is Bilingual Education? The definition of bilingual education in <<Longmen Linguistics Dictionary>> is that "education system that uses a second or foreign language as the instructional language in school". Skutnabb-kangas (1978) the world's famous expert of bilingual education, pointed out that bilingual education is the education system with two languages as its instructional language, one of them is usually the students' first language, but not utterly is. Derek Rowntree (1976) Educationalist in UK said bilingual education is the education that aims to cultivate the students' ability to use two languages equally. Each language takes up half amount of instructional language.

### *1.4 Bilingual education abroad*

#### *1.4.1 America*

Aimed at enabling students with different mother tongues to master English, The Bilingual Education Act, passed by the Congress in 1968, was implemented independently in each state with the specific situation of each state taken into account. After years of bilingual education, there showed some doubts about it, for example, in the bilingual school the immigrants were argued to give up mother tongue because they must learn English well as long as they want to live in America, but some opponents argue that giving up mother tongue and mother culture will do harm to child immigrants and affect the learning of both English and mother tongue when a student with limited English proficiency studies in an all-English environment. De la pena (1991) reports that he went to the USA at 9 with no English proficiency and claims that he succeeded without bilingual education. Currently, disputes are still hot and bilingual education is facing a grim challenge in America.

#### *1.4.2 Singapore*

Unlike America, Singapore is quite successful in bilingual education. There are few disputes. Bilingual education plays an important role in this country's development. it helping Singapore maintain its unique national features. Singapore's bilingual education possesses the following five features: strong government support; early bilingual education starting from children; adoption of an individualized teaching; a positive bilingual environment and the ready parental support.

Like America, Singapore also has problems in practice. One problem is that the bilingual education tends to lay more emphasis on English than on mother tongue, students turning to favor English and their English proficiency is remarkably higher than mother tongue proficiency. This may pose a threat to the preservation of national language and culture.

## **2. The economic approach to bilingual education**

### *2.1 Costs and benefits analysis*

Previous product of research into links between bilingualism and the economy is framed by an understanding of language as an ingredient of human capital; within the economic framework of costs and benefits, supply and demand, investment and yield (Breton 1978) bilingual education, especially, the second language learning and teaching has

received little attention in the economics of language and in the economics of education. There is little theoretical or empirical work on the costs and benefits of the second language learning. A proper understanding of the economic aspects of bilingual education is to relate the second language with the economic activities in line of the costs and benefits of individuals as well as the nations.

To the economist, every choice involves an opportunity cost-the benefit expected from value of sources in their next best alternative use. The object of cost-benefit analysis is to give a true picture of the probable consequences in evaluation those that are judge to be essential from an economic, social point of view. One popular method of evaluating bilingual education is to relate costs of bilingual education to the benefit to be derived.

## 2.2 Costs

Generally, the government plays a pivotal role in shaping the scope and form of investments in bilingual education. The costs on the government promotion of bilingual education may be measured by the linguistic similarity level of the first and the second language, the number of competent teachers. And, especially, on the degree of bilingualism of the society .I think the linguistic similarity may be the most influencing one.

The more linguistically similar the languages, the lower the costs of bilingual education because the structural closeness of languages to each other have often been thought to be an important factor in foreign language learning.

There exists a severe shortage of bilingual teachers both skillful in instruction languages and specific content areas, and institutions in most countries, and the more closeness the target language to the native language, the lower will be the training cost. By the way, the demand for bilingual teachers will lead to the salary increase of bilingual teachers, and thus increase bilingual cost in public.

For the society and individuals, bilingual education costs time and tuitions, but the promoted target language is hardly heard or seldom used, bilingual education could be very expensive and the outputs may be very low.

## 2.3 Benefits

### 2.3.1 Individual benefits

For individuals, if someone decides to invest in the learning of a second language, she will no doubt derive return from bilingual education. We first turn our attention to the communicative benefit of language learning. Obviously, ideas and technical information will flow more easily if there is no language barrier. Despite the communicative benefit, there is also the occupation benefit. For example, if you can speak a second language, then maybe you can get a job at the national level than the factory workers or laborers who are able to work in isolation with members of their own language groups.

Direct benefits to the individual are typically measured by the increased earning power that an individual derives from knowing two languages after his completion of the bilingual program. For example, in a survey of the reward of English language skills on the Swiss labor market, the computation of average labor income by level of English language skills reveals a strong positive correlation. The reason is that English language skills are correlated with other determinants of income, particularly education, and that higher earnings accruing to those who speak English may simply reflect the fact that having a higher education, they can hold better-paying jobs.

Despite of the direct economic benefit from trading with individuals of a different language group, individuals also get benefit from broadening his experience in learning about the people of a different background that is cultural benefit. It will affect the ways you thinking when you facing the problems and solving the problems better.

### 2.3.2 Social benefits

Try to imagine, in a country the ability of citizens to speak more than one language will bring much more opportunities for international trade and tourism. To this extent, bilingualism increases the opportunities for exports and imports for foreign trade compared to unilingualism. And if communication barriers are decreased, then labor services will be freed for work in production. So, the decrease in the language barrier will increase in the effective labor force of the country ,and as a result of the improvement in communications and the decrease in transaction costs, the return to capital will rise(Breton and Mieszkowski,1997)

In a word, are the benefits from bilingual education greater than the costs? I think the answer will different from society to society and person to person.

## 3. The economic of bilingualism in China

### 3.1 The bilingual education in China

China has the largest English-learning population in the world, "it seems there are more people learning to speak English in China than there are English speakers in the whole of the United States' (Taylor 2002) After our country entering WTO. We are facing serious challenge of talent competition. At present, China is urgently needs masses of

high-level, high-quality, and all-around talents. Bilingual education is the demand of our country entering into WTO and enhancing international competition. But due to the lack of experience, China is facing some problems in the novel undertaking of Chinese-English bilingual education. First, the qualified bilingual teachers are in urgent need. This is a most serious problem confronting China. Second, misconceptions about bilingual education exist. Some people simply regarding it as the intensive teaching of English. Third, bilingual teaching materials are to be enriched. The current English teaching materials are compiled with improving English proficiency as its main goal. However, bilingual education needs English books on various subject matters, for example, biology, math, chemistry, etc.

### 3.2 Costs and benefits of bilingualism in China

#### 3.2.1 Costs of bilingual education in China

The costs in this discussion are learning costs in nature. Three variables are used in an economic context to merit a brief background discussion:

##### (1) Bilingual teaching condition

The most English learners in China living in an environment in which the majority communicates in Chinese, the time in English is smaller. Language teaching professions believe that the more time spend learning any aspects of a second language, the more will be learned (Spolsky 1989).

So some experts suggest that bilingual education is most suitable in college, where the students have the basic listening skills to understand the lectures in English, but the fact is that most of the students in college think that using English in class will make the content learning less efficient and cost them an extra effort. And this is not easy even for a teacher that using English in class all the time. Take account the teaching situation in China, training teachers for bilingual teaching is a priority in the implementation of the bilingual education programs. But in China, unfortunately, at least more than half of the existing bilingual teachers are teaching under waiver strategies that is beneficial neither to subject matter knowledge nor English proficiency.

In order to avoid this kind of situation, the government should embark on a long-term project and assign more resources to teacher's bilingual development. The present problem is that while there is a great need for "well-trained" teachers for bilingual education, we know less about how best to train these teachers. This makes the return of the government investment difficult to be assessed.

##### (2) Linguistic similarity;

We all know that the learning of English in China is not an easy task. There are many Chinese college graduates could not use English in their daily communication after more than 10 years English learning. One typical example is that most Chinese have difficulties in pronouncing the English consonant. We know English is closer to French than it is to Chinese. So a French -speaker learning English is easier than Chinese. Like Spolsky once said the more linguistically similar the languages, the easier the master the language and the lower the costs of bilingual education, so we can get the following equation:

$$\text{COST} = f(\text{teaching input, linguistic distance, linguistic environment})$$

We can infer from this equation that the bilingual education in China is not an easy task. According to China Statistics Yearbook 2004, though the total GDP 2002 amount to more than 105172.3 billion RMB, the GDP per capita is not more than 1000 USD. Economic incentives can be expected to implement bilingual education but bilingual teaching is far from ready.

##### (3) Linguistic environment

We have noted that the majority of Chinese knows only one language and only a minority of the population is bilingual. English in China has not developed uniformly due to a number of social, economic and historic factors. In the cities like Beijing and Shenzhen, English is used extensively to such an extent that there is a few English-speaking community inside these cities, like the English corner. While in other areas, Like Shanghai and Tianjin, local government sponsored English promotion programs and training are at all levels, English graduates hot in the labor market, foreign investment, import and export value in these cities take 73% of the total investment, the status of English is close to semi-official language and the English level is high enough to contribute to the development of the national economy. In contrast, English level cities like Guizhou and Gansu is much lower. It is said that even the English teachers cannot pronounce English words correctly. In minority areas, such as Tibet, the promotion of Mandarin is still an ongoing issue. It is unlikely that the bilingual teaching will be in spread in these areas.

#### 3.2.2 Benefits of bilingualism in China

In recent years, for most foreign funded companies in China operate at the destination of employing Chinese local markets, the need for foreign language skills seems to be quite low. Technical expertise is seen as more important. The very fact that the labor market demand for language-only specials in 2005 almost dropped to zero is a proof. So foreign

language skills in China do not seem to play an important role in hiring. And so far there does not seem to be much evidence of bilingual benefits in enterprises in China. The reason is that any benefit measured in language may be a product of the person's education attainment rather than language knowledge.

Economic benefits of bilingualism to individuals in China seem to be obscure in the measure of income but appear opaque in the individuals' promotion requirement and future development. Since the reform and opening policy, English has been the most primary tool to absorb foreign technologies in China. Crystal (1997) writes that: English is the main language of books, newspapers, airport and air-traffic control, international business and medicine, sports, pop music, and advertising. Over two-thirds of the world's scientists write in English, three quarters of the world's mail is written in English.

The social benefits of bilingualism are more likely to be visible in China. In the rapidly developed global economy, English is considered the first necessity for the survival of Chinese society. Bilingual education is the most ideal means to quickly improve the practical English skills among Chinese speakers. Bilingual groups both constitute societies large and dense enough to be able to trade abroad, and contribute to the advancement of knowledge. In this regard, an advanced bilingualism fosters the economic growth and makes China a more appropriate partner for trade on the world market.

The entire value of bilingual education must also be viewed in light of its social possibilities and consequences. The above economic benefit considered is only the value of bilingual education in China characterized by the demand of market economy. Actually, the market value of bilingual education is not inclusive of all the benefits accruable from bilingualism. In the broader context, benefits include anything which is resulted from bilingualism in increasing social welfare possibilities, such as the development of public-spiritedness and culture consciousness.

A society with advanced bilingualism is thus to be more receptive to different ideas, in a multi-ethnic country like China, bilingualism is expected to create an increasingly open society that welcomes changes, project a more efficient government and lead to a more vibrant democracy with stronger webs of social affiliation.

Bilingual education in China is a heated controversial issue and will be kept in the limelight of educational debate, it takes a unique position among educational programs. Though there has been much criticism of the implementation of bilingual education, various forms of bilingual education are being widely experimented throughout China. It reflects the need of the individual and the society as a whole.

Obviously, estimated benefits and costs reflect the preferences of individuals. As such as members of social groups. These preferences are socially, culturally and historically determined. In addition to an economic yield to languages, cultural yield related to literary and other forms of creativity is likely to generate considerable benefits for society as a whole.

#### **4. Ways to improve the efficiency of bilingual education**

##### *4.1 Training more qualified bilingual teachers*

To make bilingual teaching successful, to train more qualified bilingual teachers is very urgent at present. Universities and colleges, schools and teachers, all of them should work hard towards this end. Normal universities should set up some special courses which are given in English, encourage non-English majors to study English and English majors to learn other courses. As a result, bilingual teachers will be strengthened.

##### *4.2 Employing many professional foreign teachers*

Considering the lack of qualified bilingual teachers nowadays, professional foreign teachers should be employed. Foreign teachers can speak the most standard oral English and they teach the students in the English environment, students have more opportunities to communicate with foreign teachers in English. Consequently, the students' oral English can be improved.

##### *4.3 Dividing the students into different classes*

It is obvious that every student's English ability is different. Therefore, when giving a bilingual education, the best way is made them be divided into different classes according to their proficiency. Students with good English proficiency can form a class and students with intermediate proficiency can form a class and students with low proficiency can form another class, consequently, bilingual teachers can select different ways for different students. In this way, students of different levels can acquire more knowledge than in mixed class.

##### *4.4 To develop comprehensive curriculum and learning materials*

The traditional way of teaching that the teachers tell the students what they are to learn, and then ask them to answer questions about what they heard, and always providing the answers themselves if students don't respond quickly enough this limits the learning experience for all students, for it gives them very little opportunity to discuss issues, solve problems, or ask their own questions, and, thus, to develop thinking skills. It is even affects students' understanding of

what the teacher says, and it provides few occasions for students to speak, and practice their English skills.

The lack of books is bilingual education other problem. Original bilingual teaching materials are not available at present because they are costly for most schools and the students. I think, the best way is that teachers or professors can base on the original bilingual teaching materials and then compile the materials which are suitable for our students.

## 5. Conclusion

Nowadays, English has been the chief way of information spread. Bilingual education is the developing requests of the information age. Our country needs the bilingual education especially after China entering WTO. Bilingual education has been widely spread in China, especially those in big cities and it had been done very well in some schools. But the bilingual education in our country's are not mature enough, there are still some problems which impede the development of the bilingual education. Only when these problems are solved, can the bilingual education develop. It is very urgent for all of us to work hard to promote favorable conditions for bilingual education.

This research is not perfect, because of the limited time and my limited knowledge. This research explores the role of bilingual education from the economic cost-benefit analysis of view, aspiring to give a helpful insight into bilingual education in China.

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## Helping Students Overcome Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety in the English Classroom: Theoretical Issues and Practical Recommendations

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### Abstract

Despite the fact that foreign language speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Greece, teachers do not always identify anxious students, and often attribute their unwillingness to participate in speaking tasks to factors such as lack of motivation, or low performance. This article aims to contribute to the literature on language anxiety and to provide teachers with strategies for reducing foreign language speaking anxiety stemming from students' fear of negative evaluation from their peers and perception of low ability. Using qualitative research, it presents a classroom-based case study which aims at examining the characteristics of anxious students with a view to implementing classroom interventions to reduce foreign language speaking anxiety. The effectiveness of these interventions is also presented and evaluated, and the pedagogical implications of the findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** Foreign language speaking anxiety, English

### 1. Introduction

A negative correlation between second and foreign language anxiety and achievement is established in the literature (Horwitz, 2001; Aida, 1994; MacIntyre and Gardner, 1991). Empirical research shows that anxious foreign language students are less willing to participate in learning activities, and have lower performance than non-anxious students (Aida 1994, MacIntyre and Gardner 1991).

Foreign language anxiety consists of "self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings and behaviors related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process" (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986, 128). Foreign language learning process is a unique process, because learners are required to communicate using a language which they have not mastered perfectly. Three components of foreign language anxiety have been identified (Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986): a) communication apprehension, b) fear of negative evaluation, and c) test anxiety. Students who exhibit communication apprehension do not feel comfortable communicating in the target language in front of others, due to their limited knowledge of the language, especially in relation to speaking and listening skills. Students who experience fear of negative evaluation do not consider language errors as a natural part of the learning process, but as a threat to their image, and a source for negative evaluations either from the teacher or their peers. As a result, they are silent and withdrawn most of the time, and do not participate in language activities (Ely 1986). Students who experience test anxiety consider the foreign language process, and especially oral production, as a test situation, rather than an opportunity for communication and skills improvement.

In order to measure foreign language anxiety, the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) has been developed, a self-report measure which assesses "the degree of anxiety, as evidenced by negative performance expectancies and social comparisons, psychophysiological symptoms, and avoidance behaviors" (Horwitz 1986, 559).

Many studies have addressed the relationship between language anxiety and motivation. More specifically, integratively motivated students "are less anxious in second language contexts" (Gardner, Day and MacIntyre 1992, 212) than students who are instrumentally motivated. Their research findings provide indications that anxiety and motivation are "two separate dimensions with overlapping behavioral consequences" (Gardner, Day and MacIntyre 1992, 212).

Six types of sources of foreign language classroom anxiety have been identified (Young, 1991): personal and interpersonal anxieties, learner beliefs about language learning, instructor beliefs about language learning, instructor-learner interactions, classroom procedures, and testing.

Apart from general foreign language classroom anxiety, many learners are highly anxious with respect to participation in speaking activities. Indeed, it is often suggested that speaking is the most “anxiety-provoking aspect in a second language learning situation” (Cheng, Horwitz, and Schallert, 1999: 420). An examination of sources of foreign language speaking anxiety showed a correlation between a) anxiety and fear of negative evaluation, and b) anxiety and perception of low ability in relation to peers and native speakers (Kitano, 2001). Kitano suggests that teachers should find ways to support students with fear of negative evaluation, which may involve providing these students with positive reinforcement, such as positive comments. In relation to learners’ perception of low ability, teachers should make interventions in the classroom environment and practices and create a “sense of community in the classroom”, so that students do not perceive it a competitive, while pair and group work can be incorporated (Kitano, 2001).

While foreign language speaking anxiety is a common phenomenon in the teaching of English as a foreign language, it seems that teachers do not always identify anxious students, and attribute their unwillingness to engage in speaking tasks to factors such as lack of motivation, or “poor attitude” (Gegersen, 2003: 30). An additional problem concerns the fact that although there is an abundance of theoretical articles on general language anxiety, there seems to be a relative paucity of empirical studies focusing specifically on the sources of foreign language speaking anxiety and providing practical recommendations and strategies to address it.

Consequently, it was our intention to contribute to the literature on language anxiety by using a classroom-based case study in order to: a) examine the characteristics of anxious students and the sources of foreign language speaking anxiety, b) implement interventions to overcome it, and c) evaluate the effectiveness of these measures for reducing foreign language speaking anxiety in the English classroom.

In this article, in order to set the scene for the case study, we first present the context of the teaching of English as a foreign language in Greek public schools. Then we present the qualitative classroom-based case study, including the effectiveness of project work and a supportive, collaborative learning community in reducing foreign language speaking anxiety. Finally, the pedagogical implications for addressing foreign language speaking anxiety are discussed.

## **2. English in Greek public primary and secondary education**

Education in Greece is provided at the following levels: a) primary education, including kindergarten and primary school, which has six grades, b) secondary education, including lower secondary school, and upper secondary school, each lasting three years, c) post secondary education, and d) higher education. Studying in primary and lower secondary education is compulsory.

English is taught as a foreign language from the third grade of primary school for three hours per week. In lower and in most upper secondary schools, English is taught for three hours per week in the first grade, and two hours per week in the second and third grade.

The structure of the teaching of English as a foreign language is presented simply to help readers understand the context of the case study. However, the findings, measures taken to overcome foreign language speaking anxiety, suggestions, pedagogical implications, general insights, and conclusions presented in this article can help English teachers worldwide deal with the problem of foreign language speaking anxiety in their own teaching situations.

## **3. Research**

### *3.1 Research questions*

The research questions of the case study were:

- What are the characteristics of students who suffer from foreign language speaking anxiety,
- What are the sources of foreign language speaking anxiety?
- Can the incorporation of project work and a supportive classroom atmosphere help these students overcome their anxiety?

### *3.2 Research aim*

The aim of the research study was not to establish a link between language anxiety and performance, because this is already well established in the literature. In contrast, the research aimed at linking the theoretical construct of foreign language speaking anxiety with everyday classroom practice. The overall aim was to provide English teachers worldwide with a useful array of suggestions, arising from a classroom-based case study, which will help them reduce language anxiety, promote motivation to learn, and, in the long run, increase English language acquisition.

## **4. Method**

### *4.1 Participants*

The sample consisted of fifteen students in the third grade of a lower secondary school in Greece, aged 13-14 years. Lessons were held three times a week for a period of forty-five minutes each. All students had been studying English for a total of 5 years, and the average classroom level was intermediate.

#### 4.2 Data collection

Qualitative research techniques were employed in the case study, since research questions pointed to the need to gain access to “a wealth of detailed information” (Patton, 2002:14), and to “processes and meanings” that are difficult to measure (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994:4). The following techniques of qualitative data collection were used: a) semi-structured interviews, b) group discussion, and c) direct observation.

### 5. Results

After data was collected, we found that six of these students were experiencing English language speaking anxiety as a result of: a) fear of negative evaluation from their peers and b) perception of low ability in relation to their peers. Their anxiety was attributed to the above factors, on the basis of the following.

First, these students were unwilling to participate in speaking activities. While a number of factors can potentially account for this, research showed that their unwillingness was not due to the fact that they did not realise the value of learning English, laziness, or lack of interest in the English language. These students’ narratives provided strong evidence that they did not participate in speaking activities, because they believed that they were not good at speaking. Consequently, they feared that their fellow students would evaluate them negatively. As Hara, a highly anxious student reported:

“I like English, but don’t take part in speaking, because I’m so bad at speaking, and my friends will laugh at me.”

Hara’s text highlights her concern with her social image and her preoccupation with how her peers would perceive her.

Another source of fear of negative evaluation was the belief that they should produce faultless sentences. This finding seems consistent with Gregersen’s (2003) suggestion that anxious learners tend to focus on form rather than content. All of these anxious students feared that mistakes in speaking activities would destroy their social image as able students. Nikos, a highly anxious boy describes feelings created by his exaggerated focus on avoiding language mistakes:

“When I speak I always make an awful lot of mistakes, and I don’t like it. That’s why I use Greek when I’m not sure of what to say. I also speak very slowly to avoid mistakes. If you listen to me speaking English, you’d think I’m not clever, but it is not so.”

Fear of negative evaluation from their peers was also evident by the following characteristic, which was common to most of the above students. When asked to participate in speaking tasks with the teacher only, without their fellow students listening to them, these anxious students were markedly more willing to participate and experiment with language.

Apart from anxiety due to fear of negative evaluation from their peers, all anxious respondents compared their speaking skills negatively in relation with their peers. As an anxious girl commented:

“You listened to them (fellow students), didn’t you? They speak English as if it’s Greek. They’re so much better than me. It’s better if I just listen and not speak.”

The language here is one of desperation and low self confidence. Not unsurprisingly, this student was withdrawn and silent during speaking activities.

### 6. Interventions to reduce foreign language speaking anxiety

Having established the sources for their English language speaking anxiety, the following classroom interventions were implemented, to help them overcome it:

*6.1 Project work* Short-term projects were used due to the following benefits of project work in foreign language settings cited in the literature: a) students are more personally involved, so they usually have increased motivation (Lee, 2002), b) they do not feel that they are constantly assessed, and c) it is easier for them to focus on communication, rather than on accuracy, and are less concerned with language errors and the consequences of “imagined failure” (MacIntyre, Noels, and Clement, 1997: 269). An additional advantage of project work is that students have an active role and responsibilities in the implementation of project work, which can boost their confidence and reduce the effect of perceptions of low ability in the target language.

#### 6.2 Establishing a learning community and a supportive classroom atmosphere

Creating a learning community that provides the environment for “optimal motivation” (Alderman, 2004), and a “collaborative atmosphere” (Gregersen, 2003:30) can help reduce fear of errors. The following classroom interventions were made, drawing principally on suggestions for creating a supportive learning classroom community (Brophy, 2004; Dornyei, 2001).

##### 6.2.1 Teacher-students relations

A set of classroom rules and norms was negotiated with the students. Making fun of a wrong answer was not accepted, and a norm of “mistake tolerance” was ratified. Errors were considered a natural part of learning a foreign language,

and students were encouraged to ask for help without running the risk of embarrassment (Dornyei, 2001). In addition, teaching practices communicated expectations of success for all students. For example, as far as grouping practices were concerned, groups were formed from mixed ability students, students were given equally academically challenging tasks, and the same questioning strategies were used for all students (Alderman, 2004), so that they realized that there was no differential treatment with respect to their language performance and out-of-school support.

#### *6.2.2 Providing indirect, rather than direct correction*

We avoided direct, on the spot correction in speaking activities, since it can undermine students' confidence, and because it discourages learners who are anxious about "sounding silly" to experiment with new language (Lightbown and Spada, 1999). I also tried to foster the belief to anxious students that they should aim at continuing a speaking activity, despite making errors. For example, we provided scaffolding so that the students had an opportunity to continue speaking despite making a mistake. Scaffolding included cognitive modeling, in which I explained the steps necessary for task completion. Alternatively, prompts and questions were provided in order to foster the development of repair strategies in case of a breakdown in communication.

#### *6.2.3 Accepting the need for self worth protection*

Behaviour that could be considered a threat to these students' social image and a potential source of anxiety was avoided. For example, information about students' test scores was kept private and was not announced to the whole classroom, while portfolios were used to evaluate their progress. These measures aimed at reducing preoccupation with fear of negative evaluation, which can lead to withdrawal from activities that "could increase their language skills" (Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002: 563).

#### *6.2.4 Teacher immediacy*

Both verbal (use of humor, use of students' first names) and nonverbal (eye contact, positive gestures) types of immediacy behavior were employed, since they can reduce anxiety and impact positively on motivation to learn (Christophel, 1990; Frymier, 1993).

#### *6.2.5 Provision of praise*

We soon realized that praising these students in front of their classmates for a minor accomplishment had a negative effect, since they considered it as an indication that the teacher had little confidence in their abilities (Thompson, 1997). As a result, non-verbal praise (e.g. a positive head movement) was most often used, instead of direct verbal praise.

### **7. Evaluation of effectiveness of interventions**

The effectiveness of the interventions was assessed on the basis of a) students' willingness to participate in speaking tasks, and b) language performance in speaking activities at the end of the school term.

Willingness to engage in speaking activities is considered important, because unless students have ample opportunities to practice oral fluency and accuracy skills, they will not develop these skills. To measure willingness, a classroom diary was kept in which these students' willingness to participate in speaking tasks was recorded. Research findings provided strong evidence that at the end of the school term these anxious students were significantly more willing to participate in speaking activities. Apart from being willing to participate, these students did not avoid eye contact with the teacher, as they did at the beginning of the school term. Avoiding making eye contact with the teacher is a typical non-verbal reaction of anxious students (Gregersen, 2003). At the end of the school term, they were looking directly at the teacher more often and for more time. Although non-verbal communication is not as straightforward as encoded language, we attribute the change in eye contact patterns to the fact that they felt more relaxed, and eager to take part in speaking tasks.

With respect to English language speaking performance, these students showed improvement. We recorded the progress of these students and their performance in speaking tasks. Performance was measured in terms of both accuracy and fluency in a speaking test conducted at the end of the school term. Although a similar speaking test was not conducted at the beginning of the school term, improvement was evident for these students.

More specifically, most students' accuracy, their "ability to produce grammatically correct sentences" (Richards, Platt, and Weber, 1985: 109) increased, mainly in relation to the use of tenses and prepositions. They still made errors, however, but in most instances this did not stop them from trying to communicate.

Their fluency, that is, "natural language use" (Brumfit, 1984: 56) also increased. At the end of the school year they exhibited many characteristics of fluency, such as increased ability to concentrate on content rather than form, and increased conversational speed, compared to the beginning of the school term. They also showed more qualities of natural speech, such as more appropriate use of intonation and stress, ability to produce continuous speech without breakdown of communication, which, among others, are major parameters of language fluency (Richards, Platt, and Weber, 1985: 108-109). Finally, their tendency to revert to their mother tongue when they encountered difficulty

disappeared almost completely. Instead, they tried to express themselves in English, using gestures when necessary, and they developed the strategy of asking the teacher for help.

We attribute the greater part of the improvement in speaking accuracy and fluency to project work, which provided them with ample opportunities to practice language in a “natural” setting, negotiate for meaning, and helped them to develop strategies on getting their message across despite language difficulties. In accordance with Gregersen and Horwitz, we found that their suggestion that “anxious students could be taught to focus on continuing a conversation as a goal in itself whenever they make mistakes”, can be facilitated by project work (Gregersen and Horwitz, 2002: 570).

At this point, two points need to be clarified. First, the above interventions do not constitute “ideal” interventions to reduce foreign language speaking anxiety. They are simply an attempt to move from theory to practice, focusing on a specific learning situation. In addition, it is not suggested that interventions were necessarily successful. For example, two students showed minimal improvement in willingness to engage in speaking activities and their speaking performance increased slightly. It seems that more individualized measures were needed, since what is effective for an anxious student may not be necessarily effective for another.

## 8. Conclusion and pedagogical implications

Teachers should realise that language learning, and particularly oral production, is a potentially stressful situation for some students, and that the “tension and discomfort related to language learning call for the attention of the language teaching profession” (Horwitz, 2001: 122). The recommendations we make are congruent with previous studies suggesting that teachers should not consider withdrawn students as lazy, lacking in motivation, or having “poor attitude” (Gregersen, 2003: 30), when in fact they suffer from anxiety. Instead, they should identify anxious learners and make interventions to help them overcome foreign language anxiety (Aida, 1994).

Because foreign language speaking anxiety in the English classroom may stem from fear of making mistakes and the consequent fear of negative evaluation, and students’ perception of low ability in relation to their peers, we suggest that teachers may want to consider the following interventions. First, teachers can incorporate project work, because it can provide anxious and non-anxious students alike with abundant opportunities to use language in a non-threatening context. We argue that the first step in reducing anxiety is to actually have students participate in speaking tasks. Because students are more eager to participate in oral activities in small groups (Young, 1990), project work can be very helpful. Second, the creation of a friendly classroom atmosphere is important. The case study presented in this article showed that a supportive classroom atmosphere, in which language errors are considered as natural in the process of language acquisition, without overcorrection which can “draw students’ attention away from communication and toward a focus on form and accuracy” (Gregersen, 2003: 31), can be instrumental in helping anxious students overcome their perception of low ability and fear of negative evaluation.

The final conclusion is that teachers need to assume the role of the researcher in their own classrooms. Before employing strategies to help students overcome foreign language speaking anxiety, foster motivation, and increase foreign language performance, practitioners should get to know their students, their attitudes toward oral production, and to shed light into the reasons that underlie their low performance and their unwillingness to engage in speaking activities. It is suggested that “teacher as a researcher” approach is an invaluable tool. Such an approach, which brings together theory and practice, can have positive effects both on the professional development of English teachers and on students’ anxiety levels, motivation and language acquisition.

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## An Evaluation System for the Online Training Programs in Meteorology and Hydrology

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### Abstract

This paper studies the current evaluation system for the online training program in meteorology and hydrology. CIPP model that includes context evaluation, input evaluation, process evaluation and product evaluation differs from Kirkpatrick model including reactions evaluation, learning evaluation, transfer evaluation and results evaluation in that the subject of evaluation is different. We take the advantages of the CIPP model and Kirkpatrick model in constructing an evaluation system for online training programs in meteorology and hydrology held by the WMO Regional Training Centre Nanjing, China so as to improve the effectiveness of the training programs and meet the demand of the national meteorological and hydrological services.

**Keywords:** Online Training, Evaluation System, Meteorology, Hydrology

### 1. The Current Status of the Evaluation of Online Training Programs

Internet plays a more and more important role on the platform of training programs, because of its low cost and trans-regional advantages. During the period from 2000 to 2008, more than half of the world top 500 companies have adopted online training programs. For example, British Telecom has its 90 percent online training programs; IBM has established a college to provide its employees throughout the world with online training programs. The research on evaluation system for online training programs is more systematic in developed countries than in developing countries. On the aspect of evaluation tools, it can generally be divided into two main categories: the first one is online data collection tools; and the other is to record, analyze the online-time, frequency of login, pages that browsed by the employees who participate in these training courses. On the aspect of the construction of platform, there are already some well-developed web education platforms, taking the "Benchmarking Service" for instance, which is a professional website evaluating the enterprises' training programs. On the aspect of evaluation for online training programs in China, it focuses on getting a certain kind of professional certificate after attending training course and passing the exam. On the aspect of constructing platform, some platforms have added evaluating function, but so far, the amount of the platforms which can sustain the systematic evaluation is still few. Most of the online training platforms mainly center on the level of online testing, following the process of the training course to analyze the changes in reaction and performance of trainees.

There are already experts investigating how to evaluate the result of training, and they came out with a lot of evaluation models. Among these models, there are some models which center on the result of training, such as "Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model", focusing on evaluating trainees' changes in reaction both in the training process and after training. There are other models centering on training itself, such as "CIPP Model". The paper aims at building the evaluation system for the online training programs. Only a systematic and integrated training schedule and procedure can guarantee the quality of training, so an efficient evaluation system should include a series of evaluation activities checking the training target, training itself and the result of training. Therefore, the paper takes the advantages of the "CIPP Model" and "Kirkpatrick Model" to construct a scientific and more effective evaluation system.

"CIPP Model" is an evaluation model consisting of context evaluation, input evaluation, process evaluation and product evaluation. Context evaluation means defining environment and requirement, and carrying out demand analysis, which can help set up the training objective. Input evaluation is evaluation of the information or data which can be utilized to achieve the aim of training by the most effective approach. "Kirkpatrick Model" includes reactions evaluation, learning evaluation, transfer evaluation, and results evaluation.

## 2. Constructing the Evaluation Index System for Online Training Programs

Employees of any profession need continuous study in work, so good training, such as online training program, can improve their comprehension towards new knowledge and technology, and eventually bring more rewards to the enterprise that they work for. The cost of online training is low, and the training program can reach more employees who want to share training resources. Therefore, to construct the evaluation system for the online training programs helps a lot to improve the quality of training.

Comparing with traditional face to face study, the characteristics of online training is the division of time and space. Online training is implemented via reliable and safely network, trainees' study is mainly autonomic learning which means that they carry out various kinds of learning activities on the platform supplied by web-based instruction independently. To ensure the process of study goes with a swing and finally the trainees achieve their goals. Meanwhile, we have to evaluate the level of guarantee of goal setting, supportive environment, resource development and utilization, the quality of teachers, the content and process of training, training environment and result, training objects and other items.

The evaluation of goal setting, supportive environment, resource development and utilization, the quality of teachers, the content and process of training, training environment and result, training objects belongs to training itself, so we adopt "CIPP Evaluation Model"; meanwhile, we adopt "Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model", which centers on the result of training, to evaluate training effectiveness.

### 2.1 Constructing the Evaluation Index System Which Centers on Training Subject

The preferential item shall be the evaluation of context, which can be recognized as demand analysis. Numerous training programs put their emphasis on meeting the training demand during the whole course. They made their decision of carrying out an online training program relying on analysis of policy basis, implementation need, technical conditions, organization conditions, skills of trainees; and their training conspectus on the basis of practical demand. To some extent, the interaction during training and the satisfaction of trainees may reflect the quality of training.

Following item is the evaluation of investment. Investment is a series of effort that training organization devotes in advance to achieve the target to make sure trainees get trained, such as supplying supportive environment, designing and constructing training resource, organizing teachers, setting out training curriculum, creating online training environment and so on.

#### 2.1.1 The Evaluation of Supportive Environment

Supportive environment consists of layout plan, management system, financial support, technical support and facilities support. By the evaluation of background we can draw up a plan, and revise the plan according to reflection which comes out of the evaluation during training; the evaluation of management system is an indispensable link of the whole evaluation procedure, which is comprised of teaching management, assessment management, teacher management, resource construction management and so on. The evaluation of management system can undergo in the form of inspecting the conclusion documents or reports of the implementation conditions of every system, the evaluation of management system can promote the efficiency and stability of training in network environment. Online training is costly in early investment, resource construction and maintenance, so we have to make cost-benefit analysis, where the evaluation of financial support is essential. Expensive input may guarantee the quality of hardware and software of online training, but we shall pay enough attention to the balance of technical device input, make best use of resources and device. Technical support can be recognized as multi-media technology such as automatic Q & A system, auto homework system, and online study field, and intelligent platforms. Facilities support is mainly about constructing and optimizing hardware, making use of virtual laboratory, and constructing environment for practice.

#### 2.1.2 The Evaluation of Designing and Constructing Training Resources

Evaluation of curriculum development is the core guarantee of the quality of the evaluation system. The quality of courses concerns a lot the success of the holistic training. The evaluation of curriculum development commences from design of curriculum, content of courses, direction, and demonstration of information. The design of curriculum shall adjust to the characteristics of self-study. As for self-study, study in coordination, practical activities, assessment and examination of different teaching activities, we should take full consideration, design the curriculum rationally, and widely popularize excellent courses. The evaluation of curriculum design consists of the evaluation of selection, adaption, or development of teaching material, academic environment design, instruction of trainees' learning, content, homework arrangement and some other aspects.

#### 2.1.3 The Evaluation of Organizing and Arrangement of Instructors

Instructors for online training should reach a certain level on professional knowledge, teaching experience and pedagogical psychology, they also have strong responsibility and a teaching organizing capacity, to give trainees advice in study, conduct study content, promote and maintain communication among trainees, so as to cultivate trainees'



independence, enlighten trainees' imagination, and problem-solving capability. The evaluation of instructors' teaching quality could adopt different approaches, such as public hearing, evaluating lesson plan, teaching content, teaching style, teachers' performance and participants' attitude and so on.

#### 2.1.4 The Evaluation of Training Courses

All kinds of courses are the vehicle of online training which consists of courseware, teaching activities and learning resources. The evaluation of training courses not only means to evaluate the results of implementation of courses, but also shall involve schedule, content, process of implementation and management of courses.

#### 2.1.5 The Evaluation of Training Network Environment

The items that need evaluation include the interface's individuation flexibility and some other items, like whether the administrator is aware of that a modification to navigation or reposting the attribute of a certain functional link may change navigational charts or backgrounds, as well as stability, cultural atmosphere, system operability, real-time, flexibility, expandability and efficiency.

### 2.2 Constructing the Evaluation Index System Which Centers on Trainees

The evaluation of reactions usually carries out in a modest way to investigate trainees' satisfaction after training. Furthermore, reaction evaluation may commence from trainees' participation to evaluate trainees' reaction, which means that if trainees enjoy their study with high enthusiasm, the training turns out to be an excellent one high quality and has its attractive merits. Participation may be inspected from trainees' clicking rate, post and reply in forum, condition of homework submission, resource sharing and comment on each other's work.

Insert Table 1 Here

The evaluation of learning is to examine and assess trainees' learning effect, mastery of knowledge, so as to urge trainees to complete their self-learning to meet the quality demands of training. At the beginning of the training, we shall come out with a pre-test for each training module on the basis of training target and traits of curriculum. Before every training module begins, trainees are going to finish a corresponding pre-test; and after every training module, a post-test should be designed, by analyzing the changes between pre-test and post-test, we may figure out in what extent of trainees' understanding of knowledge and technology has been conveyed to them. In addition, a procedural evaluation platform is necessary in the process of training, which makes tracking and evaluating trainees' study and achievement possible. Index of learning evaluation: 1 The results of pre-training test and post-training test; 2 Participation of online learning; 3 The results of exercises and practice; 4 Assessment of final exams.

The evaluation of transfer reflects trainees' capability of applying what they learn into practice. The evaluation of transfer needs follow-up investigation on trainees' practical work after training. Considering the particularity of online training, evaluation may be built on the basis of the feedback given by trainees' colleagues and leaders and trainees' comments published on the forum of the website.

The evaluation of results mainly evaluates trainees' progress in performance after training. Because the emersion of progress in performance usually takes a period, we evaluate trainees' progress, and then design suitable post-test questionnaires.

### 3. Conclusion

Establishing an effective evaluation system of online training programs is significant to ensure the quality of training and keep improvement continuous; which is also necessary to form a mechanism of self-evaluation and supervision, and enhance management of quality control system. The evaluation should cover links such as, designing and constructing supportive environment and training resources, organizing instructors, setting training curriculum, creating training network environment and so on. Exploration in the field of the evaluation system is continuous to ensure the effectiveness of the online training programs in a systematical environment, in order to train more high quality meteorologists to meet the demand of meteorological and hydrological service.

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Table 1. Index system of evaluation

Index of evaluation	Topics of questionnaires
1.Overall reaction to the training	Topic 1.Overall Reaction of the training course
2.Reaction to the online learning environment	Topic 2.Reaction to the online learning environment Online learning Platforms Speed of online operation Convenience of Operation of the platforms Online information resources Supportive environment
3.Reaction to the target of the online training program	Topic 3.Reaction to the target and content of the training program The consistency of Content and target Richness of content Diversity of training activities Interactions of online training Correlation of the training target and work The practicality of Training material
4.Reaction to the online training content	
5.Participation of the online learning	Topic 4.participation and gain Participation time of online learning per day Acceptance of online training Factors influencing online learning The most impressive part of the training program Learning results of training
6.Reflection on learning results	



## Undergraduate Internship Attachment in Accounting: The Interns Perspective

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### Abstract

Increasingly, internship has become an essential component of the undergraduate programme. It provides students with a smooth transition from the on-campus environment to the working environment. It is often viewed as a 'win-win' situation for both the intern and the intern's employers. Students are able to learn about the profession and gain practical experience while simultaneously being able to reflect on what they have learned in the classroom. Employers benefit from internships as interns are sources of future employees. This paper examines whether the expected benefits of internship, as perceived by interns before going for their internship, are actually achieved.

**Keywords:** Internship, Interns, Intern's employers, Gap, Accounting

### 1. Introduction

Most higher learning institutions in this country offer internships for their undergraduate students to provide a smooth transition from the academic world to the working environment. Internships have taken on an increasingly important role in business education over the past decade (Tackett *et al.*, 2001). Internships provide many advantages to students ranging from gaining experience and obtaining career-related direction to networking (Lubbers, 2007/8). Institutions offering internship programmes benefit through increased cooperation and rapport with the industry (English and Koeppen, 1993). Employers also benefit from these programmes, as internships can provide them with inexpensive help, new ideas and potential future employees (Rothman, 2007; Cannon and Arnold, 1998). Therefore, internships benefit students, institutions and employers (Cook *et al.*, 2004; Lam and Ching, 2007).

This paper is organized as follows; the first section provides the review of relevant literature on internship, followed by a discussion on the research methodology adopted in this study. The remaining sections report the findings and conclusion of the study.

### 2. Literature Review

Furco (1996) defines internship as engaging students in service activities primarily for the purpose of providing them with hands-on experience that enhances their learning or understanding of issues relevant to a particular area of study.

According to Lam and Ching (2007) internship can assist students to bridge the gap between the academic learning process and the practical reality. McMahon and Quinn (1995) note that internship is considered as 'supervised work experiences' where students are closely supervised during their internship attachment.

Prior research highlights various issues on internship attachments, including the importance of relevant practical experience for students (Mounce *et al.*, 2004); effects of internship predictors on the successful field of experience (Beard and Morton, 1999); the importance of practical experience towards recruiting decisions of accounting employers (Pasewark *et al.*, 2001); study on accounting internships and subsequent academic performance (English and Koeppen, 1993) and benefits and limitations of internships (Hymon-Parker, 1998).

The study aims to examine the perceptions of interns on various issues before and after their internship attachments to identify whether any gap exists in their perception. Issues are focused on what interns have learnt; the process by which they learnt; the effect of what has been learnt on their expectations of their future profession; and choices of their future career.

The internship programme contributes significantly and positively towards enhancing the knowledge base and motivational level of students (Beard, 1998). According to her, this experience can make subsequent study more meaningful and is useful to develop students professionally before entering the workplace. In 2007, the International Federation of Accountants (IFAC) issued the International Education Practice Statements (IEPS) 3: Practical Experience Requirements – Initial Professional Development for Professional Accountants, which stresses the importance of integrating formal education and practical experience in enabling graduates to develop their professional knowledge and professional skills. According to Beard (1998) this integration process may be achieved through an internship attachment. Burnett (2003) reports a finding of a study conducted to initiate changes in accounting education, which states that the best outside classroom learning activities are through an internship attachment. Findings of various studies have provided support for this suggestion (see for example: Mihail, 2006; Hall *et al.*, 1995; Bernstein, 1976; Hursch and Borzak 1979; Eyler 1992).

The rationale in offering the internship attachment as part of the academic programme is that students benefit from these internship experiences and exposure. Benefits include improvements in career-related direction (Lubbers, 2001; Beard and Morton, 1999), gaining practical experience (Lubbers, 2001), improved marketability of graduates (Swift and Kent, 1999; Hymon-Parker, 1998), job expectations (Knouse *et al.*, 1999), interpersonal skills (Beard and Morton, 1999), leadership (Cook *et al.*, 2004) and understanding of the business applications of classroom learning (Cook *et al.*, 2004; Hymon-Parker, 1998).

Hite and Bellizi (1986) found that the most commonly agreed benefit of internship attachments for students is in providing a valuable learning experience that complements their coursework. Students have described internship attachment as a bridge between the theory of the classroom and the world of practice (Nevett, 1985). Internship programmes are perceived as a valuable way to acquire broad competencies where the practical knowledge obtained supports and complements the theoretical studies learned in the classrooms (Mihail, 2006). Empirical research in cognitive psychology has established that prior experiences are able to enhance the performance in fairly complex learning and problem solving tasks (Britton and Tesser, 1982). Ricks *et al.*, (1989) argue that when individuals apply their work experience to a subsequent learning environment they can better analyze and question the theory, thus, serving as a learning condition that fosters and sustains the work and school environments. Both students and employers strongly agree that experience and exposure to the real job setting obtained from the internship programme are more valuable than additional coursework i.e. case studies and guest speakers in classes (Hall *et al.*, 1995). Internship attachments are also found to successfully enhance students' performance in accounting and auditing courses as well as in their overall GPA performance (English and Koeppen, 1993; Knechel and Snowball, 1987).

The internship experience is argued to be beneficial in socialising the student through training, teamwork assignments, meetings with clients or employees, and various events hosted by the organization they are attached to during their internship (Lubbers, 2007/8). It was found that graduates with practical experience report positive changes in feelings of personal and social efficacy (Bernstein, 1976) and show a greater sense of responsibility and career development (Hursch and Borzak 1979; Eyler 1992). Mihail (2006) noted that interns have successfully developed their personal skills, particularly relating to information technology, time management, communication skills, teamwork, specialist knowledge and ability to prioritize tasks.

Internship is perceived as the most effective strategy for the employment opportunity (Callanan and Benzing, 2004; Brooks *et al.*, 1995; Knouse *et al.*, 1999; Taylor, 1998 and Scott, 1992). Practical experience and exposure gained during the internship programme are found to be helpful in improving career decision making (Brooks *et al.*, 1995; Taylor, 1998). Internship is the best way for students to explore the suitability of a particular job (Scott, 1992). According to Cannon and Arnold (1998), internship may pave the way for permanent employment upon graduation as well as providing an in-depth understanding of actual business practice. It was found that business school graduates that have gone through an internship attachment tend to secure their first jobs faster than graduates without internship experience (Knouse *et al.*,

1999). Further, business graduates with internship experience are likely to get conspicuously higher starting pay and report greater job satisfaction compared to their non-internship counterparts (Gault *et al.*, 2000).

Various researches investigate the expectations of students and employers towards the internship programme. Tackett *et al.* (2001) mention four specific areas, namely, ethics, oral and written communication skills, office conduct and technical skills where interns and employers have conflicting perceptions. Students hope to receive monetary rewards and be treated as regular employees. However, employers are not willing to treat interns as regular employees and, thus, normally assign duties that are more appropriate for college students (Hall *et al.*, 1995). Employers are warned not to treat interns as part-time employees as this will result in an unsatisfactory internship and will most likely damage the relationship between the employer and the universities (Tackett *et al.*, 2001).

Universities should be responsible to ensure that internships are meaningful learning experiences for their students (Tackett *et al.*, 2001). According to them, this may be accomplished by careful examination of feedback from employers and interns; and is followed by the modification of the internship programme accordingly.

### 3. Research Methodology

The current study has been undertaken to examine intern's perceptions on the selected issues relating to the internship attachment, before and after the internship attachment. For that purpose, seven page questionnaires were distributed to accounting students who have completed their internship attachment at one of the public universities.

The questionnaire was designed based on the assessment prepared by the faculty and needs to be completed by each supervisor at the attachment place. The assessment contains a list of questions that encompass all aspects of the curriculum covered by the Bachelor of Accounting programme offered by the faculty. The questionnaire was piloted among the accounting final year students in the faculty. Accordingly, ten sets of questionnaire were distributed. The researcher received nine responses with comments on the wording, sequencing of questions, and whether the questions made sense and were relevant to the research objective. After taking into consideration all the comments and notes given by those who responded, the questionnaire was subsequently amended.

The modified version of the questionnaire is divided into four sections, namely, Section A: Demographic profile of students; Section B: Students' perception before going for the internship attachment; Section C: Students' opinion after the internship attachment; and Section D: Other related issues. Once gathered, the data was tested for normality and reliability. The results of the normality test indicate that all items are reasonably normally distributed.

### 4. Results and Discussions

A total of 243 students were involved in the internship attachment for the academic session of 2007/2008. However, only 156 questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of 64.20%. A demographic profile for the interns is captured in Table 1. The majority of the interns are female and more than half are Chinese. The majority of the interns did their internship attachment in accounting/auditing firms. In terms of location, 68.6 % of interns chose to do their internship in Kuala Lumpur/Selangor.

The paired sample *t*-test is used to measure the gap in the interns' perceptions of what can be achieved from the internship attachment before they go for their attachment and what is actually achieved from their attachment after they have completed the attachment. The results are presented in Table 2.

Generally, we may conclude that they have not achieved what they expect to benefit from their attachment. Comparing the two mean values obtained for items under the two situations (i.e. before and after) it reveals that eighteen of the mean values for items under the situation "*before*" are higher than those mean values for the same items under the situation labelled as "*after*". The result shows that there are gaps between what is expected to be achieved from the internship attachment and what is actually achieved by the interns. This finding is similar with the finding in Lam and Ching's (2007) study, which indicated that student's expectations before and after the internship were unmet. The two items that interns perceived as being achieved were item 8 (i.e. enhancing knowledge in the public sector accounting) and item 20 (i.e. providing the necessary information and experience in choosing the right career path upon graduation). For these two items the mean values in the column "*after*" are higher, indicating that interns have achieved their expectation, however, the *t* values for these two items are not significant. For item 8, this finding partly supports the result of English and Koeppen (1993) and Knechel and Snowball (1987), which suggests that internship is able to improve the academic performance of interns. While in the case of item 20, internship successfully improved the interns' career direction, as suggested by Beard and Morton (1999) and Gault *et al.* (2000). However, Cook *et al.* (2004) and Lam and Ching (2007) found that interns do not perceive the internship experience as an important element regarding career choice for students.

The gaps are found to be significant for items 2; 5; 14 and 16. Students do not benefit from the internship attachment in obtaining the relevant knowledge and practical experience to assist them to better adapt to their future working environment. This might indicate that students are not being treated as regular employees and, thus, are not being given appropriate or specific tasks to expose them to a proper job setting and experience. As highlighted by Lam and Ching

(2007) intern students are normally treated as floating members to make up for those employees who are on leave. Auditing is always perceived to be a “dry” subject. This perception may possibly lead the interns to put the high expectation on the internship attachment in enhancing their knowledge in external auditing in particular. This finding contrasts with the results obtained by Knechel and Snowball (1987) who found that the internship has successfully enhanced the interns’ understanding in auditing. In general, it may be concluded that the internship experience does not help the interns to improve their technical skills, except in public sector accounting. It is also found that the attachment failed to improve interns’ interpersonal skills as reflected in the higher mean values in the column ‘before’ for item 14. This finding contrasts with Beard and Morton (1999) and Lam and Ching’s (2007) studies that found the internship programme successfully improved the soft skills of interns. The interns also felt that they are not getting appropriate exposure to the latest technology used in the workplace they are attached to. Again, this finding contrasts with the results found by Gault *et al.* (2000) where interns responded that they have experienced greater exposure to a variety of new business specific software applications. The majority of the interns were attached to relatively small audit firms that still maintain manual recording and auditing processes. Most of these firms are only exposed to the usage of automated working papers instead of automated audit software. Thus, possibly giving rise to such a result.

Students have been asked who they think should be responsible to arrange their internship placement. The majority felt that the faculty should work together with them for the placement, thus supporting the finding of previous studies, which concluded that a successful internship programme requires the faculty’s involvement (Tackett *et al.*, 2001; Maskooki *et al.*, 1998). The majority of interns think that the most appropriate internship period should be six months. Mihail (2006) also found in his study that most of the interns preferred to have internship periods ranging from six to nine months instead of three months. This indicated that interns are willing to have a longer internship period and believe that they can learn more within a six month period.

## 5. Conclusion

In general, we may conclude that the interns perceive the internship attachment as not able to give them the expected benefits. However, the internship is regarded as successfully providing guidance to them in choosing their career path as well as in enhancing their knowledge of public sector accounting. The interns generally felt that the present internship period of ten to twelve weeks is not sufficient for them to learn and gain the expected knowledge from the attachment. This factor may possibly contribute towards the gaps in their perception as described in the preceding section. The same feedback is noted from employers when members of the faculty visited the interns at their place of attachment. Further study needs to be conducted to find out the reasons for these gaps.

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Table 1. Demographic Profiles for BACC Students

	Frequency	%
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	32	20.5
Female	124	79.5
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Malay	37	23.7
Chinese	112	71.8
Indian	6	3.8
Others	1	0.6
<b>Academic Qualifications</b>		
STPM	41	26.3
Diploma	103	66.0
Matriculation	12	7.7
<b>Institutions of Placement</b>		
Accounting/Auditing Firm	127	81.4
Trading Companies	4	2.6
Financial Companies	3	1.9
Others	22	14.1
<b>Location</b>		
Kuala Lumpur/Selangor	107	68.6
Others	49	31.4
<b>Years of study</b>		
Third year	9	5.8
Final year	146	93.6
<b>Duration of Internship</b>		
10 Weeks	151	96.8
12 Weeks	5	3.2
<b>Total Interns: 156</b>		



Table 2. Perception of Interns Before and After the Internship Attachment

No		Mean (Before)	Mean (After)	Std. Dev	t value (sig. p<0.05)
<b>1</b>	<b><i>The internship experience is able/had prepared me to be a better employee in the future.</i></b>	<b>5.72</b>	<b>5.58</b>	<b>0.902</b>	<b>0.064</b>
<b>2</b>	<b><i>The internship experience provides/has provided me with the relevant knowledge and practical experience to assist me in adapting myself to my future working environment.</i></b>	<b>5.83</b>	<b>5.63</b>	<b>0.757</b>	<b>0.001</b>
3	The internship experience will help/helped me to relate the theories learned in the classroom to the work environment.	5.21	5.19	0.926	0.796
4	The internship experience will help/helped me to enhance knowledge in internal auditing.	4.51	4.36	1.433	0.182
<b>5</b>	<b><i>The internship experience will help/helped me to enhance knowledge in external auditing.</i></b>	<b>5.29</b>	<b>5.12</b>	<b>1.050</b>	<b>0.048</b>
6	The internship experiences will help/helped me to enhance knowledge in financial accounting and reporting.	5.17	5.14	1.044	0.702
7	The internship experiences will help/helped me to enhance knowledge in management accounting.	4.31	4.19	1.308	0.269
8	The internship experiences will help/helped me to enhance knowledge in public sector accounting.	3.49	3.58	1.285	0.419
9	The internship experiences will help/helped me to enhance knowledge in tax accounting.	4.82	4.76	1.307	0.538
10	The internship experiences will help/helped me to enhance my ability to prepare financial statements.	5.09	5.03	0.961	0.403
11	The internship experiences will help/helped me to have better understanding in interpreting and evaluating financial statements.	5.29	5.23	0.840	0.342
12	The internship experiences will help/helped me to develop my problem solving skill.	5.31	5.27	0.849	0.572
13	The internship experiences will help/helped me to develop my communication skill.	5.57	5.54	0.860	0.709
<b>14</b>	<b><i>The internship experiences will help/helped me to develop my interpersonal skill.</i></b>	<b>5.80</b>	<b>5.52</b>	<b>0.849</b>	<b>0.000</b>
15	The internship experiences will help/helped me to improve my personal confidence and self-esteem.	5.49	5.38	0.950	0.131
<b>16</b>	<b><i>The internship experience is able/had given me the exposure to the latest technology adopted in the work place.</i></b>	<b>5.15</b>	<b>4.88</b>	<b>1.252</b>	<b>0.007</b>
17	The internship attachment is able to/had given me the opportunity to build up rapport and networking with people in the industry and business arena.	5.09	5.07	0.926	0.796
18	The internship attachment is able to/had given me the opportunity to earn some money.	4.90	4.74	1.100	0.060
19	The internship attachment will provide/had provided me with the necessary job experience that can improve my chances to get a good job upon graduation.	5.55	5.52	0.953	0.675
20	The internship attachment will provide/had provided me with the necessary information and experiences to choose the right career path upon graduation.	5.50	5.61	0.926	0.120



## Construction and Practice of the New Business Specialty Talent Cultivation Mode

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### Abstract

The vocational education of business should actively adapt the demands of the domestic and foreign business development to cultivate high-quality applicable talents with international knowledge. The traditional business specialty teaching and the talent cultivation mode have not followed the domestic and foreign market demands, and are difficult to fulfill the requirements of multiple business posts in domestic and foreign enterprises, and the only way is to reform. In this article, the target of “three innovations and one construction” about the higher vocational business specialty teaching reform and the talent cultivation mode are proposed, i.e. actualizing the professional teaching innovation of “skills + arts”, the teacher construction innovation of “double teachers + famous teachers” and the fortune ability innovation of “employment + self-employment”, and aiming at these targets, deepening the cognition and practice of the reform, exploring and constructing the higher vocational Business Specialty Talent Cultivation system with demonstrative effect, strong pertinence and implementation feature, and realizing the objective to strengthen the professional education and serve for the economic and social developments.

