The Journal of

Teaching English with Technology

(*TEwT*)

Publishers

IATEFL Poland Computer Special Interest Group

University of Nicosia

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University

ISSN 1642-1027

EDITORIAL BOARD

REVIEWERS' BOARD

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Australian Government

Australian Research Council

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VOLUME 19, ISSUE 2

FROM THE EDITOR

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The current issue of *Teaching English with Technology, A Journal for Teachers of English*, revisits the tradition of practical lesson plans and technology tutorials that have been a clear indicator of TEwT since its emergence in 2001. At the turn of the 20th century, with relatively low level of ICT literacy among language teachers all over the world, there was a clear need for simple and straightforward yet powerful tutorials, which were supposed to guide our readers in a step-by-step fashion to gaining quite deep (functional) expertise. Our Journal published a number of such practical articles, termed "A Word from a Techie", with the humble undersigned acting as one of its main authors. Such a publication line clearly conformed to language teachers' expectations, who often completed hours of technology-related courses that were usually not sufficiently geared towards achieving practical pedagogical goals in the language classroom.

The current issue of TEwT continues this tradition in relation to teaching in a paperless, board-less, BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) classroom. **Jason Byrne** and **Mariko Furuyabu** from Japan show how the paperless philosophy involves also digital material creation, and how delivery and submission can be accomplished via Google Classroom. Technical and pedagogical issues as well as troubleshooting tips for coping with Google Classroom can be found in the paper.

The second important mission that had been a trademark of our Journal since its first appearance back in 2001 was the publication of technology-based lesson plans. Starting with Internet-based lesson plans, gradually moving through multimedia and e-learning to mobile technologies, such ready-to-use lesson scenarios have always had their rightful place in our Journal. This time, **Terrill Reid McLain** (Korea) takes up an interesting issue of social media treasure hunt, giving teachers a ready-made procedure for practical lessons using Twitter in the classroom.

The practical side of TEwT is complemented by an app review (also very prominent throughout those 18 years, with website, multimedia or app assessment) of BBC VOA podcasts. **Samaneh Abdi** and **Hossein Makiabadi** from Iran take under scrutiny *Learning*

English Listening & Speaking BBC/ VOA News, which is a mobile app offering learners a massive archive of updated BBC and VOA podcasts both online and offline.

The practical papers are, obviously, balanced by research articles documenting different technology-based instructional procedures verified in a methodologically sound way. Online simulations and flipped learning as factors contributing to the development of oral production are investigated by **M. Laura Angelini** and **Amparo García-Carbonell** (Spain), who came to the conclusion that simulation-based instruction contributes to significant progress in four language-related areas: vocabulary, pronunciation, variety of expression and grammar.

"The Role of Vocabulary E-Learning: Comparing the Effect of Reading Skill Training with and without Vocabulary Homework" by **Faisal Mustafa, Syarifah Najla Assiry, Ahmad Bustari,** and **Ridha Ayu Nuryasmin** (Indonesia) attempted to determine the differences in reading achievement between students who were given either paper-based vocabulary homework or online vocabulary homework, in addition to classroom face-to-face interaction (experimental groups) and those who only participated in face-to-face interaction in the classroom (control group). The major finding was that both experimental groups outperformed the control group in the post-test.

The effect of video chat to provide interaction opportunities with native speakers in limited contexts was the issue investigated by **Julia Sevy-Biloon** and **Tanya Chroman** (Ecuador). An international language exchange program created with 17 students through video chat platforms resulted in their increased confidence in speaking, greater intrinsic motivation and increased fluency visible in overall communication skills.

Finally, the reality of implementing Communicative Language Teaching in a MALL (Mobile-Assisted Language Learning) environment is undertaken by **Rupert Walsh** (UK). As the author proves, findings from initial studies on MALL indicate not only the feasibility of using mobile devices for communicative purposes within classroom teaching, but also the opportunities they provide to implement a communicative approach more successfully than previously possible.

We wish you good reading!

DEVELOPING ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH SIMULATION-BASED INSTRUCTION

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Abstract

Foreign language teachers and researchers face a major challenge enabling students' learning. Not only must they provide training in the target language, but they must also find ways to optimise class time and enhance students' communication skills in the target language. How does technology intersect with English teaching in ways that benefit learning? A possible approach would align with integrating web-based strategies and optimising class time through new methodologies, techniques and resources. In this study, a group of university engineering students were taught with simulations to aid their learning of English as a foreign language. These engineering students were taught English through both class-based and a large-scale real-time web-based simulation. We present the results of quantitative analysis of students' oral production. The goal was to show whether simulation-based instruction contributes to significant progress in oral language production in English. The results indicate that students progressed significantly in four language-related areas: vocabulary, pronunciation, variety of expression and grammar.

Keywords: web-based simulation; blended learning; simulation; flipped classroom

1. Introduction

A primary goal of university educators of foreign languages is to provide the tools and practice for students to attain a sufficient level of foreign language proficiency to communicate effectively. Far too often, language educators must teach large classes and cover dense syllabuses. However, technological developments enable the use of blended learning classrooms. Flipped learning is a specific model of blended learning that helps educators optimise class time. In this study, flipped learning was applied to move lectures outside the classroom and introduce simulation-based lessons to enhance English as foreign language (EFL) learning, particularly speaking skills development. Flipped learning inverts the traditional teacher-centred method. Instruction is delivered online outside class time, whilst traditional homework is moved into the classroom environment (Strayer, 2007, 2012; Tourón, Santiago and Diez, 2014; Tucker, 2012). The flipped model thus uses educational technology to

deliver theory and background materials and provides opportunities for learning through simulations in class. This paradigm shift transforms the roles of teacher and learner. In this study, instructors become facilitators and guides as learners work in groups or teams during the simulations. The learners become the real participants in the classroom (Strayer, 2007, 2012).

A simulation refers to an activity in which participants are assigned duties and are given enough information about the problem to perform those duties without play-acting or inventing key facts (Jones, 2013). A simulation is based on a representation of a model that imitates a real-world process or system. Key information is provided to carry out tasks, debate, negotiate from different points of view and solve a specific problem (Klabbers, 2009).

2. Literature review

Simulations are nowadays applied in several disciplines such as medicine, nursing, engineering and languages. Today's education is more and more nurtured by true-to-life simulation scenarios. A large number of studies show the benefits of simulations as they provide immersive experiential learning. Kolb's experiential learning cycle can be addressed as the main conceptual framework used for experiential learning in simulation. Experiential learning is considered a process through which knowledge is built by transforming the experience. Learners go through concrete experience, reflection, conceptualisation, and experimentation. The cycle begins with the learners' involvement in a specific experience (simulation); then they reflect on the experience from different viewpoints (reflective observation). Through reflection learners create generalisations and principles and draw conclusions (abstract conceptualization when explaining or thinking). The learners then use these principles and conclusions in subsequent decisions and actions (active experimentation such as applying or doing) that lead to new concrete experiences (Kolb & Kolb, 1999; Kolb, 2014).

Other authors have been inspired by Kolb's learning cycle in their research on simulations, such as Ekker, 2004; Chang, Peng and Chao, 2010; Wedig, 2010; Beckem, 2012; Wiggins, 2012, 2017; Gegenfurtner, Quesada-Pallarès & Knogler, 2014; Blyth, 2018; among others. Klabbers (2001) described simulations as learning and instructional resources. According to the author, simulations offer a springboard for interactive learning that develops expertise. Kriz (2003), in turn, contextualised simulation within the educational framework. A simulation is an interactive learning environment that converts problem-oriented learning into purposeful action. According to Kriz, training programmes for systems competence through simulation have shown that simulations favour change processes in educational organisations.

Ekker (2004) conducted empirical research into simulations applied to education. The author analysed data on 241 subjects who had participated in various editions of IDEELS, examining satisfaction levels and attitudes. The participants had different roles as negotiators, technical consultants, activists or journalists within the "Eutropian Federation Simulation". The three-week simulation consisted of message exchanges, written proposals and "live" conference situations. The software used was a web-based interface driven by a database server. The project resorted to a web-based questionnaire to measure students' satisfaction, personal experiences and attitudes towards the simulation. Findings revealed that students experienced satisfaction during the simulation and they were activated as the simulation invigorated learning. The simulation was a reality in itself and participants responded actively at all times during the simulation period.

Other studies conducted by Levine (2004) and Halleck and Coll-García (2011) integrated telecollaborative exchanges and global simulations to turn the foreign language class into its own immersive, simulated environment. Levine (2004) described a global simulation design as a student-centered, task-based alternative to conventional curricula for second-year university students of foreign language courses. The author provided clear guidelines to apply simulations in language courses and identified strengths such as the use of the content knowledge in the simulation dynamics, target language activation during the simulation phases and collaborative work to carry out the tasks. Furthermore, Halleck and Coll-García (2011) used simulation-based learning to teach English to engineering students. The study shed light on participants' perceptions of how web-based simulations affect the development of language abilities, critical thinking and intercultural awareness. Simulated experience proved to be significant in an engineering curriculum since a real comprehensive engineering education should provide opportunities to work collaboratively with other professionals in an intercultural setting more than simply solving problems from a textbook.

Burke and Mancuso (2012) in their study of social cognitive theory, metacognition, and simulation learning identified core principles of intentionality, forethought, self-reactiveness and self-reflectiveness in simulation environments. They asserted that debriefing helps build students' self-efficacy and regulation of behaviour. Thus, simulation-based learning combines key elements of cognitive theory and interactive approach to learning. Theory-based facilitation of simulated learning enhances the development of social cognitive processes, metacognition, and autonomy.

Other studies on language teaching and learning have shown that simulations encourage the development and acquisition of language (e.g. Rising, 2009; Andreu-Andrés & García-

Casas, 2011; Watts, García-Carbonell, & Rising, 2011; Woodhouse, 2011; Michelson & Dupuy, 2014; Blyth, 2018). The scholars agree that simulations provide greater exposure to the target language, ensure more purposeful interaction, make input more comprehensible for learners, reduce the affective filter and lower anxiety in language learning.

To mention some more aspects of simulation-based learning, Watts, García-Carbonell, and Rising (2011) examined perceptions of collaborative work in web-based simulations through evaluations of each student's end-of-course portfolio [N = 26]. Students highly valued the collaborative work required in the simulation, which was reflected by the active participation of all team members and by team members' motivation and personal satisfaction. By analysing their own work and that of their teams, the students reported that they had become more resolute and had learnt discourse strategies to persuade others and solve problems. Students also reported that the collaborative work increased their capacity to listen to others' ideas and to learn from others. All this helped increase their intellectual development and knowledge of the world. They also understood specific content faster, improved their language skills and acquired experience in self-assessment.

Andreu-Andrés and García-Casas (2011) focused on simulation and gaming as a teaching strategy. Qualitative analysis based on the discovery of emerging patterns in the data (grounded theory) was used to study the perceptions of 47 engineering students. These students endorsed experiential learning and reported that learning and having fun brought about benefits on their academic and social life. As educators and students became more familiar with the simulations, they developed a greater appreciation of their effectiveness. Students completed the simulations with a heightened awareness of what they have learnt and how they can learn more.

Another interesting example is Woodhouse's (2011) study, in which 33 Thai university students participated in a computer simulation to learn English. Data were collected through personal interviews to learn about students' opinions of the use of simulations to learn a foreign language. The students perceived that they had learned about sociocultural aspects related to communication in the target language, and this was not hindered by the fact that the simulations were not face to face. Students noted that they acquired greater powers of decision, persuasion and assertiveness in communication.

Ranchhod, Gurău, Loukis and Trivedi (2014) analysed the effectiveness of several learning strategies based on Reeve's educationally supportive learning environment through simulations (Reeve, 2013). The investigation dealt with the concrete learning experience

generated by the simulation to develop or reinforce theoretical understanding, management experience, and professional skills.

A large-scale simulation described by Michelson and Dupuy (2014) involved 29 intermediate learners of French at a public university in the Southwest of the United States in the study. Twelve students of the experimental group in the simulation had specific roles to enact the responsibilities of residents in a commercial area in Paris. Seventeen students who belonged to the control group did not participate in the simulation and followed a traditional approach to learn French. Only the experimental students demonstrated abilities to describe how their roles motivated certain linguistic choices and non-linguistic semiotic modes. The study highlighted the potential for simulations to boost students' awareness of the target language together with other communication codes.