**Keywords:** Business talent, Cultivation mode, Construction, Practice

### 1. Analysis of the actuality of the demand of business specialty talents and the problems existing in professional teaching

As the national strategic target of building a well-off society in an all-round way and constructing the harmonious society was established, the development tendency which drive the new industrialization and the agricultural industrialization by the informationization under the whole planning of the scientific development view is more and more obvious, and the development speed of cities and villages is quicker and quicker, and the enterprise management is more and more active, and various business activities are more and more frequent. In addition, after China entered into WTO, the domestic and foreign market competition is more and more drastic, and the business management and service is more urgent and important, and the demand of the professional talents who can manage and serve for the business activities increases obviously, and the requirement of talent quality quickly increases, and at present, the demands of the business specialty talents have exceeded the supplies.

The problems existing in the teaching of the higher vocational business specialty are obvious at present. Because the business specialty is a relatively mature specialty, and the cultivation of the business specialty talents in Chongqing Education College still follows the traditional mode, and some practice parts are limited by the subjective conditions, so the graduates of the business specialty generally have narrow specialty views, low quality, weak actual working capability, deficient innovation ability and bad strategies and arts processing domestic and foreign business competitions, which reflect that the cultivation system of the business specialty in the Chongqing Education College still has serious deficiencies such as blurry cultivation target, unreasonable course system design, old teaching contents, single teaching method and lagged education ideas.

To meet the higher vocational education with the international requirements and drive the teaching reform and development of the business specialty in the Chongqing Education College, the talent cultivation system especially the teaching system reform should be further deepened, the talent cultivation mode should be rebuilt, the cultivation target should be reoriented, the structure, system and contents of the specialty course should be updated and integrated, the teaching plan should be optimized, the teaching method should be improved, the teaching idea should be actively transformed, and the vocational education theoretical level, the schooling level and the talent cultivation quality of the business specialty should be further enhanced.

### 2. The business talent cultivation mode must be reconstructed and the specialty teaching must be reformed

To quicken the talent cultivation of the business specialty, the opportunities and challenges coexist and the way consists in the reform.

### 2.1 Targets of the reform

The reform of the business specialty should cooperate with the teaching reforms of other relative specialties, depend on the background knowledge and skills needed in other specialties such as food business, drag business, auto business, tourism business, electric business, international logistics, marketplace management and business negotiation, strengthen the cultivation of the application ability, enhance students' employment strengths, and realize the "three innovations and one construction", i.e. the professional teaching innovation of "skills + arts", the teacher construction innovation of "double teachers + famous teachers" and the fortune ability innovation of "employment + self-employment". By the reform, the higher vocational business specialty talent cultivation system with demonstrative effect, strong pertinence and implementation feature can be explored and constructed, and the brand specialty of the higher vocational business can be formed.

### 2.2 Ideas of the reform

Surrounding the domestic and international business markets, the college should widely and deeply survey the demands of the business management talents and the service post (group) talents, investigate the basic responsibilities of various business posts (groups) clearly, confirm the knowledge, abilities and comprehensive qualities that students should grasp, establish the teaching plans according the cultivation targets of the specialty and the domestic and foreign enterprise business demands, organize and implement the teaching reform strategies full of pertinences, and realize the teaching reform targets of "three innovations and one construction".

Therefore, the talent cultivation targets of the business specialty are to cultivate the high-quality and applicable talents who completely develop from morality, intelligence, gym and arts, have wide international view, sensitive vocational consciousness, good vocational morality, comprehensive quality, good specialty knowledge and obvious strong suits, adapt relative business posts (group) in various enterprises, know how to manage, survey, plan, operation and serve.

The quality of the cultivation targets include following connotations.

(1) The connotation of knowledge structure. The students should know the basic principle of Marxism and the basic theory of the socialism market economy, possess socialism morality and legal concepts, grasp the relative knowledge about the market investigation and prediction, the business negotiation, the business plan, the business development, operation and service, be familiar with the general application knowledge of the computer, and the knowledge to develop the business operation by the internet and other modern communication and E-business measures, and basically grasp one foreign language to fulfill the requirements of the relative works about the business specialty.

(2) The connotation of capability structure. The students should possess the strong business plan capability, the business negotiation capability and the business risk solution and emergency capability, the good capability to implement business prediction and analysis, product distribution and business service and develop the business market, the capacity to develop the business by the computer and implement business management and service by other measures, the good capability of public expression, self-learning and information acquisition and processing, and the standard public relation manners and strong public relation capability.

(3) The connotation of quality structure. The students should possess good ideological standards, vocational morality and psychological quality, strong team spirit, excellent humanistic quality, good tradition and work style of plain living and hard struggle to ensure students can not only deal with the public relationships, but avoid losing the competitive consciousness.

(4) The connotation of graduate characteristic. The students should possess further international view, sensitive business consciousness, strong domestic and international business management and service ability and the ability to develop the domestic and foreign markets and effectively implement the business affairs; possess the applied abilities about the foreign language, computer and internet adapting with the professional works. Except for acquiring the parchment of the specialty, they should acquire above one middle-class vocational qualification certificates such as the national "Business Strategist", "Marketing Teacher", "Public Relations Officer", "Human Resource Specialist", "SEC", "Logistics Manager" and "Customs Specialists", and the second-class certificate of the mandarin, the national first-class certificate of computer, and the grading certificate of English.

## 3. Basic measures of the construction and practice

### 3.1 Forming the talent cultivation characters of "one, two, three, four"

"One" main line means to build the business plan, business management and business service ability as the main line. "Two" integrations mean the integrations of the basic quality of specialty and the specialty skills and strong suits. The basic quality of specialty is the important support of graduates' basic quality and specialty ability, and the specialty skills and strong suits are the key to strengthen graduates' employment strengths. "Three" equal attentions mean to pay equal attention to the theory and practice, pay equal attention to knowledge learning and ability cultivation, and pay equal attention to school cultivation and enterprise experience. "Four" requirements include the teacher quality

requirement of “double teachers”, the teaching management requirement combining the academic year system and the credit hour system, the exam requirement to give priority to practice skills and combine with various exam measures, and the requirement possessing the diploma certificate the vocational qualification certificate at the same time.

### *3.2 Constructing the cultivation courses of “three modules”*

The college should rebuild the course system and structure, and update the teaching contents, and integrate the cultivation courses to be three modules including “basic knowledge and capability, specialty knowledge and skills, vocational development direction”. By the developments of the courses in various aspects, the college can realize the integration of the vocational basic knowledge, vocational quality, vocational post ability and specialty strong suits for business talents, improve the enhancement of talents’ comprehensive quality and the formation of the practice and innovation capability to ensure the organic uniform of talents’ morality, knowledge, ability and comprehensive quality, and make them possess the necessary capabilities adapting various business posts (group), and the self-development capability.

The module of the basic knowledge and capability includes the courses such as basic foreign language, basic knowledge and application of computer, basic knowledge and application of internet, economy and law bases, management principle, application writing and public relation manners. The module of the specialty knowledge and capability includes the cultivation contents such as business investigation and prediction, business plan, business negotiation, business broker and agent, business SEC affairs, trade and logistics, auto business and electric business. The module of the vocational development direction includes the courses such as the post knowledge and skills in business English, business management, international trading, financial affairs and finance taxation, VF database application, and auto driving. At the same time, many courses in other specialties are provided to be selected by students according to their interests and favors in order to cultivate and develop graduates’ individuality of business management and the strong suits of business service.

### *3.3 Constructing the cooperation system of “production, learning and researching”*

The college should actually ensure the cooperation of “production, learning and researching” to form the uniform system in the schooling target, acting rule, time and space guarantee, responsibility sharing and benefit distribution, and live up to reasonable planning, standard running, effective implementation and powerful guarantee.

First, the college should establish the “production, learning and researching” cooperation committee with multiple enterprises, and the teaching instruction committee of the business specialty to comprehensively instruct the practice of the talent cultivation reform in the specialty. Two committees should periodically implement the special discussion and market investigation analysis, draw on advices of the employers, timely find out the new changes about the demands of the business talents, and amend the cultivation plan and contents.

Second, the college should associate with enterprises to cultivate talents and reduce or eliminate graduates’ employment adaptation period. The exercitation and practical training of the specialty and the business project design should closely combine with various business flows to strengthen the mutual understanding of enterprise and graduates, reduce the blindness of occupation selection and talent selection, and reduce the employment adaptation period, and try to realize the “seamless connection” of graduates and posts in the enterprise. The college should advocate and encourage graduates to choose their occupations according to their own interests, strong suits and concrete property of the business posts (group), combine with self-employment, and develop and utilize effective employment resources. The college should develop the cooperation with enterprises, enhance teachers and students’ capabilities of business management, service and R&D, accelerate the transformation of the scientific and research results, and make enterprises more possess competitive strengths in business development, business service and business management.

### *3.4 Constructing the course system and teaching contents adapting the professional cultivation targets*

The college should implement the principle that the theoretical knowledge “must be used enough” and “is oriented by the application capability”. By the interview, discussion and argumentation with experts surrounding enterprise business development and management, the college should further confirm the cultivation target of the specialty, and the responsibilities of the business posts (group), emphasize the application attention of the theoretical teaching, pay equal attention to the application of the theoretical knowledge and practical ability, and strengthen the pertinence and practicability.

### *3.5 Strengthening the reforms of the course system and the teaching contents*

The college should try to overcome the method constructing the teaching contents and course system by the traditional theoretical teaching, change the orientation taking the social demand and post responsibility as the center, and confirm the specialty cultivation target and the talent cultivation specification. Except for the public courses regulated by the nation, the course setting should give priority to necessary knowledge and skill courses about graduates’ knowledge, ability and quality, and assist with courses of general knowledge and quality development which can help to form

comprehensive quality, and try to break the limitations among subjects, strengthen the integration of course contents, simplify old knowledge contents, increase the content of modern technical knowledge, and embody the advance of the course content. The courses should accord with the target of the talent cultivation. Teachers should take the application as the intention when organizing teaching content, take the application ability cultivation as the start and end, and confirm the teaching content according to the demands of the ability cultivation.

(1) Perform the course selection system and encourage students to choose their courses. The college should fully respect students' independence of learning and cultivate students' independent personality and development potential; strengthen the practice teaching adapting the target of the specialty cultivation; not only pay attention to the organic association of the specialty practice training and the theoretical teaching, but avoid the over-adherence of the practice training to the theoretical teaching and make the practice teaching to possess relative independence; try to construct the practice teaching integrating "course practical training, (enterprise) market exercitation, graduate design, skill training, and vocational qualification exam", in which the proportion of the practice courses should occupy above 40% of the total period of the specialty. At the same time, the college should actively create conditions and adopt various measures to enhance the utilization rate of the practice training laboratory and the base out of the college, actively organize teachers and experts to compile the practice teaching materials with strong actual efficiency and pertinence, and make students who participate in the actual training to have their own copies.

(2) The composing of the practical teaching. The practical parts to support the practice teaching include following aspects.

First, various courses should fully embody the application and practice of the courses. Teachers should strengthen the case teaching, establish the scene training, and emphasize to cultivate students' actual ability to utilize modern business knowledge and concepts to solve various problems and conflicts in the business practices.

Second, the college should develop a series of student practice activities with the color of specialty such as the contest of business plans, the contest of self-employment plans, the simulated business negotiation, the simulated business dissension intermediation and the judgment of business dissension cases.

Third, the main courses in the specialty should all require the teachers to organize students to simulate the business training in the specialty actual training laboratory, strengthen the instruction and management to cultivate students' competition consciousness and ability and improve students' understands to the enterprise operation and post responsibility.

Fourth, each graduate should complete his graduate design. The graduate design is based on the actual business management and application operation, and it can completely reflect graduates' cultivation targets and the achievement degree of the specification. Graduates must put in the post exercitation report and the practice project of above one business item.

Fifth, the college should actively organize students to participate in the training of the vocational qualification exam, and make above 95% students can acquire 1~2 vocational qualification certificates about the business.

Sixth, the social practice should be actively developed. The students should be organized to make market investigation and business affair disposal in the community and society in the holidays, periodically participate in actual training in the training base of the enterprise, and be familiar with relative business works of the enterprise, and instructed by the personnel of the enterprise.

By the exercitation and practical training, students' actual business ability can be integrated and enhanced, and they will more quickly be transformed from the dummy business personnel to the vocational business personnel.

### *3.6 Constructing the vocational quality education system adapting professional cultivation targets*

Higher vocational graduates' vocational quality is composed by three parts including the vocational post ability, the vocational basic quality and the vocational emergency disposal ability, and it is comprehensive. The vocational post ability is the core, and it includes the theoretical knowledge, practical technology and special skills required by the vocational post, and the vocational basic quality includes the ideological quality, the humanistic social and science quality, the natural science quality and the physical psychological quality, and the vocational emergency disposal ability includes the self-learning ability, the innovation ability, the survival ability and the public relations ability.

First, the college should update the educational concept and comprehensively develop the vocational quality education. Various studies can be utilized to make teachers continually update their educational ideas and concepts, change the partial cognition which only emphasizes the specialty education or simply think the quality education means to develop some activities after school and cultural courses. The college should implement the thought of the vocational quality education into the whole talent cultivation plan to form the vocational quality education system.

Second, the college should strengthen the vocational moral education. In the practice of the teaching reform, the college should always persist in the "giving priority to moral education", emphasize the concept that "to do business should be

a human first”, strengthen the education of “being an upright person with honesty and doing business with honesty”, improve the enhancement of the talent moral quality and the formation of the healthy civilization habit and the learning thinking habit, give prominence to the application and actual efficiency of the theoretical teaching and actual practice training, and bring up various business talents full of strong suits.

Third, the college should correctly deal with the relationships among interior factors in the vocational quality education, and set up relative courses according to the cultivation plan by two systems including the theoretical teaching and the practical teaching, actively develop the national vocational qualification exam and training, and try to reduce the application period after graduates enter into the posts of the enterprise.

Fourth, the college should organize abundant and color second classroom activities such as humanistic and science & technology courses, professional skill contest, business plan contest, “challenge cup” invention contest, simulated court justice of economic court, and joint party of college and enterprise to offer stage for student to show themselves, cultivate their talents, edify their sentiments, enrich the school life and improve the good development of the schooling style and the teaching style.

Fifth, the college also can invite experts, scholars, schoolmates and enterprise leaders to make reports or perform symposia, set up many selectable courses such as literature, history, philosophy, arts and physics, encourage and organize students to participate in various social practices, which can open their eyes, develop their innovational potentials, improve their individuality development, promote and deepen their knowledge and cognitions about the vocational posts and the society.

### *3.7 Reforming the teaching methods and measures, and the exam and evaluation system*

The college should persist in the concept that “the theory should take the sufficient use as the limit” to reform the teaching methods. And it should reform the teaching mode and method “based on work process and post demand”, give prominence to students’ main status, insist on multiple cultivation mode integrating mutual teaching interaction, school experiment and vocational training, scene simulation and post exercitation to train students’ ability of self-learning and self-training.

### *3.8 Reforming the exam and evaluation system, and strengthen the pertinence and actual efficiency of the exam*

According to the properties of the courses, many modes such as closed-book exam, open-book exam, discussion and discourse will be combined to test students’ achievements in the theoretical courses. In the practice parts, the post actual operation, the project plan design, and the works design will be combines to organize the exams. And for part of courses, according to continually changing new knowledge and requirements, the comprehensive exam including multiple factors such as practice representation, practice evaluation and post exercitation performance will be adopted.

In the construction and practice of the talent cultivation mode of the business specialty, the conformation and implementation of many concrete implementation contents such as the organization institution, the teaching quality guarantee and control system, the relative matching policies, the teacher group construction, the experiment and actual training equipment construction, the charge investment and the talent cultivation plan are also necessary, which will be explained in other articles.

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## Investigation of Changes Implemented into Teaching Modern History in Poland

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### Abstract

The purpose of this article is to analyze teaching of modern history in Poland and the teachers' role in the process of democratization. Forty-eight high school history teachers responded to a questionnaire investigating the curricula, textbooks, supplemental teaching materials and methods of teaching. The results demonstrate that since 1989 these instructors have had many more choices of textbooks compared to the past when just one government-recommended text was available. The teachers claim that textbook material is now more objective and does not contain "white spots." Teachers also admit they now can teach in more interactive ways using discussion and critical thinking, and present different points of view.

**Keywords:** Teaching of modern history, Poland, Teaching materials and methods of teaching

### Introduction

History plays an important role in the education of a society; therefore, the teaching of contemporary history in schools merits investigation. What interests should schools serve? What values should be taught? According to Augigier (1999), the mission of schools is the transmission of cultures shared by society. School contributes to the life of society because it develops different competencies of citizenship. During a transition to a new political system, such as that experienced in Poland, education should help prepare young people for the new reality. The data on Scale of Approval of transition by the young people indicates that Poland has the heights approval of changes after 1990 and the most positive of all other Eastern European countries. (Zaleskiene, 2006)

The image of Poland is often wrong portrayed by the textbook of Eastern Civilization. Kulczynski's (2005) survey of textbooks using Poland as a test case has shown that: *What references there are to Poland are often misleading or inaccurate and certainly incomplete. None of the textbooks provide a sustained narrative of Polish history, none attempt to connect the infrequent and miniscule dots they allot to Polish history.* (p.170)

In many European countries quality assurance as the process of evaluation provides hope that the material taught and the methods of teaching are accurate. As Rozsnyais (2003) stated: *The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland all have internal quality assurance systems in their institutions. They are mandated by law in the first two countries, whilst Polish institutions have taken the initiative to implement evaluation. To what degree can quality assurance contribute to promoting a better society 'to benefit from the richness of the European Higher Education Area including its democratic values, diversity of cultures and languages and the diversity of the higher education systems' (Prague, 2001) is a difficult question to answer.* (p.278)

However some Polish teachers that are teaching in the USA are bringing relevant, plausible material and teach in the interactive way using maps and photographs of Poland then and now. (Sugarman-Banaszak, 2008)

Polish researchers see the problems of their country's transition into democracy with a different focus. For Konopka (1996), the most important factor following the collapse of the communist regime is to provide researchers the opportunity to study changing educational programs and implementing new textbooks. For Chelminska (1991), the most significant change is in Poland's culture, while Konopka (1996) believes previous research emphasized curriculum problems as the most significant factor creating most of the problems for teachers and students. Skowronek and Skowronek (1994), however, observe the same pre-1989 problems in the teaching of history still exist.

In 1992, the Polish Ministry of Education emphasized developing the spirit of democracy for the new generation. This emphasis included patriotism, tolerance and societal participation. Considering the implications of ethical teaching, however, it is unclear whether Poland's schools are now truly free of indoctrination and censorship. With 21<sup>st</sup>-century global uncertainty, concerns about what we teach our children remain.

In 1994 Centkowski remarked that there are still problems in development of an historical consciousness in young people in Poland. Skowronek and Skowronek (1994) underline that while we can observe positive changes there are still many problems. Konopka (1996), for example, affirms that changes introduced in the curriculum and textbooks, along with an increased number of supplemental books, did not eliminate difficulties in teaching history. Contrarily, though, Vulliamy and Webb (1996) conducted research in Poland and affirmed the biggest changes seemed to occur in the teaching of history. They observed that teaching of history transformed from doctrinarian to the development of a new historical consciousness. However, other researchers such as Centkowski (1994) and Serwanski (1993) stress still-existing problem in the curriculum and in the content of textbooks. Serwanski believes new textbooks are largely the same as the old ones, the changes made are superficial. Konopka (1996) proposes the examination of new history textbooks to determine their merit and potential methodological problems.

This research attempts to answer four questions. The guiding question is what role history teachers' play in the process of Poland's democratization? The sub questions are :what methods of teaching are used now compared to that used prior to 1989 ,current textbooks; and whether the new curriculum and textbooks provide opportunities for instructors to work in more interactive ways and to discuss different points of view, stimulate critical thinking

After the collapse of the communist regime in Poland in 1989, changes in the educational paradigm became necessary (Nowak-Fabrykowski and Tardiff (1999), Nowak-Fabrykowski and Sosonowski, 1995). One assumption is that a teacher's responsibility lies in the preparation of his or her students to live in a democratic society. This notion comes from the ideal that a teacher is an agent of change, one who brings changes, reflects new values, beliefs, and the freedom of speech. We could assume that the topics, textbooks and especially new classroom approaches uphold new ethical values. It is apparent that changes in teaching modern history must follow changes in politics and new ethics, but ways to develop new dispositions in students of history remains unexplored.

Majorek (1996) stresses that for too long history teaching was based only on memorization of facts. He proposes a new approach based on asking questions and discovering lies and prejudice to better evaluate differences in lectures delivered by the same professors who taught during the socialist era.

The first question asked relates to the term "democracy" and its definition, but authors such as Benhabib (1996) and Young (2000) propose a different concept. According to Benhabib (1996) democracy called "deliberative" provides the possibility for a free discussion on topics that are of interest to everyone. Young's (2000) "communicative democracy" examines many perspectives, styles of conversation and expression. Print, Ornstrom and Skovgaard (2002) described two conceptions of democracy, the first of which relates to the function of government and the second examines philosophical questions related to the way of living. The second notion is linked with compromise and tolerance, listening to and accepting the opinions of others.

### **Rationale**

According to Albala-Bernhard (1995), Polish society is weaker after the fall of communism, but reforms will help overcome those weaknesses. Researching the role of history teachers in preparing young generation for the new democratic society is important. The necessity of this type of research had been stressed in 1994 in Geneva on the conference organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The aim of this conference was to examine teachers' roles in preparation for the new generation for peace, civil rights and democracy.

Furthermore, Perrot (1984) stresses that the mission of history teachers is to provide political instruction for future citizens. This mission could be accomplished if the teachers could show their students that the discussion of political problems is possible (Print et al, 2002). If a deliberative model of democracy were to be introduced in Poland every citizen would have the opportunity to initiate dialogue, ask questions, present arguments and provide reflective thought.

### **Attitudes toward changes of students, parents and teachers**

Slomeczynska and Shobad (1995) believe generational differences cause differences of opinion. Students, parents and teachers all have different attitudes about the changes implemented in Poland. Students primarily support changes, especially in the area of ideology of democratic capitalism, an ideology valued by the political elite and "mass media." Adolescents, however, have limited experience with communistic values; while adolescents have the greatest possibility to learn, they lack the ability to accurately evaluate the new political and economical order. Because of this, young people could be less favorable for systemic changes that can cause instability and economical insecurity.



Slomczynska and Shobad (1995) suggest more teachers than parents likely would favor systematical changes because civil education requires an adequate understanding of democracy and economy. Young (2000) emphasize that free, active and diverse civil society are most important for democracy, but Poland is a traditional country and remains quite homogeneous. Vullaiamy G., and Webb, R. (1996) noticed during their interviews with students at the Lyceum in Lodz that students believe history in Poland does not have anymore “white spots” and that teachers can say the truth.

Chelminska (1991) believes discussions on the creation of democracy in Poland are linked to power and the people’s right for freedom. She deems the level of political culture and knowledge is necessary to bring Poland to its new democratic stage. The necessary factor in the development of democracy, she writes, exists in one’s capacity to criticize reality, but criticism by everyone—not just the elite. Uryga (1991) shares this conviction stressing that democracy refers to the culture of people through the way they live, their contacts with others, each person’s place in the group, and a collective cooperation in the establishment of laws and obligation. Democratic culture should be taught in school and teachers play very important roles to accomplish this objective.

### **Analysis of the Ministry of Education Journal 1989-1996 and the program of contemporary history (1957-1990)**

The *Journal of the Ministry of Education* shows that only one textbook for teaching contemporary history (Siergejczyk) was recommended until 1999, but since 1994 many other textbooks were suggested. Since 1990 several supplementary readings were also suggested. It should be noted that every year there are many more textbooks on the market and can be accepted by the history teachers.

If we look at the curricula published between 1957 and 1990 we notice that they stress the changes that occurred since 1980. In 1957 the program underlined the role of Soviet Union in the creation of democracy for people, Lenin’s socialistic model, and the universal cooperation between socialistic countries. Furthermore the singular program described two major forces that dominated the world: socialism and capitalism. It also names obligations of the socialistic citizens.

In 1959, the program helped socialistic countries in economical, sociopolitical and agricultural ways by explaining the importance of fighting to establish the “power of people.” In 1996, the program demanded historical knowledge of the politics related to “the Cold War,” as well as the Soviet Union’s role in creating world peace. Other suggested topics include the importance of the power given to people, economic transformation, the socio-political climate of 1947-49, but more predominant is the danger of the Third War and the atmosphere of political terror imposed by the capitalist countries.

The programs of 1970 emphasized the role of the Soviet Union in building a socialistic Poland. Changes in the programs were observable since 1981 and new themes included an analysis of the different models of democracies. The goals to eliminate political opposition and the fight to defend communism remained. In 1986 genuinely observable changes manifested when teachers encouraged discussions about 1981’s “martial law” and changes in the international politics. Topics such as Soviet aggression on Poland in 1939 and the Katyn massacre of 1944 were previously forbidden, but in 1990 relaxed liberties in educational programs allowed for the discussion of the crisis in 1968, the workers’ protest in Gdansk in 1981, and the error of the communistic system.

### **What are the roles of history teachers? What changes have been implemented?**

According to Dorion (1984), the scientific, ideological and pedagogical content of textbooks depends on the orientation of the educational system in which they are written. Therefore, according this approach, “the textbook is not only work of an author, his/her competence, but also reflecting society and serves transmission of ideology, values, attitudes accepted in the socio-economical and ideological context” (p.8).

Analyzing theoretical problems related to modernization, Maternicki (1996) describes textbooks published between 1948 and 1956 as a source of sorrow since they were the sources of Poland’s communist indoctrination. Some of these textbooks used by Polish instructors were nothing more than translated Soviet textbooks.

A return to the truth became possible after 1980 following the Solidarity movement, the government’s first official opposition. Maternicki (1993) stresses that “according to the list of the Ministry of Education now professors have many choices of textbooks” (p.63). But what textbooks are they using and what reasons lay behind their choices?

### **Methodology**

The basic methods behind this research are qualitative based on the collection of questionnaire data and descriptive analyses. This research attempts to answer four questions: namely what role history teachers’ play in the process of Poland’s democratization, what methods of teaching are used now compared to that used prior to 1989; what are qualities of current textbooks and whether the new curricula and textbooks provide opportunities for instructors to work in more interactive ways giving an opportunity to discuss different points of view and stimulate students’ critical thinking.

## Population

Sixty high school modern history teachers working in one of the four provinces in the Lodz region (lodzkie, skierniewickie, piotrkowskie, sieradzkie), collaborating as cooperating teachers with the Department of Didactic of History at the University of Lodz in Poland.

## Results

Forty-eight modern history teachers replied to the questionnaire (80%) (Annex 1). Most of them taught for the last four years and the majority (79%) for ten years. The shortest length of employment was three years and seven months and the longest teaching experience was thirty-seven years.

The teachers report familiarity with four different textbooks available for the teaching of modern history. None of the instructors uses just one. Among the most popular is a text by Radziwil and Roszkowski (2001) - 75% teachers stated this textbook is the best because it is the most objective, it encourages students to think, it is very well written and it could be adapted to the existing program. The textbook also features notes, illustrations and original text and provides choices of material that could be used, making possible fair evaluation and allowing different interpretation of the facts. Another textbook, written by Pankowicz (1991) - 53 %, also received good evaluations from teachers who believe the book provides easy access to information for which students are looking, claiming *"it is correct without ideology that was typical before 1989."* The teachers evaluate this textbook as the most objective. One teacher claimed that this textbook is *"the most liked by the students."* In third position a textbook by Tusiewicz (1993)- 42 %, which, according to teachers, *"is easy to understand, gives good details and has good original text."* Next is a textbook by Probis(2003)-16 %, which is commended for *"presenting the most recent facts."*

Insert Figure 1 Here.

According to the teachers textbooks underwent changes on several different dates. These dates depend on the places where the schools were located and the schools themselves, but it is clear that many changes occurred when political changes became evident. One teacher who taught for the last 34 years provided the following dates: 1963, 1975, 1982, 1987, 1989, 1990, and 1991. Others think the most important were changes in the program and textbooks in 1993, 1994 and 1995, but are these changes mostly didactical or historical?

Insert Figure 2 Here

For nine teachers (19%), changes are didactical and for twenty-five, (52%) the changes are historical. For fourteen (29 %), the criteria for changing textbooks were a combination of both.

### Methods of teaching

Did the methods of teaching change with the textbooks? For this question there are no clear or unanimous answers.

Insert Table 3 Here

Fifteen teachers (31%) agreed that they changed methods of teaching when they changed textbooks, but seventeen (35%) disagreed that changes of textbooks was related to their changes of teaching, and ten teachers (20%) were undecided. Many of the instructors stated it was not the textbook changes, but instead years of teaching experience ultimately helped them to change their methods of teaching (14%). Some said they changed their methods of teaching based upon the competence of their students, while some thought the additional books used helped them become better.

All of the instructors agreed current methods such as discovery and problem solving, called "active methods," replaced the older "passive methods." The new teachers stressed they did not change their methods of teaching because they started in the new system when active methods of teaching were required.

## Limitations

This research is limited to one city and does not demonstrate similar conditions across the country. The sample is small and limited to teachers of contemporary history. Ongoing research obviously is necessary to follow up with the changes. For Print et al. (2002), teaching democracy is based on the dialogue between the teachers and the students, and parents should also be included in this important discussion to determine whether schools in Poland still impose values and beliefs, or if schools are truly free of indoctrination and practice freedom of thoughts and ideas.

Do the teachers stimulate students so they are able to live and create a more democratic society? Is teaching more ethical than it was before? Do the teachers and students value freedom of thoughts and beliefs and dialectic reasoning? Student interviews or a questionnaire designed specifically for students would provide more information and give a voice to the students as well as the teachers.

## Conclusion

According to Konopka (1996), the negative elements of teaching modern history in Poland were primarily with the textbooks used and the methods of teaching. The textbooks contained many "white spots" and rigid curricula made

impossible discussions and limited freedom of thoughts by reinforcing reproduction, memorization, indoctrination and censorship. Ethical teaching was impossible.

There are many indicators revealing occurrences of change in the teaching of modern history in Poland. Some of these changes relate to the methods of teaching and the textbooks chosen by teachers for their respective curricula. One of the most fascinating elements was determining why teachers made their choices when looking for new textbooks. Many instructors referred to "the objective text without ideology," textbooks which offer the possibility of discussion and interpretation and encourage students to think. Instructors also take into consideration which textbooks are liked by their students.

In Poland the majority of people believe that the new system gives liberty of thoughts and expression (Stepan and Linz, 1998, p.208). It is a sign that the majority values the process of democratization. The same results were obtained by Mishler and Rose (1999) in 1991 when investigating if there was support for the new system in post-communistic countries (p.84).

While this analysis provides limited demonstrated changes, most notably perhaps is the existence of several new sources for teaching, valid reasons behind textbook selection and takes into consideration students' opinions as future indicators, since providing students the freedom to discuss and interpret facts is crucial to develop their understanding of true democracy. To determine whether teachers impose their values, attitudes and norms, it is necessary to interview students and their parents.

This research clearly cannot answer fully these questions, but it demonstrates progress toward democracy and ethical teaching.

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## Annex 1

## Questionnaires

Name of School nom de .....  
l'école

Years of Teaching .....  
.....

1. What textbook for teaching modern history are you using?
2. What textbook for teaching modern history have you been using in your teaching?
3. Do you remember dates for changing textbooks of modern history?
4. According to your opinion the changes of textbooks were influenced by didactical reasons or historiographical?
5. Did the methods of your teaching of modern history changed when you changed textbooks? Explain how.
6. Are you using additional materials?

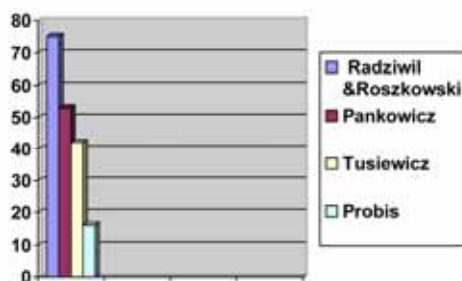


Figure 1. The most popular modern history textbooks.

### Dates for changing modern history textbooks

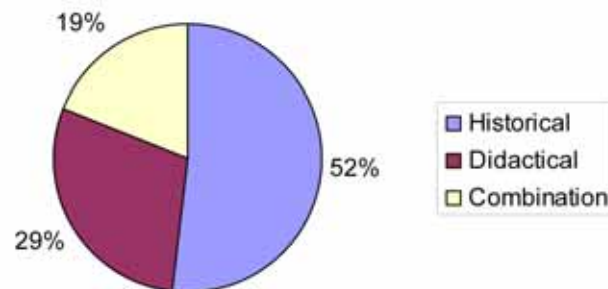
**Changes in the Programs and Textbooks**

Figure 2. Reasons for changes in programs (Curricula) and textbooks.

**Changes of Teaching Methods and Textbooks**

Figure 3. Are the changes in teaching methods related to new textbooks?



## How Do We Think about Death?

### ----A Cultural Glance of Superstitious Ideas from Chinese and Western Ghost Festivals

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#### Abstract

Superstitious ideas are always in people's life in spite of scientific and technological advancement. Hungry Ghost Festival in China, Halloween in some western countries and Day of the Dead in Mexico are three religious festivals which are observed every year. They reveal people's idea about ghosts and spirits after death. They also include doctrines which imprison people's minds and thoughts. This thesis mainly talks about the three religious ideas about death and spirits from Buddhism, Taoism, and Christian.

**Keywords:** Halloween, Hungry Ghost Festival, Day of the Dead, Religious, Death

#### 1. The origin and celebration of the three ghost festivals

##### 1.1 Halloween and Day of the Dead

Halloween is one of the oldest holidays with origins going back thousands of years. The holiday we know as Halloween has had many influences on many cultures over the centuries, from the Celtic festival of Samhain, to the Roman's Pomona Day, to the Christian holidays of All Saints and All Souls Days.

At present, Halloween doesn't have superstitious color at all. It has become children's holiday. The Pumpkin Patches are celebration symbols and "Trick or Treating" is their slogan of Halloween. Many pictures of Halloween are lovely and kindly, and most of them are funny, such as, witches, black cats. The old story has been forgotten by people constantly. Halloween has been a joyful festival in people's heart. In a word, Halloween has become an ordinary and seasonal holiday for the westerners.

Day of the Dead, falls on November 1<sup>st</sup> and November 2<sup>nd</sup>, celebrated mainly in Mexico and by people of Mexican heritage living in the US and Canada. Many people believe that during Day of the Dead, it is easier for the souls of the departed to visit the living. Celebrations can take a humorous tone, as celebrants remember funny events and anecdotes about the departed. Some people believe that possessing the items of the dead can bring good luck. Many people get tattoos or have dolls of the dead to carry with them. They also clean their houses and prepare the favorite dishes of their deceased loved ones to place upon their altar.

People in Mexico viewed death as the continuation of life. Instead of fearing death, they embraced it. To them, life was a dream and only in death did they become truly awake. They didn't separate death from pain, wealth from poverty. They have a humorous and optimistic attitude toward death.

##### 1.2 Hungry Ghost Festival

Much like Halloween in western culture, Chinese people believe that on the 15th of July of the lunar calendar, the gates of hell are thrown open, releasing hungry ghost to wander the earth in search of food and taking revenge upon those who wronged them in life. This month-long festival is known as the Hungry Ghost Festival. It is also called Zhongyuan Festival in Taoism, Yu Lan Pen Festival in Buddhism.

The Buddhist would hold the Yu Lan Pen Festival in memory of their forefathers. There was a popular folk tale about how the monk, Mu Lian, saved his mother from suffering. Mu Lian had great magic power. After her death, his mother fell into the mouth of a hungry ghost and all the food she wants to eat turned into flames. Mu Lian had no idea to save his mother, so he asked Buddha for help. Buddha told him the Yu Lan Pen canon and asked him to save his mother on the 15th day of the 7th lunar month with the help of Yu Lan Pen.

The Taoist doctrine holds that the universe was generated by three basic elements: heaven, earth and water. The official of earth named Lord Qingxu absolves sins. He was born in July 15, which is called Zhongyuan Festival. During this festival, he would release the deceased from sufferings, and those who have committed sins could also pray for

absolution.

Activities at Hungry Ghost Festival include offering food and burning hell money and incense in front of the house to please the visiting ghosts and spirits as deities and ancestors. Other activities include burning and releasing miniature paper boats and lanterns on water, which signifies "giving directions to the lost ghosts".

No matter which side they are on, Chinese citizens have never shown much interest in ghosts. The streets that night are empty in some cities, as few dare leave their house. They say if a ghost finds you in the street and follows you back home, your family will have bad luck all year. All in all, people should be very careful during the Chinese ghost festival; they have to keep away from ghosts and not offend them. It's really not as much fun as Halloween.

## **2. Religious Ideas toward death and after-death spirit**

### *2.1 Views of Christianity*

In Western countries, Christianity is a very important religion. They have many views on death and spirits.

- (1) The death of the human body doesn't mean that all the things have vanished. The death is not the end of the life, but is the beginning of another life.
- (2) We survive in the world as a guest. It is temporary.
- (3) We should hope for the happy hometown, which is in the heaven and is prepared for us by the God.
- (4) Human's soul doesn't extinguish forever.
- (5) The people can get the life again after millennium, and the rebirth is the work of the Holy Ghost. It is not the work of humans.
- (6) The samara reincarnation is extent form of the human life.

The Christian think that there is coexistent time of the human and god. And the human has soul. There was a judicial procedure after people died. If the person believes in the Christ before his death, he or she can depend on Christ to enter the eternal life. The world may end in one day, but the person can live in the new world, which is made by the God, because the life is eternal there.

### *2.2 Views of Buddhism*

In China, The ghost's world is actually made by Buddhism, such as, 18 hells and reincarnation. Buddhism thinks that the ghost was one of six kinds. In other words, after the people died, it was possible to ascend to the heaven, to continue to the people's life, to drop for the domestic animal, to go to hell, to become hungry ghost, to go to asura. It is no doubt that dead people are able to turn into ghosts, but the probability is only 1/6.

### *2.3 Views of Taoism*

Taoism does not fear death. "Life and death are like day and night." The book of Chuang Tse says, "Death and life have the same root, like twins." For that reason when we have life, death exists.

In Taoism, the energy of life has two parts, the energy of the Yin and the energy of the Yang. The spirit is Yang when a person is alive and when his spirit dies changes to Yin. Yin is the soul and can leave the body when the person dies, but the Yang energy can be preserved. So, Death is nothing but a state of energy, it does not exist in a fixed form; when the soul dies and leaves the body, it will no longer have a fix shape. Yin energy cannot be seen as we see a person.

That's why Taoism considers life as the best thing, because each person can decide about their life. They encourage people to take advantage of their life so that it can be lived healthy, prolonged and perfected.

## **3. Superstitious Thoughts of People**

"Step on a crack and break your mother's back," children can be heard chanting as they carefully jump over every crack on the sidewalk. Adults tend to think of superstitions as childish or even uneducated beliefs--and they may be. However, superstitions abound all over the world, each influenced by the cultures of different people.

### *3.1 Superstitions in Western Countries*

One of the top stories on a local news channel in Dallas, is the growing demand for statues of St. Joseph. The story reports that

When it comes time to sell a house, some homeowners rely on a statue of St. Joseph. A centuries-old tradition claims that burying a statue of St. Joseph in the yard helps homes sell faster.

Wherever there is a religion, there is a superstition. Superstitious are very deeply in people's mind. In the past, superstitions endangered the people and society. At the moment, superstitions still exist in the society. There are kinds of superstitions in people's life. Some are accepted, others are objected. At the same time, the superstitions produce an effect on the people and society. Here are some superstitions that are pretty famous and are every day examples:

- 3.1.1 An apple a day keeps the doctor away.
- 3.1.2. Getting out of bed with left foot first brings bad-luck.
- 3.1.3. Spit on a new baseball bat before using it for the first time to make it lucky.
- 3.1.4. If you blow out all the candles on your birthday cake with the first puff you will get your wish.
- 3.1.5. Before slicing a new loaf of bread, make the sign of the cross on it.
- 3.1.6. Friday, 13th is the most dreadful day and bring misfortune. Also, If 13 people sit down at a table to eat, one of them will die before the year is over. The number 13, believed to be unlucky, has been skipped over at a horse stable
- 3.1.7. The devil can enter your body when you sneeze. Having someone say, "God bless you," drives the devil away
- 3.1.8. How you start the year is how you will end it.
- 3.1.9. When someone dies, windows must be opened to let the soul out.

### 3.2 Superstitions in China

Looking back into Chinese history, superstitions have been playing an important role as a part of Chinese culture although some people think that's silly and ignorance. Since Liberation, our economic potentiality is expanding step by step, and the scientific cultural level is enhancing day by day. But, the superstitious thoughts are always in the society, and there are many superstitions in China from the past to the present which always affect people's life for a long time. Such as, Feng Shui, Ren Qi, and Temples.

#### 3.2.1. "Feng Shui"

The ancient art of feng shui has been practiced in China for thousand of years. In China, traditional buildings (like the Forbidden City in Beijing) were designed according to feng shui principles. In ancient China, the Emperor would consult his imperial advisors regarding political, military and personal issues such as:

- the building of imperial palaces, burial sites and temples
- the building of new cities and public infrastructures
- selecting of auspicious dates for worshipping rituals to seek blessing from heaven for a good harvest and for peace of the kingdom
- the waging of war and the directional movement of troops

There is also a popular saying that a person who enjoys good fortunes and karma will live in a house with good feng shui.

#### 3.2.2. "Ren Qi"

Very often, most people tend to overlook the physical feng shui of oneself. A person with good physical feng shui has strong Ren Qi. These are confident people who possessed strong interpersonal skills, which enable them to create new opportunities from their networking, in return enable them to obtain support from important people. To take a holistic approach, it is equally important to create a good feng shui for the house and also for oneself.

#### 3.2.3. Temples

China has been an agricultural country. The superstitions originated in the village. The grave of farmer's ancestors are built in there. Many people said that ghosts haunted at night. If some crops are attacked by locusts, the people think that the ghost makes trouble. Owing to the long drought, the crops have failed, but the people think that the God are punishing them. So there are many temples in China, and many people can worship the Buddha at temple every year. Chinese people believe that the ghost and the God are ubiquitous.

#### 3.2.4. Other Superstitions

- 1) In modern apartments, there is always a big mirror in the bathroom, and it is inevitable for us not to look in the mirror when we have a wash before going to bed. Some other people hung a mirror at their door or window to drive away ghosts.
- 2) If a big fire or a serious flood broke out, you would have a big fortune the next day. On the contrary, if you got a great deal of money in your dream, you'd better be careful the following days, as it is said that you will probably lose your fortune in any form.
- 3) Standing the chopsticks straightly in the rice bowl or put a empty bowl upside down is a taboo since it is a way to memorize the death.
- 4) The use of number 4 is minimized or avoided wherever possible because the Chinese word for 4, *sì*, sounds nearly the same as the word for death, *sǐ*. Mobile telephone numbers with 4 in them sell for less.



#### 4. Conclusion

Not easily swept away are superstitions in general. Maybe one reason they have been able to survive the changing world is due to their adaptability. People use superstitions to explain the things they can't control, such as love, life and death. Superstitions also relieve the anxiety these things might cause. In like manner, the children might hold onto a favorite stuffed toy or blanket for comfort, or a college student might wear a "lucky" piece of clothing while taking a test.

Halloween, Hungry Ghost Festival and Day of the Death are linked with ghosts. They originate in different religions, and spread different superstitious thoughts in some western countries and China. Through the three festivals, we can see superstitions vary immensely throughout the world, and their propagation depends on local folklore, legends, and circumstances.

People in Western countries believe in eternal life after death, death is not the end but beginning of a new life. God will help them to live happily and eternally there. Chinese people believe in life more than death. They choose to make their life beautiful. The ghosts are created by people for revenge. That also encourages people who alive to be kind to others and lesson their sins during their life time so that they won't be hunted by ghosts. An old Chinese saying says: Never be afraid of the ghost knocking at your door at midnight if you are a kind person.

From the different ways of thinking about death, we can enjoy the big culture difference between China and some Western countries. This help make life a bit more interesting, like salt in food, it give flavor to a culture, and one must agree that the world-wide culture is certainly flavorful.

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## What do 2nd and 10th Graders Have in Common? Worms and Technology:

### Using Technology to Collaborate Across Boundaries

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## Abstract

The article is about the collaboration between two classrooms that enabled a second grade class to participate in a high school biology class. Through the use of modern video conferencing equipment, Mrs. Culbert, with the help of the Dalton State College Educational Technology Training Center (ETTC), set up a live, two way video and audio feed of the lab, across town, to Mrs. Patty Culver's 2nd grade classroom.

**Keywords:** E-learning, On-line learning, Technology, Virtual learning, Worms

## 1. Introduction

*Virtual School and 21st-Century Skills*, a report issued in November 2006 by the Partnership for 21st-Century Skills and the North American Council for Online Learning (NACOL), contends that online learning through virtual schools is one of the most important advancements transforming U.S. education.

The explosive growth of K-12 online learning is unmistakable. According to the 2006 *Keeping Pace with K-12 Online Learning* study, 38 states have established state-led online learning programs or policies regulating online learning, or both. The U.S.

Department of Education reports that more than one-third of all K-12 school districts offer some form of e-learning.

Crawford (2006) states broadband connectivity has allowed for an expansion of virtual learning and it is a challenge for teachers to integrate technology advances and close access and academic gaps. Bushweller (2002) several years earlier wrote the opportunity for students to access challenging courses and academic materials is afforded through technology. Kapitzke, & Pendergast (2005) discusses E-learning platforms such as Blackboard and LiveText. LiveText is used as the e-learning platform in this this project.

## 2. Collaboration

**WORMS!** The image of these slithering creatures sends shivers down many a spine, but in Mrs. Patty Culver's second grade classroom they evoke curiosity rather than a case of the creeps. "What color is the blood?" "Do they really have five hearts?" "Which end is the head?" All are questions one might hear on a visit to the classroom.

Mrs. Culver, a second grade language arts teacher at Leroy Massey Elementary School (LMES) in Chattooga County, developed a study about earthworms to give her children real world experiences to use in their writing. The 2nd graders were able to see and touch live worms and even created a website in LiveText (<https://c1.livetext.com/doc/3396732>) about their study. Students learned about procedural writing and persuasive writing, as well as writing poems, songs, and even cartoon illustrations and were very excited to publish their work to the earthworm website. During the same semester, high school students across town were also studying earthworms and preparing to dissect the little creatures

Dr. Donna Herring, Program Chair for Instructional Technology at Jacksonville State University (JSU), was aware of the studies in both classrooms and initiated a collaboration between the two classrooms that enabled the second grade class to participate in the high school earthworm dissection lab. Mrs. Culbert, a teacher at Chattooga County High School, conducted lab dissections with her students the way most science teachers do, but she added a new twist. Instead of just having the students perform the lab work for their own knowledge, she gave them an opportunity to share that knowledge with others. Through the use of modern video conferencing equipment, Mrs. Culbert, with the help of the Dalton State College Educational Technology Center (ETC), set up a live, two way video and audio feed of the lab, across town, to Mrs. Culver's 2nd grade classroom.

During the lab, Mrs. Culbert's students used technology, including a SmartBoard and an Elmo, to show the 2nd grade students the procedures as they were performed. They explained what they were doing and what they were seeing. The 2nd graders were then allowed time to asked questions. The high school students got to experience teaching others.

Mrs. Culver felt that publishing to the earthworm website increased her students' desire to write. "They wanted to add content to their webpage as often as possible," explained Mrs. Culver. The students enjoyed reading each others work on the web and were excited to be able to share the URL so that family and friends around the world could also view their work. "The collaborative earthworm dissection lab was an awesome experience for my students," Mrs. Culver said. "They loved seeing the high school students live on the SmartBoard and enthusiastically asked questions during the dissection lab."

Mrs. Culbert felt that the experience had several benefits for her high school students as well. She explained that her students had to pay more attention to their dissections because the second graders were asking questions. "They enjoyed being the teacher and the expert of the content," Mrs. Culbert stated. "The high school students were amazed that the second graders were studying similar content and were using the same words to discuss the anatomy and systems of the Earthworm." Mrs. Culbert felt that the technology made the collaborative lab much more personal since her high school students could see the second grade class on the SmartBoard as they answered questions.

Both Mrs. Culver and Mrs. Culbert received graduate degrees from Jacksonville State University. They are committed to preparing their students to face a changing world where the ability to utilize telecommunications technology is a critical skill that will enable them to express thoughts and ideas effectively. Teachers like Mrs. Culbert and Mrs. Culver, using these types of technology in the classroom is giving their students a distinct advantage.

Mrs. Judy McEntyre and Mr. Patrick Clifton provided the expertise for setting up and connecting the two classrooms. Two Polycom video conference systems with projectors were used, one in each classroom. This allowed students at each site to see the other classroom. One Elmo digital presenter allowed high school students to show the dissection and allowed 2nd graders to see up close. One computer was recording the entire session. A SmartBoard in each classroom allowed students to see the other classroom on the big screen.

Mrs. McEntyre is director of the Educational Technology Center (ETC) at Dalton State College and an adjunct professor in the Instructional Technology program at JSU.

Mr. Clifton is the Technical Support Specialist for the ETC and a graduate of JSU. Alan Gayton, Randy Ware, Paul Bellamy, and Helen Oliver, Instructional Technology Specialists at the ETC, filmed the event. A video of the collaborative lab can be viewed at: <http://www.dscttc.org/>.

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## Issues of Practical Teaching in Vocational-Technical Schools in China and Their Countermeasures

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### Abstract

There exist a good many issues in practical teaching in vocational-technical schools in China, such as underemphasis on the part of all parties involved in practical teaching, dated practical teaching content, irrational curriculum provision in practical teaching, shortage of “double-quality” teachers and space for improvement of teaching assessment, etc.

**Keywords:** Vocational-technical education, Practical teaching, Double-quality teachers, Teaching assessment

The primary task of vocational-technical schools is to cultivate for the society applied-based talents with strong practically operational capacity, competence to resolve practical problems and to deal with emergencies. Currently, although educational philosophy of vocational-technical schools has been changed, still the strength of practical teaching is far from enough, and training of students with cumulative knowledge is still in the process. Quite a large majority of graduates cannot independently finish what is assigned to them within quite a long period of time after being engaged in a position. Tracing to its cause, it is that their practical learning at school is ignored, and they don't have many opportunities to get into contact with practical problems, so once they step into a post of work, they cannot make themselves immediately adapted to their roles. In order to better adapt to the rapidly development economic demands at present, vocational-technical schools should promptly resolve existing practical teaching issues.

### 1. Primary issues in practical teaching in vocational-technical schools

Persistent prosperity of Chinese economy has brought opportunities for development of vocational-technical schools, but also challenges to high demand on quality of working staff. Since students at school mainly learn basic theoretical knowledge in books, but there is rarely any chance for them to learn practical operational skills, with fewer practice opportunities and imperfect practice competence, the situation is caused in which quantity & quality, and teaching & employment are difficult to get integrated. Specifically speaking, issues existing in practical teaching in vocational-technical schools are mainly reflected in the following several aspects.

#### 1.1 Under-estimation on practical teaching

Vocational-technical schools are targeted at cultivating practical application skills of students, with both property of higher education and property of vocational technique. The fundamental characteristics of vocational-technical schools should be not to pursue systematicness and completeness of theory, but to emphasize integrity and practicability of practical capacity. Students from vocational-technical schools should place extra emphasis on basic competence and skills required for practice in technical fields in their majors, with the precondition that they grasp requisite basic theoretical knowledge and professional knowledge.

However, due to influences of traditional education for quite a long time, vocational-technical schools still follow the traditional educational mode, and experiments and practice courses in most schools perform practically no function at all. For example, experiments and practical courses are not qualitatively distinguished from courses of knowledge impartation, teachers just echo what the books say, students copy notes, and experiments and practical courses become courses of “an armchair strategist”. In terms of teaching content, theory is overemphasized, while practical training is ignored; theoretical teaching is dominant, while practical teaching is placed at a secondary position, which cannot reflect characteristics of vocation and technique. Furthermore, vocational-technical schools even become general compression-type regular higher education. In such way, it is an established fact that students are lacking in practical skills and practical manipulative ability, which cannot satisfy demand of the society on vocational-technical talents, and which may make vocational-technical education deviate from normal educational philosophy. For the time being, some vocational-technical schools merely regard practical teaching as a means to train skills of students, but ignore its comprehensive functions in training of their knowledge, capacity and quality. Therefore, functions and effects of practical teaching cannot be brought into full play.

### *1.2 Irrational curriculum project of practical teaching*

Curriculum project of vocational-technical schools is affected by the traditional education in that there are too many and relatively difficult theoretical courses, and most courses refer to materials of regular institutions of higher education, while there are few vocational and technical courses, and most of these courses are relatively easy and dated. Courses with high speciality and practicalness are rarely taught in curriculum schedules of these schools, especially application of new process, new technology, and new professional instructional software, etc. Practical teaching go out of joint with theoretical teaching, because practical teaching cannot comprehensively apply knowledge learned in theoretical courses and lag behind rapid development of high and new technology. Although vocational-technical schools focus on participation of enterprises in terms of formulation of practical teaching program and selection of teaching content, it is still difficult for them to realize that due to multitudinous reasons. Even if that is realized, it is usually the case that they adopt a transformed type of their own resources, but not that they allow students to go into actual work. How can students trained in such way correspond with standards of talents required by the society?

### *1.3 Weakness of teacher force in practical teaching*

Teachers are the most important resource in vocational-technical schools, and their practical capacity plays a crucial role in training of application-based talents. However, a large majority of teachers in vocational-technical schools come from other disciplines, with few practice experiences. Therefore, a large number of teachers don't have working experiences in enterprises. Besides, they are lacking in necessary practice afterwards, so it is difficult for them to conduct "application-based" education on students. Furthermore, establishment of teaching materials lags behind, and content of some materials is alienated from reality, so it's hard for them to achieve a perfect education goal. More specifically, there exist the following issues.

Firstly, lack of "double-quality" teachers. Currently, young teachers in most vocational-technical schools account for a larger proportion, most of whom "enter schools from schools" and are short of specific working experiences in the forefront of enterprises, so their manipulative ability is generally far from enough. It is inevitable that a teaching force constituted by these teachers is relatively weak in terms of practical teaching, and their theoretical teaching usually goes out of joint with practice. Secondly, the number of part-time teachers occupies a small proportion in practical teaching. In recent years, in order to promote close connection between colleges and universities and economic and industrial circles and to maintain flexibility of teachers, and also in order to increase efficiency in school management, colleges and universities in developed countries invite a large proportion of part-time teachers. Invitation of a large number of part-time teachers is a trend for vocational-technical schools to share human resources with other institutions, which can save considerable expenditure. In addition, in order to keep synchronized development of technology with forefront of the production, no other method is better than inviting teachers from technicians in the forefront of the production, because information and methods they introduce and their experiences in occupation are not at command of teachers in vocational-technical schools. For the time being, due to issues, such as limited teaching funds and weak teaching force etc, in vocational-technical schools, practice teaching staff are not paid due attention, which results in such a situation that teachers are not willing to give correct guidance on practice teaching. Teachers are the leading factor in teaching, and, without doubt, without perfect teachers in a school and without stability of teaching staff, the quality of practice teaching is unlikely to get deserved guarantee.

### *1.4 Light weight of practical teaching in the system of teaching assessment*

At present, practical teaching assessment in vocational-technical schools is mainly based on <<Standard Evaluation Target System of Training Qualified Personnel of Higher Vocational Colleges and Academies>>. However, among the 15 secondary indexes, what is directly interrelated with practical teaching are merely "conditions of practical teaching" under the primary index of "teaching conditions and their application" and "training of occupational competence" under the primary index of "teaching establishment and reform", and their weight coefficient only accounts for 13% of the total. Weight of practical teaching is unbalanced, which is disproportional compared with its position in vocational-technical education.

## **2. Thoughts on countermeasures of practical teaching issues in vocational-technical schools**

Existing issues in vocational-technical schools are generated in their own development, but it is not unchangeable. Given current issues in practical teaching, it is necessary to make attempt in the following several aspects.