A few other studies have also examined the effectiveness of technologies and simulations in the language classroom. O'Flaherty and Phillips (2015) provided a broad overview of research on the flipped classroom and links to other pedagogical models such as simulations. They reported considerable indirect evidence of improved academic performance and student and teacher satisfaction with flipped learning. However, further research is required to provide conclusive evidence of how the fusion of these methods enables language and social competence development. Angelini (2016) investigated combining flipped learning instruction and simulation-based lessons to optimise class time by using and designing simulations with prospective secondary school teachers. Angelini (2016) outlined the benefits of using simulations that are based on literary extracts with a substantial social component.

3. Methodology

3.1. The context of the study

The simulation in this study consisted of three phases: briefing, action and debriefing. During briefing, students were presented with topics related to the simulation scenario, literature on these topics and videos to be viewed outside the classroom to adhere to the flipped classroom model. The benefit of this approach was twofold: whilst students became familiar with the content and built new vocabulary and expressions outside the classroom, instructors and students dedicated class time to activating their knowledge of the content and the target language through minor-scale simulations, debates and forums. This class practice helped instructors gauge students' understanding of the topic and the type of language they used. Grammar clarifications and explanations were provided when needed. Students formed teams

of four or five members and performed dynamic activities in class. This teamwork favoured individualised learning because the instructor was able to identify the weaknesses of each student.

For the course analysed in this study, the International Communication and Negotiation Simulations (ICONS) web-based simulation platform was used. The ICONS platform, developed at the University of Maryland, combines simulation tools and simulation development dialogue (SDD) methodology to provide clear insights into global sociopolitical affairs and evaluate alternative courses of action in crisis situations. Simulations performed using the ICONS platform are thus ideal for addressing social issues related to education, environmental threats, the sustainable economy and human rights. Specialists report that simulations help instil ethical responsibilities in students and help students develop a global mindset (Crookall and Oxford, 1990; Crookall, 2010). In the debriefing phase, students reflected on the simulation dynamic and the learning component of the experience.

This article presents the findings of a quantitative study of students' progress in oral language production in English. The cohort of telecommunications engineering students (N = 48) who participated in the study had attained the B1 level of English and were enrolled in a four-month B2 level English course at university. This course corresponded to the B2 level according to the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR). All students were in the third year of the university degree programme. Under the flipped learning model, the students received instructions on how to complete the simulation scenario and guidelines to participate in minor-scale classroom-based simulations and a web-based simulation. The web-based simulation, which was delivered through the ICONS platform, simulated an international summit on current economic, social and security issues.

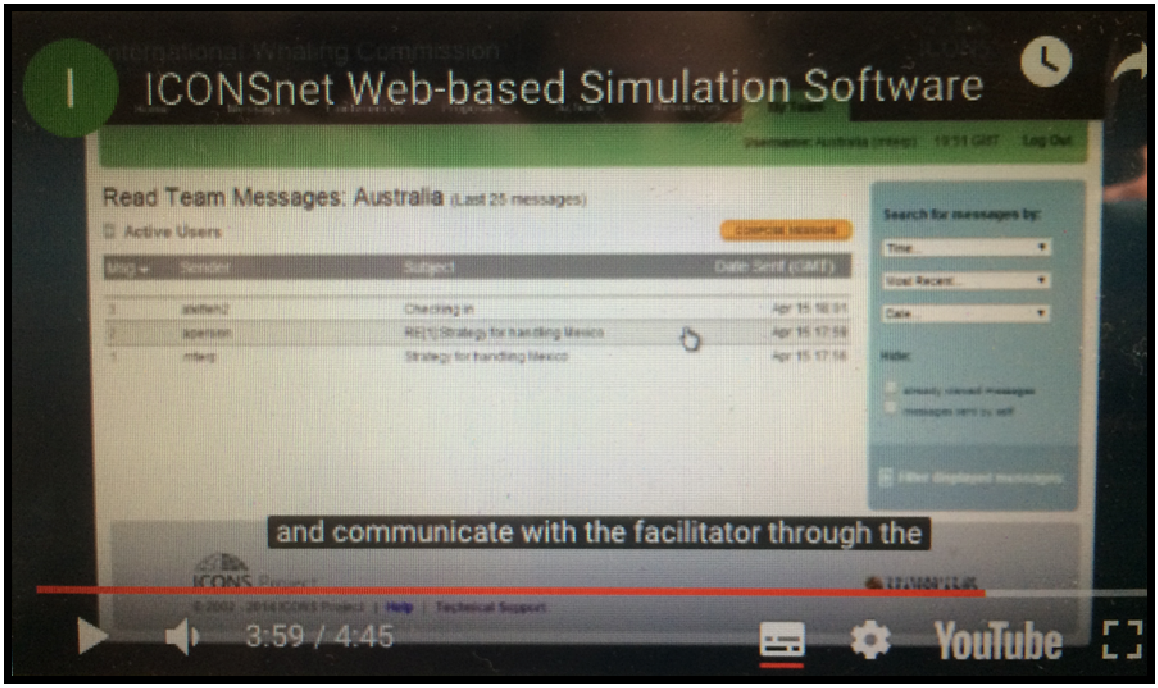

Figure 1. Screenshot of ICONSnet Web-based Simulation. https://www.icons.umd.edu/about/iconsnet

The countries that attended the simulated summit were represented by student teams. Attendance was synchronous and asynchronous. Students formed teams of four or five members, and each team member had a clear role within the team. The roles were specified in the simulation briefing.

The students signed letters of consent before participating in the research. We thereby complied with the basic principles of ethical research (see sample letter in Appendix 1).

3.2. Design and procedure

The study examined the oral production in English of third year university students of telecommunications engineering. The procedure that we followed is illustrated in Figure 2. The groups (E1 and E2) followed simulation-based training.

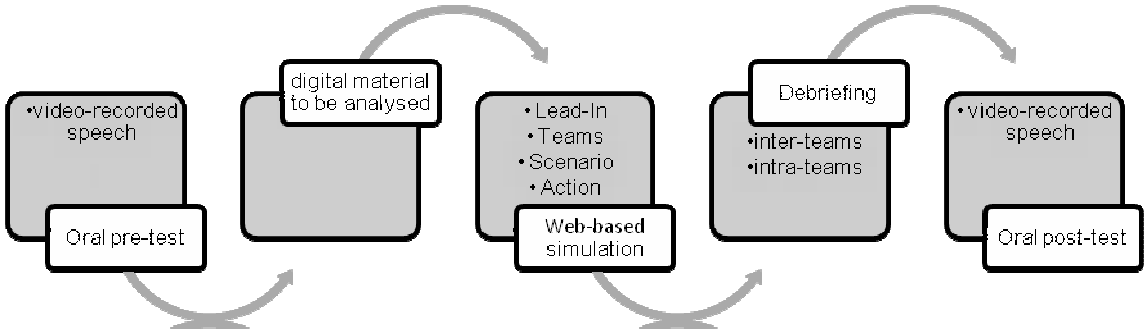

Figure 2. Procedure workflow

The groups (E1 and E2) were given simulation-based training. This training followed five steps:

(1) **Oral pre-test**: Participants were asked to speak about a topic related to the latest news by answering the following question: "Do you believe the news you read or see on TV?" English was the vehicular language prior to the simulation. This improvised speech lasted for three to five minutes. Three external examiners assessed each participant using Matthews and Marino's (1990) criteria for oral assessment. The oral presentations were video-recorded.

(2) **Flipped learning phase**: Students watched videos, read the news and researched several topics related to global issues such as the environment, society and technology. They also revised some aspects of grammar outside the classroom. The lessons were active learning spaces where students were given responsibilities and simulation scenarios to debate, negotiate and solve a problem through teamwork. Students studied grammar on their own. Occasionally, certain aspects of grammar were clarified in class. Attendance was compulsory and formative assessment was used to keep a record of students' progress. This phase prepared students for the web-based simulation.

(3) **Web-based simulation lead-in and simulation scenario**: Students revised the simulation guidelines and formed teams of four or five members. The students chose their own teams with no interference from the teacher. The participants became acquainted with the simulation scenario and their roles within the team (the simulation can be viewed in Appendix 2). The simulation lasted 21 days and entailed synchronous and asynchronous action. The final stage consisted of analysis, strategies, debate, proposals, negotiation of proposals and the final decision.

(4) **Debriefing**: Students reflected on the simulation and their performance and teamwork. The three external examiners were specialists in language testing with vast experience in the application of official exams. In this case, they assessed each participant using Matthews and Merino's (1990) criteria for oral assessment. The rubric consisted of 14 oral presentation evaluation criteria: three delivery-related criteria (natural delivery, rate of speech, posture); three content-related criteria (topic suitable for time available, topic developed with relevant details, presentation length); five textual organization-related criteria (introduction, transitions, main ideas,

development of ideas, conclusion); and four language-related criteria (appropriate vocabulary for the audience; pronunciation and intonation, variety of expressions, grammar) Descriptors were added to support the use of the assessment criteria in the rubric (Appendix 3).

The quantitative study was performed to determine students' progress in oral language production in English. The following analyses were conducted:

(1) Analysis of differences in overall assessments pre- and post-treatment.

(2) Analysis of differences in assessments for each variable.

(3) Analysis of differences in assessments for each sub-variable.

All analyses were performed in SPSS 25 under a licence held by the university.

3.3. Results and findings

3.3.1. Analysis of differences in overall assessments pre- and post-treatment

The results of a Student's t-test (p-value < 0.0001) indicate that students made significant progress in their oral language production post-treatment (Table 1).

Table 1. Overall assessment of progress post-treatment

	Mean	**Standard deviation**	**Mean standard error**	**95% confidence interval difference**		**t**	**df**	**Sig.**
				Lower	Upper			
Progress	2.94401	2.05458	0.29655	2.34742	3.5406	9.927	47	0

Note: Student's t-test for dependent variables; df – degrees of freedom; sig. – bilateral asymptotic significance.

The correlation analysis revealed a significant positive correlation (r = 0.465, p-value = 0.01) between the oral expression score pre- and post-treatment. This finding indicates that students whose scores were high pre-treatment had higher scores post-treatment. However, this finding does not necessarily indicate greater progress. According to the statistical regression principle, these students were actually least likely to achieve higher scores because they already had high scores pre-treatment.

Students made significant progress in terms of the assessments of their overall oral production post-treatment. Furthermore, there was a positive correlation between the pre- and post-treatment assessments.

3.3.2. Analysis of differences in the independent variables

Second, we studied the four independent variables: delivery, content, textual organisation and language. Table 2 shows the means and standard deviations of these four variables.

Table 2. Statistics for the pre- and post-treatment values of the independent variables

	Mean	N	Standard deviation	Mean standard error
Delivery post	2.25	48	.296	.042
Delivery pre	1.63	48	.633	.091
Content post	2.43	48	.174	.025
Content pre	1.65	48	.744	.107
Organisation post	2.37	48	.176	.025
Organisation pre	1.52	48	.606	.087
Language post	2.24	48	.232	.033
Language pre	1.54	48	.603	.087

Note: Range of scores = 0–2.5

The means of the four independent variables were higher post-treatment, resulting in a greater progress of the oral skills.

As Table 3 shows, the results of the Student's t-test confirmed that progress in the four independent variables (p-value < 0.001) was significant.

Table 3. Comparison of means of the independent variables of pre- and post-treatment

Progress	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean standard error	95% confidence interval difference		t	df	Sig.
				Lower	Upper			
Delivery	0.61	0.624	0.900	0.435	0.797	6.843	47	.000
Content	0.77	0.742	0.1072	0.563	0.995	7.271	47	.000
Organisation	0.84	0.594	0.857	0.676	1.021	9.901	47	.000
Language	0.69	0.488	0.705	0.557	0.841	9.913	47	.000

Table 4. Correlations of the pre-treatment variables with the post-treatment variables

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Delivery post- and pre-treatment	48	0.266	0.068
Content post- and pre-treatment	48	0.125	0.397
Organisation post- and pre-treatment	48	0.216	0.140
Language post- and pre-treatment	48	0.641	0.000

The results reveal a significant positive association between *language* pre-treatment and post-treatment, with a correlation coefficient of 0.641 (p-value < 0.001). This finding confirms that students with a high level of English language pre-treatment had a higher level of English language post-treatment than students with a lower level of English language (r = 0.641, p-value < 0.001). However, these results do not necessarily show that students with better scores post-treatment progressed more in language and delivery than the other students who participated in the study.