### *2.1 To deepen cognition and to transform concepts*

Resolution of issues in practical teaching in vocational-technical schools rests with cognition deepening of this system and concept transforming of education. Firstly, all faculty and staff in vocational-technical education, without exception, should have a systematic, comprehensive and in-depth cognition in educational philosophy of vocational-technical schools. Only updating and switching traditional educational concept and determining direction can ensure successful progress of strengthening practical teaching in vocational-technical schools. Switching the concept includes three aspects: firstly, to organize middle management staff to deeply learn and study theory of vocational and technical

education; secondly, to concentrate training on the extensive teachers; thirdly, to educate on students by all sorts of means. Through propaganda and learning of public opinions on a large scale, a perfect atmosphere emphasizing practical teaching should be built within the schools, and educational philosophy and thinking of educators should be changed. Each one should pay sufficient attention to practical teaching with consciousness whether in thinking or in action, so as to take the initiative in organizing and implementing each teaching assignment in accordance with goals of school running.

### *2.2 To offer courses based on goal of school running and to update timely teaching content*

The primary task of vocational-technical schools is to cultivate application-based talents proficient in both theory and competence. In order to achieve the goal, they have to increase proportion of practical teaching. Based on the principle of “competence as the standard”, we should attempt to explore a new curriculum system. Optimization and integration is necessary for professional courses, together with pertinence and practicalness. The proportion of practical teaching should be increased on a large scale in the entire teaching program, so as to achieve a rational proportion between hours of theoretical teaching and hours of practical teaching. In the content of practical teaching, traditional demonstration and replication experiments should be reduced, while designable, comprehensive and applicable experiments should be largely increased, so as to form fundamental comprehensive practice ability, competence of professional technology application and operational skills. Such practical training should be particularly paid attention to as new manufacturing technique and new technology, etc. Selection and compilation of teaching materials should concentrate on internship teaching, and should detach internship materials from theoretical materials which they are originally attached to. Experimental (internship, practical training) guidebooks, quality standard of practical teaching and assessment criteria of practical teaching etc, should be researched according to the teaching program in order to formulate scientific and normative practical teaching materials. In compilation of practical teaching materials, introduction of “new” concepts should be paid attention to, modernized information and technology should be made full use of, corresponding and relevant courseware should be set up and advanced teaching application software should be applied for practical teaching.

### *2.3 To strengthen establishment of teaching staff*

The effect of practical teaching in vocational-technical schools mainly depends on establishment of a perfect teaching team. First of all, teachers should be sent to relevant production units for short-term and medium-term practice. Those lacking in practical experiences and skills should be regularly sent to corresponding production department for specialized practice and skill practice, so as to improve their competence of practical teaching. Then, scientific service and development should be vigorously advocated. Scientific service and development is a significant component of vocational and technical education, which has a multi-directional and radiative effect upon vocational-technical schools, and encourage teachers to shift towards “double-quality”. All these activities have not only strengthened connection and cooperation with production and scientific research department, but also have brought opportunities and conditions for teachers in terms of productive practice and space for improvement, reinforcing their understanding in demands of the market and accelerating renewal of teaching content and reform of teaching. Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged for further education. Professional backbone teachers are encouraged to take the exam of on-job postgraduates and to participate in training of social skills, which will be taken into consideration in annual assessment as part of the teaching load. As for teachers who are conferred with certificates of master’s degree and doctor’s degree as well as certificates of all sorts of skills, their post allowance should be raised. In addition, vocational-technical schools should make full use of all resources to make much acquaintance with more authoritative persons with professional knowledge and high social popularity. For instance, the schools can invite these authoritative persons as guest professors, and invite them to give more lectures to teachers and students. In such way, their industrial experiences and advantages can be brought to fully enrich our teaching. Meanwhile, we can maintain a long-term and harmonious cooperative relationship with them, and enable them to play a positive role in the establishment of teaching staff in practical teaching.

### *2.4 To intensify evaluation and assessment of practical teaching*

Assessment of practical teaching and assessment of theory not only have closely linked features, but have their own characteristics. Assessment of practical teaching in vocational-technical schools should, on one hand, involve part of theoretical knowledge, and, on the other hand, should pay more attention to quantitative assessment and qualitative assessment in technology of core speciality and in vocational skills. The latter emphasizes that industrial standard and international standard should be introduced into the teaching content, and that occupation skill appraisal should be brought into the teaching program and listed in assessment and evaluation. Therefore, emphasis of assessment on practical teaching in vocational-technical schools should be placed on assessment of technology of core speciality and vocational skills and on acquisition of job qualification certificates. Assessment and evaluation of practical teaching should not only concentrate on practical competence, but should also avoid muddling through the work.

Assessment and evaluation of practical teaching should involve establishing a new evaluation and assessment system,

which should be centered with improving students' occupational competence. Evaluation of practical teaching can be further classified into three aspects: firstly, evaluation on laboratory course, namely, to train and examine students' competence to grasp theoretical knowledge and basic skills through teaching of laboratory course; secondly, evaluation on intramural practical training, namely, to allow students to assume professional labor, field work and part of scientific and research task and to cultivate their comprehensive application competence at intramural training bases; thirdly, evaluation on extramural practical training, namely, to make comprehensive practices on a large scale at extramural training bases, and to cultivate students' work competence on the post through actual contact.

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## Preliminary Study on the Role of Social Presence in Blended Learning Environment in Higher Education

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### Abstract

This paper contributes to the growing body of knowledge which identifies benefits for Blended Learning in the understanding of social processes role. It reports on an exploratory study into the role of social presence in blended learning environment. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study sought to understand social presence of learners in Blended Learning environment. The paper presents the definition of social presence as described by blended learning instructors and its role in the development of Blended Learning environment.

**Keywords:** Social presence, Blended learning, Higher education, Qualitative research

### 1. Introduction

Today, we are in the age of information and distance education in this age has taken a new paradigm for teaching and learning. Universities, colleges and other academic institutions are offering a variety of distance education courses and programs to meet the needs of students. For example, in United States over 3 million online learners are now pursuing Web-based courses (Allen & Seaman, 2006).

One of the many platforms of Web-based courses is Blended Learning. It is a form of distance education based on Internet technology, which combines face-to-face instruction with on-line instructional resources and is emerging as a major global trend (Driscoll, 2002). Today Blended Learning is a new method among many higher education institutions and also it is becoming more prevalent in higher education. Web-based instruction in general and blended learning environments especially, have impacted in the areas of everyone life style and it has the potential to reinforce the core of teaching and learning (Gómez & Igado, 2008) as well as provides the learner with higher levels of learning.

According to social constructivist theory, learning occurs in a context of social interactions through reflection, collaboration, and articulation (Yildiz, 2009). In social constructivist learning environments, the role of the teacher becomes facilitator. One of the advantages of blended courses that are based on social constructivist theory is the increase in collaborative activities and interaction between student and student through tasks, and activities in and out of class (Tan et al., 2005).

A review of literature in the area of online and blended learning has confirmed that, there are so many factors that influence student's learning and play an important role in their teaching and learning process. One of them is how students feel socially in an online community (Caplas, 2006). This feeling is known as Social Presence which plays an important role in students' successful learning. Marcus (2006) emphasizes that social presence is necessary to improve effective instruction in traditional and technology-based environments. Social Presence concept is the key of success or failure of any new innovation or change in teaching and learning environments. Understanding teachers' perception of Social Presence in Blended Learning is a fundamental step that may provide insights into enhancing students' learning.

A number of studies that examined socially oriented factors in Internet-based learning have indicated that learners' feelings are much more important in this environment than in traditional environment (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; & Picciano, 2002). For example, Picciano (2002) argued that it is possible for students to interact with each other without ever having a sense of belonging to the class or a group of students. Social presence is about relationships and how students and instructors connect to each other in the virtual world to interact socially, question each other, share knowledge and engage in activities that are mediated through the use of technology (Tu, 2002a). Social presence needs to be further researched because of its role in improving student's performance in blended learning environment is unknown. Garrison & Kanuka (2004) stated that it is important to examine social presence in blended learning college courses in order to aid course designers to design and develop online classes for enhance of students learning.

Due to the lack of research on social presence in blended learning environment, hence there is a need to this research to understand a definition and find out the role of social presence in new learning environment, because social presence in blended environment is still quite unknown. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate definition of social presence in blended learning environment from the instructors' viewpoint. In addition, it is also to understand the social presence role in Blended Learning environment. The research questions of this study are to define the social presence in blended learning environment and its role in blended learning environment.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Blended learning

Since we began to research in Blended learning we found that this concept is both simple and complex. At its simplest, according to Garrison, and Kanuka, (2004) blended learning is the thoughtful integration of classroom face-to-face learning experiences with online learning experiences. There is considerable intuitive appeal to the concept of integrating the strengths of synchronous (face-to-face) and asynchronous (text-based Internet) learning activities. At the same time, there is considerable complexity in its implementation with the challenge of virtually limitless design possibilities and applicability to so many contexts (Garrison, and Kanuka, 2004).

On the other hand Blended Learning is a hybrid of traditional face-to-face and online learning so that instruction occurs both in the classroom and online, and where the online component becomes a natural extension of traditional classroom learning. Blended learning is thus a flexible approach to course design that supports the blending of different times and places for learning, offering some of the conveniences of fully online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact. The result is potentially a more robust educational experience than either traditional or fully online learning can offer (Colis & Moonen, 2001).

Today with the emergence of the Blended Learning Environments, educational delivery has moved from just online instruction towards a mix of online and face-to-face approaches. Blended learning goes beyond barriers of time, location, and culture and has created many better opportunities for learners and instructors. Today, due to advantages of blended learning such as maximizes effectiveness, promote teacher-learner interaction, access online and physically feedback instantly and other advantage; many institutions and universities moved from online to blended learning programs and this is growing fast (Gómez and Igado, 2008).

For the purpose of this research, I used the term blended learning to describe the use of computer-based online course delivery with a mix of instructor-lead face-to-face practical activities.

### 2.2 Social presence

Social Presence concept has taken from research of Short, Williams, and Christie (1976) in the field of social psychology and communication. The term has been defined as the "degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships" (p.65). In the other words, social presence is the interlocutors in a communication medium perceive each other as real. Short et al (1976) claim that social presence is a quality and attribute of the communication media.

Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, and Archer (2001) defined social presence as the ability of learners to project themselves socially and affectively into a community of inquiry and a present a template for assessing social presence in computer mediated communication through content analysis of web-based conferencing transcripts.

Tu (2002a) mentions that social presence is a complicated construct and involves privacy, social relationships, communication styles, the nature of the task, feedback, and immediacy, among other items. He developed a 42-item questionnaire that identified social context, online communication, and interactivity as factors that comprise social presence (Tu, 2002a).

The concept of social presence was not originally designed for technology based communication. Initially it was studied for face-to-face, audio and television communication. In technology based communication research, social presence is used to understand interpersonal effects. According to Tu (2002a, & b), social presence is a dynamic variable and its degree is based upon the user's perception as well as the characteristics of the communication medium. Some researchers have recognized the importance of social presence and they indicated Social presence is an important factor in improving instructional effectiveness. Richardson and Swan found that students reporting higher perceived social presence online also perceived that they learned more and were more satisfied with their instructors.

Studies conducted in higher education have shown that social presence has a significant impact on interaction, student persistence, satisfaction, improved learning, and motivation (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Richardson & Swan, 2003; Tu, 2002b).

Tu and McIsaac (2002) hypothesized that social presence would increase interaction in the online classroom. The researchers used both qualitative and quantitative methods to study of social presence. Qualitative data were collected using observation, interview, and document analysis. Based on their analysis, the redefined social presence as "the

degree of felling, perception, and reaction to another intellectual entity in the CMC environment” (Tu & McIsaac, 2002, p. 146). They concluded that the finding suggest that social presence positively influence the level of interaction and they suggest that this can be fostered by considering the characteristics of the learners, by choosing appropriate computer-mediated communication (CMC) media and by choosing appropriate instructional design elements.

Piciano (2002) examined performance in online environment in terms of social presence of student in that research social presence was encouraged using techniques fostering a sense of presence and sense of community. Overall, the findings suggested a strong relationship among perception of interaction, social presence, and learning. In addition, it was found that while perception of social presence did not have a significant relationship to scores on the course exam, it did have a positive, statistically significant relationship to performance on written assignment.

In other study, Rechardson & Swan (2003) examined social presence in online environment and its relationship to students’ performance and satisfaction with the instructor. Analyses of data showed a relationship between social presence, students’ performance, and satisfaction with instructors. They found social presence is a predictor of students’ performance.

In terms of importance and effectiveness of blended learning in academic achievements, motivations and satisfaction of students; this study will investigate the role of social presence in a new learning environment in higher education. On the other hand, the purpose of this study will be to understand the role of social presence in blended learning environment and also to present a definition of social presence in a blended learning environment.

### 3. Methods and materials

The approach to the research was qualitative method with Semi-structured interview. Qualitative research seeks to provide holistic descriptions of the field and situation studied. The focus on the entirety of the situation encourages researchers to provide rich descriptions of the situation (Creswell, 2003). Interviews conducted with four undergraduate instructors who were instructor and facilitator in blended learning course at ARAK University, Iran.

Chat interviews are carried out because the all instructors were far from researcher. Interviews are in Persian because Persian is official language in Iranian higher education institutions, also interviews in transcribed and analyzed looking for categories, themes that emerge from the categories, and finally concluded and reported.

### 4. Results and discussion

#### 4.1 Defining social presence in blended learning environment

The responses gathered through semi-structured chat interviews with the participants were used to answer this research question. Whilst all participants in this study initially stated that they were aware of the concept of social presence, they all mentioned the importance of physical presence and social interaction that help to understand of social presence concept.

*“I think social presence is more than physical presence; this is interaction between participants of group members + physical presence in class is social presence. Social presence is more than “being to gather” (R1)*

Participants claimed to be in a place can not help to understand of social presence but that is a basic need. Also some of them gave an idea that personality and characteristics of students in blended class is important in social presence

*“Social presence depends of student’s background and personal characteristic of them especially in blended learning environment” (R3)*

For some of participant having action and reaction in class is one of dimension of social presence in blended class. And one of participant gave a new about social presence he state:

*“For me team working in blended is social Presence, this team work some times is online and some time is physically (for example football team as physically group, and computer game players as virtual group) but we need to have a same objective for controlling this activities” (R4)*

One of participants of this study state a different point of view about social presence in blended learning environment he stated:

*“Social presence is not only being together but that is ability of have communication each other into class and out of class also social presence is using other experience to help improve own experience” (R2)*

For conclusion we can say that the definition of social presence that emerged from the data is: Social presence is an individual’s ability to demonstrate his/her state of being in a virtual environment and traditional environment and so signal his/her availability for interpersonal transactions. Social presence is the means by which blended class participants communicate and interaction with other students and teachers, and indicates not only their presence in the blended environment but also their availability in controlling each other in blended class as cooperatively.

#### 4.2 Social presence's role in higher education

From the responses gathered through semi-structured chat interviews with the participants, it can be found that the answers to the above research question do indicate the role of social presence in blended learning.

All the respondents have suggested the term interaction in their responses. This seems to indicate that social presence has its role as a facilitator of an interactive platform among the performers/players and the actions that are taking place. Its role as the interactor involves several actions be it in an organization. These include in a formal setting such as in learning and training situations. It can also be in informal situations such as in games and other interactive activities. Respondents in this study also have indicated that this role played by social presence forms the support for those involved in online communication to get to know each other (Kerwald, 2008). This is observed in the following responses:

*"Learning environment is small form of community. I ask them to share their emotion. I want them to come and share their experience" (R1)*

*"I think very simple than traditional because they aren't in class physically" (R2).*

*"Because we are in a new world and so many concepts have changed, yes I think there is no problem to share their information" (R4).*

*"I think no, because they are not physically in class. Some people don't like to share their information when they aren't together physically" (R3).*

The social presence acts as another effort to encourage communication among the learners. The responses from the participant indicate that the learners are willing 'to share' information (Respondents Mohammad, Davood and Sadegh). They also showed that the role social presence may be applied depends on the preference of the learners. Kerwald (2008) stated that social presence is quite dynamic. He further reiterated that social presence according to research, have indicated that the role played by the social presence should be structured depending on situations that warrant its presence and in some situation the presence can be at its disposable.

When the participations were asked what is the importance of social presence is in blended learning environment, all of them stated that without the social presence it is difficult for student and instructors to understand concepts and interaction in the real forum, especially at the beginning of the courses. They all mentioned the importance of auditory and visual cues and especially how facial expression influenced their approach to students.

*"Social presence plays an important role for students' performance, student's motivation, attitude toward best environment, not only in blended learning environment but also in the other environments such as traditional and online form" (R1)*

*"With high social presence a student can influence to his/her community" (R4)*

#### 5. Conclusion

Social presence is an important part of communication, whether at the bedside, in the community or even in the classroom. Instructors manifest their presence in a number of ways: in person, by telephone, or via the Internet. Although there are limitations and constraints in projecting social presence through technology, it can be done successfully. The important challenge for scholars is to continue to find ways to enhance student learning experiences without 'being there.' With the understanding of what entails social presence and benefits it brings along, facilitators and learners can further enhance effective learning.

Result of this study indicate that social presence presents itself as a platform for communication to take place be it instructor-student and student-student. It has a place in the learning process using blended learning environment. By being aware and understand the role of social presence, teaching-learning process should be conducted with greater precision to assist both the instructor and the learners themselves. However, this study can be further researched by finding out from the learners themselves. Finally, with challenges this learning forum seems to be taking place as another complementary platform for effective learning.

This study suggests that the blended form decreases the distance also increase interaction between students and instructor. In blended learning environment students getting familiar with the other students culture, and opening a door for further interaction with domestic students in the classroom. Students would also benefit from such an interaction in terms of getting to know students and learning more about other student's cultures. Overall, this study

confirms that the role of social presence improves the quality of Iranian students' performance.

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# The Research of the Crisis Pre-Warning Management System under the Particularity of Nationalities Universities and Colleges

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## Abstract

The nationalities universities and colleges set up the crisis pre-warning management system, not only related to the management of our nationalities universities and colleges and their growth, but also related to the country's national unity plan in some way. However, because of minority students in the particularity of the national cultural beliefs, the ethnic and religious values, sense of national identity and national belonging sense. The system of ethnic universities is different from the regular universities. Thus, we should pay attention to particularities in every aspect of the system, and go to establish the crisis warning management system which consistent with the characteristics of the ethnic universities.

**Keywords:** The ethnic university, The ethnic university crisis management, The indicator system for crisis management

The statement of "establishing a sound social pre-warning system" was stressed repeatedly on four consecutive plenary sessions--the third, fourth, fifth and sixth--of Chinese Party Central Committee, indicating the great significance and value of "pre-warning" of "pre-warning" in maintaining social stability. As a university is highly-educated group very in social organization subsystem, Comparing with the other general social organizations, universities and colleges, as a social subsystems that has a high density of clerisy, are more sensitive to the social change in large-scale systems, and also has more impact. Therefore, the crisis "pre- warning system" of colleges and universities will be an important component of the national social pre-warming system. The nationality relation has been paid more and more attentions in nowadays, in case of that, it can be said that the management of crisis pre-warming should be on top priority in a sense. According to the Ministry of Education statistics, there are 80.73 million minority university students in 2004, accounting 5.7% of the total number of college students. The proportion of minority college students in the college and universities of western region and nationality higher education organizations is even higher. A student survey which was held by Aba, Sichuan Teachers College in 2002, shows that 52.7% of that students believed that "there is disharmony" between minority students; and 18.3% of them said that the relationship is "disharmony"; while only 5.8% of the students thought the relationship is "harmony". it was proved that the minority relationship in the nationality colleges and universities is not optimistic, an crisis pre-warming management system need to be establish without delay.

Due to the dual attributes--both education and national--of the national colleges and universities, its crisis management is different from other general colleges and universities. Therefore, this paper will pertinently put forward a crisis pre-warning management system which is applicable to nationalities universities and colleges, by analyzing the particularities of the nationalities universities and colleges.

## 1. The characteristic of nationality and the particularity of nationality universities and colleges

In ethnic relations, minority students, as one of more sensitive groups, have more power to collect and distribute the information. While its unique national consciousness, national psychology, religion beliefs and sense of culture crisis and so on, they can be agitated and bewitched by outside both mentally and spiritually, which determines the specificity of crisis management of nationality colleges and universities. We believe that the following particularities should be held in the establishing crisis pre-warning management system of nationality colleges and universities.

### 1.1 The particularity led by ethical economy

Most of the minorities are located in border areas, in which the ecological environments are relatively poor, coupled with the historical reasons, making the economic development in minority areas has remained relatively low level. In 2003, the minority areas accounted 45% of the poverty people whose food and clothing problems are still unresolved, and the rate of poverty occurrence in minority areas is 7.3%, which is higher than national level. The differences of science, education and other social undertakings are also expanding. Besides, the overall education level in those areas are low, especially the deficiency investment of basic education. It is proved that the majority student whose knowledge is instability can not keep up with the teaching schedule, as well as teaching methods. Meanwhile, the restrictions of

family economic conditions make them drop behind the Han nationality and urban students in knowledge, expertise and so on, resulting in a lack of self-confidence of minority college students. In some case, the national inferiority may be translated into the incentive which will lead to a sudden nationality crisis.

### *1.2 The particularity induced by national culture*

In the long history development, the Chinese national culture has gradually formed unique national cultures. With the development of society and the pervasion of mainstream culture, the attitudes and adaptation degree of minority students to different cultures have produced conflict, and easy get into the assimilation or nationality bias, leading to crisis. Furthermore, the different custom made some students don't understand other national customs and habits, or make the colleges and universities do not expressed the due attention and respect to the national culture. For example, a middle school at the city of French Watts province requested three Tunisia students to quit school, because they wore veils to school. Wearing veils is the custom of Arab woman; as a result, the discriminatory measure immediately brought the anger and protests of local Arab. In logistics work, although the nationality university has established special national restaurant, but food quality is not good, and some cooks have no ideas about the national diet culture.

### *1.3 particularity induced by national religious values*

According to statistics, the population of all kinds of religious Christians in china is more than 100 million, including more than 260 million minority Christians, which is more than the 25% of the total religious population, while the population of minority just accounts 8.41% of the total population. In recent years, some of the emergencies involving national relationship were resulted by misunderstanding, for individual media and people don't understand the minorities religious. The "Tibet independence" and "Eastern Turkistan" terrorists also deceive the minority nationalities in the name of religious. The two social investigations arming at the religious values of Hun nationality teenagers, conducted by Wan Ming-gang in 2002, showed that the influence of religion in adolescence are getting weaker due to the change of social trends and the decline of religious prestige. But due to the influence of family, monasteries, schools and communities to the growth of teenagers, the religion also affect the student's religious thinking and behavior habits profoundly. The students in nationality colleges and universities learn and live together, so it will inevitably involve religion and religious culture conflict. Religious culture conflict is also one of the inducements of the university crisis management.

### *1.4 particularity induced by the sense of national self-identity*

The sense of national self-identity is the attitudes to self-national (in groups) and other national (outside groups), beliefs, sense of belonging and behavioral involvement, as well as the sense of identity to national culture, national language and national history etc. this consciousness is formed in the process of national interaction between nationality members, and based on the reflection and consideration to their national identity. The national consciousness is growing due to the increase of minorities contraction, and the self-esteem of nationality colleges students are improved obviously. They pay more attentions to the development of self-nationality and real benefit with a strong sense of national self-identity. As a result, the national minority college students have a positive national attitude, and fell pride to their national identity. But in some case, this attitude may be developed into a "sense of exclusivity," the over "assumption" would allow some students to boost some common events to national relations. If this kind of negative effects of national consciousness was used by saboteurs, it could easily be transferred in to things that could damage the national development and the interests of the country.

### *1.5 The particularity caused by national psychology*

The psychology of minority students is more sensitive than the Han nationality students due to various reasons, so they are more easily strict to the issues of living habits etc. Besides, the big and small side problems which were caused by national psychology arise frequently, because the university does not provide enough communication platforms to students from different nationality. Reflected in the performance of some minority students, the representations are: they will fell offensive if the way of their daily life, customs has been neglected; they will fell incomprehensible if other people are curious about their language; they can not tolerate the slightly different views on their mentality. just as the old saying that the devil is in the details, the small contradictions would be shaped in to major contradiction which can damage the tranquilization by slow accumulation. In the daily management, the nationality colleges and universities need to start from the trivial to avoid the occurrence of a major crisis. Due to the above particularity of nationality colleges and universities and a high degree of consistency of minority students, the crisis management of nationality colleges and universities need to be in depth and comprehensive, rather than "one size fits all". Otherwise, the underestimation of these particularities may make a loophole in the pre-warning system. Meanwhile, the much emphasis could cause national political sensitivity that go against the national unity.

## **2. The establishment of the crisis pre-warning management system under the particularity of Nationalities universities and colleges**

Crisis pre-warning system is a set of signals that can induce the crisis coming and judge the system which between

these signals and the crisis in order to discover the crisis as soon as possible. the crisis pre-warning management system of nationalities universities and colleges are composed of 4 sub-systems, which is management system of warning index, collecting system of warning information, analyzing and distinguishing system of warning level, and issuing system of warning level.

### 2.1 Warning index system

Warning index system of ethnic university is set based on the analysis system model of harmonious national relationship, the investing report of psychological spot-check carried out in national ethnic university students by WangJun who wrote the book Cultural Heritage and Educational Choosing, and The Research and Practice Nationality University Student Thought Political Work in New Time in 2005 which described the thought situations of southwest nationality university students, Each theory connotation of index and specific measurable index are as follows:

#### 2.1.1 National economic index

The national economy index mainly inspects and reflects possible crisis coming under the condition of individual consumption and household income difference of nationality university students. Our economy in backland develops faster than minority areas because the difference of historical and natural condition. Our country is of cultural tradition that is said "not worry few but inequality." The people's psychology bearing capacity is poor for the income differences, which also happens on ethnic university students and other students, which may cause the imbalance of psychology or not to be balanced, or transform to disaffection and hate for society.

The measurable index and weight:

- (1) Consumption per head level of minority university students (3);
- (2) The difference of consumption per head between minority university students and the Han nationality students (3);
- (3) Household income level of minority university students (3);
- (4) Implement situation of allowance policy for minority university students from nation or government. (3);
- (5) The employment ratio between minority university students and national average (3).

#### 2.1.2 National culture index

The national culture index is mostly about possible coming crisis of minority university students that national culture conflict caused. Minority university students is the elites of nations, their energy is full and thought is active, easy to accept the new things, so that they can promote the development and extension of their nation, they are outstanding successor. Thus, they know how to recognize the culture manner of respective nation and possible crisis when they face cultural conflict or concrete national contradiction of customs and habits.

The measurable index and weight:

- (1) Culture curriculum situation of national culture in university (3);
- (2) National customs and habits as well as development frequency of popularized activities (3);
- (3) Bilingual ability of national university students (3);
- (4) Occurred frequency of national culture activities in university. (National dance, language, sported.) (3);
- (5) Arising frequency of national contradictory events of customs and habits (2).

#### 2.1.3 The national religious index

The national religious index primarily reflects and sees about the influence on minority students from national religion consciousness, and the possible crisis for self-awareness of religion. National religious of minority is small, which is easy to be neglected and invaded by external people, and religion consciousness of minority students is higher than other students so that their religious behavior and attitude are very firm. National religion plays a role of spiritual returning and soul conciliation when their mind world is not harmony. So different religious beliefs are easy to cause crisis.

The measurable index and weight:

- (1) The ratio of religious belief of minority university students to university average (2);
- (2) The satisfied degree of religious belief of freedom from minority university students.(4);
- (3) The active degree of religious assembly (3);
- (4) The times of religious conflict and the number of participation (4);
- (5)The influence degree of reactionary religious group (including extremism group of overseas religion) (3).



#### 2.1.4 The national identification index:

National identification index mainly inspects that the minority students how to see their ethnic identity, or choose what nation crisis tags. In 2000, the research on ethnic and national identity attribution by Hunter and Reed shows that: one part of the national members have strong national self-esteem, achievement awareness and ethnic identity, showing a group of internal and external group rejection preference; another part of the national members to bring about inferiority, pessimistic, negative attitude and negative identity due to the weakness and disadvantage of the nationality. The two extremes are both easy to produce crisis.

The measurable index and weight:

- (1) The identity of ethnic identity (4);
- (2) The identity of ethnic culture (2);
- (3) The identity of national religious (2);
- (4) The identity of ethnic language(2);
- (5) The identity of ethnic history (2);
- (6) National belonging (3).

#### 2.1.5 The national psychological index

National psychological index mostly reflects the sensitivity sense of related events and possible crisis on the condition of consciousness difference of minority university students. The cross-cultural researchers think that the consciousness difference plays an important influence on social consequences of minority university students, for they know they are small when nation difference appears. So their psychologies are more sensitive than others and have strong reflection of nation attitude from the crowd.

The measurable index and weight:

- (1) The proportion of the people with strong consciousness difference (3);
- (2) The tolerated extent of nation discrimination (5);
- (3) The tolerated extent of national culture conflict (5);
- (4) The sensitive degree of nation attitude from teachers and students (3);
- (5) The satisfied extent of nation relation stressed by university (2).

#### 2.1.6 The external environment index:

The external environment index totally reflects the possible coming crisis from minority university students for social environment which includes nation policy, social attitude of social mainstream and national events. In 2008, the event of Tibetan separatists who destroyed the Olympic torch rose bad influence and concern in the world, even more evidence show that the Tibetan separatists have done bad activities in university. As university students, we how to see these things rationally when social accusable continuously appears, our sensitive mind whether make change

The measurable index and weight:

- (1) The identity of Chinese nation (3);
- (2) The identity of our country (3);
- (3) The satisfied degree of national economic development (3);
- (4) The satisfied degree of the implementation of national preferential policy (2);
- (5) The sensitive degree of national emergent events (3);
- (6) The degree of satisfaction of the actual situation of national relations (3);
- (7) Opposite ideology permeability (3).

Insert Figure 1 Here

### 2.2 The system of information gathering

This part mainly about information gathering according to pre-warning index system above and the content is comprehensive and specific. The construction and operation of system of crisis information gathering needs to pay attention to three aspects:

2.2.1 Establishing the channel of information gathering. We can not acquire information from statistic report forms or statistic institution gathering by conventional system for various reasons. So it is necessary to set up a specialized information channel according to the content of index system that can meet specific need and form special, smooth and

reliable system of information gathering.

2.2.2 Information gathering should concern the three aspects: individual, school and society. The individual aspect generally refers to psychological problems of minority students, it is easy to cause problems when they enter the mainstream culture system and face continuous culture adaption, test and nation reorganization; The school aspect is about the unequal phenomena occurred for the poor management process in university, as a result the crisis appear and shackle of management; Social aspect means all kinds of dynamic thought and crisis symptom information when related nation events occurred in society influence nation university students..

2.2.3 Doing well information junior process. Pre-warning index system of nation university includes compound index based on original index synthesis and need the people who have the ability of identifying the data and operating computer to carry out.

### *2.3 The analysis system of crisis level*

The analysis system of crisis level need to go through two stages: statistical analysis of and experts identify judgment:

2.3.1 Mathematical and statistical analysis. It mainly counts information gathered according to pre-warning index by comprehensive evaluation method, and put the results into relative warning area. (Warning area is arranged artificially in advance, such as warning degree is expressed in order by green, blue, yellow, orange, red, and so on). These work can be operated not only by hand but also by compute. But in the long run, index system should be adjusted in different stage in view of the fact that the index system needs more data, and the things of every year should to be compared dynamically. Therefore it is sound and economic to establish the system of mathematical and statistical analysis if the condition exists.

2.3.2 Identifying judgment of experts. The computer can't completely replace the work of brain; especially the experts from every field need to analyze the warning limit of every index and warning situation appeared at any time. So we should build expert storeroom to carry out the investigation of Delphic method by internet and achieve intellectualized interaction between people and compute, the advice of warning reorganization and judgment can be in accordance with factual institution.

### *2.4 The distribution system of warning level*

The distribution system of warning level means output system of warning and its function is to send alarm to potential victims by using proper measure in right time. We must confirm the scope and object of alarm according to warning level in the crisis management of Nation University, especially alarm scope and object are not to be expanded to avoid the unnecessary reaction and panic and ripple effect that larges the crisis and danger.

The specific forms of warning level distribution means labels which like signal lights of traffic control is regarded as warning signals, and directly reflect the counted result of data management system and analysis from experts. For example, according to international practice, "green area" shows without warning, "blue area" shows trivial warning, "yellow area" means moderate warning, "orange area" means severe warning and "red area" means gigantic warning.

Assessment and prediction is main function of distribution system of warning level, the former is the alarm signal sent after assessing the reality of social stability in ethnic university; The latter is the forecasting alarm signal sent according to the prediction of experts and simulation of future change. Thus managers can predict and judge according to the development of ethnic university and make corresponding decision.

## **3. The problems that we should stress in constructing and operating pre-warning system of crisis of ethnic university**

Comparing to the normal university, pre-warning system of crisis of ethnic university is constructed and operated on the condition of nation relation, so we put forward the problems stressed as follows:

### *3.1 Grasping the pre- warning management system of crisis based on concentrated and multilateral ethnic relation*

Ethnic university as a special carrier gathers the elites from 56 ethnic groups and forms a highly concentrated and multilateral ethnic relation. In the special environment of ethnic relation, "ethnic relation" is not merely means the relationship between Han Nationality and minority nationality, but also the relationship among ethnic minorities, thus constituting a multilateral ethnic relationship.

Now, China is a period of social transition, many new trends of thought, cultural, belief and value interaction strongly influence the thought and belief of ethnic university students in a very complex way, and the reason for crisis and probability caused may be higher normal university. Thus, higher demand is put forward in pre-warning management of ethnic university. In this paper, the design of pre-warning management system in ethnic is only preliminary, which need the managers and researcher of ethnic university to put into practice and continuously explore, deepen and complete it according to concentrated and multilateral ethnic relation.

### 3.2 Strengthening the sensitivity of the pre-warning information of crisis and preventing "allergic reaction"

The proper principle of establishing pre-warning system of crisis in ethnic universities is very important. Because not all conflicts or crisis happened in ethnic university are related to ethnic problems or crisis. For example, general interpersonal problems and civil disputes may influence the social stability of schools more or less; ethnic relationship belongs to another character problem. So we should tell the difference between them, we should not confuse them, but also we should prevent the former the latter on certain condition. Thus, index built, information gathered, warning judged and alarm sent should be paid attention, especially to prevent sensitive attitude for ethnic relation and regarding the general social problems in ethnic university as ethnic relation to solve basely as a result to expand the problem of "national relation".

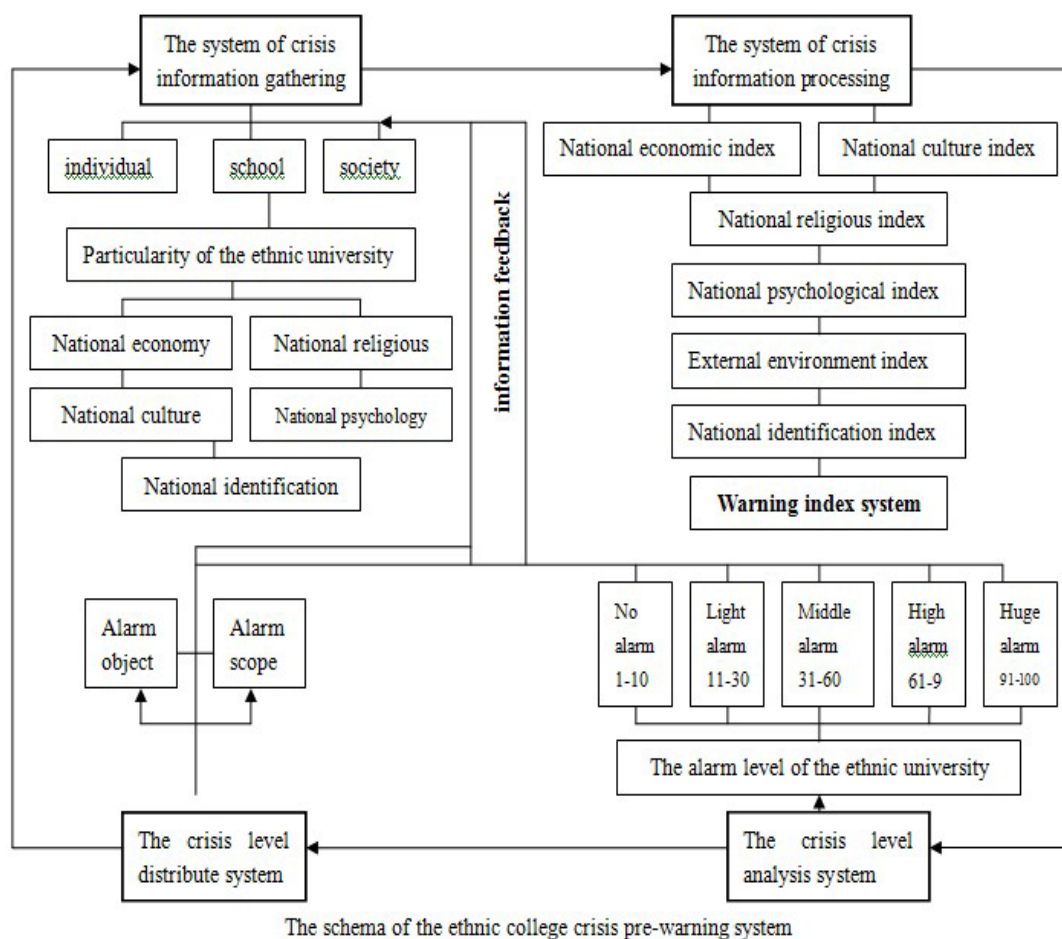
### 3.3 Training specialized managers of national relation in the combination of theory and practice

Chinese ethnic contradictions have never stopped in history, and the management of ethnic relation is still a prominent problem in every history stage. Yet the specialized managers of pre-warning crisis about national relation are scarce, so we should train some specialized managers of pre-warning crisis about national relation. Ethnic university exists special condition with theoretical study and practice of pre-warning management, so we should train some professional or part-time people according to factual things who can apply management system of pre-warning crisis by using the advantage of intelligence resource and nation gathering of national university, and sett up special courses about pre-warning management of ethnic relation. We should support management system of pre-warning crisis in the aspects of theoretical research and practical operation, also it train special managers of pre-warning crisis of national relation, which perfects the mechanism and guarantees the development of harmony nation relation .

In short, the minority university students are the hopes that nation develop harmoniously in future. Implementing pre-warning management of crisis in ethnic university, we can find the problems of management and teaching in ethnic university and solve the problems to make the minority university students develop better. Furthermore, it can help minority university students to grasp the life direction properly and treat the national relationship rationally when their thoughts are not mature so as to make contribution to developing our nation and uniting other nations.

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The schema of the ethnic college crisis pre-warning system

Figure 1.

# The Moderation of Liberal Studies School Based Assessment Scores: How to Ensure Fairness and Reliability?

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## Abstract

As part of the ongoing education reform initiated by the Hong Kong Education Bureau (EDB), Liberal Studies will become a compulsory subject in senior secondary schools in 2009. It will be one of the core subjects all students must take, besides English, Chinese and Mathematics. Some of the objectives of the subject include cultivating critical thinking, developing generic skills, life-long learning and encouraging students to see things in multi-perspectives. However, aligning the learning goals and assessment will not be an easy task. The traditional forms of assessment may no longer be adequate to assess our students. According to the officials from Education Bureau, the introduction of School Based Assessment (SBA) was deemed more desirable than assessing students by one written examination. But some students are concern about the fairness and reliability of teacher assessments. The issue of moderating SBA project work needs to be addressed. Would teachers be more lenient in judging their students' work? Do teachers have bias? Should the grades of project be based on exam results? How should moderation be done to ensure fairness? The aim of the present article is to discuss the moderation of school based assessment scores in the new senior secondary Liberal Studies subject and the adjustments schools and the authorities might have to make.

**Keywords:** School Based Assessment, Moderation, Liberal Studies

## 1. Introduction

According to the EDB, the aims of Liberal Studies are to broaden students' knowledge base and perspectives, and enhance their social awareness through the study of a range of issues. The curriculum is designed to allow students to make connections across different fields of knowledge and to broaden their horizons. The learning experiences provided will foster students' capacity for life-long learning, so that they can face new challenges confidently. The framework of curriculum and assessment takes into account of cross-disciplinary studies, pertaining in particular to critical thinking, life education and values education relevant to the Hong Kong context. To put these ideas into practice will require modifications to the teaching strategies, assessment methods and school culture.

## 2. The Challenge

Under the new secondary school academic structure, all senior secondary students will study Liberal Studies as a core subject from Form 4 to Form 6, and then sit for a public examination. The exam result may determine whether the student can get a place in university. Some people query that how can the assessment be designed to align with the goals of the subject. For instance, how can we measure a student's ability to think independently? How can we assess generic skills?

During the consultation stage of the new curriculum, there were arguments on whether Liberal Studies students should sit for examinations. Some educators argued that the public exam will destroy the "spirit" of the subject. Teaching-to-the-test and rote-learning will again dominate teaching and learning. Much time will be allocated on preparing exams rather than developing thinking skills and life-long learning attitude etc. As pointed out by Madaus that (as cited in Weeden, Winter and Broadfoot, 2002), when test results are the sole or even a partial arbiter of future educational or life choices, society tends to treat test results as the major goal of schooling rather than a useful but fallible indicator of achievement. In fact, students should be learning concepts, process, or ideas that lie behind it rather than just test items (English, 2000). On the other hand, some argued that if there is no examination, student will not take the subject seriously. Students only study what is on the test, and may not even try to work hard in this subject. After many consultations, in March 2007, the new curriculum and assessment method of the Liberal Studies is finalized. The following table shows the design of Liberal Studies assessment (EDB, 2007):

### Insert Table 1 Here

Cheung and Hui (2006) point out that, in many cases, public examinations assess learning outcomes (not always related to curriculum aims) rather than the learning process and change. Therefore, much effort is spent on training examination techniques instead of the pursuit of the goals of the subject (values and attitudes in the case of Liberal Studies). If we really want to achieve the goals of this new subject, the assessment design has to be changed accordingly.

### 3. Why School Based Assessment?

Assessment can include any activity that serves to provide feedback to the teacher and students about what the students has learned (Wilson, 2005). In Liberal Studies, besides traditional examination, teachers can use essay, speech, project, performance task, etc. as SBA components. The more variety used in assessment, the more complete the picture of what the students know and can do (Wilson, 2005). The assessment practices should be aligned with curriculum planning, teaching progression, student abilities and the local school context. Students can receive timely and helpful feedback (Black, 1993) to promote learning as the assessment is continuous and formative in nature. The information collected will help to motivate, promote and monitor student learning, and will also help teachers to find ways of promoting more effective teaching and learning.

Generic skills are fundamental to helping students learn how to learn. The skills transcend specific subjects, disciplines, or applications. One of the aims of Liberal Studies is to develop in students a range of skills for life-long learning, including critical thinking skills, creativity, problem-solving skills, communication skills and information technology skills (EDB, 2007). Skills such as IT skills are easier to assess, but skills such as critical thinking skills and creativity are harder to measure. When we want to do assessment, care must be taken in explicitly defining the learning outcomes associated with generic skills. Some consensus should be developed between teachers who will provide instruction and engage in assessment of the same generic skills in the context of different subjects. Multiple assessment methods in multiple contexts should be used to ensure that the skills are in fact transferable. In the traditional ways of assessment, paper tests and essays are used. However, many generic skills are less susceptible to assessment using these methods. The introduction of SBA could be a good alternative. Teachers can consider using portfolios, projects, role play, demonstrations, presentations, etc. as parts of the SBA coursework. These are good approaches to gather evidence of learning outcomes and are more consistent with assessment for learning. Also, learners can be engaged actively in assessing their own learning. The drawbacks can be labour-intensive for students and teachers, and there might be questions about reliability.

Arter and McTighe (2001) point out that teachers at times are nervous about grading certain types of student work – like creative writing, a research report, or an oral presentation. They are even more anxious when they need to ensure that the students “will think critically” or will be “life-long learners”. The Liberal Studies teachers in Hong Kong are facing similar problems. In order to make reliable judgments on students’ competency in generic skills, standards, criteria and indicators are needed. Some sort of rubric is required to guide the judgment to the evidence of student achievement. Using rubrics in assessment saves time, provides timely and meaningful feedback for students, encourages critical thinking and maintains equity and fairness (Stevens & Levi, 2005). Also, rubrics provide valid and reliable assessment of student learning on the complex and hard-to-assess student outcomes.

In Hong Kong, many teachers do not have the skills and experience in instructing and assessing generic skills. It seems that there is a perceived conflict with traditional curriculum and instructional methods. The use of assessment tools such as rubric and portfolio is not common. Well-established assessment procedures and tools are not adequate at the moment. More teacher development is needed to make teachers better prepared for the new challenge.

According to the Hong Kong Examination and Assessment Authority (HKEAA), School Based Assessment is an assessment carried out by schools as part of the teaching and learning process, with students being assessed by their subject teachers and marks awarded will count towards the results of public examinations. The aims of SBA of Liberal Studies are:

- To enhance self-initiated research and organizing ability
- To enhance various generic skills

One of the disadvantages of public exam is that it only gives a snapshot or a limited sample of student’s performance. Examination is summative in nature and also not very effective in assessing some of the generic skills. In contrast, SBA is more holistic and provides a more comprehensive appraisal of students’ performance. Students’ results are not determined by one single exam. Teachers can give feedback to enhance students’ understanding of their weaknesses and strengths. Students are encouraged to learn independently. This ongoing assessment process can be used to recognize needs, provide assistance with skills, clarify directions, motivate, and guide instruction (Chapman & King, 2005). Black and Wiliam (1999) also suggest that teacher assessment which diagnoses students’ difficulties and provides constructive feedback leads to significant learning gains. SBA can be used to complement public examinations. Teachers will be able to see students’ continuous progress through working on a SBA project or Independent Enquiry Study (IES) over the three year period. According to the Liberal Studies: Curriculum and Assessment Guides (Secondary 4-6) (Final version March 2007) by Education Bureau:

IES is an integral component in the curriculum of Liberal Studies. It is designed to provide a self-directed learning experience which requires students to shoulder the major responsibility of learning and demonstrate self-management skills in pursuing an investigative study on a self-chosen topic, with teachers and other peer students as partners in

learning.

Shepard (2005) points out that the aim of practicing formative assessment is to establish classroom practices that encourage peer assessment, regard errors as opportunities for learning, and promote shared thinking. That means we need to foster a learning culture: classrooms in which both students and teachers focus on learning rather than on grades. However in Hong Kong, when compared to many western countries, still only a small percentage of students can get a place in universities. Harsh competition among students is inevitable. In Australia, UK and USA, 82%, 51% and 64% of the students respectively can receive government subsidized higher education, but the figure for Hong Kong is only 18%. To make things worse, the student population has decreased rapidly in recent years and that means some schools are under the threats of closing down. Schools need good results to attract students. Therefore for some teachers, assessment for learning is fine, but helping students to get good grades is a matter of life and death. As Liberal Studies is entering the stage as a core compulsory subject and SBA is an important part of the assessment, many Hong Kong educators and students are concerning about the fairness of SBA and would like to understand how the system of moderation works.

#### **4. Moderating SBA coursework scores**

With the appropriate alignment with assessment criteria and learning objectives, a set of rubrics and guidelines can be produced for teachers to follow to give similar conclusions about student's work (Chase, 1999). Many students' abilities not easy to be assessed by examinations can now be evaluated through SBA. The validity of assessments is therefore improved as the assessment is measuring what it sets out to measure (Weeden, Winter & Broadfoot, 2002). Still, teachers, students and parents, are worry about the fairness of marking. Actually, teachers are best placed to judge their students' performance. They can reliably assess the performance of all students within the school in a given subject. However, when teachers make these judgments, they are not necessarily aware of the standards of performance across all other schools (HKEAA, 2007). Despite training in carrying out SBA, and even given that teachers will assess students on the same task and using the same assessment criteria, teachers in one school may be harsher or more lenient in their judgments than teachers in other schools. They may also tend to use a narrower or wider range of marks. To answer that, a moderation process will be carried out by the HKEAA to ensure the fairness of SBA. In fact, Australia and New Zealand have been using moderation methods for years. According to the New Zealand Qualification Authority:

The main function of moderation activities is to ensure that different applications of standards remain within acceptable limits.

The Board of Studies in Victoria, Australia says:

Moderation is the process of ensuring that the same assessment standards are applied to students from every school doing a particular study.

In Hong Kong, the HKEAA is intending to use moderation methods to moderate SBA scores for Liberal Studies and also other subjects with SBA components, which will be examined for the first time in 2012. According to the HKEAA, the main reason for having moderation is to ensure that SBA results are comparable and fair for all students from different schools.

The commonly used moderation methods include statistical moderation, consensus moderation and expert moderation. Each method has its advantages.

In consensus moderation, groups of teachers conduct moderation meeting occasionally. The teachers select samples of student work from the same activity and brought these to the meetings. The moderation participants then scored all the samples of student work, shared their scores with the group, and then discussed variations in scoring to reach consensus. Teachers also used this to discuss instructional implications as well as reflect on their own practice.

In the state of Victoria in Australia, consensus moderation was used to moderate students' coursework. The study by Ingvarson (1990) (as cited in Roberts and Wilson, 1998) found that involvement in the consensus moderation process:

- added significantly to teachers' skills for assessing student learning;
- enhanced teachers' ability to evaluate and improve their teaching;
- significantly increased teachers' access to useful ideas for teaching;
- enhanced the quality of learning of students;
- affected positively participants' teaching in non-project classes; and
- supported, rather than intimidated, beginning teachers.

Ingvarson (1990) also reported that the positive responses increased as teachers had more experience with moderation, which again reflects the need for teachers to have time to become knowledgeable and skilled in using this process.

The procedures of expert moderation are similar to consensus moderation except that the moderation participants are experts of particular fields. For example, if the topic of the coursework is pollution, experts in environmental protection can give their professional judgment on the quality and depth of the students' work.

The above two moderation methods are non-statistical methods or may refer as social moderation. One of the drawbacks is that consistency may still be at risk even though many moderation meetings were conducted. Different groups might reach different conclusions especially when the unit standards lack specificity or moderation participants lack experience and poses dominant personalities (New Zealand Qualification Authority, 1992). Although there are ways to address the potential problem, a great deal of human effort and time will have to be spent. For example, a representative from each local group meets in panels organized on a national basis and therefore the feedback can be used to improve consistency.

In 2000, the coursework assessment of Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) in Australia started to include statistical moderation in the moderation process. In Hong Kong, the HKEAA will adopt the statistical moderation method in Liberal Studies School Based Assessment. Statistical moderation is a fair and impartial way of ensuring consistency of standards across schools, while maintaining the students' rank order given by the school (HKEAA, 2007; Board of Studies in Victoria, 1999). This method is particularly appropriate in situations in which there is another measure available that can be used to moderate schools' assessment. Assuming that the public examination result is a valid measure of overall level of performance of students, statistical moderation uses students' exam results to determine if any adjustment in SBA scores is needed. This method is fast, objective and less costly, but the pre-requisite is the assumption mentioned above must be valid.

A school teacher may be harsher or more lenient than teachers in other schools. The spread of students' scores given by teachers may be different as well. Statistical moderation tries to solve the two problems by adjusting the average and the spread of SBA scores of students in a given school so that they are aligned with the exam scores of the same group of students. So the mean of SBA scores may be adjusted upwards or downwards and the deviation of scores may be stretched or compressed. The SBA scores will then be comparable across various schools while the rank ordering of SBA scores within a school remains unchanged. The statistical moderation method to be employed by the HKEAA will involve eight steps. The following is summarized from "Statistical Moderation of School-based Assessment Scores, HKEAA (2007)".

Step 1: Identify moderation group.

The group is defined by all students studying Liberal Studies taught by the same teacher.

Step 2: Convert the raw scores to a scale of 100 points.

The conversion is for the purpose of calculation and comparison.

Step 3: Calculate moderation variable.

Liberal Studies examination consists of two papers. The weighted combination of the exam scores will be the moderating variable.

Step 4: Derive moderation formula by statistical methods.

Here, outliers are excluded to avoid distortion. A candidate's moderated SBA score is a function of the predicted SBA score of the group, multiplied by a factor to take into account the relative spread of the SBA scores on the exam. The formula is like this:

$$F(x) = x_{mean} + \beta(\bar{z} - z_{mean}) + (x - \bar{x}) \frac{s_p}{s_x}$$

where  $x$  = the SBA score of candidate

$x_{mean}$  = the global mean of the SBA scores

$z_{mean}$  = the global mean of the moderator variable (exam) scores

$\bar{x}$  = the group mean of the SBA scores

$\bar{z}$  = the group mean of the moderator variable (exam) scores

$s_x$  = the group standard deviation of the SBA scores

$s_z$  = the group standard deviation of the moderator variable (exam) scores

$s_p = \sqrt{\frac{s_x^2 + s_z^2}{2}}$  or the mixed group standard deviation

$\beta$  = the slope calculated from regressing SBA scores on moderator variable scores, taking



into account the nesting of candidates within group

Step 5: Calculate moderated SBA scores.

Step 6: Convert moderated SBA scores back to the original SBA metric.

Step 7: Post hoc checking.

To identify outliers for individual review.

Step 8: Combine moderated SBA score with exam scores to form total subject score.

After statistical moderation, the HKEAA will send an SBA moderation report to each individual school for reference. The details include the statistics of the moderation group and comments:

Statistics of the moderation group:

Moderation group ID

Mean of SBA scores

Standard deviation of SBA scores

Mean of moderated SBA scores

Standard deviation of moderated SBA scores

Number of candidates in the moderation group

Comments:

The mean of the SBA scores is (within the expected range / much higher / higher / slightly higher / slightly lower / lower / much lower than expected)

The spread of the SBA scores is (within the expected range / wider / slightly wider / slightly narrower / narrower than expected)

The report can provide useful feedback to teachers and schools to understand if they were being too harsh or the spread of score is too narrow and vice versa.

School scores may be adjusted up or down after statistical moderation and the rank order of the students remains unchanged. Individual candidates' SBA scores are not directly affected by how well they performed as individuals but as a group in the exams. To achieve the highest possible final score, a student will need to achieve the highest possible SBA score and the highest possible exam scores. This method seems fair and scientific. It can be carried out in a very short time using very few resources. At the same time, teachers' judgments are valued in terms of preserving the rank order of students.

However, there are issues needed to be addressed. Firstly, statistical moderation relies on the assumption that the public exam is a valid measure of the overall performance of the moderating group. This assumption is valid in most academic subjects. But, what about Liberal Studies? It could be possible that the exams and SBA are measuring different things. If the whole assumption is invalid, the whole statistical moderation has little use. The objective of Liberal Studies coursework is to enhance self-initiated research, organizing ability and various generic skills (HKEAA, 2007). So SBA is to measure the above skills. The public exam claims to measure the overall performance of students. Therefore, it must at least include some items to assess students' research, organizing and generic skills. Even though we can design such items for written exams, they may not be most effective and reliable. Perhaps the abilities measured in the exams are highly correlated to the abilities measured in SBA. Therefore, the exams need not cover what SBA is supposed to assess, and can provide an accurate prediction. But we need evidence for that. Also, if that is the case, a paradox appears. If we can use public exam to measure what SBA is measuring, then why not just use public exam? And yet, we are using SBA to measure the skills public exam cannot measure, as said by the HKEAA (2007): "Certain components of some curricula cannot be assessed within the context of a written examination, and this can be complemented by SBA." As we can see, the exam and the SBA are complementing each other. They are probably not measuring the same things. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (1992) comments on the major technical difficulties with the method: "The dissimilarities between the elements assessed in the test and those outside the test may render the scaled results invalid."

In statistical moderation, there is no human intervention. This could be a good thing as it eliminates subjectivity. However, before the moderation process begins, the rank order of a moderating group is solely determined by one single teacher and nobody else. Although teachers are professionals with professional ethics, they might still have their preferences. Students may present their work in very distinct and sometimes creative formats. Their work can demonstrate the range and depth of a student's learning, knowledge and skills over time and across different contexts.

Students are actively involved in the selection of materials which provides opportunities for reflection and gives them a sense of ownership. It is unavoidable that different teachers may favour different ideas. Reliability refers to the consistency of assessment results (Gronlund, 1998). It is possible that the rank order of a group may be different if it is determined by other teachers. Hence, the reliability of teachers' marking may be at risk as there are no moderation meetings, no external assessors and no common assessment tasks. The problem may escalate if the number of students in the group is small.

Another drawback is that there is little chance for professional development and sharing of ideas which can provide invaluable feedback to teaching and learning. Just providing the moderation report to schools is probably not as effective as teachers of different schools discussing and marking coursework together.

The HKEAA should use Australia's experiences as reference. On top of statistical moderation, the Board of Studies in Victoria, Australia uses cross-marking and common coursework tasks to increase the comparability of school assessment. Cross-marking of carefully selected samples of student work can help teachers to establish a common application of the assessment criteria and marking scheme for each task. Each teacher can then ascertain the extent to which the marking standards need to be adjusted to align with the common standard. Since the coursework tasks set by the teachers may vary and the ways students present their work may be very different, choosing a few tasks from a pool of common coursework tasks can help to achieve comparability.