3.3.3. Analysis of differences in the sub-variables

Third, we analysed the sub-variables of oral expression in English. For *delivery*, Table 5 shows the results of the test for paired samples pre- and post-treatment for the sub-variables *oral presentation* and *fluency.*

Table 5. Paired t-test (pre- and post-treatment) of the delivery sub-variables oral presentation and fluency

Progress	Mean value	Standard deviation	Standard error difference	95% confidence interval difference		t	df	Sig.
				Lower	Upper			
Oral presentation	.53	.542	.078	.378	.693	6.849	47	.000
Fluency	.45	.561	.081	.286	.613	5.551	47	.000

Note: Student's t-test for dependent variables; df – degrees of freedom; sig. – bilateral asymptotic significance.

The mean value of the difference of the sub-variable *presentation* was 0.536 (p-value ≤ 0.001). The mean value of the difference of the sub-variable *fluency* was 0.450 (p-value ≤ 0.001). The subsequent correlation analysis of *presentation* and *fluency* confirmed students' significant progress in the sub-variable *presentation*.

Table 6. Correlation analysis of the delivery sub-variables presentation and fluency

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Oral presentation post- and pre-treatment	48	.295	.042
Fluency post- and pre-treatment	48	.201	.170

The independent variable *content* comprised the sub-variables *timed topic* and *relevance*. Table 7 shows the results of the test for paired samples (pre- and post-treatment) of the sub-variables *timed topic* and *relevance.*

Table 7. Paired t-test (pre- and post-treatment) of the content sub-variables timed topic and relevance

Progress	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error difference	95% confidence interval difference		t	df	Sig.
				Lower	Upper			
Timed topic	.63	.578	.083	.465	.801	7.585	47	.000
Relevance	.61	.653	.094	.424	.803	6.510	47	.000

Note: Student's t-test for dependent variables; df – degrees of freedom; sig. – bilateral asymptotic significance.

The mean value of the difference of the sub-variable *timed topic* was 0.63 (p-value ≤ 0.001). The mean value of the difference of the sub-variable *relevance* was 0.61 (p-value ≤ 0.001). The subsequent correlation analysis of *timed topic* and *relevance* confirmed students' significant progress in these two sub-variables. The correlation analysis of the sub-variables

timed topic and *relevance* revealed no correlation between pre- and post-treatment that was significantly different from 0.

Table 8. Correlation analysis of the sub-variables timed topic and relevance

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Timed topic post- and pre-treatment	48	.229	.118
Relevance post- and pre-treatment	48	-.045	.759

The analysis showed that students with high scores post-treatment were not the same in most cases as students with high levels of English pre-treatment.

The independent variable *textual organisation* comprised the sub-variables *introduction*, *connectors*, *logical development of ideas* and *conclusion.* Table 9 shows the results of the test for paired samples (pre- and post-treatment) of the sub-variables *introduction*, *connectors*, *logical development of ideas* and *conclusion.*

Table 9. Paired t-test (pre- and post-treatment) of the textual organisation sub-variables introduction, connectors, logical development of ideas and conclusion

Progress	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error	95% confidence interval difference		t	df	Sig.
				Lower	Upper			
Introduction	.69	.493	.071	.547	.834	9.71	47	.000
Connection	.55	.531	.076	.404	.713	7.28	47	.000
Logical development	.73	.561	.081	.570	.896	.9.04	47	.000
Conclusion	.92	.599	.086	.750	1.098	10.67	47	.000

Note: Student's t-test for dependent variables; df – degrees of freedom; sig. – bilateral asymptotic significance.

The analysis indicated that the mean value of the difference of the sub-variable *introduction* was 0.69 (p-value $\leq$ 0.001), *connectors* was 0.55 (p-value $\leq$ 0.001), *logical development of ideas* was 0.73 (p-value $\leq$ 0.001) and *conclusion* was 0.92 (p-value $\leq$ 0.001). The results confirmed that students made significant progress in all four sub-variables.

The correlation analysis of the four sub-variables indicated a significant positive correlation of the sub-variable *conclusion* ($r = 0.304$, $p = 0.036$) pre- and post-treatment.

Table 10. Correlation analysis of the introduction sub-variables introduction, connectors, logical development of ideas and conclusion

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Organisation-introduction PRE Organisation-introduction POST	48	.065	.661
Organisation-connectors PRE Organisation-connectors POST	48	.188	.200

Organisation-logical development PRE Organisation-logical development POST	48	.271	.063
Organisation-conclusion PRE Organisation-conclusion POST	48	.304	.036

Lastly, the independent variable *language* comprised the sub-variables *vocabulary*, *pronunciation*, *variety of expression* and *grammar*. Table 11 shows the results of the test for paired samples.

Table 11. Paired t-test (pre- and post-treatment) of the language sub-variables vocabulary, pronunciation, variety of expression and grammar

Progress	**Mean**	**Standard deviation**	**Standard error**	**95% confidence interval difference**		**t**	**df**	**Sig.**
				Lower	**Upper**			
Vocabulary	.58	.474	.068	.446	.446	8.52	47	.000
Pronunciation	.45	.332	.048	.362	.555	9.55	47	.000
Variety of expression	.59	.597	.077	.440	.753	7.67	47	.000
Grammar	.50	.503	.051	.051	.607	9.75	47	.000

Note: Student's t-test for dependent variables; df – degrees of freedom; sig. – bilateral asymptotic significance.

The results of the test for paired samples confirmed students' significant progress in the four sub-variables. The correlation analysis indicated the dependence of students' level of English post-treatment on students' level pre-treatment: *pronunciation* ($r = 0.710$, $p < 0.001$), *variety of expression* ($r = 0.407$, $p = 0.004$) and *grammar* ($r = 0.689$, $p < 0.001$).

Table 12. Correlation analysis of the language sub-variables vocabulary, pronunciation, variety of expression and grammar

	N	**Correlation**	**Sig.**
Vocabulary post- and pre-treatment	48	.227	.120
Pronunciation post- and pre-treatment	48	.710	.000
Variety of expression post- and pre-treatment	48	.407	.004
Grammar post- and pre-treatment	48	.689	.000

The correlation analysis confirmed that students' vocabulary progressed post-treatment, although this progress was non-significant. The results also show that students progressed significantly in terms of pronunciation, variety of expression and grammar.

3.3.4. Analysis of concordance of assessments by the three external examiners

We sought to confirm the objectivity and impartiality of the three external examiners' assessments of students' oral production pre- and post-treatment.

There were very few notable discrepancies in most assessments. This finding indicates that the three examiners tended to evaluate the same student in a similar way. There were no significant deviations. Table 13 shows that variability was due to differences in students' oral performance pre-treatment.

Table 13. Concordance of the three external examiners' assessments pre-treatment

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	R-F	p-value
Examiners	0.463	2	0.231	0.51	0.599
Variables	4.854	3	1.618	3.58	0.013
Residual	257.441	570	0.451		
Total	262.759	575			

Note: df – degrees of freedom; R-F – relative frequency.

External examiners' assessments did not differ significantly. Thus, there was concordance in the assessments of students pre-treatment ($p = 0.599$).

In terms of the results of post-treatment, the three external examiners agreed that the students had made progress in the four independent variables *delivery*, *content*, *textual organisation* and *language*. Figure 5 shows that Examiner 3 was reluctant to award higher marks, whereas Examiner 1 seemed to be more sensitive to students' progress, awarding higher marks.

Table 14 shows that the variability was due to differences in students' oral performance post-treatment.

Table 14. Concordance of the three external examiners post-treatment

Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	R-F	p-value
Examiners	1.895	2	0.947	14.50	0.000
Variables	22.626	47	0.481	7.36	0.000
Residual	34.391	526	0.065		
Total	58.914	575			

Note: df – degrees of freedom; R-F – relative frequency.

Table 14 confirms students' significant progress in oral expression post-treatment. Despite different pre-treatment levels of each sub-variable (*delivery*, *content*, *textual organisation*, and *language*), these differences disappeared in post-treatment.

Students made significant progress in *delivery*, specifically in *oral presentation* and *fluency*. This can be associated with the great exposure to the target language in and outside of class. As they followed a flipped model, they had to become acquainted with specific issues from the simulation scenario and synchronous and asynchronous, they had to participate in the simulation negotiations, forums and debates. In terms of *language*, students made significant progress post-treatment. Students progressed significantly in *pronunciation*, *variety of expression* and *grammar*. They were especially careful with the language use as their proposals had to be understood to be voted favourably. They had to work the language thoroughly to avoid repetitions of vocabulary and expressions at the time their messages were straightforward and well-interpreted. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that students progressed in all variables, although their progress in *organisation of ideas* and *content* was non-significant. Surprisingly, students' textual organization of ideas and content development did not reach significance. This can be a side effect of the exposure to well-organized texts to read and debate that students had to analyse.

4. Discussion

The analyses presented herein provide evidence of significant progress in oral language production in English. Despite differences in students' levels of delivery, content, organisation and language pre-treatment, these differences tended to disappear in post-treatment. Students progressed significantly in oral presentation and fluency (*delivery*) and pronunciation, variety of expression and grammar (*language*). Regardless of students' initial level, the variables *organisation* and *content* were non-significant despite progress in post-treatment. Arguably, these results suggest that students were somewhat conditioned by the pre-test because they were already familiar with the test dynamics when they took the post-test. Notably, however, the students were exposed to a wide range of topics inside and outside the classroom during the treatment. They had to research, learn, debate, negotiate, set forth proposals and make decisions during the simulations, especially the large-scale web-based simulation. We believe that this intensive practice justifies the findings of this study.

However, the findings of this study should only be considered in light of its limitations. The experimental group analysed had autonomous work to do outside of class to learn about specific topics before attending the lessons. This type of course design may have had an impact in the experimental students' oral performance as interaction in English was sought during the lessons, and a great exposure to audio-visual material was available. Only one of the

researchers was in charge of teaching one experimental group. Due to this, we have resorted to three external examiners to bring reliability to the study.

5. Conclusion

This study thereby shows that simulations are effective at meeting the demands of language learning. This has been shown by previous research noted in the Literature section; and this study confirms it as a "by-product". In short, the results can serve as a reference for further studies of how to improve teaching and learning strategies in EFL. Future research should consider a diverse population that covers different higher education degrees in non-immersive settings.

Deciding how to employ technology in teaching to optimise learning is a genuine challenge. In the present study, the flipped model has greatly contributed to gaining class time for speaking practice as much of the research on the different issues in the simulation scenario was conducted outside of class. The flipped classroom model and blended learning provide a learning environment with massive potential, as reported by Strayer (2007, 2012), Tourón, Santiago, and Diez (2014) and Tucker (2012). Scholars should provide insight into the most suitable teaching and learning practices in the coming years, as per the proposals of Woodhouse (2011) and O'Flaherty and Phillips (2015).

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THE ROLE OF VOCABULARY E-LEARNING: COMPARING THE EFFECT OF READING SKILL TRAINING WITH AND WITHOUT VOCABULARY HOMEWORK

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Abstract

Since vocabulary is a strong predictor of reading comprehension, vocabulary homework is seen as a way to improve reading comprehension. This study utilized an online learning platform to deliver vocabulary homework to students learning reading skills in the classroom and compare their scores with students given paper-based homework and those who did not receive any homework. The objective of the research was to determine the differences in reading achievement between students who were given either paper-based vocabulary homework or online vocabulary homework, in addition to classroom face-to-face interaction (experimental groups) and those who only participated in face-to-face interaction in the classroom (control group). Two experimental groups were instructed to complete vocabulary homework outside of the classroom. The selected vocabulary for homework consisted of 400 words common to the target academic texts. The data were collected by administering a reading comprehension pre-test and post-test, where five academic texts were used with approximately ten questions for each text. The results revealed a p-value of 0.047 for the paper-based homework group, 0.045 for the online vocabulary group, and 0.338 for the control group, which suggests that both experimental groups outperformed the control group in the post-test.

Keywords: online vocabulary homework; blended learning; reading skill training

1. Introduction

English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students have been reported to have problems with reading comprehension (Freedle & Kostin, 1993; Kheirzadeh & Tavakoli, 2012). Research has confirmed that the students' difficulty in reading comprehension originated from a lack of vocabulary size and depth (Kheirzadeh & Tavakoli, 2012, p. 150; Zuhra, 2015, p. 437). Therefore, reading comprehension instruction, which is challenging for EFL teachers, has focused on vocabulary development (Huang & Lin, 2014; Nikoopour & Kazemi, 2014; Yamamoto, 2014). Others suggested strategies to develop students' autonomy in vocabulary

learning (Haddad, 2016; Shams, 2013). In some contexts, such as test preparation, there were limited meetings dedicated to reading comprehension, and only one or two meetings focused on the topic of vocabulary (Gear & Gear, 1996; Phillips, 2001). Although vocabulary can be taught indirectly, the time dedicated to building vocabulary should not be as significant (Sonbul & Schmitt, 2009, p. 258), because even one word needs to be taught several times in order for a student to memorize it and understand its usage (Waring & Takaki, 2003, p. 145). Therefore, vocabulary homework such as using a vocabulary notebook by students to create "personalized vocabulary lists" (Bazo, Rodríguez, & Fumero, 2016, p. 270) is one of the potential supplements for vocabulary development (Vela & Rushidi, 2016, p. 204).

Many studies found that vocabulary homework can significantly increase students' vocabulary (Hirschel & Fritz, 2013; Wu, 2015) and thus enhance their reading comprehension of non-academic English texts (Furqon, 2013; Ricketts, Nation, & Bishop, 2007, pp. 235-236). However, conventional vocabulary homework cannot be monitored by teachers. Students who are less motivated can cheat without being discovered (Orosz et al., 2016, p. 43; Park, Park, & Jang, 2013, p. 350). A report by Graves (2008, p. 17) indicated that university students were more likely to cheat on homework than on tests. As a result, vocabulary homework can only be used with motivated and diligent students (Flunger et al., 2017, p. 11).

Therefore, there is a need for a method of delivering homework in which the students can be better tracked. Shuaiwen, Xiaoming and Song (2012) proposed the use of an online homework management system to encourage vocabulary building and discourage cheating. Course Management System software (MOOC), which works similarly to the system proposed by Shuaiwen, Xiaoming and Song (2012), can be used to deliver homework to students. Owing to the platform, teachers can check how long it takes for students to complete a task, how many times they repeat the task, and what their scores for each attempt are. Students who were found to be less serious can be given a warning, even detention.

However, there is little empirical research which investigates the effects of online and paper-based vocabulary homework on students' reading comprehension. Therefore, the objective of this study was to determine the difference in learning achievement among students who were given vocabulary homework through an e-learning program, those who were given paper-based vocabulary homework, and those who were not given any vocabulary homework outside of the classroom. The results of the research can benefit teachers struggling to improve their students' reading comprehension.

2. Literature review

This section presents selected literature findings, both from research and books, related to the variables in this research, i.e., reading comprehension, vocabulary in reading comprehension, and homework.

2.1. Reading comprehension

To comprehend a text means to finish the text with a full understanding of both its stated and implied meanings (Pearson, 2009, p. 3), which is essential for successful reading (Woolley, 2011, p. 15). In addition, it has become one of the foci in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teaching and learning (Atai & Nazari, 2011). Therefore, many research studies have been conducted in the area of reading comprehension (Oakhill, 1993, pp. 224-226). Gleeson and Davidson (2016, p.50) discovered that reading comprehension is problematic for students in learning while Clift (1991, p.68) revealed that it also presents challenges to teachers. Back in 1965, Kerfoot (1965) demonstrated that reading difficulties were common and the sources of those difficulties were complex.

Numerous studies have proposed methods and strategies for teaching reading comprehension (Soler, 2017, p. 3). In fact, the teaching of reading started in the early days of language teaching with the emergence of *The Reading Method* (American Classical League, 1933, p. 2). Grabe and Stoller (2011, pp. 129-130) suggested that teachers teach students reading comprehension skills to develop the ability to understand texts. Mikulecky (2008, p. 1) defined reading comprehension skills as “the cognitive processes that a reader uses in making sense of a text.” According to Grabe (2009, p. 280), there are five core reading comprehension skills which should be taught to help students comprehend texts, i.e., main idea, reading strategies, grammar, discourse, and vocabulary. However, the classification of reading comprehension skills by Gear and Gear (1996) is more practical for teaching purposes, i.e., main idea, detail information, inference, reference, and vocabulary.

2.1.1. Reading for the main idea

The main idea is defined as what the text is about (Montelongo & Hernández, 2007, p. 542). The main idea can be used as a measure to identify how much a reader understands a text (Yussen, Rembold, & Mazor, 1989, p. 313). Therefore, it has been used to test reading comprehension skill in a standardized test. The main idea is sometimes stated either in the beginning, in the middle, or at the end of a text, but sometimes the main idea is not stated, and thus readers need to infer what the main idea is (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 2007, p. 110). For

instructional purposes, research by Stevens, Park and Vaughn (2018, p. 16) proved that teaching the main idea helps students determine the main idea of a text. Mikulecky and Jeffries (2007, p. 170) suggested that teachers invite students to practice skimming to find main ideas quickly.

2.1.2. Reading for detailed information and referents

Detailed information is provided in a text to support the main idea of the text (Grabe & Stoller, 2011, p. 7), which includes detail about "facts, reasons, examples, or opinions" (Montelongo & Hernández, 2007, p. 542). In language testing, detailed information can be spotted by scanning the texts (Khezrlou, in press, p. 12). To determine how much a learner understands detail information, language tests such as the TOEFL include two types of detail information questions, i.e., stated detail and unstated detail questions. Another standardized English language test, i.e., the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), includes three types of questions for detailed information, i.e., true, false, and not given. In addition to stated and unstated detailed information, pronoun referents are considered as detailed information, and a reader can use a scanning technique to find out what a pronoun refers to (Brown, 2004, p. 209). It is most common that the antecedent for a referent is found before the referent (Mikulecky & Jeffries, 2007, p. 114). Therefore, teachers found it less difficult to teach referent selection skills to EFL learners.

2.1.3. Reading for inference

Inferential skill is defined as a high-order skill which shows good comprehension of text (Rapp & Kendeou, 2007). Not surprisingly, Putra, Kasim, and Mustafa (2017) found that advanced EFL learners scored less for inference questions. Many research studies have found that learners can make better inferences when they have background knowledge on the topic they are reading (Tarchi, 2010, 2015). However, in a test environment, most learners might not have access to this background knowledge. Hudson (1996, p. 11) claimed that language tests were designed to be answered correctly without the need for prior knowledge. A study on the effect of prior knowledge on reading comprehension in the TOEFL iBT test showed that background knowledge played a very insignificant role in reading comprehension (Hill & Liu, 2012).

All reading comprehension skills discussed above require vocabulary knowledge. Williams (1986, p. 164) stated that vocabulary is one of the factors which influence students' ability to find the main idea. A study comparing the ability to draw inferences in a Spanish class concluded that low-vocabulary undergraduate students were not able to infer meaning from a text (Calvo, Estevez, & Dowens, 2003).

2.2. Vocabulary in reading comprehension

Vocabulary is the strongest predictor of reading comprehension (Sen & Kuleli, 2015; Sidek & Rahim, 2015; Zhang, 2012; Zhang & Anual, 2008). When a language was first taught, vocabulary, in addition to grammar, was the focus of the teaching (American Classical League, 1933, p. 2). With the emergence of research in the field of language teaching and learning, various methods of vocabulary teaching have been introduced by experts in the field such as Michael Philip West, one of the pioneers in English language teaching working outside Europe (Howatt & Smith, 2014, p. 85). The methods of vocabulary teaching have been based on two main vocabulary learning strategies, i.e., deliberate vocabulary learning and incidental vocabulary learning (Hashemi & Hadavi, 2015, p. 630; Yamamoto, 2014, p. 233-234). In deliberate vocabulary learning, students learn using word-cards, learning word parts, or studying dictionaries (Nation, 2013, pp. 2-7). With the word-card strategy, students keep cards where, on each card, an English word is written on one side with an example and translation in L1 on the other side. The cards are reviewed when students have free time. Vocabulary can also be learned by studying word parts, which is a cognitive strategy (Taie, 2015, p. 3). As with many languages, a word may be broken down into parts where the meaning of each part contributes to the meaning of the word (Nation, 2001, p. 263). For example, the word *predict* (*pre* 'before', and *dict* 'say') can be understood through its parts to get to the combined meaning: to say something before it happens. Nation (2013, p. 5) proposed the use of a dictionary to help learners utilize the two strategies and as a learning tool itself.

Incidental vocabulary has revealed higher retention rates for new vocabulary. In incidental learning, vocabulary is learned as a result of language exposure (Aghlara & Tamijid, 2011, p. 557; Chun, Choi, & Kim, 2012, p. 128; Teng, 2016, p. 9). This strategy is similar to a child acquiring vocabulary in his/her native language (Day, Omura, & Hiramatsu, 1991, p. 541). Incidental vocabulary learning can happen through watching movies (Mousavi & Gholami, 2014, pp. 1277-1278), extensive reading (Day, Omura, & Hiramatsu, 1991, p. 545; Wang, 2013, pp. 68-69), playing games (Madarsara, 2015, p. 31; McGraw, Yoshimoto, & Seneff, 2009, p. 1019), and glosses (Choi, 2016, p. 137). In a teaching context, Mustafa (2018, p. 58) suggested that schools specify the vocabulary size expected in each grade in order that teachers can direct the foci of their instruction. Teng (2016, p. 9) discovered that a learner must be exposed to the target word at least ten times in an informative context for productive vocabulary acquisition. However, when the input is received aurally, a learner needs to be exposed to the vocabulary at least 15 times (van Zeeland & Schmitt, 2013, p. 609).

Research on the vocabulary size required to understand texts in English has been conducted by Nation and Waring (1997) and Nation (2006). They discovered that in order to fully understand authentic texts, one requires the 1st 6,000 most frequently used words listed in the Brown Corpus. To read a novel for teenagers, the expected vocabulary size is 2,600 words (Nation & Waring, 1997, p. 10). For other novels and newspapers in English, a reader needs the 1st 4,000 words in the BNC word family list and the 1st 3,000 words for spontaneous conversation (Nation, 2006).

Several tests have been developed to measure the vocabulary size of learners (Nation, 1983; Laufer & Nation, 1999; Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham 2001). The most recent version was developed in 2007 by Nation & Beglar (2007). The test consists of 140 items where each level (1,000 words) is represented by ten words. As much as it is useful and practical, the vocabulary tests are subject to some limitations. First, the tests only measure receptive vocabulary, while productive vocabulary could not be covered (Nation & Beglar, 2007, p. 12). The current version of the test is in a multiple-choice format. One item answered correctly by guessing, which students often do (Schmitt, Schmitt, & Clapham, 2001, p. 74), can mislead the evaluation of the learners' vocabulary size. Additionally, some higher-level words have been borrowed by other languages such as Indonesian borrowing *thesaurus* (level 14), *plankton* (level 13), *caffeine* and *reptile* (level 12), and *yoga* (level 11). Knowing these words does not signal vocabulary level in the target language. However, this vocabulary size test has been widely used because there is no other alternative. To prevent students from guessing, they can be asked to translate the target words into L1 instead of selecting an answer in multiple-choice format. In addition, Sentürk (2016, p. 92) reminded students that "If you have no idea about the meaning of a word, do not guess. If you think you might know the meaning, then you should try to," and found that students followed it.

2.3. Homework in the teaching and learning process

The origin of homework is currently unknown, but it is suggested that it has existed in education since before the 19th century (Gill & Schlossman, 2004, p. 174). According to Smolira (2008, p. 93), the purpose of homework is to "improve students' knowledge and retention of the material." Teachers and students are convinced that homework is necessary to support the teaching and learning process both in formal and informal education (Williams, 2012, p. 1). In the EFL classroom, such as an EAP class in Iran, the main concern perceived by students regarding success is the limited time to learn English in the classroom (Afshar &

Movassagh, 2016, p. 139). Therefore, language teachers use homework as a solution for limited classroom interaction (Costa et al., 2016, p. 142; Gómez, 2000, p. 45).