Any adjustment to students' score is determined by the exam scores for the whole group, not by the student's own exam score. Therefore, some people concern that high-performing students will have their scores reduced simply because they are in a low-performing group. In Australia, the moderation procedures used can eliminate that at the top end of the scale by setting the highest moderated score to be equal to the highest exam score. The procedures can also eliminate the reverse situation at the bottom end of the scale. However, the HKEAA does not have such procedures. Rather some outliers are temporarily excluded from calculation to avoid distorting the moderation results. In figure skating competition, the bottom two and top two scores are eliminated and the remaining eight scores are then averaged. This is based on the assumption that the high and low scores are biased. But a biased judge could have given biased marks throughout. The critical question is the judge's consistency in interpreting the scoring system consistently all the time. The Liberal Studies SBA will also face the problem of identifying biased markers. The use of Item Response Theory and Many-Faceted Rasch Model could be the answer. The model uses shared marking to establishing consistent severity levels of markers. Then Rasch Model is used to determine the markers severity level. As linked data (items are marked by more than one markers to form links) are necessary, the judging plan needs to be carefully designed. The Many-Faceted Rasch Model is simplified as follows:

$$\text{Log}(\text{Pr}(\text{correct response})/\text{Pr}(\text{incorrect response})) = B_i - C_j - D_k$$

or

$$\text{Pr}(\text{correct response}) = \frac{e^{B_i - C_j - D_k}}{1 + e^{B_i - C_j - D_k}}$$

where  $B_i$  is the ability of the  $i^{\text{th}}$  student

$C_j$  is the difficulty of the  $j^{\text{th}}$  item

$D_k$  is the severity of the  $k^{\text{th}}$  marker

In here, there are three facets or three factors ( $B_i, C_j, D_k$ ) which may affect the probability of getting a correct response. After data input and calculation using the software "Facets", the model will then give us outputs such as marker consistency, bias analysis and marker discrimination. Markers who were too lenient or too harsh are identified when the data and the model does not fit. Follow up actions such as re-training, cross-marking and double marking can then be taken.

Over the past 20 years, many examination bodies have adopted SBA to improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. In Hong Kong, the weighting given to Liberal Studies SBA is only 20%. In Australia and UK, the weighting is about 50%. Provinces in Canada have up to 100% SBA and the International Baccalaureate (IB) has a heavy emphasis on SBA supported by teacher moderation arrangements. Chan and Cheung (2007) point out that Liberal Studies aims at helping students to acquire important skills, knowledge and work habits that cannot readily be assessed or promoted through paper-and-pencil testing. The outcomes are essential to learning within the disciplines and also valued by tertiary institutions and employers. Furthermore, the SBA activities are probably more enjoyable and meaningful to students. Therefore if we consider the nature of Liberal Studies and overseas experiences, giving SBA a 20% weighting may be too conservative. But why people have reservation? Survey results indicate that schools and teachers have divergent views as to whether SBA is doable and whether the effort required by teachers and students is reasonable (Chan & Cheung, 2007). From the responses of many schools that they believe they are expected to do all things they have done in the past as well as carry out SBA as an extra responsibility. Uncertainties and increase in

workload are teachers' main concerns. The solution to the overloading problem is to integrate SBA with teaching programmes so that SBA will become a natural part of daily work and replace some of the traditional assessment practices within schools. All schools will start offering Liberal Studies in 2009. But not all teachers have the experience in implementing SBA. The HKEAA has to organize professional development programmes and provide exemplars and detailed guidelines to strengthen teachers' understanding of SBA and to ensure the consistency of teachers' assessment. Fortunately, the HKEAA has promised to publish detailed guidelines on how to implement Liberal Studies SBA, and also provide training for future Liberal Studies teachers.

## 5. Conclusion

The education reform Hong Kong currently undergoing composes of many initiatives. The introduction of Liberal Studies is only a small part of it. Nevertheless, it is affecting the education community. The traditional mode of teaching, learning and assessment is no longer adequate. Teaching without learning is a worthless exercise, and hence the assessment of whether students have learned is integral to the process of education. Teaching is a process to obtain our goal of learning, as the desired outcome. Assessment is the process used to determine whether the outcome was met (Wilson, 2005). The learning goals of Liberal Studies include developing many skills difficult to be assessed by written exams. Once the problems of fairness and overloading are solved, SBA could be a suitable platform for assessing generic and thinking skills as well as practicing learning-oriented assessment.

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Table 1.

Component	Part	Weighting	Duration
Public examination	Paper 1	50%	2 hours
	Data-response questions	30%	1 hour and 15 minutes
	Paper 2 Extended-response questions		
School-based Assessment (SBA)	Independent Enquiry Study (IES)	20%	



## A Tentative Exploration into the Features of the English Corner at Renmin University of China

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### Abstract

This paper has investigated the distinctive features of the English Corner at Renmin University of China. The popularity of the English Corner at RUC is firstly attributed to its physical advantage: the location of the university ensuring convenient transportation; the location of the English Corner easy to be found; and the timing on Friday evening without duration limit. And its weak points and problems include: participants have difficulties in finding an ideal matching partner and suitable topics to discuss; though seemingly more than other English Corners, the foreigners joining it are still fewer than the participants have expected.

**Keywords:** English corner, RUC, Participants

### 1. Introduction

English, in the past fifty years, has become a global language. From the worldwide perspective, 0.32—0.38 billion people have English as their mother tongue, while 0.75-1 billion people study English as a foreign language, among whom Chinese people are the major contributors. In the past 20 years, there has been a national fervor in China for English, especially for American English. After China's entry into WTO, instead of cooling down, this fervor is becoming even increasingly more heated while considered by some scholars to be unreasonably overheated.

One good reflection of this national passion for English is the large amount of English corners, spontaneously formed or purposely organized, in the cities in particular. The English Center of University Students of Hunan Province in Hunan Normal University, for instance, one of the most famous and sponsored the authority, has been benefiting a lot of people. According to the investigation carried out by [www.52en.com](http://www.52en.com), with the small-scale ones excluded, there are more than 60 famous and popular English corners in the big cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Dalian, Hangzhou, etc. In Beijing, the most famous five are those at Renmin University of China (RUC), Tsinghua University, Peking University, Beijing Foreign Studies University, and Chaoyang Cultural Center, among which the one at RUC is the most popular and reputable.

This paper attempts to explore the distinctive features of the English Corner at RUC favorable for its popularity, and the existing shortcomings as well, for the sake of offering references for its further development.

### 2. Literature Review

Though English seems to be profoundly spread in China, the proficiency levels of different people vary greatly, especially in their listening and speaking skills, the two most difficult barriers, considered by the scholars, for students and other English learners to surmount. Take students as an example. During the classroom education, more attention is attached to improve students' reading and writing ability, thus having "dumb English" become its natural product. With the gradual awareness of the importance of listening and speaking ability, scholars are probing efficient strategies to make up for this misstep, developing various classroom and extra-curricula activities on campus (Zhou 2003).

However, while the students attract most of the concerns, the need of the non-student English learners seems to be marginalized, thus they try to keep closer to the students to learn from them some strategies. When various forms of English corners are organized by schools, from primary school to universities, those non-student English learners try to join the students or even set up their own English corners following the suit (Gao 1999). English corners are so popular that we can even find it in the prison. (Shi 2009) So people are also like to discuss how to build English corners, in

polytechnic and vocational colleges, in the colleges of ethnic minority and remote areas, in private colleges and in libraries for children. (Wang 2008; Li 2008; Gu 2008 & Li 2005) With the development of information technology, some begin to study how to build online English corner. (Gao & Xu 2008)

In addition, many scholars and teachers try to study the functions of English corners and many of them place high hopes on it. Some explored the help of English corner to college English teaching, (Fu Peili 2008) some probed into the application and development of English corner in second-class English teaching in the vocational college, (Zhou & Wu 2007) and some explored its role in improving the speaking ability. (Li 2004) Others researched the communication strategies or English acquisition in English corner. (Chen & Tu 2006; Chen 2006)

Popular as English corners are, there are some descriptions about their general situations or new developments and their functions in newspapers and periodicals, but few investigations in the reasons behind the apparent attraction. As a most extraordinary member, the English Corner at RUC is no exception. It also draws extensive attention from the society. The most recent report about its newest development is "English Corner at RUC: New Destination for White-Collars" on April 18<sup>th</sup>, 2005 (www.sina.com.cn). In spite of these concerns over its apparent popularity, it is still a virgin land for exploration into its distinctive features. This paper attempts to explore this virgin land, discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the English Corner at RUC, and stimulate further researches.

### 3. Research Methods

The data collection procedures of this research included written questionnaire and personal interview as case study.

The questionnaire included 18 items in all, the first four about basic information, like sex, age, occupation, and education background, and the other 14 are relative questions, such as why they studied English, why they came to the English Corner and the frequency, the mode and topic of conversation, the biggest problem they met, and the most efficient way of improving English proficiency. 20 valid questionnaires were conducted with the subjects randomly selected from the participants in the English Corner on June 17 (the date was also randomly chosen).

4 most representative subjects were chosen for the follow-up personal interview: a 19-year-old sophomore majoring in International Economics and Trade from Beijing Institute of Technology; a 24-year-old postgraduate majoring in Electronics Engineering from Beijing Transportation University; a 25-year-old postgraduate majoring in English from Renmin University of China; a 35-year-old employee of a state-owned company. These face-to-face interviews helped to collect further and more detailed information.

### 4. Research Analysis and Findings

According to the questionnaire, 75% of the subjects are satisfied with this English Corner with 35% thinking highly of it and 40% fairly satisfied (See Table 14 below). All of the interviewed consider the English Corner at RUC as their first choice among all the English Corners in Beijing. 85% of the subjects admit that they have benefited from joining it: 40% of them have their English polished, 25% have their horizon widened and 20% have made new friends as is shown in Table 15 below.

**Insert Table 1 about here**

**Insert Table 2 about here**

To stand out among so many "competitors", the English Corner at RUC has its own distinctive features the others lack or fail to match: in addition to the physical advantages, it not only provides favorable conditions for English learners, but also creates a good environment and atmosphere for people to make new friends and relax.

#### 4.1. Physical Advantages

The popularity of the English Corner at RUC is firstly attributed to the special location of the university: its closeness to the third ring road ensures terrific convenience of transportation, with the bus lines outside the east and west entrances heading for different destinations while the last bus at about 11:30; this advantage particularly facilitates it in attracting students from the universities around it.

Besides the overall geographical convenience of the university, the location of the English Corner itself at the small square near the east entrance makes it easy to be noticed and found. Its encirclement by the small garden makes it an independent lot free from the intervention or interruption of the heavy transportation, and a relatively quiet place without much influence from outside noise.

The time of this English Corner on every Friday evening also contributes to its large population. With the prospect of the coming weekend, people, students and non-students, are willing to come. Besides, there is no time limit in this English Corner, i.e. the participants are free to choose the coming and leaving time. This allows the students to come after class and non-students to come after work, enjoying flexible time frames.

#### 4.2. Favorable Conditions for Practicing English

Apart from the physical convenience it promises, as a gathering first of all for English learners, it provides the participants with favorable conditions for practicing English: the different aged participants having varied English

proficiency, with different education backgrounds and of various occupations; the presence of quite a few foreigners from English-speaking countries; and the alternative activity of Mass English.

According to the questionnaire, the age range of the participants is quite broad: from children less than 10 years old to the adult at about 50 (see Table 2). It is convenient for people to talk with partners at different ages: the peers who have more common experiences and common concepts, thus easier to communicate with and understand each other; the seniors who have more life experiences and a more sophisticated mind; and the juniors from whom one can feel the energetic youth and passion for life as well as future.

#### **Insert Table 3 about here**

As regards to the English proficiency, one can find here new-starters, amateur English fanciers, English majors, returnees from overseas, and also friends from English-speaking countries (one of the most important attractions for the participants, to be discussed later). Statistics from the questionnaire show that 50% of the subjects want to chat with people having a better English proficiency, 25% are willing to talk with partners at similar spoken English levels, while 15% show their preference of speaking to those holding a relatively inferior position (see Table 10). These varied favoritisms can be satisfied by the extensive inclusion of this English Corner of participants at different English capacity levels.

#### **Insert Table 4 about here**

From the perspective of occupation, 70% of the participants are students, among whom 83% are undergraduates, masters and PhD candidates, ensuring a relatively good educational level of the participants and more commonplace as well; they are from different universities and colleges, study various majors of sciences and arts, and have interests and specialties in diverse fields. The rest are teachers, civil servants, and, employees in state-owned enterprises and multinational corporations, who all have to use English in their work (see Table 3). This complication of occupation offers a good chance for the participants to get in touch with partners of different educational backgrounds and with different life experiences. As a result, they can have their horizon broadened, which is considered as the most important benefit this English Corner assures the participants by 25% of the subjects (see Table 15).

#### **Insert Table 5 about here**

#### **Insert Table 6 about here**

As is considered by [www.52en.net](http://www.52en.net), the presence of foreigners is the most distinctive feature that makes the English Corner at RUC more popular than other “competitors.” These “attractive” foreigners include the overseas teachers and students, and the visiting scholars of RUC, and the guests living in Friendship Hotel as well. To talk with these natives from English-speaking countries is counted by 45% subjects as the most efficient way to improve spoken English (see Table 13). Asked what they will do when a foreigner joins the big gathering and is surrounded by many Chinese people in most cases, 40% choose to join the group and listen while 10% choose to go up and try to talk with him or her (see Table 18).

#### **Insert Table 7 about here**

#### **Insert Table 8 about here**

Another characteristic of this English Corner is its new brand activity—Mass English. It was a society first organized by a teacher of RUC 3 years ago, with as its objective helping the members (English lovers, mostly non-English major students) to improve their overall English capability: the members take turns to be the hosts of the activity, selecting topics, preparing detailed, abundant materials, and organizing the participants to join the discussion. The topics chosen are mostly the hot issues ordinary people are interested and have insight in. Participants can freely voice their opinions, debate with “opponents” and reach some common understanding. When discussing the favorite mode of conversation, Mass English has been the first choice for 20% of the subjects (see Table 9).

#### **Insert Table 9 about here**

All these favorable elements melt together and make the English Corner at RUC the first choice for the English lovers, assisting them to realize their aim of bettering their English. 90% of the subjects of the questionnaire affirm the help from it in the improvement of their listening and speaking skills: 30% of them show their appreciation by claiming that the participation in it has marvelous influence on their English proficiency; 60% indicate that they have some progress after taking part in this gathering (see Table 17).

#### **Insert Table 10 about here**

### *4.3. Suitable Circumstance for Relaxing and Making Friends*

Nowadays, with the acceleration of life pace and material enrichment, the burden and pressure on ordinary people are also increasing: students are overburdened with their study or are under great pressure from the coming future of entering the fierce job markets; career-men and -women, after having five weekdays’ hard work, need to refresh

themselves by some leisure activities. Then, the need of unloading and relaxing becomes one of the common parts in modern life. English Corner caters to this need by furnishing a quiet place for them to let out their mood through chatting with strangers about some leisure topics, like hobbies, movies, new happenings on the pop stars, etc., about the hot issues of the state, about English study and cultural phenomena, and even merely doing everyday greetings.

The investigation reveals that the most common topic in the English Corner is recreation and leisure, accounting for 35% of the total (see Table 12 below). Here one distinctive character needs to be mentioned: all these 7 subjects who have recreation and leisure as their favorable topic are students; it echoes the common social phenomenon of youth's increasing admiration and loyalty attached to the pop stars, buying albums and posters, joining fans clubs, and as is done here, communicating with peers about their idols. Therefore, topic of recreation and leisure can bring the students closer to each other, and hence become their first choice in conversation.

#### **Insert Table 11 about here**

Everyday Greetings also take up a large proportion, 30%. As is known that everyday greetings are important and useful in daily life, it makes little contribution to the perfection of English. Then why do a large number of students and even those career-men and -women come here just to do everyday greetings? Besides the possible restriction from their English ability, the most important reason, as is said by two interviewed subjects, is to feel the kindness of strangers and get oneself relaxed. In doing this, one need not think much of and temporarily forget their worries or unhappiness, thus have their mood justified to some extent.

As is mentioned above, making new friends is one of the most important benefits the participants get from this English Corner, approved by 20% subjects. 5% of the participants join this "English Party", holding making new friends in their mind (see Table 8) and having their objective reached. Though with no such intention, others also unconsciously have this unexpected result.

#### **Insert Table 12 about here**

#### *4.4. Existing Problems*

Though outstanding achievements have it made, the English Corner at RUC is still not 100-percent satisfactory. Some problems are revealed in the questionnaire and case study: most of the participants are new comers who have a short history of attendance for less than one year; only 20% find no difficulty while 80% have different problems in finding a matching partner, choosing a proper topic or female participants' embarrassment by those "over-kind" males.

75% of the participants first came to the English Corner within one year: 35% within 6 months and 40% between 6 months and one year; only 25% persist in coming for more than one year (see Table 7). Two elements give rise to its failure to keep its participants: the reason why the attendees learn English and the developing mobility of the society.

#### **Insert Table 13 about here**

65% of the subjects confess that they learn English out of "instrumental motivation," a concept introduced by Gardner and Lambert, in which the learner is motivated to learn another language for utilitarian purposes, such as furthering a career, improving social status or meeting an educational requirement. Only 35% learn English out of their personal interests, i.e. integrative motivation, in which the learners wish to identify with another ethno-linguistic group (see Table 5). According to Gardner and Lambert, an instrumentally oriented learner can be as intensively motivated as an integratively oriented one; however, they hypothesized that the latter orientation would be better in the long run for sustaining the drive necessary to master the language (Larsen-Freeman 2000). The survey finds that those learn English out their own interests visit English Corner more frequently and persist in participating for a relatively longer time, taking up 60% of the "senior" participants who have attended the English Corner for more than one year. When their need becomes less urgent, those instrumentally motivated will stop or withdraw for sometime until they once more need to practice English. Just as the subject from Beijing Transportation University has said, the first time he came here was 4 years ago before the oral examination of CET 6; then after the examination, he seldom visited the English Corner; a month ago he restarted to join it, because he found his vocabulary has been on the decline for long-time unemployment. This accounts partly for the failure of the English Corner at RUC in keeping its "customers."

#### **Insert Table 14 about here**

Another reason for the constant change of the participants is the increasing mobility of the whole society. As is shown above, the main participants are students, who may no longer remain in this university or in Beijing; when they graduate, their relationship with the English Corner may be cut off. Besides, the non-students even have more mobility: the shift of their working place, the duty of going on business in other places and even working overtime may interrupt their regular contact with English Corner.

The biggest problem the participants meet here is, as 40% of the subjects have put it, finding matching partners to talk with (see Table 16 below). Though the wide range of age, occupation and English proficiency seem to have created affluent chances for seeking an ideal partner, the random choosing without knowledge of the chosen strange partner



ahead of time makes it time consuming to pick up a satisfactory one. Though the foreigners here have already been much more than other English corners, the number of foreigners is still dissatisfactory for the participants' ideal as is indicated by the following phenomenon and data from the questionnaire and interview: one foreigner is always surrounded by a large group of Chinese; though 45% of the subjects agree that talking with a foreigner is the best way to improve English, 25% of them disapprove the others' joining the large group around the foreigner merely to listen or even talk, insisting that this merely listening and occasional cut-in have no contribution to polish one's English; most of the interviewed hope that RUC can invite more foreigners.

#### Insert Table 15 about here

The remaining problem is more restricted to the female participators, that is, the over-kindness shown by the strange males. As is discussed earlier in this paper, some people come here with the specific purpose of making friends, including those with hopes of finding a boyfriend or a girlfriend. When asked about the sex of their preferred partners, both of the male interviewees choose to talk with females. They explain that the female has a better inborn aptitude for learning languages and thus has a better English proficiency. That's why they have preference for female partners. In the meantime, only one female interviewee admits that her partners are mostly males. The other utters frankly her vexation of the males' continuous attempt to get her personal information. On behalf of the female participants, she expresses her expectation that RUC can help form a potential regulation, asking the participants to more respect others' privacy and not to annoy others while embarrass themselves as well.

### 5. Conclusion

With new ones organized now and then in universities, high schools and social communities, English corners have attracted increasingly more social attention and participation. Though aware of the great popularity and wide involvement of participants, people seldom look into the reasons for this phenomenon in the deeper level. In view of this, this paper has investigated the distinctive features of the English Corner at Renmin University of China, the most popular and representative one in Beijing, for the sake of giving references for it and others in their future development to enhance the existing superiorities and overcome their shortcomings.

The popularity of the English Corner at RUC is firstly attributed to its physical advantage: the location of the university ensuring convenient transportation; the location of the English Corner easy to be found; and the timing on Friday evening without duration limit. As a circumstance for practicing English, it is favorably conditioned for that purpose: the wide range of age, English proficiency, education backgrounds, and occupations, assuring the participants with satisfactory partners and various topics; the presence of quite a few foreigners from English-speaking countries, serving as the most attractive element for the participants; and the alternative activity of Mass English which can, besides practicing spoken English, create chances for the participants to train their English thinking and critical reasoning. It also meets the need of the participants who attempt to seek relaxation, make new friends and broaden horizon as well.

However famous and welcomed it is, the English Corner at RUC also has some weak points to be strengthened and problems faced by the participants to be solved: participants have difficulties in finding an ideal matching partner and suitable topics to discuss, which are the two crucial elements of a conversation; though seemingly more than other English Corners, the foreigners joining it are still fewer than the participants have expected. These problems are merely raised in this paper without any suggested solution.

As regards the research itself, since the questionnaire and case study are conducted in a small scale—20 questionnaires and 4 interviews, the results may not fully applicable to all the participants or other English Corners. Further researches covering wider ranges are needed to investigate deeper into the phenomenon and put forward feasible solutions to the problems raised above.

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Table 1. Comment on English Corner

Excellent	Good	All Right	Room for Improvement
7	8	5	0
35%	40%	25%	0%

Table 2. Most Important Benefits Received

English Proficiency Improved	Horizon Widened	New Friends Made	No Benefit
8	5	4	3
40%	25%	20%	15%

Table 3. Age

$\leq 10$	11-20	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	$\geq 60$
1	2	14	2	1	0	0
5%	10%	70%	10%	5%	0%	0%

Table 4. English Proficiency of Partner

Better	Weaker	Similar	Care not
10	3	5	2
50%	15%	25%	10%

Table 5. Occupation

Student	Teacher	Employee of State-owned Enterprise	Employee of Multinational Corporation	Civil Servant
14	1	3	1	1
70%	5%	15%	5%	5%

Table 6. Most Important Benefits Received

English Proficiency Improved	Horizon Widened	New Friends Made	No Benefit
8	5	4	3
40%	25%	20%	15%

Table 7. With the Presence of a Foreigner

Listen to him	Talk to him	Pay no Attention	Disapprove A&B
8	2	5	5
40%	10%	25%	25%

Table 8. The Most Efficient Way to Improve English

Fixed Partner	Fixed Topic	Talk with Foreigners	Constantly Changing Partners and Topics
3	1	9	7
15%	5%	45%	35%

Table 9. Mode of Conversation

One-to-One	Group Discussion (Free Topics)	Mass English	Depending on Situation
9	5	4	2
45%	25%	20%	10%

Table 10. Influence of EC on Improving the Participants' English

Marvelous Help	Some Help	No Help	Negative Influence
6	12	2	0
30%	60%	10%	0%

Table 11. Topic of Discussion

Everyday Greetings	Politics & Economics	Recreation & Leisure	Language & Culture
6	3	7	4
30%	15%	35%	20%

Table 12. Reason for Participating English Corner

Practicing English	Making Friends	Out of Curiosity	Passing-by
14	1	2	3
70%	5%	10%	15%

Table 13. History of Participation

$\leq 6$ months	6 months- 1 year	1-4 years	$\geq 4$ years
7	8	2	3
35%	40%	10%	15%

Table 14. Reason for Learning English

Compulsory Course	Job-Facilitating	Personal Interest	Following Trend
8	5	7	0
40%	25%	35%	0%

Table 15. The biggest Problem

Finding Matching Partners	Finding Proper Topics	Meeting "Over-Kind" Strangers	No Difficulty
8	4	4	4
40%	20%	20%	20%



## Leadership Characteristics of An Excellent Principal in Malaysia

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### Abstract

Excellent principals are sense makers of schools that help create a sustainable school climate that will enhance students' and teachers' productivity. Hence they are not only the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) but also the instructional leaders and motivators for their teams. In exploring the leadership characteristics of an excellent school principal in Malaysia, findings indicated that the principal demonstrated characteristics outlined by literature and used a variety of educational strategies and situational leadership styles. Nevertheless some felt that the principal was too ambitious, result oriented, and had little time for teachers and students.

**Keywords:** Excellent principal, Secondary schools, Leadership style, Teachers, Students

### 1. Introduction

Effective leadership is widely accepted as being a key constituent in achieving school improvement. A highly effective principal is not called to the job per se, but more importantly to the opportunity to make a difference in the school. This could mean a change in the educational landscape, heal an ailing school, or work for the concepts of greater accountability, equity and excellence.

Research findings from diverse countries and different school contexts have revealed the powerful impact of leadership in securing school development and change (e.g., Hopkins 2001a; West, Jackson, Harris and Hopkins, 2000). Hopkins (2001b) highlights the centrality of transformational and instructional leadership practices in achieving school improvement in schools facing challenging circumstances. Existing literature also indicates that the most popular theories are located in the transactional and transformational models identified more than 20 years ago (Burns, 1978; Hoy and Miskell, 2008) and lately reinvented through such terms as 'liberation' (Tampoe, 1998), 'educative' (Duignan and McPherson, 1992), 'invitational' (Stoll and Fink, 1996) and 'moral' leadership (Sergiovanni, 1992).

According to Brenninkmeyer and Spillane (2008: 436), past research paints a picture of a principal as someone who spends a lot of time solving instructional problems in the school, and whose performance in solving those problems has a tangible effect on the results of the students at the school. What is clear from these, and from literature of effective schools, is that, successful leaders not only set direction but they also model values and practices consistent with those of the school, so that "purposes which may have initially seemed to be separate become fused" (Sergiovanni, 1995: 119). Effective leaders are proactive and seek help that is needed. They also nurture an instructional program and school culture conducive to learning and professional growth. Nevertheless, effective instructional and administrative leadership is required to implement change processes (Hoy and Miskell, 2008).

However, today's school environments have become more complex and diverse where all children are expected to learn and where high learning standards set the vision of educational success for all students. In a rapidly changing and more technologically oriented society, students will need to acquire the knowledge and skills that will help them achieve success in school and in life. The evolving nature of school environments has placed high demands on educational leaders. Where knowledge of school management, finance, legal issues and state mandates was once the primary focus for the preparation of school leaders, education reform has created an urgent need for a strong emphasis on development

of instructional leadership skills to promote effective teaching and high level learning. Moreover, educational leaders must recognize and assume a shared responsibility not only for students' intellectual and educational development, but also for their personal, social, emotional, and physical development. The increasing diversity of school communities places a premium on school leaders who can create a vision of success for all students, and use their skills in communication, collaboration and community building to ensure that the vision becomes a reality.

## 2. Background of the study

Malaysia is a fast developing country with a mission to become a regional hub for educational excellence in South East Asia. In fulfilling such a noble quest, all learning organizations in Malaysia face increasingly critical demands for greater equity and accountability. Henceforth, school heads who are seen as 'sense makers' and 'agents of change' are challenged to turn around ailing schools and improve everyday teaching and learning that meet international global standards. Societal demands for greater efficiency and accountability have also seen school heads beginning to display excellence in both the management and daily administration of schools. In a move to produce excellent schools, the Malaysian Ministry of Education (MOE) gives both state and national level awards to schools in a number of categories. These include awards such as The Potential School Award, The '3K'/Three Excellent Aspects Award (given to school, which display clean, safe and conducive learning environment) and the Minister of Education Quality Award.

Alongside with these awards, the MOE realizes that award-winning schools are a result of performing and excellent school principals. Therefore the Malaysian MOE has taken steps to reward these principals by adding greater promotional posts for school heads. Beginning 1998, secondary school principals who display excellent leadership qualities can be promoted to become Excellent Principals. Later in 2005, these excellent principals were given another chance to move to a higher rung on the remuneration ladder by being awarded the designation of a Super Principal.

Potential candidates for these two posts have to undergo and fulfill a set of stringent criteria. It includes school observations by representatives from various MOE divisions such as the Federal School Inspectorate Division, the Schools Division and the National Institute of Educational Management and Leadership. Besides observations, interviews are also carried out with all the stakeholders in the school, i.e. the teachers, the students, parents and representatives from the community. The final phase of the selection is based on an interview with the school principal by a selected panel of officers from MOE chaired by the Director General of Education of Malaysia. Once selected, the principal is said to possess distinct abilities in educational leadership, educational management and parent or community relations. The selection criteria usually takes into account the ability of the leader to accomplish the school's vision and mission. It also includes aspects such as teaching and learning excellence, academic achievement, co-curricular performance, interpersonal relationships and the documentation of the school's activities.

By the year 1998, a total of 23 secondary school principals in Malaysia had been awarded the designation of excellent principals. In 2004, another 20 secondary school principals were awarded the designation of excellent principals. In 2009, the number of excellent principals has accelerated to 162 out of roughly 2200 secondary principals in Malaysia as stated in the *Majlis Pengetua Kebangsaan Kebangsaan/National Excellent Principal Council (2009)*'s website (<http://mpkk.org/>). Henceforth, it was felt a study should be conducted to examine and document the characteristics of an excellent principal in Malaysia so that others could benchmark some of the practices in improving their own leadership characteristics.

## 3. Research design

This study used a qualitative case study method to collect and analyze the research data. Stake (1997), and Creswell and Clark (2007) noted that even though case studies have not found the solutions for education problems, researchers and others have appreciated their deep, self-referential probes of problems. In-depth portraits of a small number of individual principals would however, provide a fuller access to their views across a range of issues (Gronn and Ribbins, 1996; Fraenkel and Wallen, 2006). In this study, data were gathered to learn as much as possible about the contextual variables that might have a bearing on the case. After that, the data obtained from this qualitative case was analyzed.

This paper presented only leadership characteristics of an excellent principal as part of the findings conducted in the Syed Ali Secondary School (not the real name), an exemplary school located in the state of Seremban in Malaysia. The selection was based on the number of awards it had received. According to the records obtained from the State Inspectorate Division, the principal in this study had displayed an "outstanding" effort in creating and supporting a positive teaching-learning climate in the school. The records also revealed that the principal had done a lot to improve instructional practices in the school.

The target population of this study consisted of the 87 teachers and 1105 students in the selected school. To explore leadership approaches in this school, a research design was constructed that incorporated multiple methods. The data of this qualitative study was collected through extensive interviews, casual conversations, formal and informal observations, and various kinds of school and policy documents.

A total of eleven semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were conducted for the purpose of this study. The interviews were bilingual in nature, conducted in both the Malay Language and in English depending on the interviewees' ease and comfort with a particular language. All the eleven formal interviews were audio tape-recorded, while a few informal conversations with both teachers and students were recorded in the researchers' personal notebooks during and after the conversations.

Since the principal was the main focus of this study, three interviews were conducted with the principal, three interviews with senior assistants (one interview each), three interviews with teachers, three interviews with students and one with the Chairperson of the Parent-Teacher Association. This study was guided by the following research questions that shed some light to help structure interview questions for the principals, teachers and students.

- What is the vision and mission of the school?
- What are the principal's leadership strategies?
- What are the leadership styles practiced by the school principal?
- What are the excellent personal attributes demonstrated by the principal?
- What are the administrative roles played by the principal?
- What are the limitations of the principal?

In addition to these broad questions, the researchers also included other related questions, which were deemed relevant to the research topic. In addition to conducting interviews, a number of other activities were also conducted during the 14 days of this research in the school. The researchers also took the opportunity to attend a number of meetings and special events such as management meetings, staff meetings, subject panel meetings and the Parent-Teacher Conference at the school. Besides that, the researchers also conducted a number of observations such as student activities in the afternoon and classroom observations of the teaching and learning process. Non-formal observations included observation of teachers in the staff room, observation of teachers and students at the cafeteria, and general observations of the school building, school library, and special rooms such as the science laboratory, teaching aids room, and the school Conference Room. These observations were carried out to get a complete picture of the school's physical as well as cultural set-up.

In addition to conducting interviews and observations at the school, the researchers also looked into a number of relevant school documents. It included annual school magazines, special reports on school profiles, reports on school activities and strategic planning, minutes of the various subject panel meetings and staff meetings, school examination results and analysis, some background information on the students attending the school, history of the school, and the principal's biographical information, work experience, academic and professional backgrounds, principal's duties at the school, and a diary of her work showing her activities for any two weeks at the school.

#### **4. Findings**

Within a study comprising of only one school, one principal, three senior assistants, 87 teachers and 1105 students, the possibilities for generalization are inevitably limited. Since one of the aims of the study was to explore the leadership characteristics and how far the school head shared her school vision with her colleagues and students, the volume and range of data collected in this study may provide a basis for some preliminary findings about leadership in secondary schools in Malaysia.

##### *4.1 The principal*

The school principal in this study is referred to as Aminah (not her real name). She is a 53-year old lady who holds a Bachelor of Education in Islamic Studies. Aminah has 18 years of experience in teaching secondary schools and has been in different managerial positions for the past 10 years. She was a Head of Department for 5 years and had the experience of being a Deputy Principal for five years in two schools prior to her appointment as the principal at Syed Ali Secondary School in 2000. This was her first appointment as a school principal.

Prior to her appointment in 2000, the Syed Ali Secondary School staff members were divided into two camps. One camp was with the principal while a rival camp consisted of staff members who were with the deputy principal. The staff morale was low as the previous principal believed in a 'divide and rule' policy.

During her tenureship, Aminah was able to turn around this ailing school and unite the teachers into working collaboratively towards a shared vision and mission. More importantly, the dynamic leadership qualities portrayed by Aminah saw the school pushing forward to win a number of coveted awards in the educational arena in Malaysia. Within one year of her principalship, in 2001, the school won the National Level 3K Award (best school in terms of creating a clean, safe and conducive learning environment). Later in 2002, the school won the State Potential School Award and in 2003, it won the prestigious National Minister of Education Quality Award.

#### 4.2 Aminah's vision, mission and leadership strategies

Interviews carried out with Aminah revealed that she had a number of strategies that helped her turn around an ailing and divided school. She stressed that her first strategy was to bridge the gap between the two camps. Therefore during her 'walkabouts' around the school, she would talk and carry out informal interviews with both teachers and students and get to know what they wanted their school teaching and learning environment to be. Based on the information she had collected, she gathered her top management and did her strategic planning and set in motion her plans for the school.

Her second strategy was to set up management teams that involved all teachers in the school. In developing both macro and micro management teams, she stressed that she took deliberate steps to involve members from both parties and this gave them the chance to know each other and work collaboratively. More importantly, she revealed that she 'participated as a team member and not the boss when decisions were to be made'. Besides that, she set up micro student management teams to help each staff committee so that they will have some help to execute plans that they would like to carry out in the school. She highlighted she set up a school beautification team that consisted of both teachers and students.

Once the macro and micro teams were beginning to take off, she took every opportunity she could to highlight what each team was doing at her weekly assembly or staff meetings. Aminah felt that this way "every team felt that whatever little contribution it was has been acknowledged by the school leader." She revealed that such positive reinforcement gave them the motivation to do better.

Once the teachers and students exhibited initial signs of closing the gap, Aminah moved on to her third strategy. She stressed that she whole-heartedly launched this strategy to ensure and inculcate a shared school vision and mission among all her school members. Going hand-in-hand with the vision and mission of the school was a need to "develop a certain school culture that would highlight moral values – the basic foundation to become a good human being."

Observations and interviews indicated that both teachers and students all communicated a shared vision and mission for the school. By 2004, Aminah was successful at realigning both staff and pupils to their particular vision of the school. The school's vision "*Menjana Generasi Cemerlang di Dunia, Sejahtera di Akhirat*" when translated means "To Create a Morally Upright Generation with Academic Excellence" and was well understood and implemented whole heartedly by all teachers and students in the school. This vision reminded them to pay due attention to both teaching and learning and more importantly, become morally upright citizens. Besides that, the school mission "to educate, to formulate and inculcate quality thinking in moral, academic and co-curriculum activities" was also reflected in most of their efforts to achieve excellent results in both academic and co-curricular activities.

The school management team (SMT) in the study 'walked the talk'; through the consistency and integrity of their actions, they modeled behavior that they considered desirable to achieve the school goals. They shared the belief and optimism that people have untapped potential for growth and development. The school management clearly respected others and modeled teacher leadership through empowering and encouraging others. They also trusted others and required trust from others. They recognized the need to be actively supportive, caring and encouraging, as well as challenging and confrontational when necessary.

A consistent and shared vision was an inherent part of their leadership approach. The school management team communicated their vision through relationships with staff and students and they built these around core values. The vision and practices of these heads were organized around personal values, such as the modeling and promotion of respect for individuals, fairness and equality, caring for the well-being and whole development of students and staff, integrity and honesty. It was evident that the teachers' values and visions were primarily dedicated to the welfare of staff and students, with the latter at the centre. These values underpinned their relationships with staff, students, and parents and guided their day-to-day actions.

Ever since Aminah was appointed principal, she disclosed she had secretly harboured her plan to push her school for the State Potential School Award (*Sekolah Harapan*). She explained that once she realized that the school was with her, she put forward her plans. She was glad all the staff was with her. Then, she put forward her next strategy, i.e. to improve the school physical and teaching and learning environment. She soon put her plan into action and as a learning leader, she set forth her ship for sail. She sent out teams including herself to benchmark excellent schools and learning programmes. She did not limit herself to visiting schools only in her area but set foot in schools in other states.

Bringing back best practices from other schools and her strong belief in continual improvement, Aminah and her team set into motion their plans to improve the school environment. All teachers and all student societies in the school were involved in this school project. Within one year, the school was not only able to win the State 3K/Three Excellent Aspects Award but also the National '3K' Award (*Kebersihan, Keselamatan and Keceriaan*) for best school in terms of cleanliness, safety and creating a conducive environment for teaching and learning. From then she explained there was no holding back. This is what she had to say:

*Once my school received the 3K Award I was pleasantly surprised. I had no one but to thank my teachers and students. . . . and also the State Education Department who believed in me and gave me the financial assistance I so desperately needed to run my programmes. . . . It was at this point that I realized that I had been able to get my team together and I could do more. . . . From there we managed to go on to win the State Potential School Award and the most prestigious National Level - Minister of Education Quality Award in 2003. I strongly believe in my team now and as long as I give them some direction I know they are most capable to producing tangible results. All this is possible because I think we have a shared vision and mission to give the best to our students . . . .”*

#### 4.3 Aminah's leadership styles

In her interview Aminah consistently highlighted the importance of possessing a wide range of leadership styles she used to address the diverse sets of issues and challenges she faced. She also highlighted the contingent nature of many of the decisions she had to make and how different leadership styles and strategies were used by her in different contexts.

##### 4.3.1 Instructional leadership

Aminah stressed that she is first and foremost a teacher. She stands very strongly on the fact that as a school principal her first and foremost commitment is to teaching and learning. She emphasized that “all school principals must be good instructional leaders.” As an academic leader, she put into place strategies on helping her students at all levels. Aminah ensured that her school curriculum committee had strategies to help the weak, the average and the best students. Aminah emphasized that ‘all students must be pushed to explore their true potential and this could sometimes mean challenging them to new heights’.

From the Malaysian perspective, Syed Ali Secondary School was an average school academically. Prior to 2000, the students' pass rate for PMR (Penilaian Menengah Rendah) or Lower Certificate of Education stood as 80% whilst the SPM (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia) or Malaysian Certificate of Education (equivalent to O Levels) was 68%. By 2004, with Aminah at the helm for 4 years, the school's academic achievement had improved significantly. The PMR pass rate rose from 80% to 100 % and the high stakes SPM Examination pass rate increased from 68 % to 95%.

Aminah's teachers highlighted that their school improved academically under the current leadership because Aminah always involved everyone in decision-making with regard to curriculum implementation. According to her deputy, Aminah “listened to everyone and she displayed this professional trust in all her teachers”. She gave them the help and advice they needed to implement their programmes. Aminah's deputy added that the school head not only chose “the right teacher to teach the right class” but also cultivated the habit of developing professional dialogue between teachers by encouraging the school teachers and the students to become inquiring communities.

According to Teacher 2 in the study, Aminah was a principal who placed a high premium upon her own professional development and the professional development of her staff. In this respect, the principal developed professional and intellectual capital in the school. The learning community enhanced not only students' academic achievement but also helped developed her teachers. Recent work by Barber and Mourshed (2007, 13) argues that three things matter most in terms of the top performing school system were identical in this study:

- Getting the right people to become teachers;
- Developing them into effective instructors;
- Ensuring that the system is able to deliver the best possible instruction for every child.

The first is essentially about making entry teacher training highly selective to ensure that the highest caliber trainees become teachers. This initiative has become a main focus of the Ministry of Education in teacher training. The second involves classroom coaching, enabling teachers to learn from one another and having leaders who provide these interventions. Such instructional leadership rests on head-teachers focusing their time on the quality of teaching. The third involves monitoring and reviewing what is happening in a school, and intervening when necessary. Leaders need to know what the assessment and student learning data show and act upon them. These findings add further weight to those who have advocated instructional leadership (Hill, 2001) and to research which demonstrates the values of learning-centred leadership (NCSL, 2004; Southworth, 2004). Interviews with the teachers further revealed that the teachers in the school were committed to the belief that every child can learn and succeed. The principal made decisions that motivated both staff and students and placed an emphasis upon student's achievement and learning. The teachers in the study talked about ‘creating the conditions that would lead to higher student performance’ and they were deeply concerned about the welfare and the educational experiences of their students.

##### 4.3.2 Situational leadership

Aminah pointed out that she adopted a more autocratic leadership style during the initial stage of the school improvement project before they won the Best Quality Award from the Minister of Education, Malaysia in 2003. She felt she needed to manage a divided staff and at the same time needed to get things done. Nevertheless, she



emphasized that she always listened to her people first before she made any changes. Once she had made a decision based on consensus, she ensured that everyone toed the line.

Later when the school was been observed for a variety of awards especially during the inspection stage from the School Inspectorate, School Division, and the Chief Director General's Office, the principal adopted a more supportive leadership style in order to assist staff through the process. The school management team also took this role very seriously and consciously demonstrated high levels of emotional responsibility towards their staff during the inspection period. An important contributory factor to achieving a positive outcome was considered to be how the principal's leadership style matched the situation or circumstance facing the school at different times. In particular, the principal in this study emphasized that while she had a broad set of values she adhered to, she did not consider this to be a fixed leadership approach. She felt strongly that she could switch to a leadership style that suited the situation, and could behave in ways that did not reflect her core beliefs, if necessary.

#### 4.3.3 Distributing leadership

Aminah highlighted in her interviews that student and teacher outcomes will improve when they are empowered to make decisions in their particular areas of interest or importance to them. According to Aminah, "when teachers are empowered, they feel good and usually do their best to prove that they can do the job well" Aminah stressed that by building macro and micro management teams, she gave her teachers and students the opportunity to lead, to innovate, develop and learn together. She added that she always told her teams this, "If the school is to improve only you can do it no one else. So do your best and you will see the difference."

Aminah adopted highly creative approaches to tackling the complex demands of implementing multiple changes. The decision to work with, and through, teams, as well as individuals, was a common response to the management of change. The principal used a number of strategies to bring out the best in her staff. In addition to formal development opportunities, these strategies included: the power of praise; immediate and positive reinforcement, involving others in decision-making and giving professional autonomy. Although Aminah concentrated on the teaching staff in the first instance, she also used similar approaches when dealing with support staff, parents and, to some extent, students. The following are some excerpts from interviews that indicate her distributing leadership style:

*'When I first stepped into this school it was very hierarchical in nature. Most of the decisions were made by top management. The middle and low managers were not involved in any decision making activities. Since I took over I have made it a point to stress that every individual is a member of the team and in the team each and everyone has to be committed and should share the responsibility not only to follow but more importantly contribute by giving input for decision making'* (Aminah-The principal).

*'My current principal has given responsibility to each and everyone individual in the school. For her it is not just a case of delegating tasks but shared responsibility.'* (Teacher 1)

Aminah reiterated that in her four years as head, she found that different leadership strategies would be used in different contexts but she held her central belief in distributing leadership to teachers remained unaltered. This form of leadership she added "starts, not from the basis of power and control, but from the ability to act with others and to enable others to act." For her, distributing leadership places an emphasis upon allowing and empowering those who are not in positions of responsibility or authority to lead. In general, the principal's distribution of leadership tasks seemed primarily aimed at staff commitment by supporting staff initiatives and a climate where it is alright to take risks. This is underlined by her explicit wish that the school has a vision that is agreed by all. The result supported the principals' study in Tasmania and Victoria in Australia by Moos, Krejsler and Kofod (2008).

#### 4.3.4 Invitational leadership

Stoll and Fink (1996) describe 'invitational leadership' as a form of leadership where leaders place a high premium upon personal values and inter-relationships with others. Aminah is clearly a leader that reflects many of the dimensions of invitational leadership. She placed an emphasis upon people rather than systems and invited others to lead. One concrete example was her push to enhance teaching and learning. She encouraged her teachers to conduct action research. Teachers who had successfully completed their research were invited to present their findings to both teachers and students alike. This motivated everyone to be actively involved in research and this indirectly developed a culture to enhance teaching and learning at the school. It was also clear that, while the principal possessed a range of leadership strategies to address the diverse sets of issues and problems she faced, at the core of her leadership practice was a belief in empowering others.

*'For me as a principal it is my duty to facilitate and give others the confidence to grow and to take on new responsibilities. For my staff to do this I must be able to share the power and not keep it at the top for myself alone.'* (The Principal)

*'With this principal everyone can see that there is power sharing. We are all involved in decision making and everyone's ideas are taken into consideration before a final decision is made. We like that. It is more democratic.'* (Teacher 12)

#### 4.3.5 People-centred leadership

According to the teachers interviewed, the principal was a person who displayed people-centered leadership in her day-to-day dealings with individuals. A majority (87%) of the teachers interviewed felt that her behavior and interaction with others was premised upon respect and trust and her belief in all her people. The teachers highlighted that Aminah had a strong belief in developing the potential of both her staff and her students.

A principle concern for Aminah was maintaining staff morale and motivation. To motivate her staff, she took pains in ensuring little things were not forgotten. She took the trouble to send greetings such as birthday wishes, get well soon cards and wishes on the success achieved by her colleagues and their families. These simple gestures touched the very core of human relations and made her a leader that had her staff's respect. Even though she was generous with her praises and motivation, she did not stop short to point out things that were not right.

Aminah's emphasis on continuing development of her staff reflected her recognition that teachers were her most important resource. Consequently, she was highly skilled at using a combination of pressure and support to promote the efforts of teachers, particularly when working with the most difficult students. She encouraged teachers to take risks and rewarded innovative thinking.

This was echoed by Aminah when she said that *"people are your greatest asset and I firmly believe therefore that the staff and the students in this school are my best resource for change."* It was also very obvious that the human qualities she possessed enabled her to lead others effectively and to establish confidence in others that their vision was worth sharing.

#### 4.4 Aminah's personal attributes

If Aminah was able to bring her divided staff to work collaboratively it was due to her personal attributes. Teachers and students who were interviewed all pointed out that she was a person who held fast to high morals and values.

According to her deputy (Senior Assistant 1), Aminah being an Islamic religious teacher possessed attributes of a good Muslim. She was dominant and confident yet possessed the humility that a leader should have. She was humble and mixed well with her peers. She never let rank separate her from her teachers and was a true and loyal friend when you needed one. Her teachers added that Aminah was a determined person and a principle-oriented lady. She worked hard and believed in what she was doing. In the long run, her persistence and perseverance often led her to obtain what she aimed for.

Aminah was, to both her teachers and students, a warm and caring person. She was also polite, friendly and kind hearted. To many, she was soft spoken and this most probably enabled her to maintain a cool and calm disposition at all times. One of her deputy (Senior Assistant II) had this to say:

*"She is soft spoken yet firm. Normally her kind nature just melts people. For example if you go in angry and frustrated, you would come out feeling good. That's Aminah for you. . . . She will let you talk . . . When you have finished talking only then she would respond and most of the time, the advice she gives is so simple yet leaves one fulfilled."*

*'It is important that staff and students are involved in the life of the school and relate to each other in a positive way.'* (The Principal)

*'The head has ensured that we work more in teams and work across our subject areas. This has made us build broader relationships and work together.'* (Subject Head 8)

The Head of Language Department felt that Aminah was a creative leader. To her, Aminah reflected a person "who could be dominant, steadfast and cautious at the same time." Though she was soft spoken, her staff saw her as a motivator who always brought out the best in her teachers and students. When examinations were round the corner, she would make time to go on her rounds to motivate her students to do their best.

According to her teachers, her greatest asset was her good communication skills. She was to many a good listener and her confidence in speaking ensured she was able to get her message across to her people clearly. According to her staff and students, her common inspiring words include "okay, no problem, well-done, excellent, congratulations, let's do it together, we could do it, and thank you".

Aminah was also a leader who was willing to learn. She was always passionate about learning and Teacher 32 said that Aminah always 'wanted to be in touch with the latest developments. She was willing to learn from her peers and this made her human and a friend to all of us. According to Teacher 23, Aminah possessed great enthusiasm in whatever she did. In her words, "seeing this enthusiasm in her, we too were motivated to be like her. It was moments like this we felt

inspired to work with her.” Such words also reveal the charismatic qualities that Aminah possessed. All these personal attributes most probably enabled her to win the hearts of her team.

The principal was also seen as a fair person with genuine joy and vibrancy when talking to teachers and students. Aminah generated a high level of commitment in others, through her openness, honesty and good inter-personal relationships. According to Aminah, she placed emphasis upon generating positive relationships with teachers, parents and students and fostering a view of the school as being part of, rather than apart from the community.

#### *4.5 Aminah's administrative roles*

Finally, Aminah was asked to outline some of her main leadership roles. As the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the school, she felt she could not run away from being an administrator and manager of her school. She highlighted that as an administrator, she had three capable deputies. Senior Assistant I helped her with the school Academic Affairs while Senior Assistant II looked into the student affairs. Senior Assistant III helped her with co-curriculum activities.

Aminah felt that besides being a school manager, she was also the school's Public Relations Officer. She felt her job was made easier because of the good and friendly relationship that she had with the school Parent-Teacher Association members and the District and State Ministry of Education Officers. Most of the teachers also felt that Aminah was “good at developing and maintaining relationships”. According to her deputy (Senior Assistant I) the school was never short of teachers. Any teacher who left either due to a transfer in posting or was on maternity leave was quickly replaced by a substitute teacher. Aminah was able to get quick replacements primarily because of her good working relationship with the ministry.

Aminah highlighted the fact that one of her major role was being an instructional leader. She emphasized that as a principal she demanded high standards for teaching and teacher performance. Observations, document analysis and interviews revealed that time was provided to ensure that teachers met on a regular basis to discuss teaching and learning in their various panel meetings. She also made time to monitor classroom teaching and learning and ensured individual assessments were carried out. Poor teaching was not ignored or tolerated within the school. When it did exist, Aminah ensured the top management team together with the relevant panel heads looked into possibilities of providing help and guidance. In a few cases identified in the school, a combination of structured support, monitoring and an individual development program addressed the problem of poor quality teaching. For Aminah, “effective leadership was about capacity building in others and investing in the social capital of the school.”

Another role that Aminah saw herself in was that of a motivator. To her, a principle concern was maintaining staff morale and motivation. The emphasis placed on continuing development of her staff reflected the recognition that she had on teachers as her most important resource. Consequently, she encouraged teachers to take risks and rewarded innovative thinking. In doing all this she felt she needed to provide inspiration and motivation so that everyone would be willing to give their best to the school.

#### *4.6 Aminah's limitations*

In this study Aminah displayed a number of characteristics that have been outlined by literature. Nevertheless, being human she was not without her limitations. Approximately 10% of the teachers voiced these limitations. In moving forward to giving her best and in getting the team of teachers and students to work alongside her, she was according to one teacher “a person who is too result-oriented that she has little time to stop and smell the flowers. Therefore she has little time to interact with both teachers and students.”

Similar sentiments were also shared by a group of students who felt that they did not really know their principal as ‘she hardly talked to the students.’ They admitted she talked to prefects and school captains and class monitors but lacked the personal touch with the average school student.

Teacher 12 felt she was ‘too ambitious’ whilst Teacher 34 stressed that “a teacher can only do so much - she wants us to do so much in so short a time.” Others felt that her expectations were too high as she moved to strive for the best. The teachers acknowledged that they shared her passion but emphasized that they could not cope with her ‘ever-increasing demands.’ Teachers also pointed out that they were already burdened with a heavy teaching load and other academic duties and co-curricular activities. All these resulted in some teachers experiencing a high level of job stress and low job satisfaction.

Since she was handling a big school, the workload was high and some teachers like Teacher 56 felt her ‘demands and pressure for tangible results from everyone were a bit too unrealistic’. In such a scenarion not every teacher is with her in spirit but they admitted that they felt that as a team, they had to work collaboratively with the school head. Some students felt that the school conducted ‘too many activities’, they felt ‘tired’ and would just like to have ‘some free days with nothing to do.’

Despite these limitations, the disgruntled students and teachers all admitted that she was a good principal with good intentions who worked ‘heart and soul’ for the betterment of the school.

## 5. Implications and recommendations

The research findings of this study reveal the characteristics of a successful leader and the intensity and complexity of the role of a school principal. The successful leader in this study was identified as being reflective, caring and a highly principled person who emphasized the human dimension of the management enterprise. She placed a high premium upon personal values and was concerned more with cultural as well as structural change. At certain circumstances, she had moved beyond a narrow rational, managerial view of her role to a more holistic, values-led approach guided by personal experience and preference.

With regard specifically to the role of the head teacher, the national Standards for head teachers (DfES, 2004) identify core professional leadership and management practices in six key areas. These apply to all phases and types of schools and are in turn subdivided into the knowledge, professional qualities (skills, dispositions and personal capabilities) and actions needed to achieve them (DfES, 2004: 4). These include shaping the future, leading learning and teaching, developing self and working with others, managing the organization, securing accountability and strengthening community. These criteria are similar to the important competencies identified to become an excellent principal in Malaysia, namely defining vision and mission, enhancing teaching and learning, creative problem solving, and effective communication and motivational skills (Chan, 2009).

In terms of the role changes which have occurred, it is possible to see similar changes among other school heads in Malaysia during their leadership. Based on the findings in this case and the work at the PricewaterhouseCoopers' study (2007) of school leadership, three similar criteria namely shared leadership, increased staff involvement in administration, and new leadership models and structures have been identified. Becoming a school head is never an easy task. According to Southworth (2008: 421), there is a wide range of challenges currently facing school heads and the management team which can be grouped into five interrelated issues:

- Ensuring that school leaders have the capacity to meet the radical mix of challenges they now face;
- Equipping established, new and aspiring school leaders with necessary leadership knowledge, skills and competencies;
- Spreading effective leadership more widely to reduce variations in performance;
- Ensuring schools have leadership structures that are appropriate and sustainable for their context;
- Strengthening governance and, where necessary, changing the structure of governance.

Hence, attempts to establish how common these leadership attributes are should be used for selection and promotion of Malaysian school heads by the Ministry of Education. The capacity issue reflected the mix of high levels of shared and distributed leadership, sharp accountabilities and radical changes in the way schools are now expected to interact with other services and their communities (Southworth, 2008: 422). To ensure schools heads and their management team are as effective as possible for the challenges of today and tomorrow, we need to relook into the training at how in the near future these characteristics will be demonstrated by our school heads.

Nations across the world are extending their provision of training and development programs for effective school principals. In Malaysia, the National Institute of Educational Management and Leadership has taken a step forward to establish programs for aspiring and serving head teachers. The Institute's training programs such as the *School Leadership and Management Program* (SLMP), National Professional Qualification for Headship (NPQH) and School Leadership Assessment Program are all testimonies of the importance attached by the Ministry of Education, Malaysia to the training of effective principals. This commitment has been further underlined by the establishment of a High Standard of Quality Education (HSQE), pioneered by the School Inspectorate Division in Malaysia. Since values are central to successful leadership, reflection upon these must be central to training. Alongside this must also be a focus upon critical thinking, emotional and cognitive, and intrapersonal as well as interpersonal skills development. Recognition of the intimate link in successful leadership between the personal and the professional, between the development of the individual and the organization is paramount.

Finally, strategic planning, problem-solving and the management of competing forces must be key components of leadership training for school improvement if schools are to become the high-achieving learning communities espoused by government. Rational models which focus upon the development of behavioral skills and competencies are insufficient if the needs of those aspiring and experienced heads who wish to become and remain successful in the changing times of the 21st century are not to be met.

## 6. Conclusion

This study shed some light into the intensity and complexity of the leadership role in the school. Findings indicated that the principal is indeed the 'sense maker' of a school and her leadership characteristics are critical factors that help create a sustainable school climate that will enhance both teacher and student productivity. The leadership characteristics indicated that the principal demonstrated most of the main characteristics of an excellent principal as

outlined by literature. She also demonstrated that a variety of leadership styles and characteristics have to be honed for successful leadership to take place. Coupled with a value-based leadership style, an authoritarian form of leadership may be particularly necessary in the early stages of enhancing the school performance. In such a high performing school context, immediate action is required and hence, leadership approaches are often very directive and task-focused at the initial stage. However, the evidence collected within the study suggests that the principal adopts leadership approaches that match the particular stage of a school's development. While the principal acknowledged that she had adopted autocratic leadership approaches at critical times, she also agreed that this leadership approach was least likely to lead to sustained school improvement.

Thus, in most of her leadership tenure, the principal in the study had deliberately chosen a form of leadership to move the school forward, which empowered others to lead and distributed leadership activity throughout the school. This 'teacher leadership' in many ways covers a similar terrain to transformational leadership, both its orientation and aspiration.

The particular emphasis given by the principal to distributing leadership and empowering others would suggest an approach to leadership that has collaborative, participative and moral rather than transformational principles at its core. The findings indicated that various forms of teacher leadership prevailed and that this directly influenced collective problem solving and decision-making. While the principal's responses to problems varied, depending on the circumstance or situation, her value position remained consistently one of empowering pupils, staff and parents. The findings from the research study suggest that leadership in Syed Ali Secondary School was defined by an individual value system that embraces equity, empowerment and a moral purpose.

The study revealed a complex but compelling picture of leadership in the school. It revealed that the success of a school needs the full participation and smart partnerships from all parties concerned. Besides that, strong support, clear vision and appropriate empowerment are also seen as critical and crucial factors that should go hand-in-hand with good leadership. It reflected a learning leader that practiced a form of leadership that is collaborative, cooperative, participative, democratic and centrally concerned with giving others the responsibility to lead.

(7,733 words)

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## Evaluation from Students

### —A Case Study in Construction Engineering Technology of YAU

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#### Abstract

This paper not only aims to present the feedback received from the students, but also evaluate the feedback by review the teaching practice. It analyses the teacher should be aware of the importance that feedback, both to and from the students, has upon the teaching and learning process. Through a case study about the feedback from the students in Construction Engineering Technology of YAU, the author gives some suggestions on the teaching that the teacher's reflective evaluation can refine the teaching and help them to be better teachers. The teacher may incorporate feedback into practice, which teachers, like students, can benefits from assessment and evaluation of their own work or practice.

**Keywords:** Evaluation, Teaching method, Surface learning, Deep learning, Effective teaching

#### 1. Introduction

Ramsden(2003) suggest that evaluation is a way of understanding the effects of our teaching on students' learning. Collecting information about our work, interpreting the information and making some judgments about which actions we should take into practice. Good teachers are always evaluating themselves. Evaluating teaching is about learning to teach better and exercising control over the process of learning to teach better.

#### 2. Feedback and evaluation

"Feedback may operate both to improve learning of individual students, and to improve teaching." (Biggs, 2003 p141). 'The purpose of providing feedback to the students is to help teachers and students to identify their strengths and weaknesses as they learn and to improve those areas. It is a key principle of effective teaching. The feedback should not merely be to make things better next time. Giving feedback can itself be turned into part of learning experience.' (Race, 2007, p192-204).

Evaluating student feedback is presented in detail to assist the classroom teacher in its application and the consequent improvement of both the teaching and learning processes.

##### 2.1 Evaluation participants

The students who have provided feedback are from the first year students of Construction Engineering Technology, the module was the lecture of Capital Cities in New century English Integrated Course for two sessions. There were 50 students who were non-English majors. The students' feedback was carried out after the session. I had no time to do it during the session.

##### 2.2 Aims and methods of evaluation

As there are so large students, I think the questionnaires would be the most appropriate method for acquiring feedback. The questions focused on the content and the method of delivery:

1. Which did you like best, PPT slides, text or activities?
2. What did you dislike about the session?
3. Did you learn anything from the session, if so, what?
4. What part of the lectures that could be improved?
5. Any other comments.

Feedback was received from 50 students and the result below suggests the responses were got. I will analyze the feedback in the following section.

### 2.3 Results from the feedback

1). Which did you like best, PPT slides, text or activities?

Insert Figure 1 Here

2). What did you dislike about the session?

Only three students stated that the homework for writing a composition which they disliked. The other said none.

3). Did you learn anything from the session, if so, what?

—35 said they remembered a lot of vocabulary, phrases or description about the capital cities.

—10 said they knew some peculiar qualities of cities and characteristics.

—5 said they can say something about the advantages of capital cities.

4). What part of the lectures that could be improved?

—24 stated that nothing could be improved, lecture were enjoyable.

—12 asked if I could speak slower, they want to write something down.

— 8 said they want to have more handouts.

— 6 asked they need more time to think about the issues raised in the discussion.

5). Any other comments

Most of them said nothing g. Some of them gave me some positive comments such as,

—This is an enjoyable lecture.

—Very good presentation, I like the interesting learning. I hope you continue to use ppt Slides.

—Three students who are good at English want to do more activities in the classroom.

### 3. Analysis and discussion

The first question was about the teaching methods used, from the rating graph I could get to know students enjoyed the ppt slides, which were attractive, with imagination used to create animated presentations. They also liked the activities about the text, for the text itself maybe it was a little hard for them they did not understand it completely.

Sieber (2005) described that technology had a great deal to offer teachers and students. It could provide a rich, stimulating learner-centered environment, feedback and opportunity to develop communication between students and teachers. Therefore, in my future teaching I want to support teaching with technology.

The responses of second question about was funny, almost every one of them identified nothing to dislike within the session, whereas three students dislike the composition. It hinted some students were afraid of writing; I must help them with it.

The third question was relation to session content, most of them had learned from the session. It allowed the students to reflect on what they had learned. It was evidence of the session that was successful.

The next question was open question allowing students to provide written feedback. The open question was the most challenging question asked which was how the lecture could be improved. Their responses helped me identify areas to improvement rather than prove that something worked. This is the primary focus of evaluation. They help me research my teaching, define the problem, implement a change (Biggs, 2003 pp.252-260).

On reflection, I felt I should try to change my habit of speaking. I would try to make full preparation before each lesson, speak slowly so that the students had enough time to write notes. I would also give them enough time to discuss the issue instead of finishing the content in haste. Now I have slowed down, I stop on slides that are important and give the students time to check their notes.

Some students want to have more handouts. It is clear that some students didn't understand the text clearly. The teacher should provide study guide lines, including an introductory statesmen that help the students structure their study time, providing a structure of content for the day's material. The handout for students should leave blanks that students fill in while studying. The handouts can include one or several slides which is left intentionally blank for students filling in during class. We think it is clearly that there is no "best" way to use PowerPoint handout. Practice should be driven by our course objective and our students' abilities. By providing an outline of our lecture content via handout, we can encourage students to take notes on what is important part, evaluation, not on simply writing down what appears on the slide.

This is suitable for the ideas: if we use the PowerPoint incorrectly, it can discourage interaction between the students. Maybe the teachers overload slides with information, moving the slides too quickly for the students to follow, which



can sometimes discourage students and lead them to stop listening to the lecture.

(<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/powerpoint/lecturing.html>)

#### **4. Suggestion**

##### *4.1 The change of teaching methods*

The new syllabus officially and strongly advocates that computers should be applied in English class to enhance the students' ability to use language. From the evaluation from the students, we can obviously get to know that most students are interested in PowerPoint slides. The Traditional English classroom is dominated by the teacher and students depends on the teachers' teaching. The students have become more and more passive in the teacher-centered classroom. English learning in China is test-oriented learning. Some students get undesirable scores, because some students are lack of motivation and confidence, they are passive learners. Teachers use plenty of traditional teaching in their teaching that is poor in quality. Some students frequently complain the classroom time is not used efficiently and that they are keen to study outside the classroom. Teachers are the trapped teachers, who do not know how to change the situation well.

Using educational technologies to support our teaching and students learning perhaps is the better way to solve these problems. Students are not simply learners of academic subject; they are social being. Like everyone else, they are concerned about the social, political organizational context around them, and this directly affects what they do in their work every day. So we have a great responsibility to require the sort of things — computer, Net-based English teaching, multimedia-aided teaching and learning mode that help the students learn in a superior language learning environment--- using technological tools influence learning environments. It can provide a rich, stimulating learner-centered environment, feedback and opportunity to develop communication between students and teachers.

Some technology to supporting my teaching such as PowerPoint slides, internet. Classroom facilities can influence a student approach to learning. To change a common classroom with a blackboard into one equipped with multi-media can encourage students to adopt a more intrinsic orientation to study. Students are able to absorb much more audio-visual information and fascinating images in multi-media classroom than in the traditional classroom.

Changing traditional teaching methods into teaching with technologies' resources is good for our teaching. It can drive collaboration and group problem solving; it can encourage students' self-reflection and self-evaluation. Technologies can help students learn in ways they find most effective and broaden their knowledge for learning. Brilliant students have opportunities to show their talents and learn in way that work for them. Slower students can take more time and get more feedback and direct help from teachers and other students. With the help of technologies, students with similar motives and talents can work in same study group without constraints of time and place. ( Chickering and Hermann, 2003).

Most of my students are surface learners. They come from villages, towns and cities in very rural parts of Yunnan Province. Some of them are not good at English. Most of students are afraid of doing the exercises in the textbook. Some students want to copy the right answer. They don't like thinking about the reason of the exercises. That shows the students are motivated extrinsically. They do the exercises because of importance they attach to the examination. This leads the students to adopt a surface approach—the intention only to complete task requirements. How can I tackle low motivation? In terms of motivational theory (Biggs (2003, p62-63), the value is high, the expectation of success is also high, a teacher should help the students develop intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation refers to doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable, and extrinsic motivation refers to going something because it leads to a separable outcome. In addition, the teaching should be tried to make the students choose deep approaches to learning.

##### *4.2 Improved feedback to the students*

Providing feedback to students is one of the most important aspects of teaching. Good feedback comprises not just commentary about what has been done, but suggests for what has been done next. (Brown, 2007) Good feedback can encourage and motivate students, clear up misunderstandings or confusion and improve the students' performance. Good feedback is recognized as being prompt, is related to the learning outcomes of the assignment, individualized to the student, but manageable for the lecturer. (Race, 2001)

Providing feedback on assignments should be prompt feedback. The students should need help in assessing their existing knowledge and competence. They need frequent opportunities to perform or receive feedback on their performance. They also need chances to reflect on what they have learned, what they still need to know, and how they assess themselves.

Learning is conceived as a social practice situated in a specific context where informal learning is more important than formal instruction. Students can often learn more from formal or informal assessment by their peers or themselves. It can help to reduce the assessment tasks of staff, and make a valuable contribution to their learning.

Ramsden discusses the benefits of formal and informal feedback to students. Positive and timely informal feedback is

readily comprehended and shows teacher's attention on students. The teacher's feedback to their performance implies that they have reached the teacher's expectation and received peers' positive assessment.

#### 4.3 Need More Activities

"Successful teaching is a construction site on which students build on what they have already known. Teaching requires much relevant activity from the students, interaction with others, and self-monitoring to check everything is proceeding according to the plan. The teacher's role varies, from highly directive, specifying procedures and correcting errors, to supervisory, to consultant, to group leader." (Biggs, 2003, p74).

Activities that allow students to interact and engage with each other in classes using the deep approach (Ramsden, 2003, pp53-61) in handling teaching, students have positive feelings: interest, a sense of importance, challenge, even of exhilaration. Students receive messages from the teaching context, which affect their learning activities. Therefore, in the further teaching, I am going to apply more flexible, effective and updating methods of teaching. I maximize the chances that students will engage the full range of verbs needed to achieve the desired outcomes.

For example, problem-solving activities in small group, using pictures to make up stories, guessing games, peer-directed TLAs( teaching/learning activities), teacher-directed activities, self-directed activities, student-student interaction, group-discussion ,peering-teaching, group discussion, group presentations, role-play, handouts, dictation and contests, etc. I can motivate the students positively.

I will use some humorous examples while explaining new words in order to generate the learning interests of students. I use some prior knowledge students know to show the new meaning of these words. Obviously, I guide students to take the deep approach to learning. Just as Ramsden (2003, p47) says deep approach is to "relate previous knowledge to new knowledge", to "relate theoretical ideas to everyday experience." Deep approaches to learning emphasize how students learn but surface approaches emphasize what students learn. Students in the observation class had neither unrelated tasks to do nor requirement of memorizing information so that they could focus on how to learn and how the content is organized in a coherent whole.

Ramsden (2003, p110) states "teaching is seen no longer as being mainly about telling or transmission; it is also about dealing with students and above all about making them busy." I made it like this. Teaching is to ask students to do something rather than stuff knowledge in students. During the long 50 minutes, all of them were engaged in study by sequential group work, think-pair-share and open class questioning. As a result, students looked not so bored as before but energetic and active all along. The different activities brought them into active learning and kept them from boredom and distraction.

Role-play can be used to motivate large class students. The class is a larger one with 50 or 64 students. For example, in order to have a satisfying lecture concerning a drama, I asked students to prepare role-play for the drama before class. They were allowed to gather five or six classmates as a group and play the role they like. To my surprise, each group made excellent performance. Their fluent dialogue, colorful clothes, exaggerates tone and humorous body language gained a lot of laughter and praise from their peers. Besides, my oral feedback to their performance gave them great encouragement. The key to the successful class lies in the management skills of large class teaching. "Large classes need much more meticulous preparation than small class. The larger class, the slower things get done." (Biggs, 2003,p105) How to start, structure and delivery a lecture in a large class is not so easy as we expect. During the class, student-student interaction in the large class setting lets active learning come into effect. Just as Biggs says, "students also like learning from peers." They can learn and benefit each other by different role-plays and their interests of learning the text are motivated intrinsically. In addition, the teacher's praise and comments on their role-plays can encourage students and help them get much progress in future's learning.

#### 5. Conclusion

Although this is only an exploratory research and the findings and analysis are very limited, it has, to some degree verified the importance of evaluation. The students feedback allowed me to feel appreciated and encouraged me to improve the areas that perhaps lagging behind the identified strengths. Improvements in teaching were found to be much more likely when university teachers not only received feedback but also could draw on expert help in exploring how they might best capitalize upon strengths and address weaknesses (Hounsell, 2003). Remsden (2003, P225) described that evaluation is part of our responsibility as teachers towards our students . The students were open and honest, what they responded encourage the teacher try to teach them effectively and better. Knight( 2002, p179) states with regard to good evaluation, " they affirm our intrinsic motivation to teach, while inspiring us to continue to tinker at doing better." The teacher should be glad to the feedback he receives. The teacher's reflective evaluation can refine the teaching and help them to be better teachers. The teacher may incorporate feedback into practice, which teachers, like students, can benefits from assessment and evaluation of their own work or practice.

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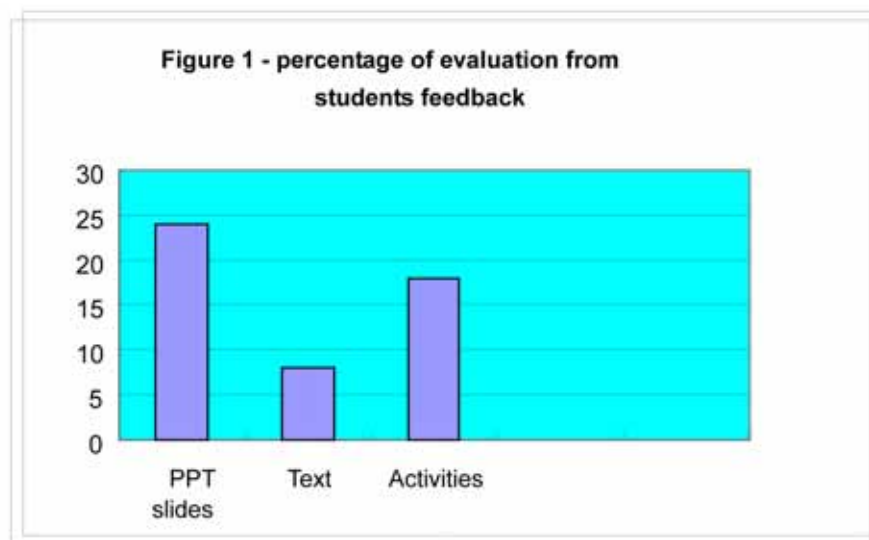


Figure 1.



## The Relationships between Child Temperament, Teacher-Child Relationships, and Teacher-Child Interactions

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### Abstract

The purpose of the study was to examine the relationships between child temperament, teacher-child relationships, and teacher-child interactions in four preschool classrooms. The preliminary analyses revealed classroom differences for all variables. In all the classrooms except one, the temperament factor Reactivity had positive and high correlations with Conflict in the relationship. Task Orientation was positively correlated to the Closeness subscale in three of the classrooms. In two of the classrooms, Task Orientation was negatively correlated with the Conflict subscale. Behavior Management was the only teacher interaction behavior that was somewhat related to temperament in all of the classrooms. Although the effect of temperament on each teacher was different, the results suggest that teachers' relationships and interactions with children are affected by child temperament; however, there might be other factors affecting the relationships, such as teacher temperament. The results and suggestions are discussed further in the article.

**Keywords:** Child temperament, Teacher-child relationships, Teacher-child interactions, Early childhood education

### 1. Introduction

It is believed that young children's experiences during the critical years (0-6) can have a considerable effect on children's developmental outcomes. Children's relationships with adults are a critical resource for children's social, emotional, and cognitive development, as well as their academic achievement in the preschool, elementary, and middle-school years (Burchinal et al., 2002; Birch & Ladd, 1997; Clifford et al., 1998; Pianta, 1999; Pianta & Walsh, 1996; Wentzel, 1998). Teachers are one of the most important adults in young children's lives since many preschoolers spend the majority of their weekdays in an early childhood program. In this regard, relationships with teachers are a crucial part of children's daily classroom experiences as well as a potential resource for enhancing developmental outcomes (Pianta, 1999). Teacher-child relationships can enhance children's development and support their learning experiences by providing children with social support and emotional security. Furthermore, when young children have close relationships with their teachers, they are better able to listen, concentrate, and learn. On the other hand, detached or conflicted relationships can impede children's motivation and learning (Pianta, 1999). Moreover, a preschool child's secure attachment relationship with his or her preschool teacher may partially compensate for an insecure relationship with his or her mother (Mitchell-Copeland, Denham, & DeMulder, 1997).

Evidence reveals that the quality of teacher-child relationships is related to young children's emotional, social, and language development, aggressive behavior, and school adjustment (e.g., Birch & Ladd, 1997; Burchinal, et al., 2002; Hamre & Pianta 2001; Howes, 1997; Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992; Mitchell-Copeland, Denham, & DeMulder, 1997). Children with more positive teacher-child relationships appear more able to make the most of the learning opportunities available in classrooms (Howes & Smith, 1995), adjust to the demands of formal schooling (Birch & Ladd, 1997; Lynch & Cicchetti, 1997; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992), develop better relationships with peers (Howes, Hamilton, & Matheson, 1994), and have fewer problem behaviors (Clifford, et al., 1998). Results from a longitudinal research study indicated that when young children's primary child-care teacher changed, if the change was from insecure to secure relationship, children's aggression with peers decreased (Howes &

Hamilton, 1993). On the contrary, conflict in the teacher-child relationship was found to be related to a decrease in children's prosocial behavior and an increase in peer-perceived aggressive behavior one year later (Birch & Ladd, 1998). These results suggest that warm teacher-child relationships can increase children's prosocial behaviors and decrease aggressive behavior, whereas conflictual teacher-child relationship can do the opposite. Teacher-child relationships also predicted academic engagement, which predicted academic achievement, kindergarten through third grade. Moreover, analyses of developmental trajectories revealed that changes in relationship quality from one year to the next predicted parallel patterns of change in academic engagement (Valeski, 2000). Therefore, poor or conflictual relationships with adults can be a source of risk for children and interfere with social-emotional development, school adjustment, children's ability to learn, academic engagement, and academic success.

Another crucial factor affecting children's developmental outcomes is teacher-child interaction. In view of the fact that young children learn basic skills and knowledge (e.g., language, social competence) through interactive experiences, the nature and frequency of teacher-child interactions contributes significantly to children's development (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Kontos & Wilcox-Herzog, 2002). Teachers are the most capable social partners in early childhood classrooms who can scaffold young children's learning and social interaction. Research findings show that frequent verbally stimulating teacher-child interactions, specifically interactions which expand children's ideas and conversations by asking open-ended and cognitively challenging questions, giving information, encouraging, and helping children elaborate on their activities facilitate the language, cognitive, and social development of children (Dunn, 1993; McCartney, 1984; 2002; NICHD, 2000; NICHD, 2003; Smith, 1996; Trawick-Smith, 1994). Furthermore, teacher-child interaction which elaborate children's ideas and conversations, or which includes 'rare' vocabulary is related to children's later development of vocabulary, story understanding, print skills, and the ability to produce extended discourse (Smith, 1996). Also, follow-in directives (following the child's lead) were found to be positively correlated to children's language development, while redirectives (initiating a new topic) were negatively correlated (McCathren, Yoder, & Warren, 1995). As well, teachers' restrictive, controlling interactions were found to be negatively related to children's language development (McCartney, 1984).

The above-mentioned research results suggest that teachers' relationships and interactions with children are of considerable importance. Depending on their nature, teachers' relationships and interactions with children can enhance or hinder children's development. Teachers' differential relationships and interactions with the children in their classrooms are influenced partly by child characteristics. Child temperament has been found to be a significant factor affecting some components of teacher-child interactions and teacher-child relationships by some studies (Flynn, 2000; Keogh, Pullis, & Cadwell, 1982; Thomas & Chess, 1977).

The purpose of this study was to further investigate the relationships between child temperament, teacher's perceptions of teacher-child relationships and teacher interaction behaviors toward individual children.

There are many theoretical perspectives regarding temperament; however, researchers (Buss & Plomin, 1984; Thomas & Chess, 1977; Rothbart & Derryberry, 1981) generally agree on the following definition of temperament: Temperament is a general term referring to "intrinsic tendencies to act or react in specific and predictable ways to stimuli, people, and events" (Teglasi, 1998, p. 475). It is also believed that temperament characteristics are biologically rooted, become apparent early in life, and are relatively stable across various kinds of situation and over time (Bates, 1987; Buss and Plomin, 1984; Carey and McDevitt, 1978; Goldsmith et al., 1987; Kohnstamm, 1986; Thomas and Chess, 1977).

Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas are considered as pioneers of temperament research in childhood (Anderson-Goetz, Worobey, 1984; Bates, 1989; Bates, 2001; Guerin et al, 2003; Rothbart & Jones, 1998). These two researchers and their colleagues conducted the New York Longitudinal Study (NYLS), which stimulated the current research on temperament in the United States. In 1959, they found that the child is an active agent in his or her own development. Child-caregiver interaction is not a one-sided process. The child plays a highly active part in the interaction process by his or her temperamental traits (Thomas, Chess, Birch, 1968, p. 4).

The fundamental principle of this approach is the concept of "goodness of fit" (Thomas et al., 1968). According to Thomas et al. (1968), the child's optimal development will be achieved if the environment and expectations within the environment are in agreement with the child's capacity and temperament. If there is a 'goodness of fit' between the adults' attitudes and practices and the child's capacity and temperament to master these demands, development will proceed smoothly, and foundation of a healthy personality will be established. If the child's characteristics and environmental demands are incompatible, the child cannot cope with these demands and becomes excessively stressed, and as a result, unhealthy personality basis will be established for the child (Thomas & Chess, 1977). The problems related to "lack of fit" between the child's temperament and parenting strategies can be reduced by adjusting parenting strategies suitably to a child's temperament (Thomas, Chess and Birch, 1968).

Some temperament characteristics can be a risk factor for developing behavioral problems. These characteristics, which include high negative reactivity, high activity level, low approach, and low task persistence, have been related to

behavioral problems. On the contrary, low activity level, high approach, and high task persistence have been related to positive self-perception (Klein, 1992). However, the involvement of effective and caring adults enhances the flexibility of children and reduces the probability of their developing serious behavioral disorders (Werner & Smith, 1992). In addition to the goodness of fit between parents and children, goodness of fit between teachers and children in their classrooms can also be an important factor affecting children's developmental outcomes. Chess (1966 as cited in Pullis & Cadwell, 1982) found that when teachers changed their reactions to the problem behaviors of temperamentally difficult children, adaptation of the children improved. Therefore, teachers may need to use different intervention strategies for children depending on their temperamental characteristics.

Research results indicate that child temperament affects some aspects of teacher-child interaction. Child temperament has been shown to affect teacher expectations (Keogh, Pullis & Cadwell, 1982; Thomas & Chess, 1977); the amount of the time teachers spend with children; teachers' monitoring decisions; and the frequency of teachers' praise, criticism, instruction, physical contact, and directive behaviors (Nelson, 1987, Pullis & Cadwell, 1982). However, although research clarified the effects of verbally stimulating teacher-child interaction on child outcomes in preschool years, how child characteristics affect verbally stimulating teacher-child interaction remains unexplored.

Only one study (Flynn, 2000) has investigated directly the relationship between temperament and teacher-child relationships. The participants of the study were developmentally disabled preschool children and their teachers. Positive relationships were found between closeness of teacher-child relationship and the Task Orientation, Personal/Social Flexibility dimensions of temperament. Martin, Nagle, and Paget (1983) have investigated the relations between temperament and teacher attitudes toward first graders. Teacher attitudes toward children were measured with Silberman's (1969) procedure. Although this procedure does not directly measure teacher-child relationships, it has similar groups: attachment, concern, rejection, and indifference. Attachment group is parallel to close teacher-child relationships, and rejection group is parallel to conflictual relationships. The findings are in agreement with Flynn (2000). The attachment group was more adaptable, more approaching, and more persistent. The rejection group was more active and distractible. The indifference group was less active, less approaching, and less intense. Martin, Nagle, and Paget (1983) described children in the indifference group as shy and passive. The indifference group received fewer teacher contacts than their peers (Silberman, 1969 as cited in Martin, Nagle, & Paget, 1983). Briefly, the findings of these two studies suggest that teachers have closer relationships with more adaptable, more approaching, and more persistent children, and they have more conflictual relationships with children who are more active, more distractible, and less persistent. To date, there is no research investigating the relation between temperament and teachers' relationship with typical children. Research investigating teacher-child relationships with typical children was needed for generalizability of the research by Flynn (2000). In light of the gaps in the research, this study was designed to examine the relationships between child temperament, teacher-child relationships and teacher-child interaction.

## 2. Methodology

The purpose of the study was to investigate the relationships between child temperament, teacher-child relationships and teacher-child interaction. The directors and teachers of the private preschools located in Tallahassee were contacted to obtain permission to conduct research with their preschool children. Among the preschools whose directors and teachers agree to participate in the study, four of the preschools with high rate of parental permission were selected to participate in the study. Children's temperament and teacher-child relationships were assessed by teacher ratings. Teacher interactions toward individual children were measured using natural observations. The data were analyzed by conducting Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson Product Moment Correlations.

### 2.1 Research Questions

- 1) Are there relationships between child temperament factors (task orientation, reactivity, social adaptability) and teacher-child relationships (closeness, conflict, dependency, overall quality)?
- 2) Are there relationships between child temperament factors (task orientation, reactivity, social adaptability) and teachers' interactions with children?

### 2.2 Participants

The sample consisted of 61 (29 boys and 32 girls) 4- to 5-year-old children who attended one of the four classrooms, which participated in the study. The Classroom 1 was part of a housing complex preschool of a university in the southeast of the USA and the Classroom 2 was part of a laboratory preschool of the same university. The university preschools were ethnically diverse (e.g., Hispanic, Chinese, Turkish, Arabic, African, African American, and Anglo). At least one of the parents was a graduate student. The Classroom 3 was part of a church preschool. The Classroom 4 was part of a private elementary school in the same city. In the Classroom 3 and Classroom 4, with the exception of one Chinese, two Hispanic, and one Polish, the children were Anglo. Family backgrounds were middle to upper middle class. All children in each classroom participated in the study, except one child whose parents did not give permission to participate in the study. There were 18 children in the Classroom 1; 16 children in the Classroom 2; 13 children in the

Classroom 3; and 14 children in the Classroom 4. Four children from the Classroom 1, 1 child from the Classroom 2, 1 child from the Classroom 3, and 1 child from the Classroom 4 were dropped from the analyses of teacher-child interactions because of absenteeism more than 3 times during the observations. However, they were included in the analyses of teacher-child relationships and temperament.

### 2.3 Measures

#### 2.3.1 Children's temperament

Children's temperament was measured by teacher ratings. The short form of Thomas and Chess' (1977) Teacher Temperament Questionnaire revised by Keogh (1982) was used. Keogh used 8 dimensions of temperament: activity level, distractibility, attention span/persistence, approach/withdrawal, adaptability, intensity of reaction, threshold of responsiveness, and quality of mood. Researchers (Keogh, 1982; Pullis & Cadwell, 1982; and Martin, Nagle, & Paget, 1983) extracted three common factors through factor analysis of teacher ratings of temperament. These factors are: Task Orientation, Personal-Social Flexibility, and Reactivity.

- *Task Orientation (Task Attention)* is composed of activity level, persistence, and distractibility. Task Orientation indicates a child's ability to be seated during a task and to persist on the task until completion without being distracted.
- *Personal-Social Flexibility (Social Adaptability)* includes items from the dimensions of withdrawal/approach, adaptability, and positive mood. Social Adaptability is about children's tendency to react positively to new situations or stimuli and to modify behaviors easily in the desired direction, and to have positive attitudes during social interactions.
- *Reactivity* contains items from the dimensions of intensity, and threshold of response, and negative mood. When frustrated, children with high Reactivity have a tendency to overact and become overly upset.

Pullis (1979 as cited in Keogh, Pullis, & Cadwell, 1982) examined the psychometric properties of the scale and found that the verified factor structure of the short form was consistent with the factor structure of the original TTQ. Internal consistencies for the factors were tested. Alpha coefficients for the factors were: (Task Orientation) .94, (Personal-Social Flexibility) .88, and (Reactivity) .62.

#### 2.3.2 Teacher-child relationship

Teachers' perceptions of teacher-child relationship were measured using the Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS) developed by Pianta (1999). The STRS measures three aspects of the relationship: (1) teacher's perceptions of his or her relationship with a particular student, (2) "a student's interactive behaviors with the teacher," (3) "a teacher's beliefs about the student's feelings toward the teacher" (Pianta, 2001, p.1). The STRS has one total scale and three subscales: Conflict, Closeness, and Dependency. Test-retest reliability estimates of the STRS are: Closeness, .88; Conflict, .92; Dependency, .76; Total, .89. Internal consistency reliability estimates for the total normative sample are: Conflict, .92; Closeness, .86; Dependency, .64; Total, .89.

#### 2.3.3 Teacher-child interactions

Teacher interactions toward individual children were measured using natural observations during indoor free play/centers time as teachers and children carried out their normal classroom activities. Free play periods were chosen to conduct the observations, because the unstructured nature of the free play setting allows teachers more freedom in their location and behavior in the classroom. Furthermore, in preschool classrooms, one-to-one interactions most frequently occur during free play. The researcher observed each classroom for eight 50-minute segments during indoor free play/centers time. The observations were completed in 7 weeks during the Spring 2006 Semester.

The teacher-child interactions were observed in terms of how the teachers interacted with individual children in their classrooms. Each instance of one-to-one teacher interaction received by a child was observed and coded. There were two levels of coding. The first level of coding consists of coding the teacher's interaction into one of the 10 main teacher interaction categories. These are: Introduces, Elaborates, Restates, Open-ended Questions, Closed-ended Question, Praise, Directives, Responds, Minimally Responds, and Ignores. The interactions, which did not fit into any of the categories, were coded as "Others".

The second level of coding represented the initiation of the interaction. It consists of three categories: behavior management, child-initiated, and teacher-initiated. (a) Behavior management: The teacher interaction is in response to a misbehavior of a child, such as not following the classroom rules or aggressiveness (e.g., hitting another child, destroying someone's building, taking someone's toy, running in the classroom, not putting the toys where they belong). (b) Child-initiated: The teacher interaction behavior is in response to a child's initiation. (c) Teacher-initiated: The interaction is initiated by the teacher. The observers coded first the nature of the interaction and then the initiation of the interaction. For example, if a child came and showed her drawing to the teacher and the teacher said "That's beautiful", then the observer coded as "Pe Ci" ("Pe" for praise/encouragement and "Ci" for child initiated).

Some of the teacher interaction variables were grouped together during the analysis to create new variables that were of

interest to the research. The computed variables are: Total Interaction, Total Child-initiated Interaction, Total Teacher-initiated Interaction, Total Behavior Management, Total Elaborates, Total Open-ended Questions, Total Closed-ended Questions, Total Praise, and Total Directives.

Reliability of the observational measure was estimated by interrater reliability. Although, the majority of the observations were conducted by the first author, for reliability purposes a second observer was trained. Prior to the collection of the data, the additional observer was trained until acceptable agreement (90%) with the author was achieved. Twelve and a half percent of the observations were conducted by both observers in order to establish interrater reliability at the first and fourth week of the observations. The interobserver reliabilities for each classroom were %88, %91, %91, and %86.

### 3. Results

Firstly, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted for the temperament dimensions and factors, teacher-child relationship subscales, and teacher interaction behaviors to compare the four classrooms in each variable. The ANOVA results revealed classroom differences for temperament, teacher-child relationships, and teacher-child interactions. Teacher ratings of child temperament revealed that the Classroom 2 had the highest means in activity, persistence, distractibility, approach/withdrawal, adaptability, and mood. Also, it had the lowest means in threshold and intensity, which make up the Reactivity factor. Therefore, either the children in the Classroom 2 are less active, more persistent, less distractible, high in approachability, have more positive moods, and less reactive than the children in the other classrooms, or the teacher has a tendency to perceive or report more positively than the other teachers. The teacher in the Classroom 2 also perceived her relationship with children in her classroom closer and less conflictual than the other 3 teachers. She was observed to be more affectionate and involved with the children than the other teachers. Also, the structural quality of the Classroom 2 was better than the other classrooms, and the teacher was observed to be more confident in content matters as well as interacting and supporting children's play. The teacher in the Classroom 4 perceived her relationships less close and more negatively than the other teachers. This teacher was also observed to be less affectionate with the children in her classroom than the other teachers.

Briefly, teachers differed in regard to the quality of their relationships with the children in their classroom, as well as the interaction styles they used with the children. Since the classrooms differed from each other in each of the variables, the data for the classrooms could not be combined. The number of participants in each classroom was not enough to conduct Multiple Regression Analyses as planned previously; therefore, the data were only analyzed by conducting Pearson Product Moment Correlations. The results are discussed below in terms of each of the research questions separately for each classroom.

#### 3.1 Question 1. The Relationships between Teacher-Child Relationship Subscales and Temperament Factors

Classroom 1: The Overall Quality of the Relationship was significantly correlated with Task Orientation and Personal/Social Flexibility positively and Reactivity negatively. Closeness of the teacher-child relationship was also related to Task Orientation and Personal/Social Flexibility positively. Conflict in the relationship was associated with Reactivity. Dependency was only significantly correlated with Personal/Social Flexibility negatively. Results are presented in Table 1.

Classroom 2: In the Classroom 2, there was only significant relationship between Closeness of the Relationship and Task Orientation. Personal/Social Flexibility was not related to teacher-child relationship. Although it was not significant Reactivity seemed to negatively affect the teacher-child relationship. Table 2 presents the results.

Classroom 3: The Overall Quality of the Relationship was related to Task Orientation positively and Reactivity negatively. Closeness of the Relationship was associated with Task Orientation. Conflict in the relationship was correlated to Task Orientation negatively and Reactivity positively. An unexpected result was that Dependency was positively correlated with Task Orientation. Table 3 presents the results.

Classroom 4: The Overall Quality of the Relationship was associated with Task Orientation positively and Reactivity negatively. Closeness was only related to Personal/Social Flexibility but it was not significant. Conflict in the relationship was correlated with Task Orientation negatively and Reactivity positively. Dependency was not significantly related to any of the teacher-child relationship subscales. Results are presented in Table 4.

#### 3.2 Question 2. Correlations between Temperament and Teacher-Child Interactions

The relationship between child temperament and teachers' interactions with children differed among teachers. Behavior Management was the only teacher interaction behavior which was related to temperament in all classrooms. The temperament factor Task Orientation was moderately and significantly correlated to Behavior management in the Classroom 1 ( $r = -.500, p < .05$ ), the Classroom 3 ( $r = -.590, p < .05$ ), and the Classroom 4 ( $r = -.783, p < .01$ ). Although it was not significant in the Classroom 2, the relationship between Behavior Management and Task Orientation ( $r = -.434$ ) was in the same direction with the other classrooms. The temperament factor Reactivity was also related to Behavior



Management in the Classroom 3 ( $r = .630, p < .05$ ) and the Classroom 4 ( $r = .601, p < .05$ ). Only in the Classroom 1, the temperament factor Adaptability was negatively related to Behavior Management ( $r = -.505, p < .05$ ).

There were few correlations between the temperament factors and the other teacher interaction behaviors. The teacher in the Classroom 1 had more Elaborative interactions with children who had higher scores on Task Orientation ( $r = .699, p < .01$ ) and Social Adaptability ( $r = .564, p < .05$ ). The teacher in the Classroom 2 initiated more interactions with children who were more reactive ( $r = .511, p < .05$ ). On the other hand, she asked more open-ended questions to children with high adaptability ( $r = .527, p < .05$ ). In the Classroom 3, the temperament factors were not related to any of the teacher interaction behaviors other than behavior management. Temperament was an important variable at the teacher's interactions with children in the Classroom 4. The temperament factor Reactivity was positively related to Total Interactions ( $r = .675, p < .05$ ), Child Initiated Interactions ( $r = .598, p < .05$ ), and Elaborates ( $r = .559, p < .05$ ). The temperament factor Task Orientation was negatively related to Total interactions ( $r = -.531, p < .05$ ). The temperament factor Social Adaptability was positively related to Child Initiated Interactions ( $r = .537, p < .05$ ) and Praise ( $r = .680, p < .05$ ). Results are presented in Table 5, 6, 7, and 8.

#### 4. Discussion

##### 4.1 Teacher-child relationships

As can be seen in the results, the effect of temperament on teacher-child relationship varied somewhat among teachers. Particularly, the teacher's perceptions of her relationship with the children in her classroom were only slightly associated to children's temperament in the Classroom 2. In the Classroom 2, only Task Orientation factor had significant relationship with Closeness of the relationship. For the remaining 3 teachers, the temperament factors were moderately and sometimes strongly related to teachers' perception of the teacher-child relationship subscales; however, there were still variations among the three teachers. Below, a brief overview and discussion of the findings are presented separately for each temperament factor.

In all the classrooms except the Classroom 2, the temperament factor Reactivity had positive and high correlations with Conflict in the relationship; however, it was not significantly correlated with Closeness of the relationship. This finding is important in that these teachers did not perceive their relationships less close with highly reactive children than less reactive children. The findings of a research, by Flynn (2000), examining the relationship between the children with developmental disabilities and their teachers are in line with this finding. Flynn also found that conflict in the relationship was related to reactivity.

Task Orientation was significantly correlated to the Closeness subscale in the first, second, and third classroom. These teachers perceived their relationship closer with children who could sit during a task and persist on task until completion without being distracted. Besides, in the Classroom 3 and the Classroom 4, Task Orientation was negatively correlated with the Conflict subscale, indicating teachers perceived their relationship more conflictual with children who were more active, less persistent on a given task, and who got easily distracted. This finding is consistent with the past research by Martin et al. (1983), who asked teachers if they could reduce their class size by three children, who they would pick. This group of children named the "rejection group" was more active and distractible than the other children. Also Flynn (2000) found that conflictual relationship was negatively related to Task Orientation.

Personal/Social Flexibility significantly affected the teacher-child relationship only in the Classroom 1. Children in this classroom who were high on Personal/Social Flexibility had higher scores on the Overall Quality of the Relationship and lower scores on the Dependency subscale. For the teacher in this classroom, all three temperament factors were considerable factors affecting her perceptions of teacher-child relationships in her classroom. These findings are somewhat consistent with past research by Keogh (1982), who asked teachers to identify those temperament characteristics that they valued in students. The teachers described "teachable" students as those who were high in Task Orientation and Adaptability and low in Reactivity. However, the findings of this study indicated that the effect of temperament differs from teacher to teacher. For example, Adaptability was only important for one of the teacher's relationships with the children in her classroom. Also, for the relationships between teacher-child interactions and temperament, there were variations among teachers suggesting the importance of teacher characteristics in these relationships. The possible effects of teacher characteristics are discussed further under teacher-child interactions.

##### 4.2 Teacher-child interactions

Although there were high correlations between child temperament and teacher-child relationship subscales, significant correlations between child temperament and teacher-child interactions were fewer than expected. This suggests that although teachers' relationships are affected by child temperament, to some extent they were not allowing their negative emotions towards temperamentally difficult children to control their interactions. However, there were still some relationships between child temperament and teachers' interactions with children with a variation among teachers. This means that to some extent, teachers' interactions with children are affected by child temperament, but each teacher was affected by child temperament differently.

Behavior Management was the only teacher interaction behavior that was somewhat related to temperament in all of the classrooms. Task orientation was the common temperament factor, which was related to behavior management in all of the classrooms. In all classrooms, children who are more active, easily distractible, and less persistent received more behavior management interactions from their teachers. Children who are able to sit during a task, persist on task until completion without being distracted received less behavior management interactions. The reason of this finding can be the children with low task orientation (more active, more distractible, and less persistent children) may have more off task behavior and more misbehavior resulting in more disciplining by the teachers. This finding is consistent with research by Pullis and Cadwell (1982), which revealed that task orientation was the most important factor in classroom management rated by teachers; and by Paget et al. (1984) which found that the most attentive first grade children were the least likely to receive behavior contact.

Behavior Management was negatively related to the temperament factor Social Adaptability in the Classroom 1. This finding is not in agreement with the previous research. Pullis and Cadwell (1982) for instance found that while Adaptability was not related to first and third grade teachers' monitoring decisions, it was positively related to kindergarten teachers' monitoring decisions, in situations involving children interacting in groups (Group Activity, Nonacademic Transition, and Free play). Pullis and Cadwell (1982) suggest that since adaptability is related to social interaction skills, some highly adaptable children can be too sensitive to social demands and may not be goal oriented within group situations. The inconsistency between the findings in this study and that of previous research can be explained with other factors affecting the relationship between behavior management and adaptability, such as classroom structure, teacher temperament, and teacher's beliefs about how an ideal child should be.

Also, in the Classroom 3 and the Classroom 4, Reactivity had moderate correlations with Behavior Management; which means, children who have a tendency to overact to stressful situations and become overly upset when frustrated received more behavior management interactions from their teachers. However, this was not the case for the other two classrooms. This difference may be due to the structure of the classroom, the other characteristics of the children, or the unsuitability of teacher characteristics and child temperament. However, in the Classroom 4, the reason for the difference may not lie with the teacher's characteristics, because she also had positive interactions with more reactive children. Also, the relationship between reactivity and closeness of the relationship was almost zero ( $r = -.033$ ). Therefore, the reason for the difference in findings between the classrooms may be related to classroom structure or the other characteristics of the more reactive children in this classroom affecting their behaviors. Nonetheless, in the Classroom 3, although the finding was not significant, Reactivity and closeness of the relationship was negatively related ( $r = -.447$ ). The reason for this can be that the teacher in the Classroom 3 may not have known how to handle children with high reactivity or she might have had a low tolerance to reactivity; resulting in a higher level of problems and conflict between the teacher and the reactive children.

Other teacher interaction categories are discussed separately for each teacher. For the teacher in the Classroom 1, Task Orientation and Personal/Social Flexibility were significant temperament factors affecting Elaborative and Behavior Management Interactions. This teacher had less elaborative interactions with children who were more active, less persistent, easily distractible, and had shorter attention spans. Also, she had less elaborative interactions with children who were less socially adaptable. As a result, these children might not have been receiving enough elaborations to expand their learning experiences. Even though, this was not the case for the other classrooms; it is still an important finding considering the possible effects of teachers' elaboration on children's language and cognitive development and academic success.

Social adaptability also affected the teacher's interactions with children in the Classroom 2. She asked more open-ended questions to children who were more socially adaptable, so less adaptable children were receiving less open-ended questions. An interesting finding was that she initiated more interaction with more reactive children. This teacher might have been interacting more with reactive children to reduce their stress and probability of overacting. For the teacher in the Classroom 3, temperament was only important at Behavior Management which was discussed above.

For the teacher in the Classroom 4, reactivity was the most important temperament factor affecting her interactions with the children in her classroom. Although she had more behavior management interactions with more reactive children, she unexpectedly had more interactions and elaborative interactions with them also. This finding is also consistent with the results of the first research question. Although this teacher perceived her relationship with more reactive children as conflictual, the correlation between Reactivity and Closeness of the relationship was almost zero ( $r = -.033$ ). The conflict may have been the result of the problem behaviors of the reactive children. In spite of the conflict in the relationship, the results suggest that this teacher neither had less close relationships nor less positive interactions with more reactive children. On the contrary, she had more positive interactions with more reactive children. We can say that this teacher was good at dealing with reactive children and not letting the conflict get in her way to build a good relationship with them. On the other hand, she may not have been giving enough attention to children who were less reactive.

Another important finding for the Classroom 4 was that the temperament factor Task Orientation, which consists of activity, persistence, and distractibility, was negatively correlated with total interactions. This finding contradicts with the findings of the research by Keogh and Burstein (1988), which revealed that the frequency of teacher-student interactions was positively related to task orientation. Moreover, although it was not significant, task orientation was negatively correlated with all the interaction categories. More persistent children received less interaction, elaboratives, and directives. In this classroom, the children who had more positive temperamental characteristics seemed to be somewhat ignored by the teacher.

Although the effect of temperament on each teacher was different, the results suggest that teachers' relationships and interactions with children are affected by child temperament. Teachers may not have detailed knowledge of child temperament; however, they are aware of the temperamental characteristics of children in their classrooms, and furthermore, affected by these characteristics without even realizing their differential treatment to the children depending on their temperament. Nevertheless, there are other factors affecting the relationship between child temperament and teacher-child relationships and teacher-child interactions. An important factor can be teacher temperament. Observations showing the possible effects of suitability of teacher temperament and child temperament are discussed below.

In the Classroom 1, although, Reactivity and Behavior Management was not correlated, the teacher's perception of teacher-child relationship indicated a relationship between Reactivity and Conflict. Even though the teacher considered her relationship with reactive children more conflictual, observations in the classroom did not show reactive children receiving more behavior management interactions from the teacher. For that reason, we can say that in this classroom, reactive children did not cause more problems than the less reactive children; therefore, the conflict in the relationship was not the result of the children's misbehavior. So, the question can be asked, how can the conflict between the teacher and reactive children be explained? Can the teacher have low tolerance to reactivity? Although, the teacher's personality was not tested in this study, the researcher observed that this teacher was a little bit shy and quiet and also she was overly controlling her reactions. There may not be a goodness of fit between the teacher's temperament and reactive children's temperament. She may not have been able to empathize with these children since she was very different temperamentally from reactive children. Also, reactivity may have been too irritating for her considering her temperament.

Another observation of the researcher related to goodness of fit between the child temperament and teacher temperament, which was not included in the quantitative results since the observation was conveyed during circle time instead of free play, was concerned the teacher in the Classroom 2. This teacher who was outgoing, confident, and extravert seemed to have a problem empathizing with a shy girl during this incidence. During the circle time, when the girl was reciting a poem that she memorized in a very low voice in front of the class, the teacher in a firm manner kept saying to the girl that she had to work on her weak voice. The 5 year old girl blushed and her voice got weaker as the teacher insisted, but the teacher did not seem to understand how her behavior was affecting the girl. The teacher's purpose was to encourage the child to speak louder; instead her attitude made the girl feel more embarrassed and her voice weaker. However, it appeared that the teacher was not able to realize how her attitude was affecting the girl.

Although, this teacher can be considered a very good teacher, she was not able to empathize with a shy girl. Also, she seemed to lack necessary knowledge of how to deal with or encourage a shy child. This observation also shows that teachers' temperament can be a significant factor affecting their relationships with children who have different temperamental characteristics than theirs. On the whole, this teacher compared to other teachers was more confident in the content area, had more interactions with children, and elaborated children's play more. Therefore, she seemed to be successful in many ways. However, she appeared to need training in child temperament.

Future research can look at the effect of the relationship between teacher temperament and child temperament on teacher-child relationships and teacher-child interaction in order to see if some teachers are better at dealing with some temperament characteristics. If this is the case there might be a need to consider whether a teacher's temperament or personality and child temperament are a suitable match while enrolling a child to a classroom. Future research can also include variables such as a teacher's expectations of an ideal child, teacher age, and classroom structural quality. Also, future research can replicate this study with a larger sample size, using more classrooms and combining the data from the classrooms that are not significantly different from each other for analysis.

In sum, the findings of this study suggest that although there are some differences among teachers, teachers are aware of the differences in the temperamental characteristics of preschool children, and that temperamental characteristics are related to the quality of teacher-child relationships and partially to teacher-child interactions. Temperament, thus, may be an important individual difference in preschool children's experiences in a preschool classroom. The findings indicate a need to educate teachers about temperament and how to use this knowledge in their classroom to improve their relationships and interactions with children. Therefore, temperament as a topic should be included as a course in early childhood education programs and curriculum. It may also be useful to include material on temperament in

in-service training courses. Pre-service programs or in-service training may include theoretical knowledge about temperament, and the assessment of the temperament, and its application in the classroom context. Knowledge about temperament can help teachers not only to improve their relationships and interactions with children, but also to create the necessary environments that can modify the temperamental characteristics of the children in their classrooms.

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Table 1. Correlations between Temperament and Teacher Child Relationships -Classroom 1 (n=18)

STRS Subscales	Temperament Factors		
	Task Orientation	Personal/Social Flexibility (Social Adaptability)	Reactivity
Total Score	.548(*)	.474(*)	-.759(**)
Closeness	.729(**)	.402	-.150
Conflict	-.307	-.170	.727(**)
Dependency	-.173	-.581(*)	.419

Table 2. Correlations between Temperament and Teacher Child Relationships - Classroom 2 (n=16)

STRS Subscales	Temperament Factors		
	Task Orientation	Personal/Social Flexibility (Social Adaptability)	Reactivity
Total Score	.241	.084	-.367
Closeness	.492(*)	.096	-.384
Conflict	.111	.080	.332
Dependency	-.064	-.191	-.076

Table 3. Correlations between Temperament and Teacher Child Relationships - Classroom 3 (n=14)

STRS Subscales	Temperament Factors		
	Task Orientation	Personal/Social Flexibility (Social Adaptability)	Reactivity
Total Score	.709(**)	.004	-.706(**)
Closeness	.726(**)	-.322	-.447
Conflict	-.698(**)	-.057	.722(**)
Dependency	.568(*)	-.318	-.236

Table 4. Correlations between Temperament and Teacher Child Relationships - Classroom 4 (n=13)

STRS Subscales	Temperament Factors		
	Task Orientation	Personal/Social Flexibility (Social Adaptability)	Reactivity
Total Score	.740(**)	.011	-.695(**)
Closeness	.349	.480	-.033
Conflict	-.786(**)	.237	.875(**)
Dependency	-.246	.177	.421

Table 5. Correlations between Temperament and Teacher-Child Interactions - Classroom 1 (n= 14)

Temperament Factors	Teachers' Interaction Categories							
	Total Interaction	Teacher Initiated Interaction	Child Initiated Interaction	Behavior Management	Elaborates	Question Open-Ended	Praise	Directives
Task Orientation	-.126	-.069	.194	-.500(*)	.699(**)	-.069	.229	-.215
Social Adaptability	-.310	-.125	-.078	-.505(*)	.564(*)	-.239	.031	-.160
Reactivity	-.070	-.287	.106	.186	-.375	.007	-.338	-.064

Table 6. Correlations between Temperament and Teacher-Child Interactions - Classroom 2 (n= 15)

Temperament Factors	Teachers' Interaction Categories							
	Total Interaction	Teacher Initiated Interaction	Child Initiated Interaction	Behavior Management	Elaborates	Question Open-Ended	Praise	Directives
Task Orientation	-.020	-.190	.148	-.434	.148	-.055	-.043	-.098
Social Adaptability	.440	.345	.376	.411	.283	.527(*)	.407	.454
Reactivity	.186	.511(*)	-.020	.280	-.015	.275	.367	.272

Table 7. Correlations between Temperament and Teacher-Child Interactions - Classroom 3 (n= 13)

Temperament Factors	Teachers' Interaction Categories							
	Total Interaction	Teacher Initiated Interaction	Child Initiated Interaction	Behavior Management	Elaborates	Question Open-Ended	Praise	Directives
Task Orientation	-.137	-.355	.288	-.590(*)	-.052	.107	.181	-.350
Social Adaptability	.279	.171	.119	.466	.119	.171	.027	.107
Reactivity	.474	.514	.073	.630(*)	.436	.010	-.209	.446

Table 8. Correlations between Temperament and Teacher-Child Interactions - Classroom 4 (n= 12)

Temperament Factors	Teachers' Interaction Categories							
	Total Interaction	Teacher Initiated Interaction	Child Initiated Interaction	Behavior Management	Elaborates	Question Open-Ended	Praise	Directives
Task Orientation	-.531(*)	-.123	-.445	-.783(**)	-.342	-.314	-.444	-.253
Social Adaptability	.243	.052	.537(*)	-.159	.485	.116	.680(*)	.080
Reactivity	.675(*)	.354	.598(*)	.601(*)	.559(*)	.442	.508	.384

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)



# A Study of Metacognitive Strategies Employed by English Listeners in an EFL Setting

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## Abstract

This paper presents a study on the metacognitive strategies employed by English listeners in an EFL setting. The results of the study reveal that the subjects used directed attention most frequently and they used monitoring least frequently. Besides, there are differences in the use of metacognitive strategies between successful and unsuccessful listeners. The differences exist in the use of directed attention, functional planning and self-management strategies. The study proposes that listeners' metacognitive awareness should be cultivated and strategy instruction should be integrated into the teaching of listening.

**Keywords:** Metacognitive strategies, Metacognitive awareness, English listeners, EFL setting

## 1. Introduction

Listening is bearing greater and greater importance in foreign language classrooms. Language acquisition research demonstrates that listening provides comprehensible input for learners and plays a crucial role in language acquisition. Without understanding input at the right level, language learning cannot occur.

On the other hand, listening is a challenging job. Firstly, listening comprehension is a complex process in which the listener must distinguish between speech sounds, understand language and syntax, illustrate stress and intonation, store what was collected in all of the above, and interpret it within the immediate context of the utterance. Coordinating what is mentioned above involves much mental activity on the part of the listener. Secondly, a foreign language learner is confronted with both external problems (e.g. environmental noise and indistinctive speeches) and internal pressures (e.g. lack of motivation, anxiety and distraction) when dealing with listening tasks. Thirdly, listening activities carried out in the listening classroom cast listeners in the role of overhearer. Listening courses which take the form of listening to tapes rob the listeners of making responses, asking for clarification, or taking part in the interaction. In the real communication, listeners seldom play the part of nonreciprocal overhearer. Thus the development of effective strategies for listening becomes significant not only for the ability to understand and participate in spoken communication but also for language acquisition.

In the west, research on learning strategies appeared in the mid 1970s. Research on listening strategies has been done in several aspects: 1) research on several languages (most of them in an ESL setting, but also French, Italian, Russian and Spanish), 2) research on comparing strategy use at several proficiency levels, 3) research on cognitive and metacognitive strategies and 4) research on the relation of strategy use to text, task and setting. But it should be noted that few studies were done in an EFL setting and the size of the sample was small. In China, the study on learning strategies emerged in the early 1980s. Research on effective strategies for listening has been carried out in the following aspects: 1) the relation of learning strategies to listening comprehension, 2) the effect of background knowledge upon the use of listening strategies, 3) the effectiveness of listening strategy instruction and 4) the comparison of strategy use at university student level. It is obvious that the research does not cover a wide area compared with that done in the west. In addition, one point should be pointed out that most of the subjects of the studies were non-English majors. Especially, little research has been done in China concerning what metacognitive strategies listeners use and the differences in the use of metacognitive strategies between successful and unsuccessful listeners. Therefore, this study intends to make an investigation into metacognitive strategies employed by English listeners in an EFL setting.

## 2. Statement of Related Theories

Oxford (1990, p.8) states that "learning strategies are specific actions taken by the learner to make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more self-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations." It is clear that learning strategies are conducive to language learning. Learning strategies enable learners to respond to the learning situation and manage their learning in an appropriate way and allow learners to take more responsibility for their own learning and become an autonomous language learner.



In light of cognitive theory, O'Malley and Chamot (2001) classified learning strategies into three major types: metacognitive strategies, cognitive strategies and social/affective strategies. Metacognitive strategies deploy use of knowledge about cognitive processes and consist of attempts to manipulate language learning by virtue of planning, monitoring, or evaluating. They serve an executive function. Cognitive strategies mean the steps or operations employed in solving problems that need direct analysis, transformation or synthesis of incoming information. They are directly related to the performance of certain learning tasks. Cognitive strategies play an operative or cognitive processing function. Social/affective strategies display a broad collection that concerns either interaction with another person or ideational control over affect.