However, teachers encounter many problems in delivering homework to their students. First, over the years class sizes have increased, making the grading of homework a very time-consuming process (Jonsdottir, Bjornsdottir & Stefansson, 2017, p. 13). Second, feedback is usually delayed, which, according to Smolira (2008, p. 91), may reduce "the usefulness of feedback for learning." Third, teachers do not know whether or not a student completed the homework honestly. Therefore, many experts proposed to change the delivery system of homework to a web-based system. Web-based homework does not need to be graded manually, and the feedback can be immediate (Richards-Babb, Drelick, Henry & Robertson-Honecker, 2011, p. 81). In addition, students can reattempt the homework several times, which can increase the retention of the material. The duration of exercise completion can also be used as an indicator of whether students cheat or complete the exercise with their own effort and whether they are serious in completing the homework.

Several studies have investigated homework delivery systems (Chen, Cannon & Taylor, 2017; Jonsdottir, Bjornsdottir & Stefansson, 2017; Smithrud & Pinhas, 2015; Williams, 2012). The studies compared paper-and-pencil based homework (PPBH) and web-based homework (WBH). Many found that the homework delivery system did not correlate with the students' achievement (Bonham, Deardorff & Beichner, 2003, p. 1066; Chen, Cannon & Taylor, 2017, pp. 1065-1066; Cole & Todd, 2003, p. 1342; Williams, 2012, p. 14). However, other studies found that students who were assigned homework delivered through online learning outperformed students who completed paper-and-pencil homework (Bonham, Deardorff & Beichner, 2003, p. 1066; Mendicino, Razzaq & Heffernan, 2009, p. 342).

3. Methodology

3.1. The aim of the study

The objective of this study was to examine whether vocabulary homework had a significant effect on reading comprehension and whether the mode of homework delivery gave a significantly different effect. Therefore, this research employed a quantitative method with a control group pre-test and post-test design by giving treatment for three groups, i.e., one no homework group (control group) and two homework groups (experimental groups). The three groups were given treatments through classroom face-to-face interaction, while only the experimental groups were assigned vocabulary homework. The experimental group 1 was

given paper-based homework, and the homework for the experimental group 2 was delivered through an e-learning platform. Descriptions of participants, treatments, tests, and analysis are provided in the following subsections.

3.2. Population and sample

The population of this research comprised senior students at Syiah Kuala University, Banda Aceh, Indonesia. They participated in TOEFL preparation training, a graduation requirement for students at the university. Three classes were chosen randomly with a cluster random sampling technique. Two classes were used as the treatment groups, and the other was the control group. Each group consisted of 23 students for the control group and the experimental group 2, while there were 21 students in experimental group 1. Eight females and 13 males were in the treatment group 1, while the treatment group 2 comprised 12 females and 11 males. In the control group, there were 13 female and ten male students. The participants were between 23 and 24 years of age and had studied English for at least 6.5 years, with a total of 672 classroom hours in high school and university. The following table summarizes the number of scores used in this study.

Table 1. Distribution on research participants

Groups	Participants (N = 67)		
	N	Male	Females
Control group (without homework)	23	10	13
Treatment group 1 (paper-based homework)	21	13	8
Treatment group 2 (online homework)	23	11	12

3.3. Design and procedure

The training for the three groups covered paper-based TOEFL subtests, i.e., listening comprehension, structure, written expression, and reading comprehension. In reading comprehension, all groups were taught reading skills including the main idea, stated and unstated details, implied details (inference), vocabulary in context, and pronoun referents. Ten meetings were dedicated to reading comprehension with 90 minutes for each meeting. The material used in the training was taken from the *Longman Introductory Course for the TOEFL Test* by Phillips (2001). This material was selected because it presented all the reading skills systematically with adequate reading strategies and practice devoted to each skill. The number of meetings for each topic is provided in the following table.

Table 2. Number of class meetings for each topic

No	Topics	No. of subtopics	No. of meetings
1	Vocabulary	7	4
2	Implied detail	1	1
3	Stated detail	1	1
4	Unstated detail	1	2
5	Pronoun reference	1	1
6	Main idea	1	1

In the training, the instructor explained the material, focusing on the reading technique which explained how each type of question was approached, accompanied with several examples. After that, the students were instructed to read one text and answer the following questions. The instructors discussed the questions and revealed the correct answers after students finished each text. Each subtopic consisted of three to four texts. Students were invited to ask questions when they did not understand the instructor's explanation.

Unlike the students in the control group, those in the experimental groups were assigned to complete vocabulary homework. The additional treatment, i.e., either online vocabulary homework or paper-based homework, was meant to encourage boosts to their vocabulary size. The homework covered vocabulary lessons followed by exercises related to the provided vocabulary. In each vocabulary lesson, ten words were provided in a list with their meaning, part of speech, and context, as in Figure 1.

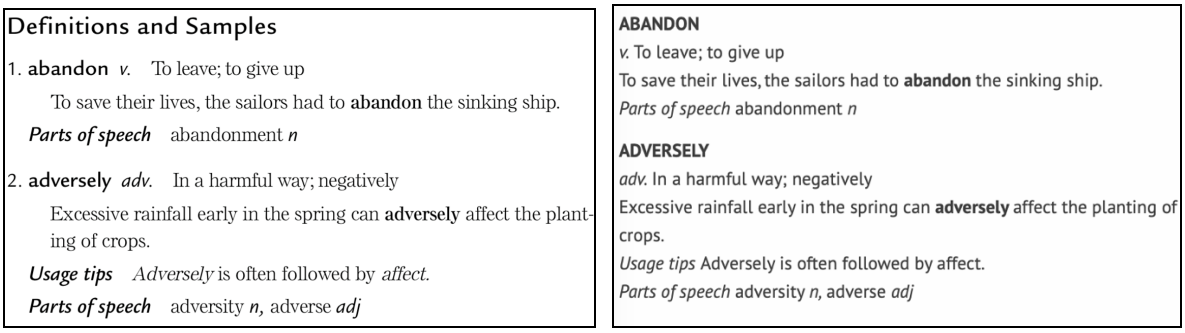

Figure 1. Examples of paper-based vocabulary homework (left) and its online version (right)

There was a total of 400 words provided for the homework throughout the course of the treatment provided by Stafford-Yilmaz and Zwier (2005). Exercises for each lesson included 11-13 items. It was estimated that the students needed at least half an hour to complete each lesson along with the quizzes. The exercises were in the form of multiple-choice, completion, matching, and drag and drop as in Figure 2.

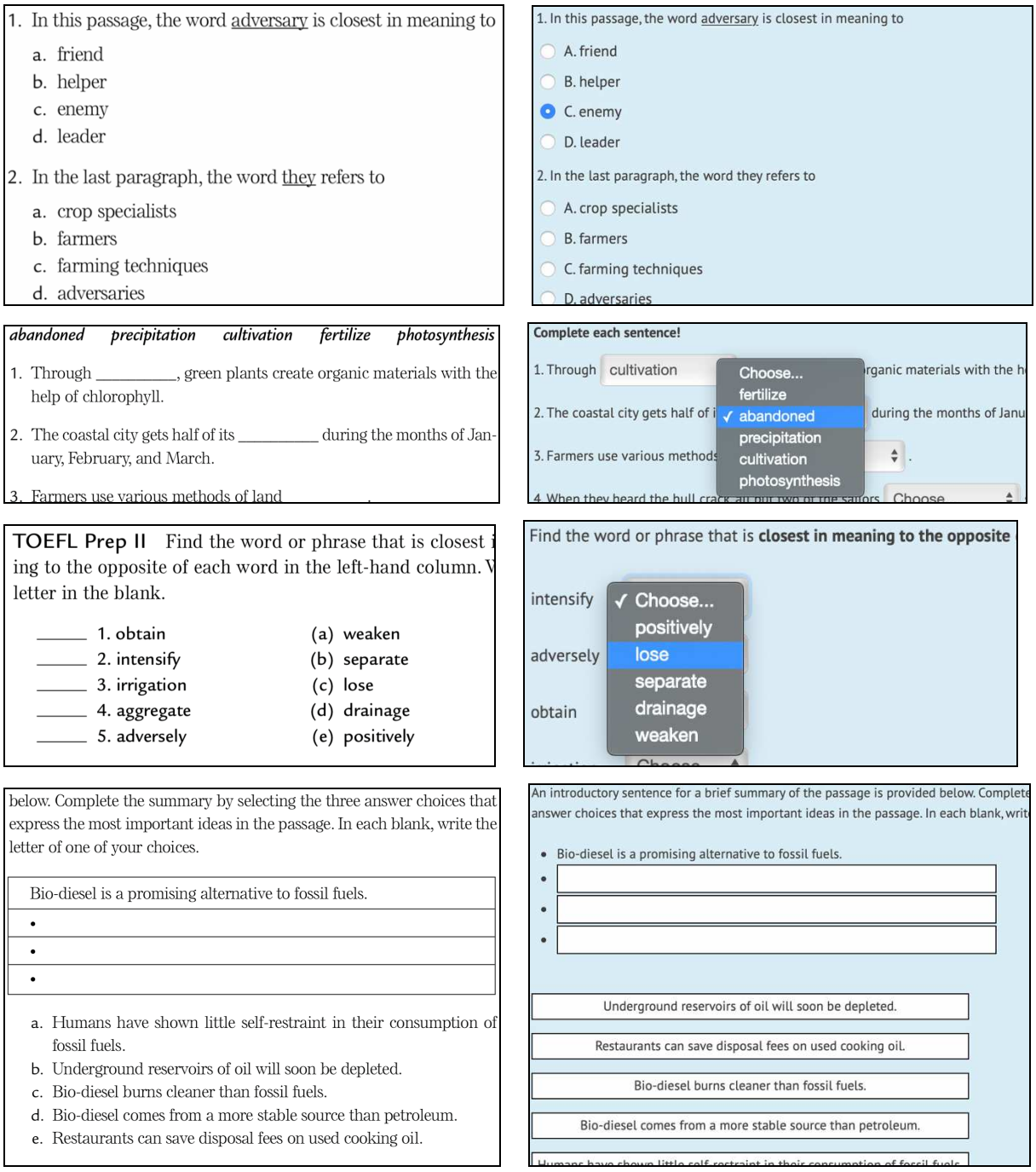

Figure 2. Types of exercises for paper-based homework (left) and online versions (right)

Figure 2 shows the types of exercises for vocabulary homework delivered on paper on the left and their online version equivalence on the right. The vocabulary homework was designed to be completed in 8 days. The vocabulary set was divided into themes, which covered nature (day 1), science (day 2), mind and body (day 3), society (day 4), money (day 5), government and justice (day 6), relationship (day 7), and culture (day 8).

Paper-based vocabulary homework was delivered each day to the class to be collected the next day, and the feedback was given one day after each submission. The online vocabulary

homework was delivered through the Moodle online application for learning management system (LMS), as also used in Bataineh and Mayyas (2017), Bower and Wittmann (2011), and Ghiglione, Aliberas, Vicent, and Dalziel (2009), which was installed on the institution website. To activate their access to the website, the students received account information from the e-learning supervisor.

In the program, students were obligated to complete all the lessons and exercises seriously. Their homework completion was monitored by the e-learning supervisor for both types of homework. For online vocabulary homework, they were scored for the way they completed the homework. The scoring system was different for lessons and exercises. The scoring system is provided below.

Table 3. Scoring system for the process of vocabulary lesson in vocabulary homework

No	As written on the page	Description	Score
1	No login yet	The student has not logged into the system.	0
2	Lesson started	The student has clicked on the lesson.	1
3	Course module viewed Content page viewed	The student has started to view the lesson but has not finished reading all the content in the lesson.	2
4	Lesson ended	The student has finished reading the lesson.	3

Table 4. Scoring system for exercise completion in vocabulary homework

No	As written on the page	Description	Score
1	No login yet	The student has not logged into the system.	0
2	Course module viewed	The student has clicked on the exercise.	0
3	Quiz attempt started	The student has started the exercise.	1
4	Quiz attempt viewed	The student has finished the exercises but has not clicked on the “submit” button.	2
5	Quiz attempt summary viewed	The student has reviewed the exercise before submission.	2
6	Quiz attempt submitted	The exercise was submitted.	3
The exercise has been submitted, but the completion duration is too short.			1.5
The submitted quiz is less than 80% correct, but the student did not reattempt the exercise.			1.75

Their homework progress was monitored daily. Students who scored less than 3 for most exercises after the first three days were invited to the training office, given motivation, and warned of training failure by the training coordinator. Those who scored less than 3 for some exercises were given a warning letter. There were six students who were invited to the office and another seven students who were warned in writing. As a result, they caught up with the homework and started completing the rest of the homework as expected. This type of supervision was not possible for the paper-based homework group. They could only be monitored based on whether or not they submitted the homework. No student in this group was invited to the office because they all submitted their homework.