Among these three major types of learning strategies, metacognitive strategies lie at a different level. Metacognition is the process that underlies the efficient use of strategies and the essence of intelligent activity (Wenden, 1987, p.573). The term metacognition, first introduced by John Flavell, is often defined as thinking about thinking. Wenden (1987) considers that metacognition includes metacognitive knowledge and regulatory skills. Metacognitive knowledge consists of knowledge about person, knowledge about task and knowledge about strategy. Knowledge about person involves beliefs about one's personal attributes and preferred learning style, knowledge concerning what one knows and does not know and what one can do and cannot do, and a consciousness of one's progress. Knowledge about task means an awareness of the aim and requirements of the task, and an ability to evaluate the information provided and pick out the relevant information. Knowledge about strategy encompasses an awareness of what strategies should be applied according to different kinds of tasks and a general knowledge about language learning. Regulatory skills are further divided into pre-planning and planning-in-action. Pre-planning includes setting goals, choosing materials and methods, evaluating proficiency level and foreseeing the difficulty. Planning-in-action involves strategies such as monitoring, checking outcomes and improving plans. Williams and Burden (2000) contend that metacognition involves two concepts. One is a knowledge about learning, the other is an ability to use cognitive strategies smartly. Knowledge about learning includes a knowledge of mental processes and a knowledge of the self. A knowledge of the self refers to an understanding of one's feeling, motivation, attitudes, personality and learning style and an awareness of the manner in which these factors influence the use of cognitive processes.

In this study, we hold that metacognition contains two concepts: metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies. Metacognitive knowledge covers knowledge about person, knowledge about task and knowledge about strategy. Metacognitive strategies refer to an ability to manage and regulate the use of suitable learning strategies for different tasks, including such strategies as planning, monitoring, or evaluating. This indicates that a language learner is able to evaluate the learning situation, to make plans, to choose suitable skills, to sequence them, to coordinate them, to check their effectiveness and to change the plan when necessary. Metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive strategies form a reciprocal relationship. Metacognitive knowledge is a necessary step in learning to manage learning and metacognitive strategies are the actual deployment of metacognitive knowledge.

### **3. Research Design**

#### *3.1 Research Questions*

It is widely accepted that teaching students everything they want to learn is impossible. The most important thing for students to do is learning to learn. In this process, metacognition plays a key role. An awareness about learning and an ability to regulate learning help learners to acquire the skills of self-directed learning and become an autonomous language learner. Accordingly, examining listeners' use of metacognitive strategies may help teachers have a better understanding of listeners' metacognitive awareness and allow learners to find an effective approach to obtaining success in listening tasks.

This study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What are the metacognitive strategies employed by English listeners in an EFL setting?
2. Are there any differences in the use of metacognitive strategies between successful and unsuccessful listeners?

#### *3.2 Subjects*

The subjects chosen for this study consisted of 160 English sophomores with an average age of 20. They were from four intact classes of a Chinese University. After two years of study, subjects have got used to university study and formed their own learning strategies. In addition, careful preparation for Test for English Majors Grade 4 (2007) made them hold a positive attitude towards the investigation.

Depending on subjects' raw test scores of the listening section of Test for English Majors Grade 4 (2007), the study divided subjects into three groups. The top group was thirty-six subjects with the highest scores. The bottom group was thirty-five subjects with the lowest scores. The study defined the top group as successful listeners and the bottom group as unsuccessful listeners with the purpose of comparing the differences in the use of metacognitive strategies (see Table1).

Insert Table 1 Here

### 3.3 Instruments

The data were collected using three separate instruments: the listening section of Test for English Majors Grade 4 (2007), a written questionnaire and Statistical Package for Social Sciences 11.0.

Test for English Majors Grade 4 (TEM4), provided by National Testing Service of China, is a scientific and effective means for evaluating English teaching efficiency and English learners' language proficiency, which contains following sections: writing, listening, cloze test, grammar and vocabulary, reading comprehension and speaking. Concerning listening, it consists of dictation, statements, short conversations and news. This authoritative test is taken by most of English learners in Chinese universities.

The questionnaire was self-designed with reference to the questionnaires of Su (2003), Wen (1996) and O'Malley and Chamot's classification of metacognitive strategies (2001). It addressed two areas: 1) listeners' personal background and 2) use of metacognitive strategies. In the questionnaire metacognitive strategies involve seven independent strategy types: planning, monitoring, evaluation, selective attention, directed attention, functional planning and self-management. Responses to independent strategy types are designed on a five-point-scale. In order to check whether there were problems in the questionnaire like the range of listening strategies, wording, sequencing, instructions and format and the duration of the investigation, three pilot studies and face-to-face talks with a small number of English majors were manipulated.

Statistical Package for Social Sciences 11.0 was used to analyze the data collected from the study. Statistical Package for Social Sciences is a comprehensive and the most commonly used computer software that can handle complex analyses of large amounts of data in a very short time. The study utilized Statistical Package for Social Sciences 11.0 to find out: 1) the metacognitive strategies used by the subjects, 2) the differences in the use of metacognitive strategies between successful and unsuccessful listeners.

### 3.4 Data Collection

The investigation was conducted in three intact classes in a Chinese university, which adopted a person-administered mode. The researcher as an organizer participated in the whole process of the investigation with the help of her colleagues. All four data-gathering sessions were carried out in the subjects' own classrooms during regular class-time in order to minimize the impact of the environment. Subjects were informed that their responses would not influence their learning and confidentiality was guaranteed 100%. Almost all the subjects participated, producing a response rate of 99%.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

The questionnaire was analyzed by grouping items by area of assessment. The subjects' responses to each item were tallied. Then each item was considered within the group of items that addresses a specific category. Finally, the means of all the subjects' responses to each group of items were calculated by SPSS. The mean supplies information on the average performance of all the subjects' metacognitive strategies and inform the researcher about how subjects as a whole performed.

In addition, T-test was employed to detect the differences between successful and unsuccessful listeners in the use of metacognitive strategies. T-test is an analysis technique that compares the means of two groups. It is helpful to determine the researcher's confidence about the fact that the differences between the two groups as a result of strategy use are not due to chance.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### 4.1 Metacognitive Strategies Employed by English Listeners

Means and standard deviations are calculated by SPSS to find out how subjects as a whole performed concerning metacognitive strategies. The results are displayed in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 Here

As shown in Table 2, the mean of the responses to directed attention by all the subjects is the highest (i.e. 3.91 on a five-point scale). The means of the use of selective attention and self-management by the subjects are higher (i.e. 3.61, 3.55). The mean of the use of monitoring by all the subjects is the lowest (i.e. 2.58).

In the category of metacognitive strategies, directed attention, selective attention and self-management are frequently used. This denotes that listeners realize the importance of attention and attempt to look for more opportunities to practice listening outside the class. O'Malley et al. (1989) reported that in perceptual processing listeners used attentional strategies to maintain their concentration on the task.

However, planning, evaluation and functional planning are sometimes used. Monitoring is rarely used. Metacognitive

strategies mirror listeners' learning awareness and learning beliefs. The results show that directed attention, selective attention and self-management are conducive to successful listening in the eyes of listeners. Planning, evaluating, functional planning and monitoring are not effective enough. Or listeners have a good command of directed attention, selective attention and self-management and a poor mastery of planning, evaluating, functional planning and monitoring. Before listening to some material, an instructor usually informs learners that they should attend to a listening task and ignore distractions and they should fix attention on specific aspects of the listening material by looking for key words and topic sentences. At the end of the listening class, the instructor reminds learners of more listening practice and previewing. It is natural for listeners to skillfully employ these strategies—directed attention, selective attention and self-management in their listening.

Besides, this shows that listeners' learning is not independent but instructor-centered. Planning, monitoring, evaluating are characteristics of self-directed language learning. The literature on self-directed language learning unanimously believes that self-direction requires learners to be able to plan, monitor and evaluate their language learning, which aims to promote learner autonomy. The low means of the responses to planning (mean=3.25), monitoring (mean=2.58) and evaluation (mean=3.20) indicate that learners have not taken responsibility for their own learning and they lack the spirit of learning independently and creatively. Learner autonomy is absent in listeners. In addition, the low mean of the use of functional planning (mean=3.10) suggests learners' lack of awareness that listening is interconnected with other aspects of learning such as speaking, reading and writing. Only when all skills are well developed can listening proficiency be enhanced.

#### *4.2 The Differences in the Use of Metacognitive Strategies Between Successful and Unsuccessful Listeners*

T-test was used to detect the differences in the use of metacognitive strategies between successful and unsuccessful listeners. The results of the test are shown in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 Here

According to Table 3, there are differences between successful and unsuccessful listeners in the use of metacognitive strategies. The differences lie in the use of directed attention, functional planning and self-management.

On the basis of the results of T-test, it is easy to work out the reason why some listeners are more successful. Successful listeners are better at the use of directed attention, functional planning, self-management and evaluation. In order to realize effective task execution, successful listeners are aware of the importance of attention. They ignore irrelevant distractions during listening. In so doing, listening input is picked out of various upcoming stimuli, which guarantees the sufficient provision for working memory. What's more, successful listeners plan for and rehearse linguistic components necessary to carry out successful listening. They get themselves familiar with phonetic knowledge and practice imitation to make the pronunciation standard. They read extensively to review grammar, enlarge vocabulary and enrich background knowledge. All of these are closely connected with successful listening. Meanwhile, successful listeners are characterized by learner autonomy. They are conscious enough to understand the conditions that help them to learn and arrange for the presence of those conditions. Hence, they actively establish optimum conditions helpful to listening outside the class. They find a way to successful listening and work independently without supervision and direction from their teachers. They view learning as something they do for themselves.

We also have a clearer picture of the strategies used by successful listeners and unsuccessful listeners respectively. Results display that successful listeners frequently use directed attention, self-management, selective-attention, functional planning and evaluation. Unsuccessful listeners regularly apply selective attention and directed attention. It should be found out that both successful and unsuccessful listeners believe that attention is important in the process of listening. Secondly, both of them are short of the knowledge of planning and monitoring. This reflects that listeners are unable to propose appropriate strategies for handling an upcoming task and check their comprehension or performance while a listening task is occurring. Thirdly, the means of the use of planning, monitoring, evaluation, functional planning and self-management by unsuccessful listeners are lower (<3.30). This proves that unsuccessful listeners seriously lack metacognitive knowledge. The lack of metacognitive knowledge may be illustrated from the following two perspectives.

If what goes on in many a listening classroom is observed, the answer to the lack of metacognitive knowledge is clear. In an ordinary listening class, the teacher usually chooses the listening textbook and other listening materials for the listeners; the teacher makes decisions on a program; the teacher plans the lesson; the teacher conducts listening activities; the teacher checks and evaluates listeners' work. In a classroom where the listeners' role is that of a recipient, there is a powerful 'covert curriculum' at work. It shapes listeners' expectations about listening and their own role in it. It prescribes the subjects, textbooks, routine of listening. In a teacher-centered class an easy perception to shape is that learners are conceived to be passive. It is not difficult to see why directed, regulated, passive listeners lack metacognitive knowledge. Listeners are convinced that all they have to do is to attend a listening course and do as required. Listeners sit in the classroom, teachers do their jobs and learning takes place.

The other factor that may account for the lack of metacognitive knowledge is the difference between high schools and universities. In high schools, many teachers tend to guide learners' learning by informing them of what, when and how to learn. In universities, learners are on their own to decide what, when and how to learn. Another difference is that high school teachers often spend considerable time attempting to motivate learners to learn, whereas university teachers generally expect learners to be self-motivated. If learners are unaware of the differences, they are likely to accept the view that the job of the teacher is to teach, transmit, regulate and evaluate and that of the learner is to receive and absorb. Therefore, it is necessary to change the listeners' wrong view on the role of the teacher and the learner and let listeners acquire the ability to take on more responsibility for their learning by strategy instruction.

## 5. Conclusions and Suggestions

The results of the study reveal that directed attention, selective attention and self-management are often used and planning, evaluation and functional planning are sometimes used and monitoring is rarely used in the category of metacognitive strategies. Besides, there are differences in the use of metacognitive strategies between successful and unsuccessful listeners. These differences exist in the use of directed attention, functional planning and self-management strategies.

Based on the findings of the study, suggestions concerning the cultivation of metacognitive awareness are made to the listeners and teachers. First, instructors should teach what metacognition is and what role metacognition plays in learning. This helps listeners to have a comprehensive system of knowledge about listening tasks and listening strategies and think about personal factors that may facilitate or impede listening. Second, instructors should carry out activities where listeners are given opportunities to practice metacognitive strategies.

One activity to practice metacognitive strategies is to hold discussions about strategy use in the listening classroom. Here strategy use involves the use of two kinds of strategy. One is concerned with strategies employed in learning listening in general, the other is related to strategies used in a particular listening situation. For the first type of discussion, certain time may be arranged for listeners in class. Discussions may center on such topics as "how I develop listening," "how I improve my listening proficiency outside class," "the best way to understand spoken English" and "what impairs listening." Listeners are encouraged to exchange their thoughts and beliefs with each other and apply new strategies in their own learning. After a period of time, similar discussions will be held and listeners share their experiences and check the effectiveness of the strategies.

The second type of discussion may be woven into the pre-listening and post-listening activities. In the pre-listening activity, listeners not only brainstorm knowledge related to the present topic, but also brainstorm strategies conducive to the handling of the upcoming task. After doing this, listeners may discuss with their partners the strategies they will use and the difficulty they will meet. In the post-listening activity, listeners review the usefulness of the strategies they have employed as well as reinforce their understanding about the material they have heard. By doing so, listeners are motivated to think about the process of listening. In fact, they are learning to learn listening on their own part. Consequently, their metacognitive awareness about how to learn listening will be cultivated gradually.

Another activity to practice metacognitive strategies is using a checklist of listening strategies. Teachers may prepare a list where listening strategies are written down. Each time the listening task is over, listeners are told to reflect upon their strategy use before listening and during listening by putting a tick beside a strategy item. Also, listeners are encouraged to assess the appropriateness of their strategy use. Finally, listeners are prompted to make plans to improve their performance next time. This method is suitable for introverted listeners who are reluctant to speak out in discussions.

Needless to say, there are limitations concerning the study. For example, all the subjects are from the same university and the questionnaire is self-designed. So a replicated study may be conducted in similar conditions to test the validity of the findings of the study. In addition, the research method for investigating metacognitive strategies should be improved. This study adopted a written questionnaire, which may make subjects overestimate or underestimate the frequency of use of certain strategies. To complement this weakness, other research methods like oral interviews and verbal report may be added to obtain a more accurate strategy description. However, it is assumed that the study may provide a truthful description of metacognitive strategies used by English listeners and offer helpful suggestions to the teaching of listening and the improvement of listeners' abilities in an EFL setting.

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Table 1. The division of subjects

Name of the group	Raw test score	Number of the subjects
The top group	20—24	36
The mid-group	15—19	89
The bottom group	9---14	35

Table 2. Means and standard deviations: subjects' use of metacognitive strategies

Category of metacognitive strategies	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation
Planning	160	3.25	2.12
Monitoring	160	2.58	2.40
Evaluation	160	3.20	2.00
Selective attention	160	3.61	2.54
Directed attention	160	3.91	3.28
Functional planning	160	3.10	2.98
Self-management	160	3.55	3.02

Table 3. T-test: Differences in the use of metacognitive strategies between successful and unsuccessful listeners

Variable	Mean of the top group	Mean of the bottom group	Mean difference	T-value	Sig.
Planning	3.26	3.14	.12	-.623	.543
Monitoring	2.82	2.68	.14	-.643	.553
Evaluation	3.39	3.12	.27	-1.179	.241
Selective attention	3.90	3.70	.20	-1.032	.263
Directed attention	4.10	3.34	.76	-2.931	.010
Functional planning	3.71	2.94	.77	-2.942	.009
Self-management	3.97	3.12	.85	-3.792	.000



## Project Based Learning (PjBL) Practices at Politeknik Kota Bharu, Malaysia

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### Abstract

This study explores the utilization of Project-based Learning module in the subject of project development for the Mechanical Engineering students at Politeknik Kota Bharu. This study focuses on the development of the PjBL module based on socio-constructivist approach. The objective of this study is to explore the influence of the utilization of the PjBL module on students' meta-cognition, motivation and self regulation. Result shows that the overall engineering students reported higher level of motivation, self confidence and self regulation throughout the process. The PjBL also enhances the cognitive and critical thinking in engineering problem solving among students. The use of PjBL module enables students to plan their project easily, work collaboratively with peers with minimal supervision from supervisors or lecturers and successfully complete their project on time. The positive feedback from this study may be used by management to further apply this PjBL concept across disciplines and departments.

**Keywords:** Project based learning, Polytechnic, Engineering, Practices

### 1. Introduction

Project management is a subject that is compulsory to be undertaken by students enrolled under the Mechanical Engineering Department, Polytechnics, Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education. This subject carries J5012 as its subject code. In conjunction with the current technological advances, a new approach to teaching and learning has been developed specifically for this subject. This new approach that utilizes the concept of project-based learning method aims to provide students with the necessary knowledge and information pertaining to the subject. The traditional method of instruction may not be sufficient to meet the needs of the dynamic subject to comply with the international engineering standards. Project-based learning (PjBL) should replace the traditional method of instruction (Dori, 2000) in the effort to improve the quality of graduates. The internal researcher and developer should develop PjBL to fulfill the needs of technical institutions to produce engineering graduates and better facilitate the creation of innovative products (Moursund, 2002; Thomas et al., 1999) suitable for industry.

The establishment of polytechnics is a part of government policy to produce semi-skilled workers to fulfill the needs of local industries. These workers should also possess the soft skills needed in the working environment and meet the

engineering standards. Polytechnics should find new teaching and learning methods to adapt to the dynamic needs of the industries. The PjBL concept is applied to the project management subject and provides better stage-by-stage supervision of engineering students and facilitates the development of innovations that meet the international engineering standards. This PjBL module developed support Dewey, Papert and others, the advocates of learning from projects rather than from isolated problems. PjBL concept enables engineering students to face the task of formulating their own problems, guided by the general goals they set, the 'interesting' phenomena and difficulties they discover through their interaction with the environment (Collins et al., 1989).

The PjBL module was introduced to the Mechanical Engineering students taking the project development subject at Politeknik Kota Bharu. This module is central to the notion of socio-constructivism and other related activity-based approaches. Under the PjBL module, students are expected to formulate their own problems and set their own goals. The goals they set as well as the unexpected discoveries they will make during their interaction with the real works environment serve as guides (Collins et al, 1989). It is therefore important to divide scenarios into sequences and to divide problems into sub-problems via PjBL module (task by task by using standard PjBL forms guide) so that each group of project development performs only one task at a time (weekly progress) and that these tasks are flexible enough for engineering students to complete them whatever their level of engineering work progress. Project-based learning (PjBL) is a model which differs from traditional teaching since the focus is put on the learner and his project. Learners have the opportunity to work more autonomously and build their knowledge.

PjBL module provides standardized procedures for team projects. This module facilitates the development of innovative products or projects. This PjBL module was developed and first introduced in Politeknik Kota Bharu, hence being a pioneer among polytechnics and community colleges at Malaysia. It grows up for the starting point with same process occurring at U.S generated with their developers such John Dewey and William H. Kilpatrick (Synteta, 2001; 2002; 2003). The project method in PjBL module is a genuine learning process of producing innovative products at the Mechanical Engineering Department, Politeknik Kota Bharu in relation to the dynamic engineering education advances. The advantages of PjBL concept was described in detail and definitively delimited for the first time by William Heard Kilpatrick in his essay, "The Project Method," which became known worldwide (Wilson et al., 2001).

Rooted (at least its design of the curriculum, instruction and assessment) in various constructivist schools of thought (Synteta, 2003), constructionist (Morsund 2002; Thomas et.al., 1999), cooperative or collaborative learning (Dillenbourg et al., 20002, and generally active learning, has strong theoretical support for successful achievement. Still, we have to note that PjBL is not a pure constructivist model but uses also multiple methods of instruction, among them direct, explicit, (didactic) instruction (Markham et.al., 2003). PjBL can be found under the name of project method, project approach, knowledge in action, learning or education by project, intentional learning (Thomas, 2000), learning by doing, and design experiments (Barron, 1998), to name a few.

Project Based Learning (PjBL) module is a teaching procedure and learning model (curriculum development and instructional approach based on BIE approach) that emphasizes student-centered instruction by assigning innovative projects design and development. It allows engineering students to work more autonomously to construct their own learning, and culminates in realistic, student-generated products. More specifically, project-based learning focuses on the central concepts of engineering discipline. It also engages learning and technical experiences that involve students in complex, real-world projects through which they develop and apply skills and knowledge. In addition, project-based learning requires students to draw from many information sources and disciplines in order to solve technical and vocational problems. PjBL is also a learning in which curricular outcomes can be identified up-front, but in which the outcomes of the student's learning process are neither predetermined nor fully predictable to produce innovative engineering product. Meanwhile, Moursund (2002) and Thomas (2000) defined PjBL as an advance engineering experiences through which students learn to manage and allocate resources such as time and materials. Project-based learning (PjBL) module focuses mostly on a production model which incorporates the steps required to produce innovative products successfully, namely defining the purpose of creating the end-product, identifying their innovative product to produce, researching the topic, designing the product, managing the project, solving the technical and vocational problems that arise, completing the making of the product, and performing self-evaluation and reflection (Schneider, 2005).

So, the driving force is the end-product, but the key to success is the skills acquired during its production.

The PjBL module was designed based on various socio-constructivist technical institutions of thought (Bruner, 1973), but can also be found in other modern instructional theories (Ausubel et al., 1978; Reigeluth, 1999). Socio-constructivism is an understanding of learning that stresses the importance of constructing knowledge based on previous knowledge and interaction with the social environment, based on theories of constructivism (Piaget), socio-culturalism and situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Socio-constructivism has been perceived as a set of pedagogies which use strategies like project-based learning (Thomas et al., 1999), problem, inquiry or action learning. Each of these designs has different pedagogical objectives. Good pedagogical designs should include somewhat

structured pedagogical scenarios while lecturer's or supervisor's role is crucial. In this perspective, the modern teacher has to perform the roles of a facilitator, manager and orchestrator. He needs adequate supporting environments since such designs can become very complex and costly. Therefore, the objective of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of PjBL module in developing the meta-cognition, motivation and self-regulation of Mechanical Engineering students in project development.

## 2. Methods and materials

### 2.1 Model development

During the development of this PjBL module, developers focus on the powerful pedagogical designs. The PjBL concept aims at the development of general problem-solving skills, deeper conceptual understanding and more applicable knowledge (van Merriënboer et al., 2003). These include the application of complex, realistic and challenging engineering problems that elicit active and constructive processes of knowledge and skill acquisition in engineering students. The PjBL module should facilitate the participation of small group or encourage collaborative work and provide ample opportunities for interaction, communication and co-operation. The PjBL module encourages engineering students to set their own goals and provides guidance to students in taking more responsibility for their own technical and vocational learning activities. Project-based learning (PjBL) focuses on the learning process of the project teams. PjBL concept enables smooth implementation of engineering problem solving process (Dym and Little, 2004). With PjBL concept, more students are engaged in their learning style. These students work collaboratively to ensure the overall process conforms to the standards provided in the PjBL module. Supervisors or lecturers play their parts as tutors or mentors to ensure that the process runs smoothly.

Self Directed Learning (SDL) component works further enhance the effectiveness of the PjBL module developed (Figure 1). This SDL acts as a catalyst to facilitate self directed learning in engineering students involved in project development. Furthermore, SDL motivates them to complete the project successfully on time. Both SDL and PjBL enable students to be independent and capable of self learning without direct supervision from supervisors or lecturers (Shapiro, 1994). The PjBL module development incorporates student centered learning process in producing innovative product with minimal supervision. The principles and model of PjBL module followed the suggestion of Barron (1998). Figures 2, 3a, 3b, 3c and 4 illustrate the development of PjBL concept, namely:

#### *Phase 1: Module planning, designing and drafting.*

The module was pilot tested for a period of six month. Based on the findings and responses from respondents, the module was redesigned to incorporate some added value to the PjBL module.

#### *Phase 2: Testing the effectiveness of the module.*

In this phase, two groups or team projects were selected as sample to test the effectiveness of the PjBL module. The responses from the two groups were collected as data to evaluate the module with the study objectives.

The project management subject utilizes standardized forms provided by the PjBL module. These guided PjBL forms generate consistently and process monitoring by weekly progress. The forms embedded in the module includes: Form P001 - Project discussion and proposal, Form P002 - Project sketches and design, Form P003 - Supervisor's review and confirmation, Form P004 - Final technical project design and making methods, Form P005 - Project planning of each stage development and fabrication process, Form P006 – detailed drawings for each component measurement and workshop fabrication methods., Form P007 - project procedures and fabrication methods, Form P008 – writings of each team member for workshop selection that conforms to the standard planning form (P005). Each process should be drafted consistently at each stage to avoid delays. The other forms are Form P008 – provide inputs for machines selection and present the calculation sheet for each components of the product making, Form P009 - final design of additional component and testing, Form P010 – evaluation and confirmation form for the components, Form P011 – evaluation and testing of any added value or component to innovative products produced and finally Form P012 – submission and evaluation of the power point for final presentation.

The roles of actors are also particular in PjBL module development. Project-based learning module is structured to transform teaching from "lecturers/supervisors telling" to "engineering students doing". Engineering students become active problem-solvers, and effective decision-makers rather than passive listeners. They collaborate or cooperate in groups, organize their activities, conduct research, solve problems, synthesize information, organize time and resources and reflect on their learning. Teachers change their role "from sage on the stage to guide on the side" and assume the role of cognitive and meta-cognitive coach (by asking, monitoring, probing, managing, group regulating, keeping moving) rather than knowledge-holder and disseminator. Project serves as the initial challenge and motivation (appealing to be explored, setting up the context of learning). The monitoring and evaluation of this project development subject is monitored through PjBL forms and this provides weekly marks on the progress of the project teams. The formative (weekly progress evaluation) and summative (final report evaluation) assessment facilitate the successful attainment of the project objectives (Wilkerson, 1995).



In accordance with the innovative approach to learning, PjBL module also requires an innovative approach for the challenging task of assessment. It requires continuous and frequent assessment and include assessment from supervisors and peers, as well as self-assessment and reflection on the progress of the project.

### 2.2 Pilot test of PjBL module

The pilot test for this study takes a period of six months, after which the module was amended based on the findings especially on the problems and objectives of the study. This PjBL module which incorporates the use of PjBL forms guide the students with task by task process for the project development subject. Consistent monitoring and continuous evaluation facilitate the making of innovative products. This PjBL module was developed based on BIE project based learning concept. In team project development via PjBL concept, engineering students generate technical problem solving by entering each stage of project producing process. Collaborative activities are carried out throughout the period. At the same time, supervisors monitor the students' progress by following the task by task PjBL module guide. This new teaching method is able to match the needs of the project development need with the available equipments and resources.

Respondents for the pilot study comprised final semester students of Diploma in Automotive who utilize the PjBL module for the project development subject. These respondents have also entered some basic information such as other basic engineering syllabus, engineering workshop information and guides. These respondents are familiar with the use of hand tools, engineering design (Acad, Pro-Eng etc.) and automotive workshop. They have also undergone a six months practical training in industries. Based from an input data survey from the respondents, a lot of internal motivation and external skills have been identified during the developmental stage of the PjBL concept. By using PjBL module, planning becomes easy to them as their understanding of the project planning procedure for workshop improved in the process of entering the information into the module. Overall, the students said that their self-confidence and conformance to regulations and procedures increase when they utilize the PjBL module.

### 3. Results and discussion

The following are the salient points of the students' outcome during the interview.

*"We have fun and confidence when we use this PjBL module for our project development. It works smoothly with a nice guided and totally easy to understand and highly motivated us to directly go further and on schedule. Overall process is covered with this PjBL module and generates full internal and external motivation". After understanding PjBL concept and using PjBL module, our project planning becomes easy, progresses and completed on time. Our self-confidence and self-regulation increases. The process that covers overall stages helps us in doing engineering works easily with confidence. PjBL forms helps us to generate our ideas on paper easily, at the same time there are improvements on the project management and development. At the beginning, we never thought that this PjBL Module ease us to produce innovative project on time and enable us to successfully work within the engineering standards. Going through such a cognitive experience with this PjBL module, it helps us a lot in the technical problem solving. Our knowledge in exploring new engineering product increases. This PjBL module helps us to get involved in engineering critical thinking and always generate alternative problem solving throughout the process".*

Researchers have investigated the impact of project-based learning (PjBL) and related instructional approaches in a wide variety of engineering educational contexts ranging from automotive course, agriculture course to mechatronic course. These approaches have generally been shown to be effective in increasing students' motivation by engaging them in their own learning, in improving student problem-solving and higher order thinking skills (Mergendoller et al. 2003). It promotes meta-cognition and self-regulated learning by asking students to generate their own strategies for problem definition, information gathering, data-analysis, and hypothesis-building and testing, comparing these strategies against and sharing them with other students' and mentors' strategies. Teaching with the project-based learning method enables engineering students to work cooperatively with peers and supervisors in a student-centered environment where learners are encouraged to explore various topics of interest. The collaborative nature of the investigation enhances all of these valuable experiences as well as promotes a greater appreciation for social responsibility (Synteta, 2003). Hence, it also provides opportunities for interdisciplinary learning by engaging engineering students in applying the content of different subject areas during the various phases of the project. PjBL helps polytechnic students develop real world skills like the ability to collaborate well with others, make decisions and take initiative, and face complex problems. After completing a project, students are asked to create a self-evaluation of the project, like writing a meta-report. This enables the students to focus on their learning process and allows them to see their progress. Self-evaluation gives students a sense of accomplishment and further instills responsibility for engineering learning and by documenting the learning and project development process it also makes it easy to distribute marks to the end of presentation, with all the obvious advantages.

### 4. Conclusion

The PjBL module applied to project development in the Mechanical Engineering Department have some impact on the motivation, self confidence and conformity to regulation in students. The PjBL module allows consistent monitoring

and continuous evaluation of students' progress in project development. The use of PjBL module enables students to plan their project easily, work collaboratively with peers with minimal supervision from supervisors or lecturers and successfully complete their project on time. It is suggested that future work should look into a particular instructional design issue dealing in a bigger project-oriented classes for an innovative product development with a high technical expectations.

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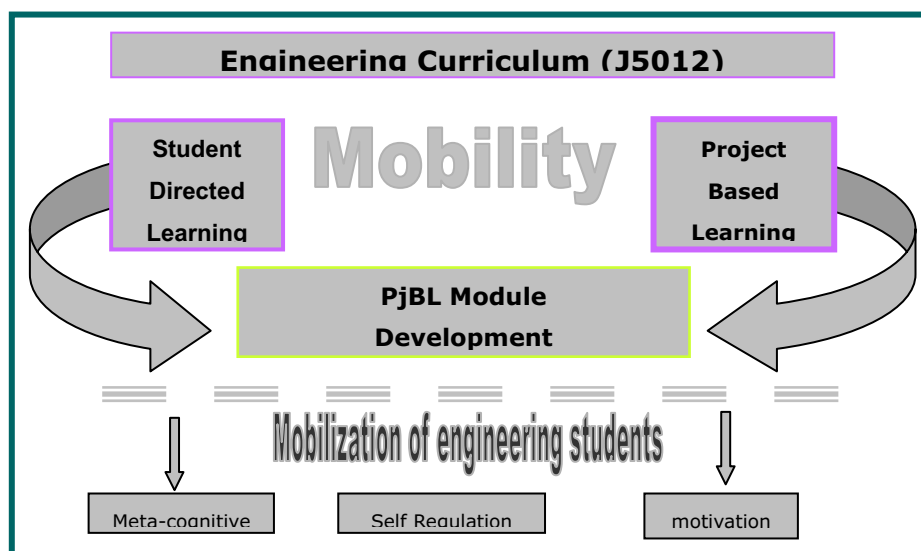


Figure 1. Model of PjBL Module Development

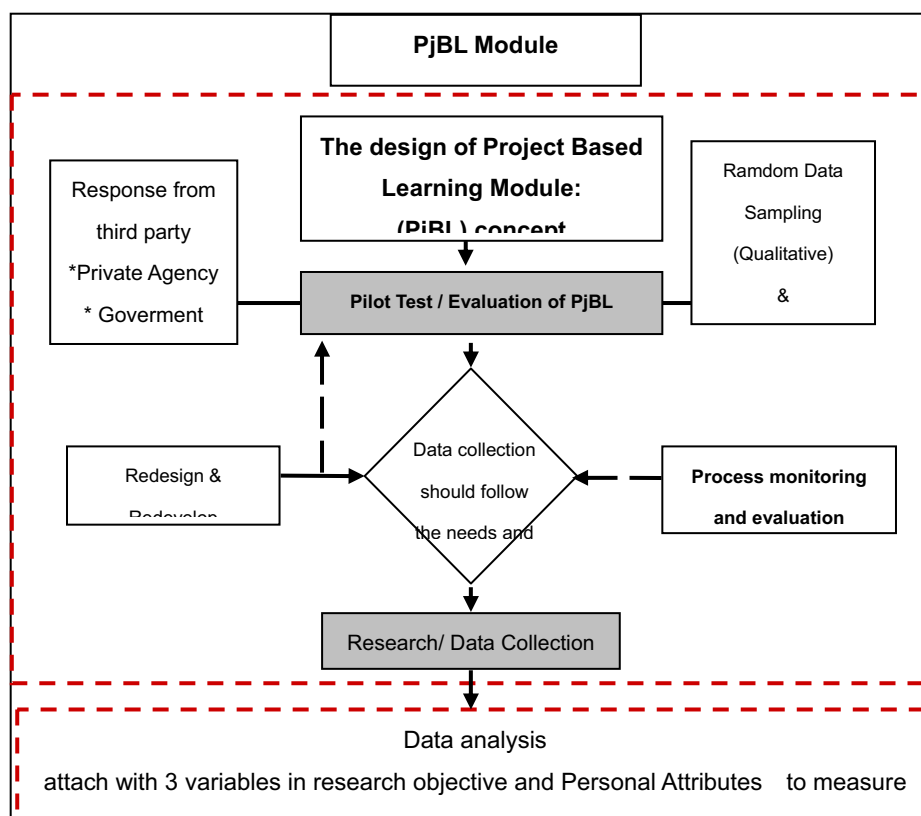


Figure 2. Methods for PjBL module development

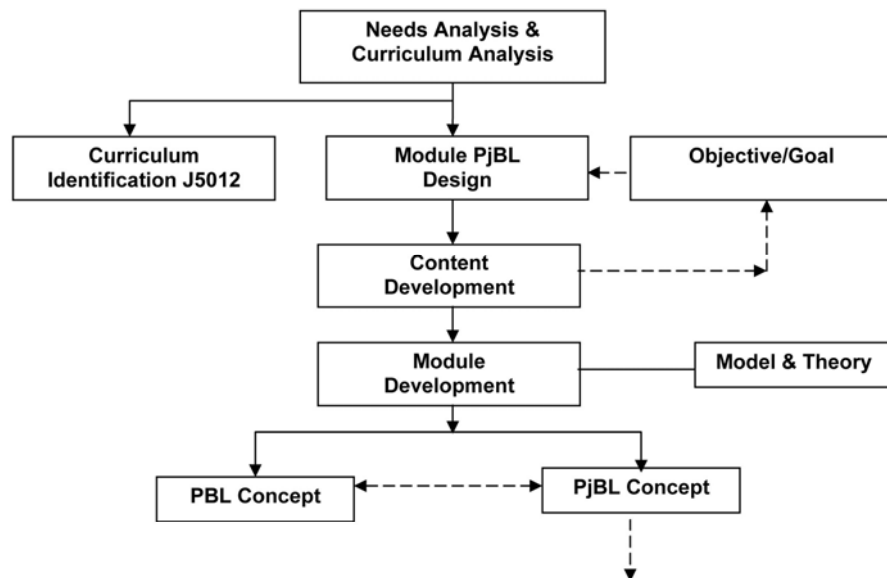


Figure 3a. Phase PjBL module development

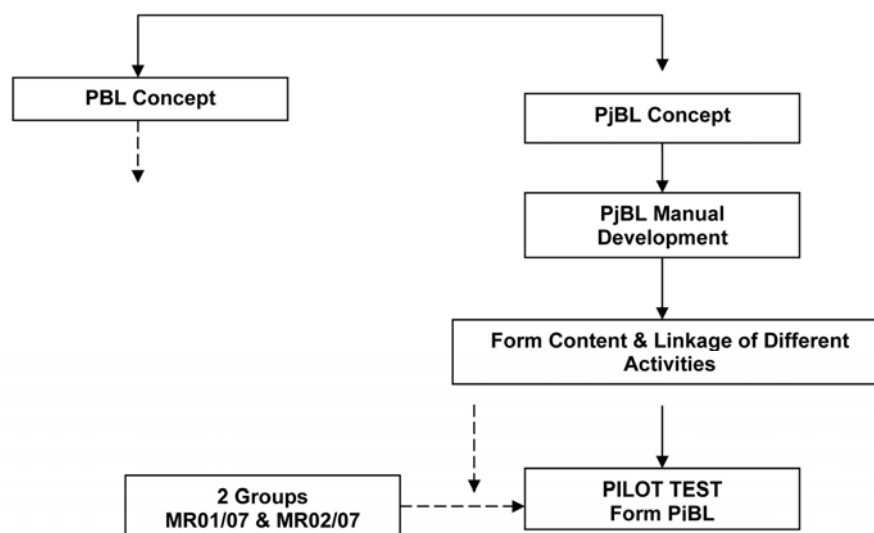


Figure 3b. Phase PjBL module development

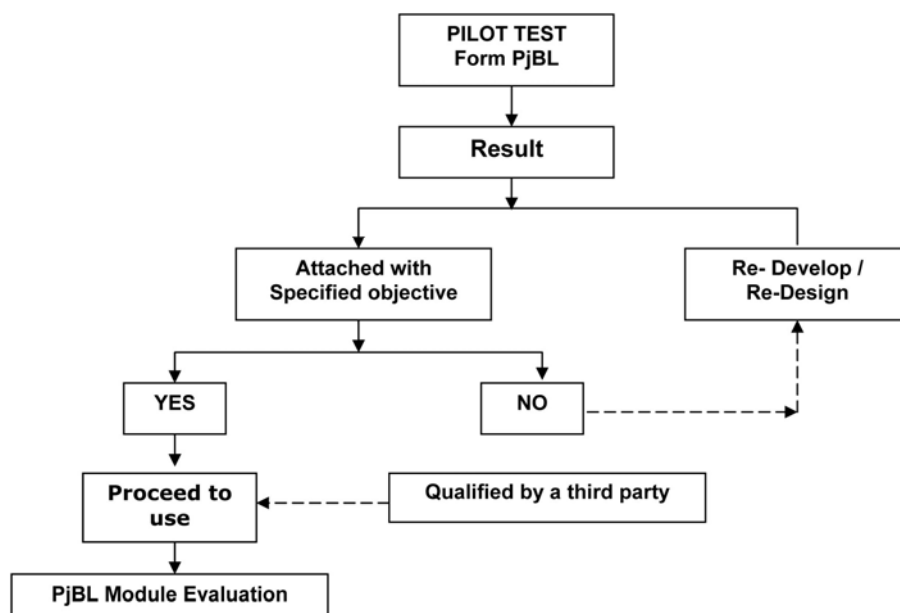


Figure 3c. Phase PjBL module development

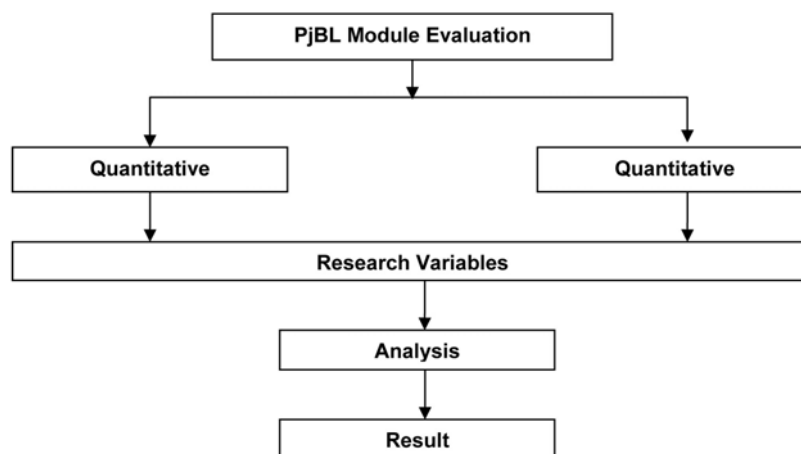


Figure 3d. Phase PjBL module development

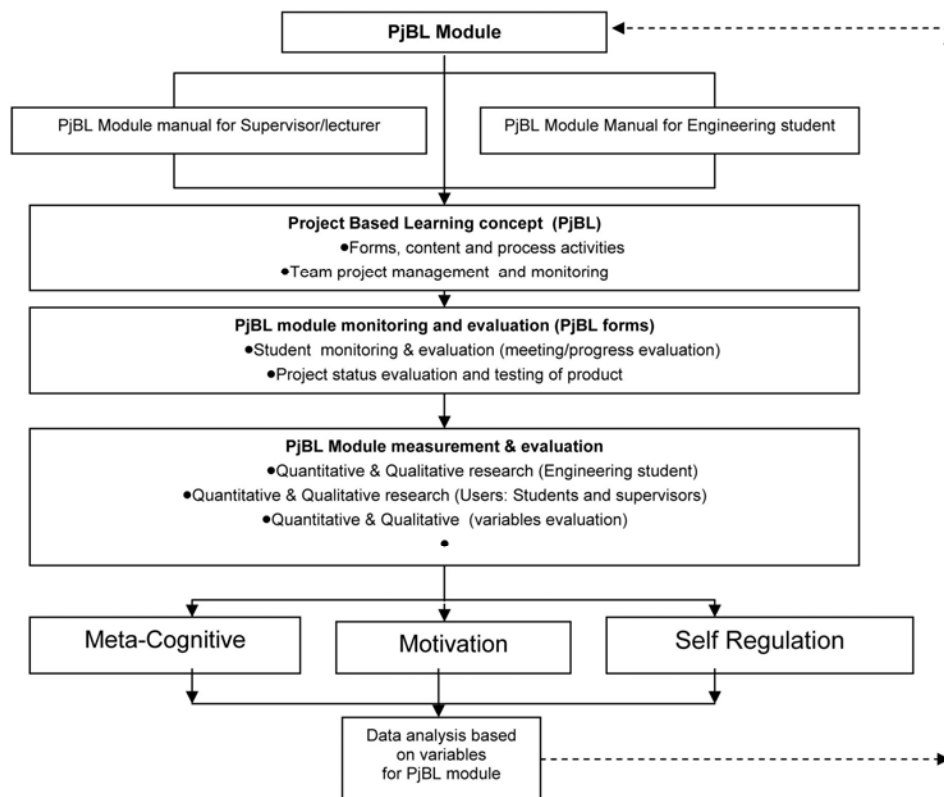


Figure 4. Implementation procedure for PjBL module development



## Relationship between Teachers and Students Based on New Curriculum-Face and Politeness in the Chinese English Teaching

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### Abstract

The paper objectively reviews the current situation of English teachers' face and politeness unconsciousness in the Chinese English language classroom teaching. At the same time it analyzes the reasons for the lack of face and politeness. *English Curriculum Standard* calls for human concern that teachers should give students a complete respect, pay more attention to affective education from view of teachers, view of students and view of evaluation. Face and politeness principles in the second language acquisition also need teachers to protect students' self-esteem, give students a suitable evaluation and encourage their autonomous English learning. On this basis, the paper probes into the relationship between students and teachers, and several suggestions on how to give students' face and politeness are raised.

**Keywords:** Face, Politeness, Chinese English teaching

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Background of writing

##### 1.1.1 English teachers' face and politeness unconsciousness

English language education is in a major concern for China's policy-makers, teachers, parents, and students. They focuses on the important issue of what constitutes subject knowledge of English teaching, especially parents and students, who need teachers to have high qualities almost in all kinds of aspects of English language education. Some students are not interested in English or they are weak in active learning. One of the important reasons is that they lack or lose confidence in class, which has much connection with English teachers. Some of them don't realize the face and politeness of the students, namely their face unconsciousness. However, it is essential to students in their English learning.

##### 1.1.2 Human concern in English language teaching

*English Curriculum Standard* calls for human concern that teachers should give students a complete respect. Affective education is an essential project in curriculum reform. It pays close attention to students' emotion, attitude and values. Virtue and wisdom, feeling experience and perfect personality have a close connection with the development of emotion. It can make students develop better from a natural person to a social person. Students can treat kindly, understand and tolerate others; they are full of confidence and overcome difficulties bravely; they love nature, life and human beings. So, it's said that affective education is happiness education, pleasure education. It is the true essence of education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Humanistic curriculum (McNeil, 2006) lays stress on students' thought, emotion and action. However, in some Chinese English classroom teaching, students get little education concern that is badly needed. The classroom teaching is not student-centered but teacher-centered, so students and teachers don't equal in many speech acts. More or less, students have submissive and oppressed feeling in class, so they can't get enough face and politeness.

##### 1.1.3 Views of new curriculum

###### 1.1.3.1 View of teaching

View of teaching in the past only coped with examination, which only concerned language skills and language knowledge, and neglected students' affective education. Examination is the center of all teaching activities. In class, teachers poured down knowledge to students, so this kind of teaching caused students' emotions of boring learning. However, in the notions of new curriculum, knowledge and affection have the same position. In teaching, teachers play a leading role while students are main part. Teachers should develop students' main part sufficiently because valuing

students' main part is inspiring students' learning interest, which is a key to students' learning happily. Carrying out the view of teaching can help students' affective education develop better.

### 1.1.3.2 View of students

Over a long period of time, people think that students who obey and have high marks are good students while students who get lower marks and disobey are weak students. This view of students neglects students' main part. But the perspective of affective education believes that in the world, almost everyone can learn anything that can be learnt as long as they have suitable precondition and current learning factors. Weak students appear because of blunders accumulation during the learning. As long as teachers remedy the blunders in good time and gradually eliminate them, the appearance of weak students may be evitable. The view of students shows that education must face all the students, which just embodies the essential of the notions of *English Curriculum Standard*. So teachers should strengthen the devotion of affective factors, do their best in students' ideological work, give each student's appropriate chances and make everyone learning happily. So, the personality of students can be developed very well.

### 1.1.3.3 View of evaluation

When teachers evaluate students, they shouldn't regard score to be the only standard. The diversity of evaluation has gradually come into the students' evaluation system. More persons with noble aspirations begin to pay attention to improving the learning condition of students and affective experience. In the view of evaluation of *New Curriculum Standard*, the function of affective factors used very well can really encourage students to study hard, help students form good mentality and do very good to students' further learning. In teaching, the inspiration evaluation should be adopted more and the opportunity and experience of learning success should be given to each student in order that they can see their bright future and strengthen their self-confidence.

## 1.2 Face and politeness principles in linguistics

In the study of politeness, the most relevant concept is 'Face'. Your face, in pragmatics, is your public self-image (George Yule, 2000:134). This is the emotional and social sense of self that every person has and expects everyone else to recognize. Politeness is showing awareness of another person's face. Face is used in much the same way as in the expressions to lose face and to save face, meaning something like 'self-respect' or 'dignity'.

The basic ideas of the two concepts are that: we lead unavoidably social lives, since we depend on each other, but as far as possible we try to lead our lives without losing our own face. However, our face is a very fragile thing which other people can very easily change, so we lead our social lives according to the Golden Rule ('Do to others as you would like them to do to you!') by looking after other people's faces in the hope that they will look after ours. Face is something that other people give to us, which is why we have to be so careful to give it to them (unless we consciously choose to insult them, which is exceptional behavior.) In conversation, we will be involved in what Goffman (1967) has called face-work, the work of presenting faces to each other, protecting our own face, and protecting the other's face.

For sociolinguists the most relevant discussion of face is by Brown and Levinson (1987), who distinguish two kinds of face. They call them 'positive' and 'negative'. Positive face is the desire to gain the approval of others while negative face is the desire to be unimpeded by others in one's action, but these terms can be misleading because both kinds of face are valuable; they are called 'solidarity-face' and 'power-face'. Both kinds could be described as 'respect' but this word has a different sense in each case. Solidarity-face is respect as in I respect you for..., i.e. the appreciation and approval that others show for the kind of person we are, for our behavior, for our values and so on. If something threatens our solidarity-face we feel embarrassment or shame. Power-face is respect as in I respect your right to..., which is a 'negative' agreement not to interfere. When our power-face is threatened, we feel offended. Each kind of face is the basis for a different kind of 'politeness'. Solidarity-face shows respect for the person, whereas power-politeness respects their rights.

## 2. Studies

### 2.1 Material collection

Here are some dialogues between teachers and students in the Chinese English language classroom teaching, which often happen in middle school.

Extract 1, T: Silence! Order! The lesson will begin.

S: May I come in?

T: Come in! (Bob comes in out of breath) Oh, Bob! You are late.

S: (His face turns red.) I'm sorry. I was caught in the traffic jam on my way to school.

T: (Strictly) Come earlier next time! Do you finish your homework?

S: I'm sorry but there is only one left. I spent enough time doing it but I can't, it is difficult for me to do.



T: Really? Never speak to me like that again. You must hand in your homework today. Don't late next time! Go to your seat.

Extract 2, T: (After having a dictation) Mary, give me your paper.

S: Yes, Sir.

T: Six words are wrong. So many! (In all, 20 words are given to students.)

S: (The rest students look at Mary. Mary's tears fall down her cheeks.) Sorry!

T: You must remember new words every day. Do exactly as I say. Linda has got one hundred. You should learn English like Linda. I believe all of you will get a very good result.

Linda: But Sir, this time Mary is better than last time. She's got 70.

T: Be quiet! Boys and girls, that's not enough.

Extract 3, T: I want you to listen carefully to what I'm going to say. Please make a sentence by using the phrase 'call on'.

S1: I called on my aunt last week.

T: Good!

S2: He calls on my father tomorrow and I am...

T: Stop! You are wrong. You shouldn't say so. You should say: He will call on my father tomorrow, anyone else?

S3: We are going to call on Mr. Zhang on Saturday.

T: Good! (Point to another student who is handing up.) You go ahead.

S4: Sir, I recently read a story. There is a phrase 'drop in on', I looked up it in my dictionary. It has the same meaning as 'call on'. Can I say: I dropped in on my grandpa yesterday?

T: Right! But today what we learn is the phrase 'call on'. You can use the phrase 'call on' to make a sentence. That's OK.

## 2.2. Material analysis

In the three extracts, we can find teachers frequently using the imperative sentence, direct sentences, more sentences in which 'must', 'should' are used and also encouragement lack as well as euphemism lack.

If you say something that represents a threat to another person's self-image, that is called a face-threatening act. For example, in the extracts above, teachers use direct speech acts to order students to do something or not to do something. "Come earlier next time." "Never speak to me like that again." "Give me your paper." "You must remember new words every day." "Do exactly as I say." "I want you to listen carefully to what I'm going to say." Teachers are acting as if they have more social power than students. But, in fact, they don't actually have that social power, so they are performing a face-threatening act. An indirect speech act, in the form of a question (Could you pass me that paper, please?), removes the assumption of social power. This makes teachers request less threatening to the students' sense of self. Whenever we say something that lessens the possible threat to another's face, our speech act is a face-saving act.

In extracts above, it's obvious that teachers threaten students' solidarity-face and power-face. For solidarity-face we have a wide range of ways of showing intimacy and affection-words used for addressing the other person and others used to show solidarity-politeness towards the person referred to. For showing power-politeness there are different 'address' words and all the euphemisms that protect the other person from being offended. We need to save our own face by saving the face of everyone we talk to, so we need to manage our behavior, both verbal and non-verbal, very carefully. If we see speech and interaction, as skilled work, we may see that failure like teachers in extracts are due to lack of either skill or motivation. As a matter of fact, a lot of speech acts are face-threatening acts. We, however, can lighten or eliminate the threat. When we interact with others, we must be aware of both kinds of face and therefore have a choice of two kinds of politeness, especially in our English language teaching.

## 2.3. Reasons for the lack of face and politeness

In the Chinese English language classroom teaching, why does the phenomenon exist that teachers violate the face and politeness principles? China is a country with a long history. In the Chinese traditional culture, teachers are superiors. In the Chinese long feudal society, people regarded students either adults who narrowed or small people who didn't know at all, meanwhile they drew the relationship between the monarch and his subjects of the feudalism into teacher-student relation. The teacher-student relation even evolved into 'clan relations'. The stretch of social system makes teachers the embodiment of truth, the model of action and absolute authority. The classroom teaching is not student-centered but teacher-centered. This unequal relation of lack of humanity naturally contains the factors of power and autocracy. In the

teacher-student relation of teacher 'supremacy', students' freedom is deprived; body and mind are fettered; interests are stifled. The originality of life can't be respected and there is not creativity at all. Stepping out of traditional boundaries in the development of English language teaching is an urgent need.

### 3. Instruction

*English Curriculum Standard* advocates that teacher 'supremacy' should be broken and change teacher-student relationship. Its education model is certainly inspiration, motivation and encouragement. Students' status and role are taken seriously. It's especially important in our classroom teaching. We should adopt the student-centered classroom teaching model in which teachers are no longer the sage on the stage and at the same time students are no longer negative accepters of language knowledge. Students and teachers are equal in interaction, transmitting information, getting knowledge, experiencing language and acquiring the feel of language.

In order to protect students' self-respect and encourage their autonomy, with *English Curriculum Standard* promulgated it is necessary to talk about how to use the face and politeness principles correctly in our English classroom teaching. The paper provides several suggestions.

#### 3.1 Improve teachers' personal quality

There has been a growing worldwide concern about not only the subject competence of teachers but also their personal quality. It is essential for teachers to treat students sincerely and respect them. There is a kind of education that is called 'smile'. Criticizing and punishing students can make teacher-student relationship become unharmonious in class, which is not helpful to classroom teaching. Teachers should tolerate students, satisfy students' psychology and reduce their contradictory feeling during the teaching. Toleration is a kind of virtue that teachers should have, and also it is a kind of education art. Teachers need do an encouraging education to students, develop their successful feel for the language and cultivate them a whole person. The quality of teaching art is not impartation but encouragement, awakening and inspiration. Teachers, never regard ourselves sculptors, let's understand the diversity of students and respect uniqueness of each life, so in our English language teaching, we will get enjoyment based on equality, understanding and respect.

#### 3.2 Do positive and suitable evaluation

It is a common belief that teacher reinforces students' good conduct effectively and enhances their academic learning. Praise has positive effects on students' learning and motivation. Evaluating learning emotion is mentioned in new curriculum evaluation reform. Evaluation plays a regulatory role in the students' learning emotion. Students need teachers' positive evaluation because the younger people are, the stronger desire they have in order to make others notice them. The evaluation from teachers can make them feel that teachers respect and care for them, so evaluation must be valued in the classroom teaching. But teachers' evaluation must be correct and suitable, especially after students answer questions in class. Teachers should use words that are encouraging. For instance, if students answer correctly, teachers had better give a positive definite response, "Good/ Very good/ Excellent, Thank you"; if students can't give a clear answer, teachers also have a positive response and encourage him, "That's almost correct./ Better than last time./ The first part of your answer is right, but..."; if students give an answer that is not right, don't negate their answer completely or scold, satirize students but dig their good qualities, "Your answer is not right, but your pronunciation is very good./ No, it's not the right answer to this question, but it's also very important. Thank you." Teachers not only cultivate students' interests but also pay more attention to protect their self-respect and confidence. Besides, teachers can accept students' evaluation, admit bravely and correct their mistakes and do self-reflective for themselves. If so, teachers' prestige and deep feelings between students and teachers can be built.

#### 3.3 Make students feel very warm like spring rain

##### 3.3.1 Care for students

Teachers should care for students sincerely, especially concern the common students. I know a student who is considered to be mentally deficient. Because he was short of training of image memory for a long time, it caused him to forget something quickly. Besides, sarcasm from his classmates made him feel very inferior. In view of this situation, I made a plan for his remembering words with him privately. Because every week I would give a dictation of one unit, I want to make him get his self-esteem by this chance. At the beginning he felt nervous. After repeatedly training, the rate of word consolidation is up to fifty percent. One day, facing all the other students, I made him first taste success. Since then, his English learning has gradually improved and he also gets his respect from his classmates. As long as teachers love students, they can go into students' innermost being, understand students' demands, inspire students' thirst for knowledge and develop students' intellectual resources.

##### 3.3.2 Understand students

Teachers should understand students. When students demand something from teachers, teachers should consider more for students by putting themselves in students' place. In English teaching, teachers should give lessons to students in accordance with their characteristics and make each student grasp knowledge as much as possible.

### 3.3.3 Trust students

Teachers should trust each student. However, trust has a precondition, which is respect. Teachers need to have the same attitude to different students and dig the advantage of each student. In English teaching, chances that show students' intellect should be given each student. Teachers' duty is not only teaching but also protecting students' self-respect and creating a relaxed learning atmosphere. In the teachers' trustful eyes, students learn happily and in the students' trustful eyes, teachers teach happily.

## 4. Conclusion

*English Curriculum Standard* puts forward higher requirements for teachers' qualities in all kinds of aspects, especially affective education. Teacher-student relationship and language classroom teaching have a kind of bilateral and interactive relation. Concerning affection can improve the quality and effect of language teaching. On the contrary, language teaching helps students develop positive and healthy affection. This shows that studying affective factors in class has great significance for both theory and practice of SLA. Stepping out of traditional boundaries of classroom teaching, teachers should give students face and politeness, and they are equal. It will be conducive to classroom teaching, and students can grasp knowledge very well, meanwhile teachers can get great pleasure from teaching. It presents human concern in *English Curriculum Standard*.

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## Should All Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) Be Included in Mainstream Education Provision? - A Critical Analysis

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### Abstract

Traditionally, children requiring special educational needs (SEN) are segregated into separate learning environments. While this education practice has been established for years, other educators and analysts have been questioning its efficacy. Most of them suggest that students with SEN should be included into mainstream schools to maximize their learning experiences. Several other benefits as well as issues have been raised in relation to this educational issue. In this paper, the factors related to the education and inclusion of students with SEN, including the curriculum, attitude of the educators, professional development, equality issues as well as learning experiences, will be discussed. The significance and relevant effects of these factors will be the basis of the conclusion of this paper on whether inclusion should be adapted.

**Keywords:** Special Educational Needs, Inclusion, Segregation

### 1. Children with Special Needs: A Historical Account

Historically, people with specific learning disabilities have been segregated from mainstream school practices as well as economic and social activities (Atkinson et al. 1997). Similarly, several people with sensory impairments as well as physical disabilities have been excluded from the society (Humphries and Gordon, 1992). At times, segregation of the disabled had led to severe social practices like sterilization and incarceration. Such practices had been observed due to misconceptions of physical and intellectual characteristics (Oliver and Barnes, 1998). The practice of separating the disabled from the rest had originated from the mistaken notion that human bodies must conform to a certain standard or norm. Foucault had discussed this erroneous belief extensively (Rabinow, 1984).

### 2. Segregation versus Inclusion

The provision of appropriate educational needs for children with special disabilities has long been a common issue in education. Arguments and debates have been raised in line with the right policies on how to educate children with special educational needs (SEN). According to Jenkinson (1997), children with disabilities are traditionally educated in segregated classrooms, specifically designed to cater to the students' certain incapacities. Educators find this segregation system beneficial, as they are able to apply curriculum formulated specifically for special children. Likewise, children with disabilities benefit from this system not only because of the appropriate curriculum, but also the thought of attending classes with classmates having the same disabilities enhances their confidence or self-esteem as well. Furthermore, being segregated assures the security and sufficient support special children need.

However, in an article written by Dunn (1968), the segregation of special children involves many issues of concern, which were generalized into four main points of argument including the students' academic achievement, the detrimental effects of labeling associated with placement outside the mainstream, the racial imbalance in special education, and recent advances in individually paced curricula which would make it possible to accommodate students with disabilities in the regular class. Furthermore, several educators have argued that exposing children into ordinary education settings will be the most effective means of equipping children into better self-supportive adults in the future (Jenkinson, 1997). The students are not the only ones affected by the segregation system. Teachers or educators are also isolated through this kind of setting. Being isolated, their teaching competencies become limited as well. Considering the significance of this point, educators have suggested to integrate the special needs student into normal education settings (Smith, 1998).

Indeed, the topic regarding the integration of students with special educational needs into ordinary schools has been a common argument. This key educational issue has recently introduced the term inclusion that exemplifies a whole range of ideas about the meaning and purpose of school (Kliwer, 1998).

Inclusion involves the reorganization of ordinary schools, in such a way that every mainstream school is capable of accommodating every student regardless of their disabilities, making it certain that each learner belongs to a single

community. The concentration of inclusion is more focused on the discussion of values. Thus, the principle behind inclusion is founded on the broad agenda of human rights, clearly emphasizing that segregation of any form is morally incorrect (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000).

A familiar statement about the basis for inclusion is the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1994). Although it makes an explicit statement concerning children's rights, it refers to the level of education and learning rather than inclusion. It does not only state a view on children's rights, but it also asserts children's uniqueness and stressed considering the wide diversity of these children's characteristics and needs. The Salamanca Statement proponent provides an effective education to the majority of children improving the efficiency and ultimately the cost-effectiveness of the entire education system (Lindsay, 2003, p. 3). It implies a tension between application of proposed system for all children and a view that it may not be effective for all, implying that inclusion may be a less effective system of education.

This then gives rise to the conflict of implementing an uncertain reform that supports human rights against a politically structured educational system for the special children. Moreover, the inclusion system had been described as follows by Oliver (1996, p. 84): a process rather than a fixed state; problematic; political; requires changes in school ethos; involves teachers who have acquired commitment; requires changes in the given curriculum; involves recognition of moral and political rights of pupils to inclusive education; recognition that students with special needs are valued and that their achievements should be celebrated; acknowledgement of the importance of difference rather than sameness or normality; and inclusion requires struggle.

In spite of these apparent conflicting and varying views, certain significant factors should be discussed in order to determine whether the inclusion system should be implemented into present school systems.

### **3. Inclusion and Child Development**

Inclusive schools are established primarily for improving the special children's learning and development. Specifically, inclusion aims to benefit special children through improvements in their learning outcomes, including their social skills, academic achievement and personal development. So as to meet all the learning needs of the children within a community, inclusion promotes the initiation of mainstream school restructuring. According to Ainscow (1991, p.3), inclusion aims to establish more effective schools that recognize students' difficulties in learning; hence, effective schools support the need for appropriate reforms.

In general, inclusive schools are characterized by strong emphasis on quality instruction as well as administrative leadership; emphasis on the student's acquisition of basic abilities; high levels of expectations for students as well as confidence in teachers' ability to deal and support the individual needs of their students; obligation to give a balanced and broad coverage of curriculum experiences appropriate for all children; promotion of secured and orderly environment conducive for both teaching and learning; and close evaluation and monitoring of each student's learning progress (Hopkins, Ainscow and West, 1994; Ainscow, 1991).

Indeed, inclusion illustrates an almost perfect educational system. However, is there any proof that these aims were successfully attained? Several tests and research have been done to answer this inquiry. A number of studies deal with the inclusion of children with certain disabilities in general education classrooms. A previous study of three preschoolers with profound disabilities (Hanline, 1993) established the social and communication benefits of full inclusion for these children. The results of this study conflicted with previous studies of preschool children with disabilities who seemed to be socially isolated in general classrooms (Peterson & Haralick, 1977; Peterson, 1982; Faught, Balleweg, Crow, & van den Pol, 1983). A further study (Cole, 1991) examined social integration of children with disabilities in 43 Minnesota classrooms. The 2-year study compared integrated and segregated (special education only) sites and determined that developmental skill progress was similar in both types of schools, but that children in integrated sites progressed in social skill development while the segregated children actually regressed.

While social skill development may vary based on numerous results of previous studies, inclusion is capable of enhancing children's academic achievement through speech and language programs, improved parent-teacher communication, greater use of group work, a student participation in class discussions, and increased community acceptance of people with disabilities (Jenkinson, 1997, p. 155). Students at mainstream schools were more likely to have higher academic achievements than those at special schools, even when developmental level was similar. Against these benefits, inclusion also brought its share of challenges. From the evidence set by Jenkinson, in his survey, she said that some focus group participants felt that students with disabilities are receiving too much attention and concerns with inadequate resource provision for these special students meant that students without disabilities were missing out on the attention and encouragement they needed. Evidence indicates that nearly all children with physical and sensory difficulties, including children with no other impairments should be educated at mainstream school but it is important not to overlook their emotional and social needs (and in some cases medical or personal needs). Success or the ease of inclusion shouldn't be decided on the basis of who requires the least fuss needed to monitor emotional and social well being.

In a study done by Carlberg and Kavale's (1980, p. 301-302) the researchers commented on the failure of inclusion in enhancing academic achievement. This study showed that the average Behavioral Disability (BD)/Emotional Disability (ED) or Learning Disability (LD) student in special class placement was better off than 61% of his/her counterparts in a regular class. This study provided evidence that segregation is better than inclusion. However, the results of this study are not applicable to the general context. There is an example of a male child with learning difficulty in a regular U.K. class. This boy is always at the bottom academically which means he can't read, write; and he has displayed chronically bad behavior as evidenced by his use of an electric stunning device for scaring other students while considering it a fun game. For security reasons, he has been sent to a special school. This change to a new environment that provides more attention has positively impacted the boy. He is now very happy, gets more individual instruction and attention, and as a result, is no longer getting into trouble thanks to the special school. Such cases provide evidence that shows integration should be based on individual needs.

Hornby (1999, p. 157) commented on this aspect of inclusion and noted that the level of inclusion, either locational, social, or functional, should be based on the needs of each child and the exigencies of the situation. Once these factors have been identified and considered, the focus of the educator can now be a combined view of mainstream and individual educational children with SEN.

Aside from integrating mainstream and individual need factors of children, inclusion can enhance academic achievement of children through the proper learning environment. According to Jenkinson (1997, p. 193), the environment shall be designed to ensure maximum interaction between students with severe disabilities and their chronological age peers, and at a level that should also occur in the wider community. This will be the main purpose for integration. For an appropriate school and classroom environment, Sailor (1989) identified six minimal requirements for successful inclusion of students with severe disabilities (Jenkinson, 1997, p. 192).

Classroom and learning environments should be age appropriate; close enough to the students' home in order to minimize excessive time spent on traveling to school; provide program interaction within the school building; procedures shall be implemented to encourage interaction between students with disabilities and non-disabled students; and no more than ten percent of students in any school should have severe disabilities. In considering the proper learning environment, it should not be based on Sailor's view alone, but other needs and support should be considered and provided to them.

Kaufman, Agard and Semmel (1978) identified a number of environmental factors that were related to performance. Taking an example of age appropriateness, in larger special schools it is often possible to have a loose grouping in terms of CA and MA. Crocket and Kauffman (1999) researched on inclusion in relation to different SEN/disabilities and also individual differences within individuals with the same disability, and identified dilemmas that often increased with age. A 16 year old student with an MA of five years could not be included full time with a class in inclusion school. Peer shall be considered as a person of the same age, status or ability. Peers learning together are not only occurring in academic settings, but also in interaction, culture, and other activities that relate to psychological conditions. Intellectually disabled children who are 16 years old in five year-old pre-school may be not suitable to grow up with similar physically age children. Physical difference may have a negative impact for children with disability. In the same age group, children with disability will develop to identity with their peers. Increasing interaction is more difficult if there is a large age gap for group activities outside of the classroom. In short, students in mainstream schools were more likely to have higher academic achievements than those in special schools, even when developmental level was similar (Jenkinson, 1997, p. 57).

Secondly, a range of individual differences within an environment may require a large variety of curriculum materials and public equipment to be accessed to suffice children with difficulties. Funding is always a burden for mainstream schools if they only take ten percent of children with disability; if it is for a minority and not for the majority, the function of the facilities could then be considered a waste by some. In order to provide a better environment for the quality of class activity participation, relationship interactions with the peers is an option.

#### **4. Attitude of the Educator**

While inclusion is beneficial for developing the competencies and skills of both students and teachers alike, implementing a program of inclusion will most likely put teachers under considerable pressure brought about by the required environmental restructuring. Based on several studies, reports of teachers unable to find enough time for the application of inclusion were frequent and common (Diebold & Von Eschenbach, 1991; Semmel et al., 1991).

Teachers face constant dilemmas (Dyson, 2001). The dilemma includes pace, learning styles, seating arrangements, and individual attention. Catering to a range of needs in a single class was difficult for some teachers. Where adequate resource staff were available, successful integration could be jeopardized by poor coordination between resources and classroom teaching, or by over dependence on an untrained teacher aide (Jenkinson, 1997, p. 23).

Teacher perceptions of full inclusion have been studied, with varying results. A survey of 381 special and general

educators (Semmel, Abernathy, Butera, & Lesar, 1991) discovered that teachers believed that "full time placement of students with mild disabilities will not have positive social benefits for these students." Another study (Giangreco, Dennis, Cloninger, Edelman, & Schattman, 1993) with nineteen teachers who actually had students with disabilities in their classrooms, concluded that 17 of the teachers underwent a transformation from initial negative reactions to the placement of students in their classrooms to a more positive viewpoint. Teacher interviews included numerous reports of benefits to students with disabilities, their classmates, as well as teachers themselves.

In previous studies, research that focused on the attitudes of educators on inclusion has been reported. Previous American studies related to full inclusion have concluded that several educators were not supportive of placing special students in mainstream schools. For instance, in study conducted by Coates (1989), general education teachers teaching in Iowa neither exhibit any negative views towards pulling out of programs nor did they extend any support on the full inclusion system. Semmel et al (1991), showed similar research findings. After surveying 381 elementary educators from both general and special schools, the researchers also concluded that the participating educators were not supportive of placing special students in mainstream schools.

In a study conducted by Vaughn et al. (1996), the researchers concentrated on the perception of both mainstream and special educators' towards inclusion by means on focus group interviews. The research concluded that the majority of the respondents who were not participating in any inclusive programs had strong negative thoughts and feelings about inclusion. Moreover, the participants stated that such a system was impractical for decision makers to implement as it is not applicable to classroom realities. The teachers identified several factors that would affect the success of inclusion, including class size, inadequate resources, the extent to which all students would benefit from inclusion and lack of adequate teacher preparation.

While there were several studies showing the negative insights of educators towards inclusive schooling, contradictory findings have also been reported. For instance, a study conducted by Villa et al. (1996) provided results that favored the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream schools. The researchers noted that teacher commitment often emerges at the end of the implementation cycle, after the teachers have gained mastery of the professional expertise needed to implement inclusive programs. Similar findings were reported by LeRoy and Simpson (1996), who studied the impact of inclusion over a 3-year period in the state of Michigan. Their study showed that as teachers' experience with children with SEN increased, their confidence to teach these children also increased. The evidence seems to indicate that teachers' negative or neutral attitudes at the beginning of an innovation such as inclusive education may change over time as a function of experience and the expertise that develops through the process of implementation.

Research has suggested that, although teachers' attitudes can be affected by several interacting factors, one of the most important is the level and nature of support that they receive. Based on this assumption, Clough and Lindsay (1991), referring to the UK context, have argued that there might be variations in teachers' attitudes within the UK, reflecting the levels and history of support in each Local Education Authority (LEA). Indeed, LEAs vary in the provision they make to schools either directly through staffing and capitation, or through support services (such as special needs support teachers, educational psychologists) and this is likely to affect teachers' attitudes. Moreover, some authorities have promoted inclusive education (Bannister et al. 1998; Lindsay et al. 1990), while in others the pace of change has been slow. Despite the disparity among research results and the overwhelming number of variables associated with establishing success with inclusion, the call for full inclusion of all students into general education schools and for most students into general education classrooms continues (National Association of State Boards of Education, 1992).

From this summary of studies on teachers' attitude towards inclusion, one may wonder how others can disagree with inclusion in spite of its many advantages on learning. What then is the essence of being an educator when no time is allotted for the children's benefit? How can special children learn effectively when their educators are not even open to challenges geared towards better education means? The inclusion system then effectively emphasized the primary goal and purpose of educators for special and ordinary students alike. In spite of difficulties the inclusion system involves, educators must not initially discourage the idea. Considering the benefits the system can possibly lead to, in addition to an educator's role of applying an educational means where his students can learn more effectively, inclusion system should be treated with a more open and positive outlook.

## 5. Inclusion and Resources

The process of education should be given to children with disabilities to make them part of society. While inclusion may help achieve this goal, the inclusion of children with learning difficulties in mainstream schools requires greater attention. Sufficient resources would have to be allocated to support these children's learning. Funding should thus support provision for enough facilities, teaching materials, appropriate curriculum and learning activities. Unfortunately, lack of funds is often times an obstacle for development. Aside from the establishment of proper learning institutions for disabled students, teaching also becomes a critical issue. The issue tends to be problematic as teachers pay less attention to their special students within mainstream classrooms. Furthermore, the formulation of the proper curriculum, one that is adaptable to every child's educational needs, has been a problem as well.

People who support the inclusion of special children in mainstream schools call for total restructuring, including the incorporation of radical changes in the curriculum. Inclusion advocates pointed out that separate curricula further promote exclusion, segregating children who can learn normally and those who cannot (Ainscow, 1991 & 1994; Jenkinson, 1997).

According to Ridsale and Thompson (2002, p. 22), the problems related to the formulation of the curriculum have always been connected to the inabilities of the children, when in fact such an issue is brought about by curriculum inadequacy. Alongside this issue, others have argued on whether curriculum that was developed by special educators for disabled students should be so readily discarded. Although the curriculum for inclusion has been modified to suit the educational needs of the students, there is still a growing pressure for special schools to follow a core curriculum similar to the one applied in mainstream schools Jenkinson (1997, p. 169). Certain dilemmas and difficulties are encountered in designing a common curriculum that will meet all students' needs. For instance, students with disabilities may require special methods of instruction to compensate for their disability, or they may need special equipment or communication technology to enable them to learn from an unmodified curriculum (Jenkinson, 1997, p. 169).

Inclusion, as well as the implementation of a modified curriculum, may be seen to be impractical and uneconomical for some as the closure of special schools and classes imply an end to many of the resources, expertise and other benefits. If disabled children will be included into mainstream schools, the outcome will not only require the withdrawal of many resources needed by students with disabilities, but this will also place unfair burden on regular class teachers who are attempting to face several changes implied by the restructuring of the education system as a whole (Jenkinson, 1997, p. 170).

In order to properly implement inclusion, changes should be done not only to the curriculum. The people who will implement and take charge of the implementation, as well as those who will monitor and evaluate the outcomes of inclusion, should be properly designated and recognized. For this purpose, the quality of teaching should be based on the different needs of students. Teachers should be able to sort out special children's behavior and able to cope with the lack of resources. Professional training is not the only necessary and essential quality educators should possess. Experience, ability, passion, and patience for the children with difficulties are also important.

As Jenkinson stated, inclusion provides several demands in terms of extra time, knowledge and skill required to prepare adapted curriculum materials and implement special instructional techniques. In addition, the adequacy of resources is difficult to determine as every child has varying educational needs (Jenkinson, 1997, p. 173). However, in this discussion, the significant role of the educator has been implied for the successful implantation of inclusive schooling.

## **6. Inclusion and Equality**

Other than the development of students and teachers capabilities, the involvement of equality is probably the most significant aspect of the inclusion system. Out of this correlation, inclusion has given rise to key principles on equality and special children. These principles state that students with special educational needs should not be treated differently from other pupils (this principle is particularly true as many children with SEN encounter difficulties during their education); the purpose and goals of education should be common for all students; if it is possible, students with special educational needs should have these needs provided through mainstream schools; in order to obtain these educational needs, mainstream teachers should take charge; in terms of decision-making regarding placement and school provision, students with special educational needs, together with their parents, should be involved; and that students with special educational needs should be evaluated accordingly.

The relation established between the principle of equal opportunities and special educational needs was further strengthened even at the international level by means of three important legislations formulated by the United Nations. Though it is known that other countries have not signed up or adhered to the conventions and rules of the United Nations, these legislations are still important and worth noting. For instance, Article 2 of the UN convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) specifically mentions disability and states that all rights shall apply to all children without discrimination on any ground, including those with special educational needs. In Article 23 of the same legislation, it was stated that education should be designed in a manner conducive to the child "achieving the fullest possible social integration".

In Rule 6 of 22 under the UN Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), integrated education was clearly defined as the vehicle for equalizing opportunities, noting that countries should ensure the education of people with disabilities is an integral part of the educational system. The statement written on Point 7 (p. 11) under the UNESCO Salamanca Statement (1994) invites countries to respond to a conceptual framework of action based on a direct commitment to inclusive schooling. Moreover, this legislation clearly states that, "The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles of and rates of learning and ensuring quality to all through appropriate



curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching strategies, resource use and partnerships, with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs encountered in every school".

These legislations then showed not only an increasing recognition of the rights that children with disabilities and special educational needs have, but a description, albeit in fairly abstract terms, of what inclusive education might look like. The Salamanca Statement acknowledges that schools must change if they are to genuinely provide equal opportunities for all pupils.

While it is not difficult to promote or stress on the importance of equality, putting it into practice takes extreme effort. Equality issues in relation to inclusion presents two main problems. One is that attaining total equality in practice is close to impossible particularly in group teaching situations. Another problem is based on the observation of Berlin (1997) wherein it is conceptually unintelligible that "Great Goods" or values such as equality can be combined with others. Isaiah Berlin cautioned people into believing that complete equality is attainable. He suggested that embracing this idealism may be dangerous as it will involve the overruling of other significant interests.

Without a doubt, such generalization is true and inevitable. Nonetheless, this does not necessarily suggest that inclusive schools should be disregarded. Rather, this correlation between equality and disability implies that educators, school administrators and parents should recognize that we have to adjust to certain dilemmas and difficulties within school and learning environments.

### **7. Inclusion and Psychology**

Based on individual needs, the psychologist's decision is what matters. If children with learning difficulties lack any progress on academic or social ability in mainstream schools, it is unnecessary to insist on mainstream schools or integration into regular class. With experts giving tests and attaining judgments, it is they who decide whether to stay in mainstream or move to special school. It is important that the parents should not intervene regarding this matter because it is the instinct of most parents to insist that integration will be better for their children. Many parents argue this issue forcefully, and may even go to court. This approach may at times not be sensible and could even be harmful for their children. The real question is not whether or not they insist that their children with disability go or not go to a special school, but whether or to not be negatively labeled or stigmatized.

Teachers will be in the best position to know and help promote the learning process of children. If parents ignore teacher's suggestions in these regards, it may give them the wrong direction for their children with disability. If most students are happy to make real progress at special schools, why are people insisting that human rights automatically require a push to be integrated? This is a kind of discrimination when not factoring in the children's individual needs; it is not fair as well. The provision shall be based on the flexible needs, as well as rights, of each child.

Labeling special school based on parent's concern is problematic on the values of our society. Why should children not go to special school if they need to? Our responsibility as educators is to educate people fairly and to understand the situation of students with disability. They need to have rights to choose what the best is for them.

### **8. Conclusion**

Based on the discussion and comparison of inclusion and segregation, indeed, certain difficulties may be encountered by letting children attend mainstream schools. However, considering the positive impact of inclusion, inclusion appears to be an educational system worth striving for. The concept of inclusion may have its own set of drawbacks. Nonetheless, such disadvantages can be resolved primarily through effective training of educators (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000). In several surveys, the significance of training has been overly stressed (Bowman, 1986; Center and Ward, 1987; Leyser et al., 1994). Not only does training enhance the capabilities of teachers, more importantly, training facilitates the establishment of positive attitude towards inclusion. Such a generalization was proven by the findings gathered by Beh-Pajooh (1992) and Shimman (1990). People involved in the students' learning environment, particularly the educators, school administrators and parents, should coordinate with one another towards their children's better development. Furthermore, educational systems should not be constricted to norms and established practices. Rather, education should be adapted based on the needs of the children and correct conceptualization of their disabilities.

The final decision whether or not to place special needs students in mainstream schools must be made after careful consideration of all concerned participants: teachers, parents, school administrators, students, as well as the society at large. All stakeholders must have full input: Without all fully participating in the process, a less than optimal outcome for the special needs student may occur resulting in lower academic achievement than what otherwise could be obtained. History is filled with examples of those who have overcome extraordinary disabilities to achieve greatness. We must all do our part to help them on the path to achieve to the best of their abilities.

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## On the Cultivation of Innovative Talents in Colleges and Universities

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### Abstract

It is the sure pursuit for the Colleges and Universities to cultivate the innovative talents for the society. The cultivation of innovative talents in Colleges and Universities plays a crucial role not only in economic and social development, but also in schools' and personal development. The internal quality of innovative talents includes the spirit of innovation, creativity and innovative personality. What constrains the cultivation of innovative talents includes the quality of students, the policy level, the educational practice and etc. It needs the policy, school leaders and teachers to make more practical efforts to promote the cultivation of innovative talents.

**Keywords:** Innovative talents, Connotation, Higher education, Cultivation

### 1. Introduction

Higher Education plays a vital role for national economic and social development. It is through the cultivation of innovative talents that the value of higher education can be showed. There is no doubt of taking human-cultivating as the essence of education, but what kind of talent should be trained has been a contentious issue. With the realization of the popularization of higher education, more and more people began to pay attention to the issue that what kind of talent should be trained. Whether one hold a clear concept of it or not has a significant impact in practice. We believe that it is the sure pursuit for the Colleges and Universities to cultivate the innovative talents for the society.

Different people have different ideas about the cultivation of innovative talents. Recently, there are more and more scholars begin to pay attention to it. Initially, Tanjing, Li Chunmei did their research on the cultivation of the innovative talents in the field of English and sports, trying to find the effective way of training the innovative talents. Chen Xiaocan, Hu Jiao'e expressed in their essay "On the Environment to Cultivate the Innovative Talents" that the proper environment guarantee the innovative talents doing their best, which provides a valuable reference for the colleges and universities to create the environment. Yang Chunqiao focused on the basic quality that the innovative talents should have. He believes that creative talent should be able to perform some intelligent quality, cultural quality and health quality and discussed these aspects in detail. Mr. Zheng Wenli discussed how to cultivate the college students' creative quality from the knowledge, management and several dimensions of innovation. Liu Keli, Xie Zaigen, believed that to cultivate the innovative talents, the colleges and universities must correctly handle the relationship between knowledge, ability and quality; the school must reform the teaching content and methods, in particular, the school must reduce the total amount of teaching content, increase the forefront knowledge and relatively academic knowledge, strengthen the cultivation of the spirit of science and academic education methodology; the school must strengthen the cultivation of practical abilities, give full play to the role of non-intelligence factors, create an environment of innovation and so on. Wang Peng thinks what the first thing in the way to cultivate the innovative talents is: to liberate the mind, to update the concepts and to reform the teaching methods. These arguments all have their own unique, but not comprehensive enough. When talked about the cultivation of innovative talents, the above scholars either focus on a professional area or to talk about the cultivation of innovative talents only from the teachers' side or the students' side. Indeed, the cultivation of innovative talents is a complex system, it involves all the aspects of education which is difficult to cover them all. What is innovation in this paper shows in the following aspects: the author gives the significance of the cultivation of innovative talents; shows the connotation of innovation; explains the current constraints in higher education that affect the cultivation of innovative talents; and offers the training strategy for the innovative talents. There are a systematic elaboration on the cultivation of innovative talents in this paper, may it be of help for the later research.

## 2. The significance of the cultivation of innovative talents.

Being an educational concept, the cultivation of innovative talents has the leading value for the training practice which can be showed in the aspects of social development, school development and personal development.

### *2.1 The cultivation of innovative talents plays a supporting role for the economic and social development.*

Comrade Jiang Zemin once said: "Innovation is the soul of a nation, is an inexhaustible motive force for national prosperity", "Without the creativity, it is difficult for any nation to survive in the world's advanced nations." Since World War II, the world's economic and social development can be summed up in three categories: Resource-dependent, Import-dependent and Scientific and technological innovation. China is a country with a large population, the population factor in economic and social development is both a positive factor and a negative factor. From the negative factors, due to its large population and the relatively less per capita resources, the development that totally depends on the resources will lead to inadequate capacity for sustained development. On the positive side, it will offer a solid foundation for sustainable development of our country if the large population can be transferred into human resources. It is the higher education that takes the duty of training human resources. Hence, the cultivation of innovative talent can enhance our country's scientific and technological innovation capacity, make a better use of the limited resources, and gain the country an invincible position in the international competition so that China can stand tall in the world.

### *2.2 The cultivation of innovative talents plays a positive role for the development of colleges and universities.*

In the era of popularization of higher education, the survival and development of colleges and universities is a serious issue of concern. The school quality and characteristics have a decisive impact on the school's survival and development in this increasingly competitive era. It is the quality of personnel training that value the school's quality and characteristics. And it is whether the school can cultivate the innovative talents that value the school's quality of personnel training. If a school can take training innovative talents as its basic philosophy, it would try to embody the innovation training in all the school practice. The innovation in the teaching model, the innovation in the personnel training program will create an innovative atmosphere of the campus culture, play a direct and indirect impact on the development of students and make the school full of vigor and vitality. From the talents' view, which is the production of education, graduates of the school is the brand of the school, the more achievements can the graduates make, and the more successful the school will be. It can be said that the cultivation of innovative talents has a decisive impact on the survival and development of higher education. On the opposite side, the school-trained people who has less innovation means the school which has no characteristics that its survival and development is a problem worth considering in this increasingly competitive era.

### *2.3 The cultivation of innovative talents is in the line with the development of human-beings.*

From the individual part, a person's development is an inevitable trend, which has differences in the direction, speed, and the net result. Everyone has the needs for self-actualization, and everyone desires to maximize his potential development to make an ideal self. The quality of the potential innovation means much for the development and realization of his potential. We can find in the real life that the innovative talents can always choose the different lifestyles and get extraordinary development. Higher education is the education to help people get ready for going into the society and giving full play to his own value. That how to make higher education are better adapted to the community and contribute to the society are the questions that the colleges and universities face.

## 3. The meaning of innovation.

Colleges and universities should take the cultivation of innovative talents as its educational mission, which is also the key points for the Colleges and universities to concise its characteristics. However, in the cultivation of innovative talents, what should be made clearly is that what kind of talent is creative talent, what characteristics creative talents should have.

Innovative talents, based on the views of Mr. Guo Wenan, should refer to the talents who have the spirit of innovation, the ability to innovating and the innovative personality. What is innovation? It refers to make new development, new breakthroughs on the original basis". The innovative talents are always good at break the routine and are good at discovering the problems, analyzing the problems and solving the problems. The quality of innovation is the base of innovative achievements. The quality of innovation can be seen from two aspects: One is dominant quality, which is the external quality that can be showed by new concepts, new ideas and new achievements; the other is hidden quality, which can be showed as the psychological characteristics that being the basis for innovation and restricts the activities of innovative activities.

In the practice of personnel training in higher education activities, the school always takes cultivating people's inner qualities as the goal, therefore, this article describes the quality of innovation mainly from the perspective of internal quality. The inherent quality of creative talents includes three aspects: the spirit of innovation, innovative ability and innovative personality.

### 3.1 *The spirit of innovation.*

According to "Modern Chinese Dictionary", the "spirit" is the human consciousness, thinking and the general state of mind. "Innovative spirit" means the integrated use of existing know ledges, in formations, skills and methods to give new solutions and the awareness, confidence, courage and wisdom to invent and reform. As a subjective power, the spirit of innovation has stability and plays a leading role in one's mental activities and practical activities. In particular, the spirit of innovation includes the following:

3.1.1 Unwilling to be mediocre, the spirit of pursuing the excellence. As a spiritual force, Unwilling to be mediocre, having the spirit to pursuit the excellence is a driving force for innovative activities. It is difficult for anyone who always seeks to preserve the status quo to be creative.

3.1.2 The spirit of abandoning the old novelty. In real life, we are always surrounded by the things we had already had. Keeping the old can also be a way of life as a choice, but to choose such a lifestyle, a person will lose the basis for the creation of a new life. Innovative people, will tread the surroundings and the traditional culture with a critical attitude, they know what they should give up, what they should pursue, such as the pursuit of new knowledge, new-born things.

3.1.3 The spirit of independent thinking. The people with the creative spirit will not be parroting, they will maintain their own independent thinking and their own independent charging.

### 3.2 *Innovative ability.*

Innovative ability means the ability to innovate. It is the core elements of the innovative talents' quality. It mainly includes "The creator's re-processing capacity, general working capacity, practical ability and the ability to operate innovative techniques as well as show innovation capacity"<sup>[1]</sup> Innovative thinking is the basis of the innovation capability's formation, development and performance. It is the key point to realize the creative action and to show the exceptional achievements of the creative action. The concern about the training of the students' ability to innovate takes a positive effect to the growth of students and helping the students to engage in social professional activities. It can make the work of creative, solve problems, and give direct impact on the outcome of the show. Therefore, among the various activities in colleges and universities, the important part to improve the quality of university education is taking the training of innovation capability as the core.

### 3.3 *Innovative personality.*

Innovative personality is the personality of the creative talents, and it is an important psychological foundation for the creative action. The main elements of innovative character include self-confidence, courage, determination, the sense of responsibility and cooperation, strong interest, ration and so on. The formation of innovative features is closely related to the environment and the education that one received. The cultivation of creative personality is an important content in the higher education. The healthy personality is an important evaluation criterion of the school quality. And to develop the positive character itself is one of the goals in higher education. the development of the positive character has an important role in promoting the formation of spirit and all-round development of one's quality. Therefore, as one of the connotations, the development of the innovative personality has great significance to the overall development of the creative quality.

## 4. **The current constraints in higher education that affect the cultivation of innovative talents.**

There ought to be no doubt of taking the cultivation of innovative talents as the sure pursuit of higher education, but in China's current higher education activities, emphasizing the cultivation of innovative talents are of great significance. Because there are some constraints in higher education that hinder the practice of cultivating the innovative talents. If we can not change these factors, the cultivation of creative talents will be an empty promise. Constraining factors includes:

### 4.1 *Factors of students.*

Factors of students themselves are internal factors that constrain the cultivation of innovative talents. Factors of students themselves mainly exist in the relative lack of the creative personality and the creative thinking. The lack of creativity has much to do with the primary and secondary education. The exam-oriented education still plays an important role in China's current course of primary and secondary education. In the eighties, the exam-oriented education mainly exists in senior high school; to the nineties, the exam-oriented education has been extended to junior education, primary education, early childhood education and family education after birth. Early childhood education, primary and secondary education becomes the preparation for entrance exams for colleges and universities, which leads to the increasingly heavy burden on students. Although the party and the state has developed a number of measures, including vigorous curriculum reforms, to reduce the students' burden, yet the burden of students did not come down, they become heavier and heavier. Examination-oriented education has become an important measure to value the quality of education by thousands of households and even the local government. Against this background, the students are repeatedly deprived of time and space to develop their creative quality so that they could achieve excellent results in the

entrance exams for colleges and universities. In the learning content, the students are required to do much repeated training in order to deal with college entrance examination, which greatly suppressed the creative thinking of students. Therefore, the students lost the opportunity to develop their creative personality. That is why the students in universities always treat the study with the way that already formed and show a relatively low quality of innovation.

#### *4.2 The concept, system and practice of the cultivation of innovative talents in higher education.*

The concept of the modern university emphasizes on this three functions: education, scientific research and social services. These three function embodied in the quality of personnel training. But in the current educational practice of the Universities, there is a shortage of university philosophy. University philosophy is the understanding of the nature of university education. It is the understanding of university personnel training, values, functions, attributes and so on, which plays the guiding role in university educational practice. However, in China's current development of higher education, popularization of higher education goes too rapidly that the rational understanding of higher education does not kept pace with its development and many universities lost their direction in the process. The concept of pluralism, the relative chaos of education had a negative impact on practice. For example, some famous universities lost their university philosophy that has already formed which leads to the decline in the quality of personnel training; the major universities have forgotten their social responsibility of giving elite education and so on. In particular, when we talked of what kind of talents should universities and colleges train, many colleges and universities do not take cultivation of innovative talents as its basic philosophy to guide the educational practice. In the process of popularization, higher education gradually loses its pursuit and is confused by the noisy world. The university begins to pay attention to how to make money by turning itself into a vocational training institution instead of paying attention to how to cultivate the innovative talents and how to develop the school's characteristics. It is the teacher who gives the most influential affect to the students in their cultivation of innovation during the educational practice. However, in the management of university activities, there are a number of measures that is detrimental for teachers to develop their innovative quality. For example, scientific research is the most important indicator in evaluating one's professional title, there are too much emphasis on high academic qualifications and so on. It is difficult for the teacher who lacks of creativity to cultivate creative students.

#### *4.3 The factors of policy restrict the cultivation of innovative talents as well.*

In China, the administration of colleges and universities tend to be more powerful, which means the university looks like administration more and more. It will surely lead to the neglecting of the spirit of innovation. Administrative intervention, especially the impact of higher policy shows more and more clearly. The most criticized aspects are: 1) English education. During this year's Congresses, many representatives pay much attention to college English teaching and learning and give the harshest criticism. English education in universities and colleges influenced higher education and the training qualification much. Students spend too much time to learn English that they neglect the professional learning and ignore the study of broad cultural knowledge which hinders the cultivation of innovation. Being a kind of communicating tool, English being paid so much attention shows the deficiency of policy. Many students learn English from the point of Utilitarian, and many students lost the passion for learning because of their failure in English learning, this perhaps is not what the policy-makers expect to. 2) Undergraduate teaching assessment. The starting point of should be impeccable. It expects the undergraduate teaching assessment could promote the quality of higher education and to ensure that the popularization of higher education will satisfy the people. However, in the assessment, its meticulous and too mechanical requirements seriously hampered the activity of higher education. It even talked about the teacher's lesson plans, papers correcting and other technical aspects. These practices increase the burden not only on colleges and universities, but also on the teachers. Teaching creativity turns into a stereotype, which is no good for the students to develop their creativity. 3) Employment policy. The basic mission of higher education is to cultivate the creative talents, to train high-quality talents for the community. However, educational administrative departments pay special attention to the employment rate of colleges and universities. The employment rate of university is taken as one of the basic indicators of quality. Under the impact of employment policy, the school pays close attention to employment problems and has no time to think about the cultivation of students' creativity. Because the number of students who can go on post-graduate study is calculated as the employment indicators, together with a number of local colleges and universities' misunderstanding toward post-graduate study, many local colleges and universities become the training camp for post-graduate entrance exam. Teaching plan making, teaching materials selection and teaching arrangements are all made post-graduate study as the center, as a result, students has relatively narrow field of vision and relatively lack of innovation capability.

### **5. The training strategy for the innovative talents.**

Innovative talents training is a systematic project, it need external conditions and internal factors to work together to create an atmosphere of innovation. It can be explained from the following aspects:

### 5.1 Drawing up the policy that is helpful for innovative talents cultivation.

Higher education in China are influenced much by Chinese relatively centralized political system, so drawing up the policy that is helpful for innovative talents cultivation will be very important. In the formulation of policies, we should minimize the negative effects of policy, try to foster an atmosphere that encourage the cultivation of innovative talents in higher educational practice.

### 5.2 Universities and colleges should have a clear idea of the cultivation of innovative talents.

As managers of institutions of higher learning, whether they have clear ideas of teaching management has a direct impact on the development of schools. Take Mr. Cai Yuanpei, Mr. Mei Yiqi as examples, their concept for the University did much to the development of Peking University and Tsinghua University. Therefore, the school managers should have clear plan about how to cultivate innovative talents and institutionalize the way of cultivating innovative talents.

### 5.3 The key to strengthen the cultivation of innovative talents is to strengthen the building of the ranks of teachers.

High-qualified teachers are the guaranty to the school quality and the cultivation of innovative talents. At present, school managers all realized the importance of owning a high-qualified teaching staff. Through internal and external training, basically the various colleges and universities have formed a teaching staff of reasonable qualifications, professional title and age. The school administrator should realize the creativity of the teaching staff is as important as well. Only the creative teacher can cultivate the creative students. Teachers are not only set examples for students, but have much influence on the students' creativity through a variety of activities, methods and means. Therefore, school administrators should pay attention to develop the teachers' innovation and encourage the teachers to give more teaching reforms and create a more free environment for the teachers to do their teaching and research.

### 5.4 The system to develop the students' creativity should be established and be improved.

The principle of creativity is "Everyone has the creativity, the level of creativity can be enhanced by training" Every student has a huge potential of creativity. The university should help the students to release their potential and further improve their creativity. The university should not only make an atmosphere to encourage the students' creativity, so that every student believe in himself and has the ambition for success; but also hold a wide range of activities to mobilize the enthusiasm of students, so that their dream can be a reality. For example, the school can organize innovative competition and setup a research fund to promote innovation and so on.

## 6. Conclusion

At present, economic globalization and the knowledge-based economy is coming, the countries around the world are faced with fierce competition. Competition between countries, in terms of economy, or technology, fundamentally speaking, is the competition of talents. To foster the cultivation of innovative talents has become the primary task of universities and colleges. The paper talked about the significance of the cultivation of innovative talents; showed the connotation of innovation; explained the current constraints in higher education that affect the cultivation of innovative talents; and offered the training strategy for the innovative talents. The connotation of innovation is a complex social engineering. The universities and colleges should take the cultivation of innovative talents as the highest goals, strengthen the theoretical study and practice, speed up the educational innovation and make their contributions to promoting our country's scientific and technological progress and the development of a knowledge-based economy in the 21st century.

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## Food Safety Attitude of Culinary Arts Based Students in Public and Private Higher Learning Institutions (IPT)

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### Abstract

Food safety issue is not new in Malaysia as problems such as unsafe food handling, doubtful food preparation, food poisoning outbreaks in schools and education institutions and spreading of infectious food borne illness has been discussed by the public more often than before. The purpose of this study is to examine the food safety knowledge and attitude of culinary based students from four (4) public and private higher learning institutions (IPT) with prior knowledge on food safety, hygiene and sanitation. The study involved a total of 114 group administered questionnaires that were usable and coded comprising of 34- questions assessing their knowledge and attitude on food safety. The research finds that higher learning institution's students who have prior knowledge on food safety partly do not represent their attitude towards food safety although their correlations recorded moderate positive relationships especially on personal hygiene practice ( $p=0.07$ ,  $r=0.42$ ) and keeping food at safe temperature ( $p=0.17$ ,  $r=0.36$ ). On the other hand, their knowledge in avoiding cross contamination ( $p=0.00$ ,  $r=0.50$ ) and avoiding food from unsafe sources ( $p=0.02$ ,  $r=0.36$ ) were positive and significant in influencing their food safety attitude. There were no significant differences among food safety knowledge and attitude based on the students' demographic profiles. The results urged for more improvement in both knowledge and practice of food safety among students in public and private higher learning institutions towards recommended food safety standards and positive attitude in food preparation process.

**Keywords:** Food safety, Knowledge, Attitude, Food borne illness, IPT students

### 1. Food safety historical issues

Food is a critical contributor to physical well-being and a major source of pleasure; worry and stress (Rozin, Fischler, Imada, et al., 1999). As a result, more stringent quality control is a must in the food industry, and customers' confidences are more dependent on the quality assurance promised by the food provider. One of the required outputs is to ensure that the food produced is safe to be consumed. Food safety has been defined as the conditions and measures that are necessary during the production, processing, storage, distribution and preparation of food to ensure that it is safe, sound, wholesome and fit for human consumption (World Health Organization [WHO], 1984). Food handlers neglecting the basic rule of food preparation such as mishandling and taking for granted hygiene practice contributed to the outbreaks of food poisoning. Common mistakes identified include serving contaminated raw food, cooking or heating food inadequately, obtaining food from unsafe sources, cooling food inadequately and having infected persons handle implicated food or practice poor hygiene (WHO, 1999).

Reported number of cases in Malaysia for the first month of 2008 alone showed that it is an alarming issue with 257 cases of food poisoning as compared to only 34 cases for the same period in 2007 (Ministry of Health [MOH], 2008). Most researchers have one common understanding regarding food safety education; most feedback gained is based on self-reported questions (e.g. Lynch, Elledge, Griffith & Boatright, 2003; Walczak, 1997). However, observational studies indicate that errors in food handling are more common than reported on questionnaires (Medeiros, Hillers, Gang, et al., 2004). Manning and Snider (1993) revealed that there were deficiencies in attitudes, knowledge and practices in safe food handling among food handlers. Therefore the core knowledge of food handlers may come from the root of the problem. Students/graduates who attended courses relating food hygiene and sanitation play a major role in determining the level of awareness among food handlers in the industry to-come. Previous research has been done on this topic but little efforts were found focusing on students' knowledge and attitudes towards safe food handling especially in public and private higher learning institutions (IPT) in Malaysia.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Food safety knowledge

Knowledge is associated with current practices, which in turn affects willingness to change current practices if it is learned that current practices are unsafe (McIntosh, Christensen, & Acuff, 1994). However, actual food handling practices are known to differ from self-reported practices (Jay, Cormar, & Govenlock, 1999). This is important as studies by Evans, Madden, Douglas, et al. (1998) have shown that the main factors responsible for the outbreaks of food poisoning in England and Wales during 1992–1994 and 1995–1996, respectively, were inappropriate storage, inadequate cooking or reheating, and cross-contamination. Particular attention should be given to the importance of time and temperature control, personal hygiene, cross contamination, sources of contamination and the factors determining the survival and growth of pathogenic organisms in food (WHO, 1988; Goh, 1997). These are the factors that can double the effect of an outbreak.

Zain and Naing (2002) in their study showed that food stall had four times significantly higher odds of having poor knowledge. The main reason of this was food handlers who involved in food stall/hawkers activities were not all registered with local government, had low level of education and were not trained (Zain & Naing, 2002). Manning and Snider (1993) further concluded that assessment of workers in temporary public eating places revealed deficiencies in attitudes, knowledge and practices in the areas of cooling/reheating, temperature control and cross contamination. Sockett (1995) points out that many people do not know the basic rules of food hygiene. In contrast, surveys conducted in 1986 and 1995/1996 illustrated that respondents did know which foods were at high risk from food poisoning, but knowledge about how a food could be made safe to eat was limited (Raab & Woodburn, 1997). Many program planners believe that by enhancing knowledge or altering attitudes, they can induce behavioural change (Shaw, 2003). Numerous studies document that education alone may not result in behavioural change, and that to change most complex behaviours, multifaceted approaches are needed (McKenzie-Mohr & Smith, 1999).

#### 2.1.1 Personal hygiene

Research carried out from 1998-2000 showed that in 100 reported food poisoning outbreaks, the vast majority were attributed to inadequately trained staff (Food Safety Authority of Ireland [FSAI], 2001). This represented an improvement on the situation found by Tebbutt (1992) eight years earlier when 22 per cent of food businesses had failed to train managers or operatives in hygiene. Poor personal hygiene causes more than 90% of the food safety problems. Statistics showed that improper hand washing alone accounts for more than 25% of all food borne illnesses (Weinstein, 1991). Proper hand washing includes using water at least 100°F, applying enough soap to build a good lather, vigorously scrubbing hands together for a minimum of 20 seconds assuring that you scrub under your nails and between fingers, rinsing thoroughly under running water, and drying with a single use paper towel or warm air dryer (Snyder, 1998). Hand washing should always be completed after using the restroom; touching raw foods; touching the hair, face or body; sneezing, coughing, or using a tissue; smoking, eating, or chewing gum or tobacco; handling chemicals; taking out or handling trash; bussing or cleaning a table; touching clothing or aprons; and touching anything else that may contaminate hands (National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation [NRAEF], 2004).

Manning & Snider (1993) found that some personal hygiene and handling practices of workers did not support their knowledge and attitudes about hygiene and cross contamination. Even though the workers indicated frequent and thorough hand washing to be important, only one person was observed washing their hands, including workers handling food and money. As Chatterjee (2005) highlighted that unsafe and inefficient practices followed by food manufacturers were due to unhygienic practices and lack of personnel hygiene knowledge. A study in the U.S. suggested that improper food handler practices contributed to approximately 97% of food borne illness in foodservice establishments and homes (Howes, McEwan, Griffiths, & Harris, 1996). Education, training, and the development of food safety certification examinations are key components in the process of ensuring that food handlers are proficient in and knowledgeable about food safety and sanitation principles (Jacob, 1989).

### 2.1.2 Cross contamination

The transfer of germs from one food items to another is called cross contamination. Approximately 10 to 20% of food-borne disease outbreaks are due to contamination by the food handler (Zain & Naing, 2002). The common cause of cross contamination in the kitchen is because of contaminated hands and equipments used to prepare cooked and raw food at the same time. Cross contamination can also occur when uncovered raw foods are stored directly adjacent to or above ready-to-eat foods in a refrigerator or other holding equipments. In a recent review (Djuretic, Wall, Ryan, et al. 1995), cross-contamination was identified as an important contributory factor in 36.3% (147/405) outbreaks of food-borne disease. It is generally accepted that the hands of food handlers are an important vehicle of food cross-contamination and that improved personal hygiene and scrupulous hand washing would lead to the basic control of faces-to-hand-to-mouth spread of potentially pathogenic transient microorganisms (Allwood, Jenkins, Paulus, et al., 2004).

The food preparers' hands have been cited as the main factor or a contributory factor in up to 39% of domestic food poisoning outbreaks (Ryan, Wall, Gilbert, et al., 1996). Scott and Bloomfield (1990) identified the ability of the test organism *S. aureus* to cause cross contamination for up to 24 hours via the fingertips. The draining board and the counter-top showed the greatest frequency of contamination by the target microorganisms (Scott & Bloomfield, 1990). Food handlers often have little understanding of the risk of microbial or chemical contamination of food or how to avoid them (Hobbs and Roberts, 1993). A survey conducted by Williamson, Gravani & Lawless (1992) revealed that unsafe use of kitchen utensils were common. Their result showed that 37% of the survey respondents would only rinse the knife and cutting board used to cut fresh meat prior to using the same items again to chop fresh vegetables for a salad. On the other hand, 5% of the respondents would simply start chopping the vegetables with the same knife and cutting board. They summarized that only 54% would wash the knife and cutting board with soap and water prior to chopping the fresh vegetables.

### 2.1.3 Safe temperature of food

As explained by McSwane et al. (2004), controlling temperature of food cook is vital in assuring that food service establishment complies with food safety regulations. Food borne illness may be resulted from temperature abuse while preparing a dish. According to NRAEF (1999), time temperature abuse occurs when food has been allowed to stand for an extended period of time at temperatures favourable to bacterial growth. McSwane et al. (2004) further added that the abuse of temperature also may be caused by insufficient amount of cooking or reheating time and desired temperatures that should eliminate the existence of harmful microorganism. The usage of devices in measuring food temperature such as thermometers, thermocouples and infrared reading is essential in determining whether the food were in the danger zone or otherwise (McSwane et al., 2004). Nott & Hall (1999) explained that the major purpose of cooking is to increase the palatability of food, the heating of many foods is essential to kill bacteria thereby increasing the foodstuff's safety and storage life. In practice, pasteurization and other sterilization processes require stringent assurance that all parts of the food product have been heated above a certain temperature for a defined period of time (Nott & Hall, 1999). Several studies have reported that poor holding and cooking temperature control was a main factor contributing to food borne outbreaks (Todd, 1997). Improper holding temperature of food also can contribute to the growth of certain bacteria through its spores because not all of these spores will be destroyed with heating processes (McSwane et al., 2004). Thus it is important for all food handlers to recognize their responsibilities in ensuring that all food prepared were monitored in every stages of its preparation.

### 2.1.4 Food from unsafe sources

In most countries of the South East Asian Region, laboratories with the capacity to detect common food borne hazards are rare, and where they do exist, the high cost of testing is an obstacle (DeWaal and Robert, 2005). Walker & Jones (2002) explained that the traditional food safety control approaches have tended to focus on the general appearance, structure and cleanliness of food outlets. However, these methods have failed to successfully deal with the problem of food borne illness and have paid insufficient attention to the factors which actually cause illness (Walker & Jones, 2002). Miles, Brennan, Kuznesof, et al. (2004) demonstrates the result where the participants were worried to some extent about all of the food safety issues with which they were presented, but there was a tendency for worry to be higher for those hazards related to the use of technology applied to food production (e.g. hormones, pesticides, antibiotics, genetic modification) in comparison to those hazards related to cost, diet, hygiene and other lifestyle issues (e.g. food poisoning, fat in the diet, food hygiene). Foods originating from an unapproved source or imported foods can influence the likelihood of an outbreak (Sato, 2007).

## 2.2 Food safety attitude

The responsibility of having positive attitude towards food safety does not only lie on the shoulder of the management team. Employees, students and even any food handlers should take their own initiatives to enhance their knowledge in the matter and profiling themselves to be more positive. Pilling, Brannon, Roberts, Shanklin, and Howells (2008) found

that employees perceive many barriers to implementing food safety programs. Employees noted that lack of time, training, and resources, along with employee attitude, availability of hand sinks, and inconveniently located resources were barriers to hand washing within a foodservice operation (Pilling et al., 2008). It is undeniable that not all of teaching institutions in the developing countries which involved in the culinary field is equipped with the proper and more manageable facilities. It is well-known that improving knowledge does not necessarily lead to changes in attitude or behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980). However, the gap between knowledge and behaviour is regarded as an affective dimension (Galli, 1978). Various studies have shown that the efficacy of training in terms of changing behaviour and attitudes to food safety is questionable (Mortlock, Peters, & Griffith, 1999).

A review of literature found only one research study that focused specifically on food safety knowledge of college students (Unklesbay, Sneed & Toma, 1998). Eight hundred twenty-four students in food-related and non-food related disciplines, in three geographic locations, completed a food safety questionnaire. Results indicated gaps in college students' knowledge. Students scored poorly when quizzed whether unsafe foods could be identified by the way they looked and smelled. Students also incorrectly indicated that unopened processed meats could be refrigerated long term without any risk of causing food borne illness. Only 50% of students were aware that older adults were more vulnerable to food borne illness than teenagers (Unklesbay et al., 1998). While focused on the challenges of obtaining a college education, many students eat whatever and whenever it is convenient. They may be unaware of proper food handling practices needed to avoid food borne illness (Yarrow, 2006).

A national food safety mail survey done by Li-Cohen & Bruhn (2002), which included college students/graduates examined consumer handling of fresh fruits and vegetables. Investigators concluded that college or post-college students were more likely to practice risky produce handling behaviour, compared to those with less formal education. College/ post-college students were also less likely to wash their food preparation surface before cutting produce, meat, poultry, and/or fish (Li-Cohen & Bruhn, 2002). Unklesbay et al. (1998) surveyed college students and found that students rarely check temperatures of their refrigerators and freezers. 20 Students also exhibited risky food consumption behaviours. An alarming 7% of the college sample consumed either raw fish or raw hamburger. Additionally, students consumed raw eggs (12.7%), unpasteurized eggnog (6.4%), and cookie dough (5.8%). When asked how they determined serving temperatures of leftovers, 24.3% of students indicated they relied on touching or feeling the food. Only 6% relied on temperature readings, and another 3% relied solely on microwave settings (Unklesbay et al., 1998). Based on the literature reviews mentioned above, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H1: Students' food safety knowledge positively influence food safety attitude.

H1a: Knowledge in personal hygiene practice positively influence food safety attitude.

H1b: Knowledge in avoiding cross contamination positively influence food safety attitude.

H1c: Knowledge in keeping food at safe temperature positively influence food safety attitude.

H1d: Knowledge in avoiding food from unsafe sources positively influence food safety attitude.

H2: Food safety knowledge and attitude scores significantly differ based on students demographic profiles.

### 3. Plan for data collection process

This research was conducted by gathering and obtaining the responses from students of higher learning institutions in Malaysia. It was conducted among the final year students of Diploma in Culinary Arts (or similar category) in each of the higher learning institutions. The reason for doing this is to narrow down the scope of the study to focus only to those students who have taken Food Hygiene, Food Sanitation or Food Safety course during their study period and had already undergone practical/industrial training. They represent four higher learning institutions with two were from public IPT and the other two were from private IPT. The sample size was amounted to a total of 120 students and group administered questionnaires method were employed. Questionnaire was constructed by adopting from the Wales Food Safety Attitude Battery (WAFSAB) by Coleman, Griffith and Botterill (2000). At the end of the data collection process, a total of 114 questionnaires were gathered, usable and finally coded. This represents 95 percent of the total questionnaires distributed earlier.

### 4. Results & analysis

#### 4.1 Reliability & validity analysis

Reliability of the instruments used was tested by running Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The result outlines that the alpha coefficient value for all variables in the study were from .66 to .85 accordingly. The dependent variable or criterion variable of food safety attitude had a high reliability coefficient of .85 with a total of 17 scale items. The independent variable or predictor variable of food safety knowledge showed that its dimensions of personal hygiene practice had a coefficient value of .67, avoid cross contamination with value of .78, keeping food at safe temperature with value of .68 and avoid food from unsafe sources had a reliability coefficient value of .66. The overall coefficient value of food safety knowledge had a reliability coefficient value of .70. The results also indicated that the reliabilities of the scales used in

this study were high and aligned with previous research (Coleman et al., 2000). It also demonstrates the internal consistency of a reliable scale (Table 1).

#### 4.2 Descriptive statistics & analysis

Table 2 shows that the distribution of gender had almost equal distribution with female respondents were higher with 58 respondents (50.9%). The rest were male respondents (49.1%). Total respondents from public IPT were 61 respondents (53.5%) and the other 46.5 percent were from private IPT. In terms of ethnic origin or race, Malays were the prominent race or ethnic group in the study with 94 respondents (82.5%). It was followed by 15 Chinese respondents (13.2%), two Indian respondents (1.8%) and other race with three respondents (2.6%).

#### 4.3 Pearson correlations of the study variables

Table 3 presents correlations among four dimensions of food safety knowledge and food safety attitude. Moderate relationships were noted; with the strongest relationship being between avoid cross contamination and food safety attitude ( $r=.50, p<0.05$ ). The other dimensions were having moderate significant correlations with food safety attitude such as personal hygiene practice with  $r=.42$  ( $p<0.05$ ), keep food at safe temperature with  $r=.36$  ( $p<0.05$ ) and avoid food from unsafe sources with  $r=.36$  ( $p<0.05$ ). The correlations among the four dimensions of food safety knowledge were slightly low but significant relationships with the strongest were between avoid cross contamination and personal hygiene practice with  $r=.47$  ( $p<0.05$ ).