3.4. Data collection procedures

To find out whether the training improved students' reading comprehension, the students were given a pre-test and post-test. The test material for both tests was reading the section in the TOEFL provided by the Educational Testing Service (ETS). This test was selected because it accommodates the nature of this research. First, it was designed for an academic purpose. Second, the test measured all reading comprehension skills focused on in this research, as presented in Table 5. It comprised five passages with 50 questions in total. The topics of the passages were varied. ETS (2009, p. 8) claimed that no background knowledge on specific topics is required to answer the questions in the test. The students were given 55 minutes to complete the test. The reading skills included in the test are presented in the following table.

Table 5. Skills tested in reading comprehension test of TOEFL

No	Reading Skills	No. of Items	Percentage
1	Vocabulary	17	34%
2	Implied detail	10	20%
3	Stated detail	10	20%
4	Unstated detail	5	10%
5	Reference	5	10%
6	Main idea	3	6%

To find out whether the students' reading scores improved significantly after the treatment, a statistical calculation was employed. To decide which formula suited the data, the data distribution was verified through a normality test, which was determined based on the Shapiro-Wilk Test. This type of normality test was used because it has been proven to be the most powerful normality test for the sample size in the range of $3 \leq n \leq 5000$ (Razali & Wah, 2011; Yap & Sim, 2011). The normal distribution was interpreted at the significance level 0.05 (Coolican, 2014, p. 453). The results of the normality tests are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Tests of normality

		Shapiro-Wilk		
		n	Statistic	Sig.
Control Group Score	Pre-test	23	.95	.29
	Post-test	23	.98	.86
Experimental Group 1 Score	Pre-test	21	.94	.23
	Post-test	21	.90	.03
Experimental Group 2 Score	Pre-test	23	.93	.10
	Post-test	23	.97	.73

As the data were collected in the form of numeric variables and had been proven to have a normal distribution for the control group and the experimental group 2 ($p>0.05$), the proper technique to analyze the data was a Paired Sample T-Test. However, since the post-test scores for the experimental group 1 were not normally distributed ($p<0.05$), a Paired Sample Wilcoxon Test was used. The Paired Sample T-Test and Paired Sample Wilcoxon Test were used to reveal the mean difference in students' scores between the pre-test and post-test. The main concern of this research was to investigate if there was a significant improvement in scores after the treatment for each group. Our hypothesis for this study was that the mean scores between pretest and post-test were similar, or not significantly different, at the significance level of 5% ($p>0.05$).

3.5. Results

The research was intended to reveal whether there was a significant difference in reading achievement between the experimental and control groups. The pre-test and post-test scores of all participants are presented in Figure 3.

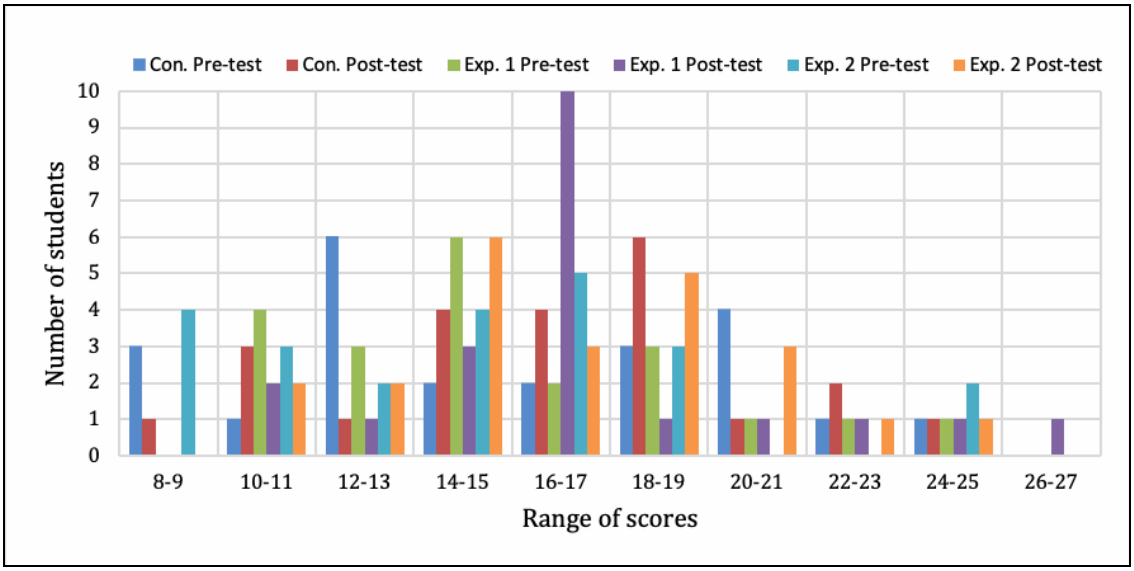

Figure 3. Students' scores from the pre-test and post-test

Figure 3 shows that both experimental groups exhibited more improvements, especially in the mid-tier to higher ranges, compared to the control group. The improvement is shown in all groups. However, some students, whose scores were already high in the pre-test, did not improve their scores, but the number of students having these static scores was very few. This shows that vocabulary homework helped students' ability in reading comprehension. Table 7

presents further descriptive statistics about the reading scores of the control and experimental groups.

Table 7. Descriptive statistics

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	Control Group (Pre-Test)	15.48	23	4.49	.94
	Control Group (Post-Test)	16.65	23	4.15	.87
Pair 2	Experimental Group 1 (Pre-Test)	15.24	21	3.85	.84
	Experimental Group 1 (Post-Test)	16.76	21	3.92	.86
Pair 3	Experimental Group 2 (Pre-Test)	14.65	23	4.47	.93
	Experimental Group 2 (Post-Test)	16.83	23	3.71	.77

Table 7 reveals that the students in all groups scored higher in the post-tests, with more improvement shown by the online homework group. In order to determine the statistical significance, a Paired Sample T-Test (for Pair 1 and Pair 3) and Paired Sample Wilcoxon Test (for Pair 2) were employed. The results of the tests for each group are presented in Table 8 and Table 9.

Table 8. Paired Sample T-Test for Pair 1 and Pair 3

		t	df	p-value
Pair 1	Control group pretest – posttest	-.98	22	.338
Pair 3	Experimental group 2 (Internet-based) pretest – posttest	-2.13	22	.045

Table 9. Paired Sample Wilcoxon Test for Pair 2

		V	df	p-value
Pair 2	Experimental group 1 (paper-based) pretest – posttest	45.5	21	.047

The Paired Sample T-Test presented in Table 8 and Paired Sample Wilcoxon Test in Table 9 revealed that the mean differences before and after the treatment resulted in p-values of 0.047 for the paper-based homework group and 0.045 for the online homework group. The improvement was significant when the p-value was lower than the critical, significant value, which is 0.05. Since the p-values of both experimental groups were lower than 0.05 ($p<.05$), the hypothesis that the scores of both tests would be similar was rejected. These results suggested that there was indeed a significant improvement in students' reading scores after they were

given reading skill training with the addition of vocabulary homework, regardless of the delivery mode. Furthermore, the control group students failed to show a significant difference in their reading scores between the pre-test and the post-test. The result of the Paired Sample T-Test for the control group was 0.338 ($p>0.05$), accepting the hypothesis that the scores of both pretest and post-tests were similar. Therefore, the results indicated that the improvements in mean scores between the tests of the experimental groups were insignificant.

4. Discussion

Several reports have shown that homework is a pivotal component in language learning (Costa et al., 2016, p. 142; Gómez, 2000, p. 45). It was hypothesized that participants who completed homework performed better than those who only participated in face-to-face classroom instruction. The research results presented above have shown a significant difference in achievement between students who were assigned homework, regardless of the mode of delivery, and those who were not, even though both received similar classroom vocabulary instruction. The p-values in the Paired Sample T-Test or Paired Sample Wilcoxon Test, which were lower than 0.05 for each experimental group and higher than 0.05 for the control group, confirmed that reading skill training within a short period of time, i.e., two weeks, did not have any significant effect on reading comprehension of academic texts without vocabulary homework. In addition, these results also suggested that vocabulary homework is beneficial to improve students' reading comprehension, be it delivered on paper or through an online platform.

Vocabulary instruction has been found to improve reading comprehension in most previous studies (McKeown, Beck, Omanson, & Perfetti, 1983; Sonbul & Schmitt, 2009; Stahl & Fairbanks, 1986). However, although the three groups were given explicit and implicit vocabulary instruction in the classroom interaction, the current study did not show any statistical evidence of improvement for the non-homework group. Previous research on the subject was often restricted to general vocabulary while the current study focused on academic vocabulary. Ono (2002) found that learning academic vocabulary was more problematic for students than learning general vocabulary. The passages in the pre-test and the post-test were intended to measure students' comprehension of texts in academic English. Therefore, the research results suggested that homework that was made compulsory is essential for students to learn and retain academic vocabulary. The fact that reading skill training failed to improve students' reading comprehension of academic texts, where vocabulary instruction was the focus of the training, confirmed that deliberate vocabulary instruction in the classroom is ineffective,

a belief shared by Miller and Galdea (1987). In our study, the vocabulary instruction also covered word-part analysis strategy (WPAS), which has also been proven unhelpful for academic vocabulary learning because, according to Taie (2015, pp. 6-7), the learners needed strong inferential skill, i.e., a sub-skill of critical thinking, in order for WPAS to be effectively applied.

Contrary to expectations, nine students (39%) in the online homework group and six students (29%) in the paper-based homework group did not obtain higher scores in the post-test compared to the pre-test. Six of the students (67%) in the online homework group did not complete the homework as seriously as the rest of the class, either for the vocabulary lesson or the vocabulary quiz. However, the lack of improvement in scores obtained by those students did not negatively affect the group scores in the statistical analysis because the proportion of students who did not improve their scores was small, and the improvements by successful students were very significant. This unexpected finding emphasized that students who completed the vocabulary homework seriously demonstrated significant improvement in their reading comprehension of academic texts.

The generalizability of these results was subject to certain limitations. For instance, the treatment was conducted intensively, where the students received five hours of instruction a day, with an additional 1.4-1.8 hours of homework. The overall exposure time to the material was much shorter than the time students spent in Williams's (2012) study. In addition, most students who participated in the research were simultaneously working on their undergraduate dissertation, which requires many hours of work per day. In a more relaxed learning environment, the students' achievement is likely to be different.

These findings have significant implications for the teaching of vocabulary. The current research has found that both monitor-enabled vocabulary homework and traditional homework had a significant effect on reading comprehension. The findings suggested that EFL and ESL teachers can adopt the method provided in this study to improve vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension of their students. Although both modes of homework delivery appeared to yield a similar effect on students' achievement, online-delivered homework is always more effective. The teacher can monitor how the students complete the homework. The combination of low scores and fast completion can inform teachers that the students do the homework only for the purpose of completion. In addition, automatic grading saves a lot of teachers' time. Such scoring also enables students to reattempt the homework, which can bring benefits for students' learning. The platform used in delivering the web-based homework in the current study was Moodle, which was installed on the institution website. This system is unfeasible in schools or

universities that do not have an institutional website domain and skilled IT staff. However, there are many other free platforms that do not need to be installed with a specified domain, one of which is Edmodo. Edmodo treats the whole world as a single educational entity, allowing anyone to register as a teacher to create classes or as a student to join classes. Due to the preference of students, this platform was also recommended by Balasubramanian, Jaykumar, and Fukey (2014, p. 421).