### 5. Hypothesis Testing

#### 5.1 Students' food safety knowledge positively influence food safety attitude

The influences of the four dimensions of food safety knowledge on food safety attitude were explored and examined by using multiple regression analysis (as shown in Table 4). The coefficient of relationship ( $R^2$ ) of 0.35 showed that 35% of the variance in food safety attitude was explained by the four sub dimensions of food safety knowledge. Out of the four dimensions, only two were having significant influences on food safety attitude; avoid cross contamination ( $p=0.00$ ) and avoid food from unsafe sources ( $p=0.01$ ). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 (H1) was partially supported with only sub hypotheses of H1b and H1d were having significant influences on criterion variable (food safety attitude).

#### 5.2 Food safety knowledge and attitude scores significantly differ based on students demographic profiles.

The result from the independent-samples  $t$ -test which was conducted to compare the food safety attitude scores for public IPT and private IPT found that there was no significant difference in the food safety attitude scores. Public IPT recorded  $M=6.05$  with  $SD=0.58$  and private IPT ( $M=6.08, SD=0.66$ );  $t(112) = -0.21$ , with  $p=0.83$  (two tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference =  $-0.02$ , 95% confidence interval was between  $-0.26$  to  $0.21$ ) was very small (eta squared =  $0.00$ ). Comparing food safety attitude scores and gender of the respondents, it was found that there was no significant difference in scores for males with mean score of  $6.07$  ( $SD=0.69$ ) and females with mean scores of  $6.06$  ( $SD=0.55$ ) with  $t(112) = 0.06, p=0.95$  (two tailed). The magnitude of the differences in the means (mean difference =  $0.007$ , 95% confidence interval was between  $-0.22$  to  $0.24$ ) was very small (eta squared =  $0.00$ ). On the other hand, one way analysis of variance test (ANOVA) was computed to explore the impact of race on levels of food safety attitude. Subjects were divided into four race based groups (Group 1: Malay, Group 2: Chinese, Group 3: Indian & Group 4: Others). There was also no significant difference at the  $p<0.05$  level with  $F=1.12, p=0.35$ . Therefore, hypothesis 2 (H2) was not supported.

### 6. Discussion

#### 6.1 The relationship between food safety knowledge and attitude

Although several studies have shown a wide range of kitchen sites to be cross-contaminated by food preparation activities (De Boer & Hahne, 1990; Humphrey, Martin, Slader & Durham, 2001), this study proves that sufficient knowledge on avoiding cross contamination significantly influenced the students' food safety attitude. Proper preventive measures being taught to the students can create and develop positive attitude on food safety compliance. Preventive measures among them such as 1) always store cooked and ready to eat foods over raw products, 2) keep raw and ready to eat food separate during storage, 3) keeping all food-contact surfaces clean and sanitary, 4) avoid bare hand contact with ready to eat food, 5) keeping species of meat and poultry separate, 6) using clean, sanitized equipments and utensils for food production and 7) prepare raw and ready to eat food in separate area (McSwane et al., 2004). In this study, the students reportedly understand that these preventive measures are vital in ensuring that cross contamination can be avoided. Educating the student on the risk of contamination and source of it proves to be one of the contributing factors to positive food safety attitude. Risk of contamination can be educated to the students through interactive signage, labels and work manual or standard operating procedures in the kitchen.

Proper procurement and receiving procedures such as buying from approved sources, determine quality of food received and thorough checks upon receiving of goods were well understood. Although most of the process does not include the students and merely all of the process is being done by the staff of the institutions, students accept the fact

that the root of food borne illness starts from the receiving area. One of the most important rules is to reject any damaged and spoiled goods upon the receiving point. A lot of strict receiving and checking procedures were created and implemented by most food service establishment to check the condition of merchandise delivered. Among them is the physical check to see any foreseen damage, change of colours, smell and texture of the food. Next would be the grade of the merchandise whether it complies with the standard grade such as colour, weight, shape and appearance and overall quality. Perishable items usually come with an expiry date and items such as milk and other milk products such as cheese should be checked for its overall state to avoid receiving spoiled items. Same goes to fish and other seafood products, fruits, juices, vegetables and frozen items. Proper ventilated dry storage is important in making sure that canned, bottled and dry items are stored safely until the day that it is used. The implementation of FIFO (First In, First Out) method ensures that the earlier ordered foods are used first. Thus the students need to be alarmed as to ensure that the food is safe to be consumed. Food storage should be strictly apart from chemical storage as it may lead to hazardous contamination. Site visits and store inspection routines by the students will allow them to recognize potential hazardous contamination and storage violation. While there is concern about chemicals and other substance in food, microbiological contamination of food is the primary cause of food borne illness (Snyder & Poland, 1990). Well taught learning modules in the kitchen could not only prevent chemical contamination but also putting microbiological contamination as the biggest threat to the kitchen operation.

Although the result of this study indicates that personal hygiene practice and keeping food at safe temperature were not the contributing factors to food safety attitude, it does not mean that the students were not aware of its importance. Lack of supervision also can be a contributing factor to this notion. Pilling et al., (2008) found that insufficient number of hand sinks, resource location and attitude of the food handlers had restrained them from implementing food safety program such as hand washing. It seems that although knowledge is sufficient, physical facilities might be an obstacle in guaranteeing that proper food safety attitude can commence and reported. Green and Selman (2005) also found that there were a number of factors that impacted foodservice employees' ability to prepare food safely, including time pressure; equipment and resource availability; food safety emphasis by management and co-workers; and food safety education and training. Work culture in the kitchen facility also a predetermined factor that positive personal hygiene can be implemented or not. If the students were used to the culture of not taking care of personal hygiene, good knowledge on food safety would not make any difference at all. Good personal hygiene maybe is not being taught at the early age thus making it difficult to set a habit in the later age.

#### *6.2 The differences of food safety knowledge and attitude scores based on demographic profile*

College students who have taken courses relating to food safety such as nutrition and food science reported more food safety awareness and were more likely to report safer practices. In this study, it was found that there are no significant differences whether the respondents are from public or private IPT. This suggests that the same outline were used in the food safety education process by both types of institutions. Both IPTs plan on their educational outline based on the same goal; cultivating positive safe food handling knowledge, practices and behaviours among the students. Few researches reported differences in knowledge and attitude based on the respondents' demographic profiles such as gender and race or ethnic origin (e.g. Unusan, 2007; Albert, 1995; Bruhn & Schutz, 1999). But in this study, the results were contradicting to most of the researchers' earlier findings. Race or ethnic origin does not significantly impact the scores of food safety knowledge and attitude. Although most of the above said researches dictated that female respondents have more positive attitude on food safety compared to male, the result in this study proves it wrong; given the fact that this study recorded nearly equal distribution rate of male and female. Regardless of any different demographic characteristics of a food handler, improvement efforts through health education can be done to cultivate safe food handling behavior and practices.

### **7. Limitations & Future Research**

Several limitation noted in the earlier part of this research suggests more improvement and other recommended future explorations. The limited samples involved in this study have made it difficult for the researchers to generalize to all students of higher learning institutions. It would be worthwhile if future research can be undertaken by considering more variety of students' profiles such as their major of study. Future research can be done to explore the relationship between food safety knowledge level and attitude between health and hospitality major. Little participation by the higher learning institution also specifically limits the sample size. In the future, it is suggested that these kind of study which is known to have huge impact nationally, should be done as a national initiative and with collaboration from relevant government agencies such as the Ministry of Health or other related agencies. Involvement of the Malaysian Association of Hotels (MAH) can also be encouraged. Therefore, looking at the large participation and predicted impact, larger participation from the higher learning institutions are expected. Assessing students' beliefs and knowledge through self-reporting questionnaires limits findings on actual practices and behaviour of the students in actual kitchen setting. This notion suggests that a combination of various methods should be used such as interviews and observations to gain in-depth findings and more details insights.



## 8. Conclusion

The findings in this study is hoped to have offered some insights to the management of the institutions to better understand the continuous occurrence of food borne illness through lack of positive attitude in personal hygiene practice and keeping safe temperature of food in educational institutions including school, colleges and IPTs. The significant relationships between avoiding cross contamination and avoiding food from unsafe sources concluded that much attentions has been deliberately focused on the surface of the issue. Whereas the most important aspect that student should be aware of are the root of the issue. Basic hygiene practice can and proved to be the first line of defence against food borne pathogens. Temperature abuse is the first and major contributing factor of food borne illness. Current continuous occurrences of food borne illness in schools in Malaysia prompted the education management to focus on this issue more seriously. National initiatives should be highlighted and launched because the wide coverage by the media and news reports helps in delivering the message to those with little or no exposure on food safety education. It is important, therefore, to predict potential hazards and establish proactive control measures (Miller, Smith & Buchanan, 1998). The consensus among experts summarizes the need for food safety education as increased awareness of; 1) current and emerging food borne illness cases, 2) knowledge and consequent behaviours of proper food handling, and 3) the increased risk population (Wilson, 2002). Shiferaw, Yang, Cieslak, et al. (2000) noted that the media has given much attention to food borne illness and has strived to alert the public but much consideration have to be look into especially the demographic characteristics of the target audiences to ensure effectiveness. Cultures of certain race or ethnic origin may suggest positive or negative attitude towards food safety for example the culture of the Malays Muslims encourage its followers to use hand when eating thus exposing to more food borne illness risk. Same goes with the Indians whereas the Chinese are well-known to be using utensils such as chopsticks. Whatever methods of handling food are not important as long as they comply with the basic safe food handling practices. Early education is also vital in ensuring that future students will be more responsible of themselves especially in the food preparation process. Different environmental setting suggests different approaches in the demographic characteristics in implementing safe food handling practice.

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Table 1. Reliability coefficient values of study variables

Variables	Number of Scale Items	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient ( $\alpha$ )
Food safety knowledge		.70
1. Personal hygiene practice	4	.67
2. Avoid cross contamination	5	.78
3. Keep food at safe temperature	4	.68
4. Avoid food from unsafe sources	4	.66
Food safety attitude	17	.85

Table 2. Respondents' demographic and work profiles

Profiles	Categories	Frequencies	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	56	49.1
	Female	58	50.9
Race	Malay	94	82.5
	Chinese	15	13.2
	Indian	2	1.8
	Others	3	2.6
Type of Institutions	Public IPT	61	53.5
	Private IPT	53	46.5

Table 3. Pearson correlations matrix among food safety knowledge dimensions and food safety attitude

Scales	1	2	3	4	5	Mean	SD
1. Personal hygiene practice	-					5.24	1.44
2. Avoid cross contamination	.47**	-				6.03	1.22
3. Keep food at safe temperature	.43**	.38**	-			5.34	1.40
4. Avoid food from unsafe sources	.22**	.25**	.29**	-		5.49	1.32
5. Food safety attitude	.42**	.50**	.36**	.36**	-	6.06	1.12

The table outlined the correlation strength among the variables, its average mean and standard deviation.

N=114

\*\* $p < 0.05$

Table 4. Regression results of food safety knowledge dimensions and food safety attitude

Independent variable in the equation	<i>B</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	$R^2$ (F)
constant	2.39		4.84	0.00	0.35 (14.54)*
Personal Hygiene Practice	0.18	0.17	1.81	0.07	
Avoid Cross Contamination	0.26	0.08	3.40	0.00*	
Keep Food at Safe Temperature	0.09	0.12	1.40	0.17	
Avoid Food from Unsafe Sources	0.18	0.23	2.81	0.01*	

The table showed the beta, significance and regression values between both variables.

\* $p < 0.05$

Table 5. Food Safety Knowledge and Attitude Scale Items

<b>FOOD SAFETY KNOWLEDGE</b>
<i>Personal Hygiene Practice</i>
1. Smoking is prohibited in the kitchen
2. Always wash hands after coughing or sneezing
3. Physical hazards (hair) can cause illness
4. Take care of personal hygiene ensures safe food
<i>Avoid Cross Contamination</i>
5. Ready to eat food contaminated if not handled properly
6. Contamination occurs when mix raw and ready to eat food
7. Avoid bare hand contact with ready to eat food
8. Should not store F&B containers in ice served to customers
9. Walk in freezer should be clean to avoid contamination
<i>Keep Food at Safe Temperature</i>
10. Cold food should be below 5°C
11. Improper hold temperature factor of food borne illness
12. Food temperature danger zone are between 5°C to 60°C
13. Freezer storage practice prevent growth of bacteria
<i>Avoid Food from Unsafe Sources</i>
14. Check the source of food to ensure it is safe
15. Damage merchandise should be rejected
16. FIFO method ensures earlier ordered foods are used first
17. Perishable items should be fresh upon receiving
<b>FOOD SAFETY ATTITUDE</b>
18. I have to ensure cleaning supplies stored separately
19. I will ensure cleaning supplies stored apart from all food
20. I will make sure food are obtained from reliable sources
21. I always wear hair restraint while at work
22. Previously cooked food must be reheated
23. I should consider freshness of food during purchasing
24. I should be aware of cleanliness of food purchased
25. Should keep hot food hot and cold food cold
26. I have to ensure internal temperature of food are checked
27. I will make sure smoking is prohibited in food preparation area
28. I have to ensure service area is non smoking area
29. Food contact surface should be cleaned using sanitizing agent
30. Frequent hand washing is a must so food is safe to eat
31. My responsibility that frozen food be thawed
32. I will always ensure that knives are cleaned after usage
33. I am informed that knives should be sanitized after use
34. Thoroughly washing chopping board prevent cross contamination



## Higher Education Research Methodology-Literature Method

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### Abstract

Starting by a brief introduction of literature method, this paper raises the question of how to choose representative research literatures. For this question, Professor Hongcai Wang points out the root of this problem and the strategies to resolve it and provides the ways to choose representative literatures. Through analyzing and summarizing, this paper comes to a conclusion of "how to choose representative research literature".

**Keywords:** Literature method, Representative, Research literatures, Root, Strategies, Ways

### 1. Literature methodology

Literature research methodology is to read through, analyze and sort literatures in order to identify the essential attribute of materials. Its significant difference from other methodologies is that it does not directly deal with the object under study, but to indirectly access to information from a variety of literatures, which is generally referred to as "non-contact method." Literature materials are the crystallization of wisdom, are the ocean of knowledge, have important values for the development of human society, history, culture and research scholars. Education researches shall fully share information, conduct literature researches to grasp sources of relevant researches and scientific developments and to understand what our predecessors have achieved and the progress made by other researchers. However, in the ocean of knowledge of such a vast amount of information, how should we choose representative literatures?

### 2. How to choose representative research literatures

As we write dissertations, we often encounter the problem of what materials are representative literatures.

#### 2.1 The root of the problem.

According to Professor Hongcai Wang, the root of this problem, for researchers, is the lack of qualitative analysis of the literatures.

Zhenguo Yuan points out that "literature research methodology" include non-structured qualitative analysis and structured quantitative analysis. They access to and process information contained in literatures from different perspectives. Generally speaking, literatures are descriptions of the nature, functions and characteristics of objects. These qualitative descriptions seldom show the variable relationship of research subject, so researchers tend to apply logical reasoning to explore the logical relations among objects rather than the quantity relationship.

In general, qualitative analysis is to classify information contained in literatures, to select typical examples to re-organize and come to conclusion on the basis of qualitative description. The qualitative analysis of literatures has special values in distinguishing the past trends and forecasting future models.

Qualitative research of literatures does not focus on the quantity and completeness of literature materials. It focuses on personal literature researches and chooses small samples or characteristics of cases according to the interests of the researches and subject requirements.

Qualitative analysis is to study whether the objects under researches have certain nature or to study chance reasons and process analysis. The base of qualitative analysis is philosophy method. It compares the similarities and differences between things through reasoning, sums up the types of things and grasps the rules of things. The common reasoning process of qualitative analysis is as follows: what is the problem? What is the definition of the concept? What are the facts? What is the reason? What is the conclusion of the study? Qualitative analysis commonly applies seven methods, respectively: causal analysis, comparative analysis, conflicts analysis, the results and functional analysis, induction and deduction, analysis and synthesis and scientific abstract method.

#### 2.2 Strategies to overcome the problem

Professor Hongcai Wang provides three strategies to overcome this problem, to talk with scholars, to identify the grade of literatures and to enhance theory knowledge

After we have collected as many literatures as possible related to our research subject, we must sort them out and analyze to determine what representative research literatures are and what general references are. In the determination

of the representative literatures, several principles must be followed: One is purpose: Literature materials must be pertinent, valuable for the subject under research, are the theoretical base or background information of the research subject and are typical examples. Researchers could use these materials to find out the past trends and to predict future relevant to these materials. The second is. Authority: The author of the literature has reputation or is representative in this research field, or is academic leader, or authority editor of key discipline research bases, and has published articles in national famous magazines. The authority of literature can also be known by identifying how many times the literature has been cited. Under normal circumstances, only literature with authority could earn trust and be given references. The third one is effectiveness. Research materials are valuable for the research subject. The values are reflected through being good for abstracting, being beneficial for obtaining arguments, being conducive to the formation of research thoughts. Therefore, research data must be accurate, comprehensive, profound and typical, not out of date. The stronger the effectiveness is, the more likely the true scientific conclusions could be achieved. The literature then is representative. The fourth one is reliability: The reliability of literature includes authenticity of the literature and the reliability of the contents. When researchers refer to certain literature, they must first make sure whether these literatures are authentic, or fakes or modified, especially for historical documents describing issues. Because the formation time of them is far from our times, it is hard to determine its authenticity. After identifying the authenticity of literatures, we must also verify whether the facts or data recorded in the literature are reliable, such as whether the literature faithfully records the truth and whether the concepts and date in the literature and data are accurate, and so on.

Then, how to choose representative research literatures? The following ways could be applied.

#### 2.2.1 To interview scholars

To interview scholars and ask them to recommend representative research literatures is a rather direct and efficient way. For example, one of my teachers recommends us to read several books which are all valuable for education researches, which are *Encyclopedia for Education Researches*, *Education Researches Handbook*, and *Education Researches Comments*. These literatures are valuable for us to conduct education researches are representative.

#### 2.2.2 To identify the grade of literatures

Under the premise of identifying the grade of literature, we should first explain how to identify the authenticity of literatures. Methods of identifying literature include two ways, respectively, external audit and internal audit. External audit is to identify the authenticity of literatures. We should identify the authenticity of the version by comparing the book's presentation style with contemporary publications; On the other hand, we can also examine whether the contents of the book describe the facts that occur after the book is written since. We should also identify the authenticity of authors. Three ways are generally used. The first one it to analyze other works of the author to know the language styles of the author and then check whether the literature on hand has same language style. The second is to analyze whether the style of the literature is consistent. The third is whether the idea of literature and logical point of view is consistent. Internal audit refers to the identification of the authenticity of contents. Main methods include: first, mutual prove of words. If there are inconsistencies between the events described, we should verify it. Secondly, we could use real object to literature in words. We could check whether the text description is consistent with physical evidence. The third is to compare the contents of the documents with historical background to see if it's consistent with the contemporary political and cultural background. The fourth is to study of the life, point of view, basic thoughts of the author and the specific environment when the literature is formed to determine objectivity and tends of the author. In short, internal audit and external audit both make comparison to identify the authenticity of contents in order to collect quality literature.

To identify the authenticity of the documents, we can grade collected materials. According to the content processing ways, education literature could be divided into zero grade, first grade, second grade and third grade. Zero grade literature is usually called the first-hand literature and is the first description of events or experiences and is written by persons who experience the event and is the most primitive original documents, not published or modified, such as the letter, draft, discussion draft, or original record. First grad literature generally refers to works of the record of the incident, research results, new knowledge and new technology monographs, papers, investigation reports and other literature. Literature is also referred to as a secondary literature, is the evidence description reports or materials processed once by actual witnesses and participants in the events. It includes books, newspapers, periodicals, research reports, and government publications and so on. The second grade literature is also known as the retrieval of documents. It refers to literatures that process and sort books and papers to summarize the main points and to put them in system with some methods, such as the bibliography, titles, abstracts, indexes and other publications. Such documentation will be distributed in a systematic literature, entries. Third grade literature is also known as the reference literature. It systematically sorts the first grade literature and make summary based on the second grade literatures. Such literature is different from the original literature, and also different from the secondary literature. It has subjective nature and reflects the authors opinion on the first grade literature and is the comprehensive research results of many first grade literature, such as the dynamic synthesis of educational research, teaching thematic commentary, teaching progress

report, which is therefore called as the third grade literature.

### 2.2.3 To enhance theory knowledge

How to choose representative research literature? On this issue, we must not only master above-mentioned points; we should also study the fundamental theory knowledge of literature methodology. How are we going to collect the literature? To find valuable literatures for certain research subject in the vast literature ocean, we must master effective method to collect the documents. First of all, researchers should determine the scope and nature of the research subject and fix the direction of the search. Secondly, researchers must know education journals and periodicals both at home and abroad, understand domestic and foreign types of educational books, pictures, audio and video, electronic data and statistics overview and know from where could these materials be obtained. Finally, researchers must be familiar with literature index and directory classification method and master the basic skills of literature retrieval.

Then, we must sort and analyze the large number of literatures collected. How to handle it? The sorting of the literature refers to the process in which researchers conduct creative analysis, comparison and summarizing of literatures that are collected and are identified. Through this kind of reasoning, researchers form scientific understanding of research subject. The specific methods of literature sorting mainly apply logical analysis, judging, reasoning, synthesis and dialectical thinking, etc., to make fact judgment from the materials or to summarize some rules or principles to sort these materials.

After sorting literatures, we should analyze the literatures. As raised by Zhenguo Yuan, literature research methods include non-structured qualitative analysis methods and structured quantitative analysis. Non-structured qualitative analysis has been illustrated. Structured quantitative analysis is also known as content analysis. Content analysis is to systematically and objective quantitative literature contents and to make description. For example, when a reader wants to buy a book, he or she will first look at the directory, read an article and take a look at the keywords. These are a kind of intuitive content analysis. Some educators have conducted researches on *Education Science* by Kaiipob. It is found that Kaiipob mentioned "the transfer of knowledge" more than 100 times and only mentioned "the development of intelligence" only 10 times. Therefore, he put forward that Kaiipob's education science is a education science of imparting knowledge. This study is the use of the content analysis. The characteristics of content analysis are intuitive, objective, systematic, and quantitative. The nature of content analysis is to describe literature in words by data, which is good for formal hypothesis application, for scientifically sampling, and for the application of computers to do literature researches. Content analysis is mainly used in trend analysis, comparative analysis and intention analysis.

## 3. Summary

For the problem of how to choose representative research literatures, we make the following summary.

*3.1 To master fundamental theory knowledge, including qualitative analysis, literature grade identifying, literature collection methods, literature sorting and contents analysis.*

*3.2 To identify representative literatures based on fundamental knowledge*

3.2.1 The literatures written by experts or scholars from national key discipline research bases

3.2.2 Comment literatures used by discipline annual report or discipline development status meeting

3.2.3 Literatures written by discipline leading scholars

3.2.4 Literatures often cited

3.2.5 Literature of time effectiveness reflecting the current development of research fields

3.2.6 Comments by experts on relevant issues of literature and timely learn the authority of literatures.

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## Multiple Responses through Verbal Discourse in the Reading of Literary Texts

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### Abstract

The past decade has viewed the important role literature plays in enhancing the learning process among students in Malaysian English classrooms. However, most English teachers in particular are not prepared to teach literature due to the lack of training and exposure on the subject. This paper seeks to explore the ways teacher trainees from one teacher training institute attempt to provide multiple responses on two Malaysian short stories through verbal discourse. This qualitative study uses the transcripts from the audio recorded discussion among dyads to analyze the ways subjects respond to two short stories. Using a constant comparative method, recurring themes were lifted based on Newell's (1996) typology of responses. The findings of this study revealed that the subjects used four different types of responses, namely associations, interpretation, personal response and evaluation. These responses describe the subjects' maturity in relating their understanding of the literary texts besides the capability of making critical judgments and rationalization.

**Keywords:** Multiple responses, Literary texts, Meaning

### 1. Introduction

One of the most significant current discussions in the educational field is the role literature plays in enhancing students' learning. The importance of literature is debated by various stakeholders, namely, the teachers and parents at large. Since the incorporation of the Literature in English component in the English language subject in 2000 in secondary schools, English language teachers have accepted the role literature plays with mixed feelings. Often, not knowing how to approach literary studies in class, teachers treat teaching literary texts as another reading comprehension lesson (Vethamani, 2004). This has led students merely seek for information and memorize it for examination purpose. This impedes learners' personal engagement and multiple interpretations of texts which are crucial for the study of literature (Purves & Rippere, 1968). Hence, the aim of implementing literature in English component remains unfulfilled.

Vethamani (2004) urges for the rectification of the situation since the study of literature does not only focus on mere literal comprehension but the need to enjoy and experience them as well. Teachers who attempt to teach literature as a comprehension text impede students 'multiple interpretations' which are crucial in the study of literature. Quite often, these teachers seek for the one definite answer intended by the author of the literary work. This is one of the reasons why students find difficulties in making out the meaning of the literary works. What they failed to realize is that learning literary texts differ from other genre that normally requires factual information. Rosenblatt (1982) distinguishes the difference in terms of the emphasis placed by learners as they read. According to Rosenblatt (1982), learners might attempt to seek for factual information to be highlighted for examination purposes. This is known as the 'efferent stance' of reading (p.269). This is one common academic behavior emphasized in the Malaysian schools as a license to further their studies in higher institutions.

Another concern deals with the 'correctness' of the interpretation of the literary works. Learners generally avoid participating in a literary classroom for fear of giving the wrong interpretation. What they failed to realize is that 'correctness' should not be seen as a warrant for understanding literary texts. Misinterpretation by learners should be seen as a necessary part of reading that contributes to the learning process (Purves, 1988). This allows learners to create their own meaning of the literary works based on their own understanding. Learners' version of the interpretation should be seen as legitimate since it involves their personal engagement with the text (Iser, 1978). Therefore, there is a need



to allow learners to reflect their own literary experiences through literary works and to allow for multiple interpretations of the texts to take place. Based on these views, this paper seeks to look into ways learners attempt to achieve multiple responses from a dialogic discourse of literary text. This is seen as a crucial aspect in the study of literature in Malaysian context since no studies have look into the ways learners' respond to literary works.

## 2. Literature Review

A considerable amount of literature has been published on literary study. These studies have highlighted the important role literature plays in the enhancement of learners' knowledge. Earlier studies on literature focused on readers' role in literary experience. Richard's (1929) investigation on students' responses to poems identified among others their incapability of responding to the texts. For example, they relied heavily on already established critical opinions. On the other hand, Squire (1963) focused on the types of responses students produce when they read short stories. The author divided each short story into several parts and asked the students to read each section. This was followed by interview sessions to seek the types of responses students produced. The analysis of this study yielded seven categories of responses: literary judgment, interpretational, narrational reactions, associations, self-involvement, prescriptive judgment and miscellaneous. Other researchers have also attempted similar studies and identified several categories of responses. Among them, Purves and Rippere (1968) identified four categories for analyzing the content of responses through written responses: engagement, perception, interpretation and evaluation. These categories were further developed and expanded by Odell and Cooper (1976). Based on written responses on three novels by first grade above average students, four categories were identified by the researchers. These categories were similar to the ones proposed by Purves and Rippere (1968) but were refined by adding sub-categories. These are personal statements (about the reader and the work), descriptive statements (narrational and descriptive of aspects of the work), interpretation (parts of the work and the whole work) and evaluation (about evocativeness construction and meaningfulness of the work).

A similar approach was also adopted by Newell (1996) by using writing tasks to analyze students' responses to a short story. Forty-five 10<sup>th</sup> grade students were assigned to either reader-based or teacher-centered instructional tasks. The students wrote analytic essays responding to the short stories and completed three post-tests of story understanding. The results of the study indicated that students who received reader-based tasks attained higher post-test scores compared to students who received teacher-centered instructional tasks. Newell (1996) further identified six literary response statements which were similar to the ones identified by earlier researchers such as Odell and Cooper (1976), Purves (1985) and Squire (1963). The six types of statements are: descriptive (retelling of story and description of aspects), personal reaction (reaction to form and content), associative (references to writers' experiences and knowledge), interpretive (statements that go beyond what are found in the story and inference is made), evaluative and miscellaneous.

Probst's (2004) metaphor 'to build on shifting sands' best describes the way literature is approached in the Malaysian schools. Teachers are trying their best to deliver their lessons and students are straining their memory power to digest what is imparted in the classroom. This resulted in the lack of critical judgment and respond on the students' part.

The emphasis on memorizing facts for the examination purpose further hinders students' capability of using their thinking power to make evaluation and judgments. Bleich (1975) cautions for the need to read literary text in the form of a response for learning to take place. Furthermore, delivering personal response of literary works is not an academic behaviour taught by teachers to their students. Hence, there is a need to view literary texts through the aesthetic stance. The aesthetic stance requires learners to respond by using their 'lived-through' experiences with the short stories (Rosenblatt, 1983, p. 286). It focuses on subjects' perception through the senses, feelings and intuition (Rosenblatt, 1988).

Reader response is very much focused on students' responses to the text read that involves relating to their prior knowledge and personal experiences. Since these responses are 'individual and multifaceted', the end product results in various interpretations by different learners (Barr & David, 1996, p. 453). Mellor and Patterson (2000) believe that it is more productive knowing how and for what purpose each interpretation is constructed. This will enable learners to grasp a stronger understanding of the issues highlighted and relate them to their surroundings.

Unfortunately educators' emphasis on efferent stance in reading literary texts limits students' comprehension to merely searching for facts to satisfy the needs of the exam-oriented curriculum. Therefore, there is a need to balance between efferent and aesthetic stances to enable students to connect their experience of the real world to the literary texts.

Reader response theory can meet the needs and goals of the Malaysian National Educational Policy (MNEP) if students are allowed to see the values and significance of reading literary texts. MNEP emphasizes the need to produce individuals who are 'intellectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonic, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God' (KBSM, 2003). These aspects highlighted by MNEP are seen necessary in order to produce knowledgeable and competent Malaysian citizens which can be attained through learning literature. Reading literary texts is a journey towards self understanding. This can be achieved through the process of discovering various themes

that highlights the significant human issues. Indirectly, the reading process shapes their thought and gives a clearer view of the real world itself. This will guide the learner to be a better person who can reason between good and bad based on their social norms and cultural values.

The study on readers' response gained much attention after Rosenblatt (1970) introduced the transactional theory of reader response. She places the reader as an important factor in creating meaning of the literary text. The text consists of printed words by the author and is seen as a lifeless form. It is the reader who brings life to the text by relating the printed words to their experiences as shown in Figure 1. This allows for the negotiation of meaning to take place between the author and the reader, hence the transaction takes place where learners attempt to make their own judgment from their experiences and prior knowledge. This results in a new meaning understood by the reader. The learners' interpretation is seen crucial in the reader response theory that confers value on the text (Burnard, 1998). Rosenblatt (1982) addresses a few factors that support the emphasis on readers in creating their own meaning. Literature is viewed as a reflection of the real world. This allows for the reader to have their own perception of the real world based on their surrounding and experiences. Furthermore, different cultural background may influence the perception of the reader. Hence, multiple interpretation of the literary texts should be valued.

Iser (1978) proposes that literary works consist of gaps where learners are required to fill those gaps based on their understanding. Similarly, real life situation also consist of gaps or uncertainty which are not easily understood. Learners resort to fill these gaps with their experiences, values and beliefs. This leads to a variation of interpretation by different readers since different students react differently due to their background experiences (Anderson, 1991). Therefore, educators should forgo uniformity of interpretation among their students. Based on the framework described in this section, this study focuses on how teacher trainees respond to local short stories using Rosenblatt's reader response theory. Particularly, the study highlights teacher trainees' use of prior/personal experiences in providing multiple interpretations of the read texts.

### 3. Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature where teacher trainees' responses to two short stories were recorded through verbal discourse. The primary data collection consisted of dyads' recorded discussions on two local short stories. Each subject was given a week to read each short story followed by an audio recording session where the dyads will record their discussions of the two short stories. A comprehension evaluation sheet was used as a guideline for the subjects reading process (refer to Table 1). During the audio recording session, subjects were asked to discuss the short story by using a set of questions given by the researcher as a guideline (refer to Table 2). The recorded conversations were transcribed verbatim to identify the multiple responses of the subjects.

#### 3.1 Subjects

The subjects consisted of 96 teacher trainees from one teacher training institute in Kuala Lumpur. These trainees were enrolled for a B.Ed (TESL) degree programme and were in their second semester of their study. Literature was one of the components taught in the subjects' foundation programme. Furthermore, they were familiar with the literary component since they have studied literature in the secondary school. These subjects were paired at random to form dyads for the discussion sessions.

#### 3.2 The Texts

The study focused on two local short stories that shared similar theme which is on poverty. The first short story is 'Just a Girl' by Lee Kok Liang. This story surrounds on a traditional Malay setting. The state of poverty of one family is highlighted. The parents are burdened with a blind daughter and contemplate to send her away since they could not afford to look after her. The protagonist feels lonely and are longing for love. Her obsession with the moon becomes intense when she hears that the moon is lovely and kind. The story ends with the girl walking into the river in search of the moon.

The second short story 'Journey' is written by Shirley Lim. This story focused on a young protagonist from a poor family background. Her burden is highlighted when she has to buy medicine for her ailing mother. The protagonist's dilemma is further intense with the irresponsible father who spends money gambling with his friends. The story ends with the protagonist crying alone at night thinking of her fate.

The two short stories were selected for this study for various reasons. First, both stories reflect the culture the students are familiar with. Second, both stories focus on a young protagonist which students can relate to. Third, these stories require inferencing from the reader since they consist of gaps which entail critical thinking and interpretation by the reader. Since both stories have open-ended endings, readers' understanding and interpretation are tested based on their experiences and their ability to think critically.

The reasons mentioned above are seen necessary since one of the goals of the NEP is to produce life-long learners with high moral standards. This can be materialized if the selected texts allow for critical thinking to take place. Furthermore,

by introducing local texts, learners will be able to relate to their surroundings that allow for reasoning and justification to take place.

### 3.3 The Procedure

There were two steps involved in the collection of data for this study. In the first step, the subjects were given the first short story 'Just a Girl' by Lee Kok Liang. They were required to read the story and make notes a week before the recording session to familiarize the content. The audio recording session was conducted with each dyad discussing the story and allowing them to view their opinions. No time limit was set for the session. The same procedure was repeated for the second short story 'Journey' by Shirley Lim. The audio recording sessions were necessary to allow the researchers to gain students' multiple responses of the two short stories. The transcripts from the recorded discussions were obtained and analyzed. Using the constant comparative method, recurring patterns of aesthetic clusters were identified and labeled accordingly based on the six types of responses proposed by Newell (1989). However, only four types of responses were identified from the transcripts; associations, interpretation, personal response and evaluation. Table 3 shows an example of each type of responses found in the transcripts.

## 4. Findings

The findings of this study revealed the evidence of subjects' multiple responses by using four variations of aesthetic clusters. They are associations, interpretative statements, personal reactions and evaluation. These are discussed with examples in the section that follows.

### 4.1 Associations

Making association refers to the experiences and knowledge used as examples or illustrations of ones' understanding of the text (Newell, 1996). The subjects attempted to associate their understanding in various ways. This was achieved by using prior knowledge, personal experiences or intertextuality.

#### 4.1.1 Prior Knowledge

Subjects attempted to comprehend the text through prior knowledge. For example, excerpt 1 shows how the dyad unfolds a complicated phrase. The phrase 'her other body leaves' (line 5) seems illogical to be accepted by most readers without prior knowledge of the culture portrayed in the text. Dyad B's explanation based on her knowledge of her belief allowed dyad A to gain understanding to the complicated phrase. Similarly in excerpt 2, dyad A highlighted the word 'herbs' and was not sure of its' significance in the story. Dyad B uses her prior knowledge on her cultural belief and suggested that herbs could refer to a kind of medicine used to terminate pregnancy (line 4). She rationalized her answers by stating that the protagonist's mother could resort to abortion due to her state of poverty (line 9).

#### Excerpt 1

- 1 A For me I think erhm here this story, I find it interesting because erhm I found out something about the Muslim's belief where when you sleep you guys believe that right?
- 2 B Yeah, when we Muslim sleep, we believe that the soul the spirit like fly away from
- 3 A Like leave the body.
- 4 B Yeah like leave the body and will return back in the morning when we woke up. That's why we we like erh say erh we have the prayer to say thanks to god that we are still alive in the morning.
- 5 A This one right? When night she felt sleepy now. And then she knew her other body leaves, I think erh that's what it means.

#### Excerpt 2

- 1 A No idea about it. Maybe some herbs.
- 2 B Herbs or whatever. I think its some 'chung yeoh' something like thatlah.
- 3 A Some herbs. Twigs twigs and leaves.
- 4 B Herbslah. Cos like you know in Mandarin we have this Cantoneselah. (chung yeoh) is like if they eat it, sure they miscarry the baby one you know?
- 5 A Is it true?
- 6 B Yeah its something, its like herbs. I don't know people whether they are

still using this medicinelah but its like if you ate it too much, the baby will you will miscarry your baby. Something like thatlah.

7 A Maybe maybe she wanted to abort the baby because

8 B Because like birth controllah. Too many to many siblings, right? Too many children she has.

9 A And they are poor. Only have salted soup and fish to eat. Oh god I can't imagine that happening.

These examples indicate the maturity level of the dyad in connecting their prior knowledge of the issue discussed and relating them to make sense of the literary text. Making connections between what was discussed and personal experiences and perspectives is said to enhance learning comprehension and retention (Ballenger, 1997). Furthermore, talking about literature among peers has its benefits where learners are able to get insights, visions and views of the world perceived by their peers, hence leading to shared knowledge (Koay & Chiu, 1998).

From the examples given above, association is one form of aesthetic response from the subjects that associate or compare the issues or the characters of the short stories to subjects' experiences or prior knowledge. This allows subjects to move from interpretation of their experiences to reasoning out their understanding of the short stories. Furthermore, Rosenblatt (1970, pp. 30-31) views the reading of literature as bringing in 'personality traits, memories of past events' and 'present needs' for the understanding of the stories.

#### 4.1.2 Use of intertextuality

Intertextuality is another form of aesthetic cluster utilized by subjects to enhance comprehension. Intertextuality is a process of understanding current texts by means of previous texts (Wink & Putney, 2002, p. 132). This is evident in the subjects' discussion where they connected a previously learnt story to relate to the story being discussed. Examples of the use of intertextuality are shown in excerpt 3.

Subject A in excerpt 3 are questioning the significance of the title 'Journey' to the protagonist. In order to solve this curiosity, subject B relates the title of this story to another story with the same title (line 5). Both subjects are able to evaluate by means of comparing the themes of both stories. They finally agree that these two stories do not share similar theme since the plot of the stories are different. Through intertextuality, these subjects are able to rationalize and make their own judgment on the meaning of the story.

#### Excerpt 3

1 A What's your thinking?

2 B Ha ha I'm thinking about some... I don't knowlah why the title is journey?

3 A It very this story ah the journey very different to the other the journey

4 B Catherine Lim

5 A Yeah but if according to your idea that this is about her growing up then there is a connection because the journey by Catherine Lim is actually about how Richard made his decision is it?

6 B Yeah

7 A That modern little traditional whatever

8 B Or maybe this journey it talks about how the how the girl

9 A Go and buy the medicine?

10 B Ah he he he

11 A **Takkanlah** they named the title after that. **Hai** not sure.

12 B Oh oh no no actually I think a how along along along her journey to buy the medicine she she saw many many many thingslah like a woman what ah? About the passengers about the its it villagers ah

13 A So journey is about how she grew up.

14 B That's a good one.

Subject B in excerpt 4 manages to compare the character in the current story with another character from a story read previously (line 8). This link occurs when both subjects are curious about why the authors for both the stories did not

name their protagonists. Subject A manages to reason out by means of intertextuality that the author purposely introduced a nameless protagonist to depict the protagonist as only 'a simple' (line 7) and 'lonely' girl (line 8) .

#### Excerpt 4

- 1 A No names.
- 2 B I don't like story without names.
- 3 A Refer like that to the girl, the girl you know.
- 4 B Yeah. The girl is like a nobody, not important.
- 5 A Ah maybe that's what the author wants right?
- 6 B What?
- 7 A The story about a simple girl common, nobody knows. Its like a everyday life where can happen in real world.
- 8 B Same as Just a Girl , right? Nobody cared about her since she's just a simple girl, lonely, like this one.

The examples above show how the subjects were able to see the relevance of outside sources and relate them to the short story. This is one way subjects were able to explain their own understandings of the story. The process of making connections to intertextuality allows learners to organize and reconstruct their understanding of a story for themselves. This is one way transfer of learning occurred among the subjects. This is evident when learning in one situation influences that person's learning in another situation (Bigge & Shermis, 2004, p. 211). This allows the subjects to integrate their new knowledge into their existing knowledge base, therefore allowing them to understand and remember it better.

#### 4.2 Interpretive statements

Interpretive statements are associated with statements that go beyond what can actually be found in a story (Newell, 1996). This form of statement is usually based on inferences made from the text. Interpretive statements allowed subjects to not only understand what was between the lines but go beyond them. For example, in excerpt 5, the subjects are discussing the significance of the personification 'skulls smiled without friendship' found in the short story. Subject A's interpretation of the dream to the harsh life of the protagonist leads her partner to assume that the protagonist's dream foreshadows what will happen to the protagonist's family (line 2). This allows subject B to infer that the dream could foreshadow the abortion carried out by the protagonist's mother and that the skulls personify the unborn child as stated in line 10.

#### Excerpt 5

- 1 A Ah.... To take the parcel.....yeah, maybe ehrrm can you imagine eh when you facing the a harsh life and you suddenly you ... cannot accept it then it goes into your dream a hah you dream about it a hah everyday and night.
- 2 B I think the dream symbolizes what will happen next. So that night she dreamed that she sees a lot of things such as
- 3 A Skulls
- 4 B Skulls smiles without friendship and looking around
- 5 A Quite scary
- 6 B Ah yeah. That's why a hah.
- 7 A Maybe maybe the skulls symbolize that the dream symbolizes that ah....her mother will have an abortion
- 8 B Yeah, skulls smiled without friendship ah....they never know each other but they still smiled
- 9 A Ahah, hah
- 10 B Its like a symbol of her the ..she will have brother but her brother will be unborn

In excerpt 6, the dyad is discussing the reason for the protagonist's mother to bleed. Subject A's explanation is very detailed where she points out the protagonist's father as an irresponsible man, who has the habit of gambling, hence, neglecting his family. This leads the mother to take the sole responsibility towards the family (line 2). Therefore, subject

A infers that the protagonist's mother went through an abortion due to poverty (line 4).

Excerpt 6

- 1 B So ah...why do you think her mother is bleeding?
- 2 A I think because you know her father his father loves to gamble, so for me a person who loves to gamble who loves to gamble you know doesn't have a work, they just know they just know, they just want to take money from people. If you if you see in movies eh.. I don't think in movieslah, I read if who if a if man..
- 3 B If a father
- 4 A Yeah if a father loves to gamble ,for sure the family's condition is in you know in a ...its hard to say ..have a lot of difficulties, have a lot of problems because if a father loves to gambling to gamble gambling. Okay ah..probably a....most most of the man who loves gambling, okay, they are lazy at work and then they only know, if they are lazy, they only know to take money from their wife. So ah.. they become irresponsible okay and then ah.. the wife have to take..you know to take to take the you know to carry out eh responsibility responsibility

In excerpt 7 both subjects agree that the theme of the story could be on the women's role. They derive this point by inferring from some of the events that took place in the text. For example, subject B points out the fact that both the protagonist and her mother are women (lines 4 and 5) and carry heavy responsibility since they are 'overworked' (line 11). On the other hand, comparison is made to the male characters in the story where the brothers and father are seen playing (line 7). Both subjects came to the conclusion that the theme is about women's role in the society (lines 10 and 11).

Excerpt 7

- 1 A The theme
- 2 B The theme yeah
- 3 A Maybe about woman maybe
- 4 B Yeah because the girl and the mother both are
- 5 A Women
- 6 B The what women?
- 7 A The male characters in the story, the four brothers were playing in the street that's all they are doing. The father is playing the elder sister is the one looking after.
- 8 B Yeah
- 9 A The baby.
- 10 B Women, women's role
- 11 A Role in the society. The mother I think is overworked.

On the other hand, multitude of responses can also occur in different interpretation perceived by the subjects. For example, both subjects in excerpt 8 conveyed their different opinion on the theme of the short story. Subject A believes that the theme is 'about abortion' (line 3). She came to this conclusion by linking the author's background. On the other hand, subject B has a different view that the theme is referring to the protagonist's journey to maturity (line 10). She justifies her answer by stating the big role played by the protagonist in looking after her ailing mother (line 12).

Excerpt 8

- 1 A: The theme. Okay, from the story that we shared just now, I think the theme is about, yeah, when you woke up at night and you see your mother bleeding, a...from an unknown location it seems like and unknown parcel, when the what, background of Shirley Lim
- 2 B : Yes

3 A: She's a social writer I think. She always writes about social life and everything, so, I think it's all about abortion, you now

Later

10 B: Ah...okay, my theme, I think is different from you. I think the theme is ehm  
is like being a matured girl when you are not ready. Being matured  
matured girl. In this context a...the girl, a...had to take big  
responsibilities, okay

11 A: Okay

12 B: From a...where she has to fetch the parcel like you said, okay then ehm  
she when her mother was bleeding she's the okay, from what you have  
said, now I know why why the mother was bleeding. She's bleeding from  
the abortion and I think the parcel contains a ehm medicine. She has to like help  
look after her motherlah.

From the examples above, the capability of the subjects to predict the possible outcome of the abortion reflects their ability to comprehend likely outcomes beyond the story. This ability was stressed by one of the subjects who admitted that discussion helped her to see beyond the printed words. Furthermore, interpretation based on inferences is crucial in literary studies since the nature of literature is full of riddles which Iser calls 'blanks' or 'gaps' which need to be filled in by readers (1978, p. 8). This is supported by Mercer (2000, p. 147) who believes that one way of achieving understanding is by making inferences through interaction. Hence, inferencing is one form of scaffolding that enabled subjects to understand the literary texts.

#### 4.3 Personal Reaction

Subjects are also capable of providing personal reaction towards the characters found in the stories. For example, subject A views her personal reaction towards the protagonist's parents. She asserts that the parents 'should love her even if she is blind'. Subject A reacts to the story as if it is not fictional but happening in reality. She goes one step further by making a statement on how the character should act in line 3.

##### Excerpt 9

- 1 B I think the theme is about social injustice.
- 2 A Why social? Because she is blind?
- 3 B No you see, the way the parents want to send her away. They should love her even if she is blind.

In excerpt 10, subject B reacts personally towards the protagonist's father who is characterized as a lazy man in the short story. This leads subject B to emphasize the importance of a father's role 'as the leader' in a family by taking 'full responsibility' towards the family (line 1). Based on the personal reaction given by subject B, subject A suggests that 'a balance of responsibility between husband and wife' is essential for a happy family (line 2).

##### Excerpt 10

- 1 B I think yes. In my opinion, the man must lead. Is the leader of the family. And must take full responsible to take care and raise to take care of the children and erh help the children well raise up. And to help them get to school to get proper education , to get proper food and erh basically as the leader of the family must erh take full responsibility.
- 2 A So can we say that the story is trying to say that there should be a balance of responsibility between husband and wife?
- 3 B Ya, that's what I believe.

In excerpt 11, subject A's strong emotional feeling is expressed in lines 1 and 3 when she states that the protagonist's mother's reaction is immoral. She further gives a personal statement in line 3 when she states 'her mother should think first before she do something'. This personal statement on how people should act is identified as a 'personal reaction statement', where one reacts to the content of a text (Newell, 1996, p. 170). This is further supported by Miller and Dungwall (1997, p.290) who view literary discussion as crucial in 'developing students' self-conscious reflections'.

## Excerpt 11

- 1 A Since killing is one of the most heavy criminal and ah very unmoral
- 2 B Immoral
- 3 A Immoral thing. I think her mother should think first before she do something.

There are so many alternatives in order to solve a problem actually.

The assertion of personal reaction by the subjects in the literary discussion enabled them to see the relationships 'between the texts of their own lives and the lives of others who are like them as well as different from them' (Rogers, 1997, p. 109). The venting of personal feelings prompted by the short story played a prominent role in the subjects' responses to help them enhance the meaning of the story. Subjects were able to relate to the text in a truly empathetic manner. It also enabled subjects to relate to the real life. Loban et al., (1969) believe that literature gives a balanced perspective in which through different emotional responses, one may accept or reject the compassion offered by the literary text.

## 4.4 Evaluation

The ability of making evaluation of the story is evident among the dyads. For example, in excerpt 12, subject A manages to highlight an issue from the story which is on abortion. She stresses the illegality of abortion and that there should be another option available to solve the problems faced by the protagonist's mother. In excerpt 13, subject A focuses on the role of men in a family. She stresses that the author has highlighted the burden carried by women in raising a family and that men need to play an equal role, as well.

These two examples show how evaluation as a form of scaffolding was rendered by subjects to express their understandings of the short story. They took one step further by rendering their own opinions through critical thinking. This is evident when the subjects were able to evaluate the reactions of the characters from the story; hence, they were able to build their own sense of values.

## Excerpt 12

- 1 A One thing that attract me and this attracted me from erh one point that had attracted me from this text is wrhm the issue that had been brought her.  
Whether it is erh whether it is the right thing to abort your children you're your children lah erh if you are in

## Excerpt 13

- 1 A Because the interesting part here is that the author is said that ah...
- 2 B Using indirect or direct I don't know lah. Like readers need to think and read many times before you you can understand the whole whole story.
- 3 A The message here for me is that ah man must must be a be responsible.  
Because in this story I found that her mother is the one who bring up the children not not her father. So ah what I can say here is that a woman should not woman should not take all the responsibility to to raise their children but they have to share the responsibility that is the good example for a happy family.

## 5. Discussion

Based on the transcription analysis, the aesthetic focus was prominent where these subjects related their experiences, previous knowledge and intertextuality to the texts. These enabled them to hypothesize and infer the possible outcomes of the story. Allowing participants to share their understandings of the literary works with their peers produce multiple responses. These responses are the result of the verbal discourse which is much concerned with the social aspect of the learning process. What is evident from the participants' discussion is the mature responses produced by relating to their personal experiences and knowledge. This is one evident that indicates subjects' intellectual capacity. Much research that have been conducted in the field of literature focus on how much learners take with them from reading literary works. This study shows that the learners have reached the state of maturity when their viewpoints are shifted from the unknown to the known. Their capability of reasoning and rationalizing their opinions have put them one step higher in the learning process which is emphasized in the MNEP.

The participants' literary competence is revealed when they are capable of evaluating issues highlighted in the story and



relate them to their everyday lives. This is very much needed in the education system to produce life-long learners who will be productive in their workplace. The satisfaction gained by the subjects from discussing literary works is shown from their aesthetic responses. Incorporating subjects' personal reaction also allows them to express their emotions and make reflections. This is crucial in achieving high moral standards as reflected in MNEP.

One aspect that needs to be acknowledged by educators is the fact that response to literature is unpredictable and may change over time. Learners' experiences can alter their perspective over certain issues and this enables them to gain new knowledge from literary experience. Therefore, response to literature is a learned behaviour (Purves 1973).

The examples also show different interpretation are produced by different dyads in understanding the same context. These differences are the result of the depth of their experiences and prior knowledge towards the issues highlighted and their capability of making critical evaluation of the issues.

This study has attempted to look at the ways teacher trainees respond to two short stories. Their multitude responses give a new perspective in the study of literature in the Malaysian classrooms.

## 6. Implications and Conclusions

This study suggests the need for educators to create an environment for the students to express their understanding of literary works. For example, discussions in the classroom should be encouraged by allowing every student to participate in the discussion. Educators also need to allow peer discussion to be carried out in the classroom since peers can also contribute in the learning process. Students' multiple responses should be seen as a healthy learning process. It is not the question of how learners read that needs to be focused on. Instead, teachers should address the ways learners communicate with literary works.

As the study of literature is emphasized by the Ministry of Education (MOE), there is a need to reconsider the ways literature is approached in the classroom. The guiding principle should focus on the transaction that occurs between the reader and the text as proposed by Rosenblatt (1970). This will allow educators to reflect on their students' capability of expressing themselves and making judgments through various issues highlighted in the literary works. Indirectly, the learning process transcends beyond the four walls of the classroom where students will be able to relate what they have learnt to the current issues globally.

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Table 1. Comprehension Evaluation Sheet (Adapted and modified from Cattell, 1999)

<b>Characters</b> Name the protagonist. Comment on other characters and the way the author presents them to the reader.	Identify the protagonist's physical traits/ characteristics through; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The protagonist's words or actions</li> <li>• Narrator's words describing protagonist's actions/thoughts</li> <li>• Other characters' reactions towards the protagonist.</li> </ul>
<b>Setting</b> Tells when/where the story happened	Identify setting through; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time</li> <li>• Place</li> <li>• Cultural value</li> </ul>
<b>Key images</b> Look for key images. Say what the image is, what it means and how it works in the story.	Identify the literary elements used by the author.
<b>Events (What happens)</b> Include all major events. Comment on any details and incidents which you find interesting in the story.	Identify; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• which event happened before/after another event.</li> <li>• problems/conflicts that occurred</li> </ul>
<b>Theme</b> What are the main ideas in the story?	Identify issues highlighted in the story.
<b>Treatment of Conflict</b> Tells how problem was solved	Identify; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• how the problems/conflicts were solved.</li> </ul>

Table 2. Questions for Discussion

1.	Describe and discuss the characters found in the story you have read. Which character do you like/dislike? Give your reasons. Relate the character to your personal experiences if possible.
2.	What are the problems faced by the protagonist? Support them with evidence from the text.
3.	What are the issues highlighted in the story? Discuss the issues by giving your personal opinion.
4.	Can you identify any literary techniques used by the author in relation to the story? Identify them and discuss the effectiveness of the techniques mentioned. Why do you think the author used these techniques?
5.	Is the theme of this story similar to other stories you have read? Is it universal? Can you relate it to other cultures?
6.	Do you like this story? Will you read it again? Give your personal opinion.

Table 3. Examples of responses

	Types of responses	Examples	Rationale
1	<b>Association</b> References to one's experiences and knowledge that is used as examples or illustrations	B There're lots of technologies better than last previous times, right? So we don't we do not seriously believe in such A Nonsense right? The black magic, the mirror don't you think B Ehm I wouldn't say I don't believe it completely because you know I've seen some thing similar yeah A Ha ha. Okay where in Sabah? B Yes.	Dyad B associates her understanding of black magic through her prior experience.
2	<b>Interpretation</b> Making inferences	A Eh how you know the father is gambling ah? B You see the dice... A Where? B Dice means gamblinglah.	Dyad B highlights 'dice' to infer that the protagonist's father is gambling.
3	<b>Personal reaction</b> Engagement with the story	B I don't understand why the father is hot tempered person. A You know, I think he he is angry because of poverty. He ah cannot afford to feed his family. B That is why the son ran away right? A Yeah you know she is actually a victim due to her blindness. But it's not her fault to be blind, its not her fault to be blind. She is innocent.	Dyad A renders her personal reaction towards the protagonist by stating that it was not her fault being blind and that she is innocent.
4	<b>Evaluation</b> Making judgment , differentiate between fiction and reality	A What do you think of the mother? B She should defend her daughter. It's not her fault being blind, right? A But in real life mothers don't send their daughters away if they are blind right?	Dyad B makes an evaluation by relating the event from the story to real life.

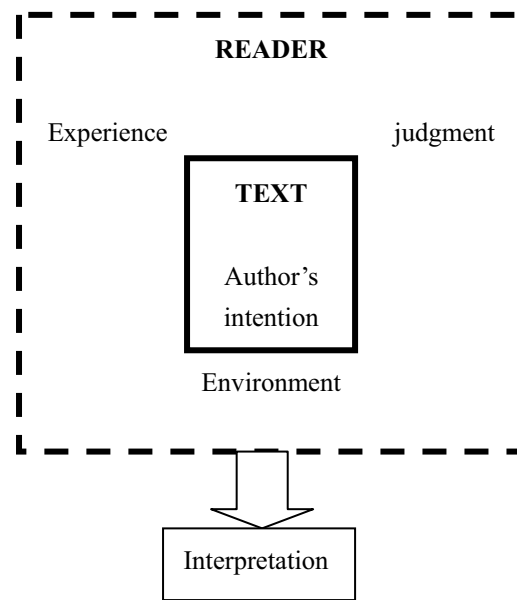


Figure 1. The Reader Response Process

A journal archived in Library and Archives Canada  
A journal indexed in Canadiana (The National Bibliography)  
A journal indexed in AMICUS  
A journal listed in DOAJ  
A journal listed in Ulrich's  
A journal listed in Journalseek  
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