5. Conclusion

Web-based homework has been popular in English language classes because teachers can monitor how their students complete the work. This research investigated the role of web-based homework in improving students' reading comprehension of academic texts in reading classes. The mean scores of three groups, one with web-based vocabulary homework, one with paper-based vocabulary homework, and the other without any vocabulary homework, were compared by using a Paired Sample T-Test or Paired Sample Wilcoxon Test, depending on the data distribution. Based on the results of this research, the students who were given reading skill training which focused on vocabulary instruction could not achieve significant improvement in their academic reading comprehension score ($p=.338$). Only when the training was accompanied by vocabulary homework, be it delivered in a paper-based version or through an e-learning platform, did the scores improve ($p<0.05$). Therefore, EFL and ESL teachers are encouraged to assign vocabulary homework as a compulsory learning requirement in teaching reading comprehension.

Notwithstanding the results, this research does not reveal the percentage of words the students were able to retain through this homework delivery system after a certain period of time. A future study could assess the students' vocabulary mastery after the treatment so that modification in vocabulary homework can be made. Thus, innovation in vocabulary teaching can better help students improve their skills in this most pivotal aspect of reading comprehension.

Acknowledgments

The authors are indebted to the instructors, supervisors, and program coordinators who have facilitated the authors in conducting the current research. Among others are Prof. Dr. Usman Kasim, M.Ed., Mahlil, Munilya Maulida, Siti Raisha, Maria Ulfa, Aditya Rivaldi, and Maya Maulina, and Muzdhalifah Alqinda. In addition, our appreciation also goes to William Wickham, a Writing Center associate at Oberlin College for his initial feedback for the manuscript.

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AUTHENTIC USE OF TECHNOLOGY TO IMPROVE EFL COMMUNICATION AND MOTIVATION THROUGH INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGE EXCHANGE VIDEO CHAT

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Abstract

University EFL students in Ecuador do not have many opportunities to authentically practice English outside of the classroom. This lack of daily connections decreases students' ability to effectively communicate and improve in language learning. Therefore, an international language exchange program was created with 17 students through video chat platforms. The objective of the research was to give students an opportunity to practice English to increase intrinsic motivation and oral communication. This study followed a mixed method approach using questionnaires, informal interviews and observations over a five-week period. The program showed increased confidence in speaking, students seemed to be more intrinsically motivated to improve and an increase in fluency was seen in overall communication skills.

Keywords: authentic learning; communication; EFL; motivation; technology; video chat

1. Introduction

In Ecuador, there is a deficiency of 4,250 English language teachers throughout the country (El Comercio, 2016) and many schools do not have English language teachers that are properly trained with the necessary knowledge of the English language to teach English in Ecuador (Andes, 2012). To confront this lack of recourses, a new major in pedagogy of national and foreign languages was created at the *Universidad Nacional de Educación* (UNAE) in Ecuador and was further defined in 2017 when an innovative proposal was specifically written for this major. The goal of the new major is to train English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers for primary and secondary education to fill the deficit of EFL school teachers and improve overall English language teaching quality throughout the country. The first cohort of 38 students in the English language teaching major has begun this semester.

However, one of the obstacles facing these students is that many of them have entered the program with little or no English language knowledge. The results from their entrance

exams show that most of the students tested below an A1.1 level of English according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Thus, the proficiency professors for this group were faced with the obstacle of increasing students' English language levels specifically in oral communication. They had to find innovative alternatives to enhance the students' ability to internalize English and increase their knowledge, ability and fluency at an increased rate, because the expected level of English upon graduating is C1 per CEFR. In 2016, *El Consejo de Educación Superior* required that all students training to be English language teachers prove in the seventh semester of study that they have obtained a C1 or higher in English, so that they can continue studying and graduate as EFL teachers. Due to this new regulation, students must now have an extremely high level of English by the time they graduate to become English language teachers in Ecuador.

2. The background for the study

To create an innovative and interesting approach for increasing oral communication and motivation an online video chat language exchange was initiated. It allows students to have authentic interactions with English language speakers, since many of them do not have this option outside the classroom. This program involved 17 of the 38 students in the first cohort studying to be English language teachers. The 17 students chosen showed that they needed much support to improve their English language skills. These students participated in a five-week video chat language exchange for 60 minutes each week with 17 Spanish language students from a state university in California.

The program allowed students to practice speaking in an authentic setting outside of the classroom. Students gained knowledge about native English speakers' culture and practiced their oral communication skills which boosted their confidence in speaking at an increased rate. Finding a strategy to allow students to practice English authentically outside the classroom is important, since most of the students do not have regular contact with English in Ecuador. These students only practice English in class, which does not aid in internalizing the language or motivate them to improve their skills. As Alshumaimeri (2015) demonstrates, EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia have similar problems and, as a result, EFL students also do not have access to daily authentic English use. The article explains that some EFL teachers in Saudi Arabia have been working on finding various authentic materials and activities that would give students opportunities to practice English authentically to lead to the internalization of the language. In this research, the authors suggest that the use of authentic materials, specifically video chat

language exchanges, may allow for authentic English language learning for EFL students at UNAE.

Through informal interviews, the instructors found that many of the students did not initially choose to study teaching English as a foreign language and were not intrinsically motivated to learn English fluently. The video chats facilitated learning because they increased participants' intrinsic motivation by giving them alternative reasons to improve English language skills. Students now had a relationship to maintain for a short amount of time and insight into the culture and customs of native English speakers. As it was found by Wen-chi, Wu, Yen & Marek (2011), lack of motivation can decrease students' abilities to internalize and ultimately learn EFL. Oletić (2014) explains that without intrinsic or personal motivation to learn a language it is almost impossible to become proficient.

Therefore, it has been one of the goals of the researcher to find activities, methodologies and strategies to motivate EFL students at UNAE to want to learn English both inside and outside of the classroom. Finding alternative ways to motivate and increase speaking skills for students has been a challenge, but the use of technology as an authentic material through international video chat language exchanges has been an innovative teaching and learning tool. This tool focuses on how interacting with native speakers can aid in increasing EFL student's motivation to learn English, oral communication skills, and confidence levels using English.

The post test and post questionnaire showed positive results which will be described in the findings of this paper. Principally a few administrative obstacles were found, but once these problems were solved, students began to make meaningful connections with their partners in the United States.

3. Literature review

3.1. Use of technology, specifically video chat in EFL

The technology used to increase communication skills is a type of technological communication tool which Hsu (2019) defines as any tool used by humans to communicate through the internet. In a study of first year university EFL students, Al-Abdali (2016) found that technology, specifically video chat, increased university level students' communication skills largely in part because they could communicate and have regular interactions with native speakers. This technological interaction allowed students to develop their skills in a more relaxed and purposeful setting. In Japan, Iino and Yabuta (2015) found that students not only increased their English language communication skills, but also gained global competencies through international video chats. They also found that the use of technology such as video

chats could fill the void of purposeful L2 communicative experiences, resulting in the improvement of students' oral articulation.

Kasapoglu-Akol (2010) explains how technology and the internet are part of students' everyday lives and are proliferated throughout the world today. The research from the present study suggests that when connected to EFL, technology and the internet can create a more purposeful learning environment. Jauregi and Bañados (2008) also found this to be true in their study of the use of virtual video communication to improve oral Spanish skills. Students found that establishing connections to real-life activities while learning a language aided their oral expression. A study conducted by Carey and Crittenden (2000) found that the proliferation of various web CTs allowed for more effective learning, especially as regards communicative skills. This study specifically looked at the use of the internet to support communication skills among students and Park and Son (2009) also found students to be active autonomous learners with technology, giving them more control over their learning.

Golonka et al. (2012) completed a comprehensive review of hundreds of studies that focused on the relevance of the role of technology in language learning. This review guides the findings in this current article, as they also discovered that technology can play an important role in foreign language learning by increasing authentic interaction and students' connections with the new language being learned. Ryobe (2009) found that the use of technology, and specifically video chat, not only increased students' abilities to communicate, but also gave them a sense of confidence they did not have before participating in the activity. Through video chats, Kristi et al. (2012) found that the tasks provided along with the use of technology allowed for improved learning in various skills, students felt an increased motivation using video chat and purposefully used the target language of English. Yanguas (2010) completed a complex study using computers to promote communication for language learners at a university level. The study used video chat as a classroom tool to practice listening and communication skills and it found that language learning was generated. This is because it was an authentic situation where students could improve L2 communication even when they had not yet perfected these skills.

3.2. Authentic materials

Authentic materials are defined as "materials which are prepared for native speakers and not designed to be used for teaching purposes Al Azri and Al-Rashdi, 2014, p. 249". Hsu (2019) explains that technological communication tools are a popular authentic tool to use in an EFL classroom to promote communication. Alshumaimeri (2015) mentions that there are many

different types of authentic materials and when they are used in the classroom, real-life situations are emphasized and internal connections for the learners are created. Al Alzri and Al-Rashdi (2014) also explain that these types of materials have become extremely important for EFL teachers around the world as a teaching tool to bring situations into the classroom that would be encountered in the real world and to aid in student learning. Their study discusses how authentic tools are necessary to utilize in EFL classes which have little or no interaction with native speakers. Like the participants in this study, Carey and Crittenden (2000) completed their research with participants that had very little access to authentic English speakers. They found that the use of video and audio technology allowed for authentic communication to occur between the participants and fluent English speakers. This interaction was seen to be a very effective tool aiding in increasing oral communication. Wen-chi et al. (2011) explain how teachers must be creative in providing authentic teaching strategies in the classroom to design opportunities for language learners to participate in real-life communication activities. Reiterating the idea Peacock (1997) claims that authentic materials can mimic actual social interactions, which is exactly what a video chat between L1 and L2 language learners could be. The present researcher used authentic materials as an innovative mode of communication practice using video chat, where the EFL participants interacted with native speakers in a comfortable reliable setting.

3.3. Motivation in EFL

Oletić (2014) defines motivation as the reason people persevere and attempt to attain anything. When motivation is connected to students, this tends to stem from students' personal experiences or eagerness to prevail in the area being studied. When EFL students have very little authentic interaction with L1 speakers, many feel unmotivated (Gilakjani, 2012). The research in this paper shows that very few of the participants had regular interaction with L1 speakers. Wen-chi et al. (2011) explain that this phenomenon happens in many countries around the world where EFL is taught since many learners around the world do not have the opportunities to speak English in authentic settings and therefore lack meaningful interactions in their L2. The researchers explained this ultimately results in a lack of motivation among students' which tends to decrease their abilities to reach an advanced level of language proficiency. In this study, this phenomenon was seen in case of the participants since many of them did not use English in their daily life and since they had no connection to English, they did not have an intrinsic reason to learn it. As the participants began the video chat language exchange program, similar results were found from the study conducted by Almeida d'Eca

(2003). Almeida d'Eca explains how various forms of internet chat provide an extremely motivating experience for language learners when there is little opportunity for authentic communication. This strategy not only aids in oral communication but can give students an intrinsic reason to improve English language learning by allowing them opportunities for authentic interaction with L1 speakers. Similarly, Tafazoli and Golshan (2014) recognize that various types of technological interactions can aid to enhance communication skills and motivate students, especially in EFL settings, when used as a specific tool and not the only form of language learning. However, the research completed by Mora Vázquez, Trejo Guzmán & Roux Rodríguez (2010) showed that any activity allowing students to utilize L2 in the community of native language speakers will have a positive impact on student motivation to improve L2 knowledge.

The participants in this study explained that it was difficult to be motivated because they had little to no interaction with the L2 outside of the classroom. Students needed the motivation in the classroom, since, as Gilakjani (2012) explains, "students learn best by seeing the value and importance of the information presented in the classroom. If the students are not interested in the material presented, they will not learn it" (p. 57). The researcher used video chats to connect learning to real-life interactions, which in turn created an authentic reason to increase their language skills. Gilakjani (2012) also suggests that student motivation can be increased when different types of technology are used in EFL courses. Finally, as Hsu (2019) found, the use of video chat increased L2 student motivation because of students' interactions with native speakers from other countries. Participants from the study felt more comfortable speaking to L1 speakers after participating in the program.

4. The study

4.1. Participants

The participants of this study were beginner level EFL students in UNAE in Ecuador. They were 17 native Spanish speakers from a beginner language proficiency course. These students were chosen because they needed the most support in various language skills, specifically listening and speaking, and they had little or no authentic or meaningful opportunities to practice English with native or fluent English speakers outside of the classroom. For many students participation in the video chats was the first time they had long or meaningful conversations in English with a native speaker in an authentic setting.

The native English speakers for this program were university students in California studying in their first year of Spanish courses. They were also chosen because they have few opportunities to practice their Spanish with native speakers outside of the classroom. The university they are studying at lacks students with cultural and economic diversity and finding Spanish speakers to practice with can be a challenge. This exchange program allowed for a unique opportunity to gain cultural insight along with language practice.

4.2. Design and procedure

The study used the action research framework following a mixed methods approach. The researcher used qualitative and quantitative tools to gather information about the use of technology and authentic materials in the classroom and the way in which these educational tools and strategies effect the motivation of EFL students at a university level.

At the beginning of the semester, first year university students who were studying to be English language teachers joined this program. These students volunteered to interact on a regular basis with a native speaker outside the classroom because they did not have these opportunities to use English in an authentic manner and they were looking for innovative strategies to improve L2 learning.

First the students took an oral pretest to evaluate their level of English. This allowed the researcher to be able to monitor the student's growth over the five weeks. The students were then paired randomly with university students from the United States. Each Ecuadorian student was given an email template, an email address and a WhatsApp number of their video chat exchange program partner. They were given one week to establish contact with their partners and set up the first meeting according to the schedules of both students. They were obligated to meet once a week for the five-week period for a minimum of one hour. During each meeting the students spoke using WhatsApp, Skype, Facebook or Facetime as a means of interaction for the video chat. Each student was given specific questions for each weekly meeting based on the topics of the language class they were attending simultaneously. Each week the students also had to evidence each meeting by sending the instructor a screenshot with a time stamp of their meeting and the completed questionnaire. Examples of the questionnaires are included Appendix 1.

Throughout the program the student's meetings were monitored through checking the completed questionnaires, screenshots and informal individual discussions about the student's experiences. This is when students shared their positive experiences such as speaking to native speakers for the first time, being able to communicate in English for short periods of time and

making cultural connections with their video chat partners. This was also when such difficulties of the program as the use of new technology, having scheduling confusions and being unable to meet on certain specified dates were discussed. Also discussions concerned the ways to improve and eliminate these problems. Concluding the five-week program, students had a post-test to evaluate their communication abilities.

4.3. Data collection procedures

The researcher used various tools to gather data in the study over the five-week period. This time frame was chosen after a trail period in previous semesters. It was found that students often lost interest if the experience was longer and when it was shorter, time did not allow for students to develop skills authentically. Various tools were used in this study to measure the needs, abilities, difficulties and results.

(1) A pre-questionnaire related to the following topics:

a) previous use and knowledge of this type of technology;

b) previous interaction with native speakers;

c) opinions about improving English oral communication;

d) motivation to learn English.

(2) An oral pre-test - this was administered at the beginning of the five-week period and followed CEFR, which allowed the teacher to discover if students were below an A1, A1.1, A1.2, A2, A2.2. The findings show that students who participated in this activity were at various levels ranging from below A1 to A2.2.

(3) Various informal conversations over the five-week period - the participants shared their experiences and conversations with their partners in the United States, they also discussed their difficulties and concerns about their participation.

(4) An oral post-test - administered following the same parameters as the pre-test, it included direct questions, open ended questions, describing images and having a simple conversation based on various topics with another student. This test allowed the professor to see if students increased their oral communication skills following the five-week video chat language exchange.

(5) A post questionnaire - completed by the participants to find opinions about:

a) changes in comfort levels when speaking in English;

b) use of technology to improve EFL oral communication;

c) motivation in relation to the activity;

d) opinions about the activity.

Below are the action research findings of each of the tools used and completed by the instructor.

5. Results and findings

5.1. Pre-questionnaire results

The pre-questionnaire results shown in Table 1 explain students' familiarity with the use of technology and the English language. This describes students' general use and knowledge of technology and English in their daily lives.

Table 1 Student use of technology and English

Questions / Answers	Yes	%	No	%	Total n	Total %
Previous use of video chat technology	14	82.35	3	17.64	17	100
Regular oral interaction with English in daily life	1	5.88	16	94.11	17	100
Motivating factor to speak to a native English speaker	17	100	0	0	17	100

5.2 Oral pretest and post test results

The pretest and post test results shown below in Figure 1 are of those who participated in the video chat. These results are based on the CEFR levels for A1 and show that all the students who participated in the program improved their oral communication skills over the five-week period. The students who had a lower level of English improved more than those whose level of English was A2 or higher. These students' English did not improve but stayed at the same level.

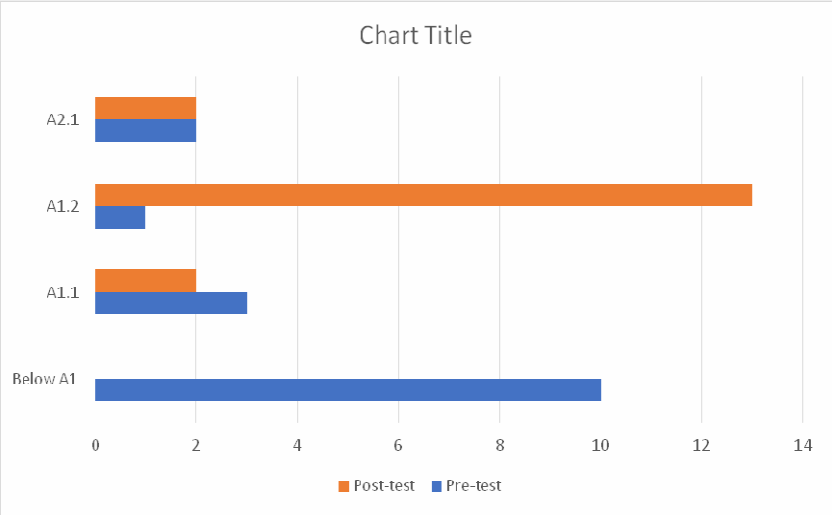

Figure 1. Pre and post test results

5.3. Informal meeting results

The informal meetings took place before the video chats began, about once a week during the activity and at the end of the five-week period. These meetings were utilized to discuss any opinions or thoughts the students had about the video chats. Below are the results of the discussions in the meetings. The participants' comments from discussions during the activity are included in the conclusion.

Table 2 shows that the participants were uncomfortable speaking in English before the video chat sessions. However, throughout their participation in the project, these students began to feel more comfortable speaking in English. At the end of the program most of the participants expressed their comfort levels in oral communication had increased. As they were exposed to native speakers from the United States, 6 students discussed various culture differences they found between Americans and Ecuadorians such as being on time, differences in school schedules and living arrangements.

Table 2. Students' opinions about language exchange video chat

Topics discussed	yes	%	No	%	Total n	Total %
Comfortable speaking in English at the beginning	2	11.76	15	88.23	17	100
Cultural differences	6	35.29	11	64.70	17	100
More comfortable speaking in English after experience	15	88.23	2	11.76	17	100

Throughout the video chat program various administrative and technological problems arose. Students discussed these problems with the instructor throughout the five-week program. The problems included internet connection, time management, assignment completion and student responsibility problems. The percentages of participants who encountered these issues are shown below in Table 3.

Table 3 Problems encountered by participants during the language exchange video chat

Problems during the five-week period	Yes	%	No	%	Total n	Total %
Technological problems	8	47.05	9	52.94	17	100
Did not meet weekly	5	29.41	12	70.58	17	100

Students found that technology sometimes impeded their abilities to meet with their partners on a regular basis. Some had internet connection problems, while others did not have

access to a computer or a cell phone at the allotted meeting time. Other students found the time change between Ecuador and California confusing and tried to meet at the wrong times. A reoccurring problem students found is that they could not meet weekly because their partner was not available at the allotted time.

5.4. Participants' opinions shared in the post questionnaire

As evidenced in Table 4 below, most students who participated in the video chat had very positive experiences, increased motivation and improved communication skills. It can also be seen that 15 students used WhatsApp to communicate with their partners who were in the United States. Two students did not benefit from the video chat experience, because they could never connect with their partners to complete the activity.

Table 4. Post-experience opinions about the video chat language exchange

Comments and student opinions	Yes	%	No	%	Total n	Total %
Use of WhatsApp video	15	88.23	2	11.77	17	100
Positive experience	15	88.23	2	11.77	17	100
Increased motivation	15	88.23	2	11.77	17	100
Improved communication skills	15	88.23	2	11.77	17	100

6. Discussion

The instructor of this group found that most of the participants lacked communication skills when using EFL. They were shy, did not speak fluently, had poor pronunciation and were ultimately uncomfortable speaking English in the classroom. When the teacher asked if they had access or any interaction with the English language outside of class, the majority answered they did not. They also did not feel that social oral interaction was a motivating factor to learn English, because none of the students used English in their daily lives. However, since these students were studying to become English teachers, they understood that oral communication was an important part of their teacher training formation and they were excited to participate in the authentic learning strategy provided by the professor.

Therefore, the researcher decided to use video chats with native speakers as an approach to aid in increasing regular interactions in English and motivating students to make English language learning a part of daily life. Students at first were reluctant to participate in the video chats since they did not feel they had sufficient levels of English to interact with native speakers, most being beginner language learners. These students voiced concerns of being shy

or unable to communicate sufficiently in English. However, after many initial meetings they found they could converse and interact in English at a level they did not think possible. Some students even connected with their language exchange partners at a personal level and made friends. Some students explained in the exit questionnaire that they were able to learn from their partner and vice versa. They also stated that they had created connections with English on a cultural level.

Others continued their weekly chats even after the activity concluded. Participants were surprised at how well they could interact, and many began to feel that gaining the sufficient levels of English would enable them to become an English language teacher in the future. This type of feedback validates the results found in this paper. Participants began with little or no authentic daily L1 interaction and later found motivation and rapid improvements using authentic materials provided by the EFL instructor.

The main drawbacks that were seen by the instructor was the inability to control the entire situation. Since this is an authentic interaction, there were two parties involved. The participants from the US sometimes cancelled or did not show up for their meetings. The participants in Ecuador sometimes did not have functioning internet connections. When this occurred, it resulted in unmotivated participants from UNAE and their counterparts. This was observed with two students who began the program but were unable to finish. They lacked motivation and were not able to improve communication skills since they were rarely or unable to connect with their partners for the reasons mentioned above. These students only met once and then their partner did not show up or the internet did not work properly. The instructor hopes that in the future there will be ways to overcome these issues, so every participant will benefit from the exchange to the same extent.

7. Conclusion

Students who participated weekly in the video chats were surprised at how much they could speak in English with their partners and the overall feedback from students was positive. The study can be used as an example of how Latin American EFL professors can utilize video chat and technology as a strategy that enables students to practice L2 in real-life situations when they are not available. This study also shows that having purposeful L2 interactions can motivate students to improve in oral communication and skills. It was seen that students began the course with little EFL knowledge and after five weeks were able to have a simple conversation and felt empowered by the experience in their language learning abilities. Others explained how they increased their comfort levels when speaking and now are not afraid to

speak in English with other people. This suggests that participants may have felt more intrinsically motivated to improve their communication skills and may have been more comfortable speaking in English after participating in the video chat.

Another aspect seen throughout the program was that if students or their partners did not commit to meeting regularly, a frustration among the students who made the effort was created. One student explained that they scheduled a meeting at three different times over the course of a week and their partner never connected. After this experience, they did not want to participate again. Another student explained that whenever they tried to connect on video chat with their US partners, the internet connection would not work. This is a technological problem that is unfortunately unavoidable in Ecuador. However, it still decreased student interest in the program. These are administrative and technical issues the instructors are attempting to fix for future replications of the activity.

The research mentioned has shown that most students were motivated to learn English and improved their oral EFL skills with confidence and fluidity after the activity. The students who regularly participated in the program became intrinsically motivated to interact with their US partners and therefore began to show more interest in English language learning. This increased their communication skills in English as they were given a situation where L2 was used authentically. As for the problems that arose, the instructors plan to find solutions in future replicas to solve the unmotivating administrative and technical problems that happened during the language exchange video chats.

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SMARTPHONES AND CLT: THREAT OR OPPORTUNITY?

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Abstract
Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is one of the fastest growing ELT sectors. To date, the teaching methods of MALL appear overly influenced by the desires of businesses, large institutions and technicians to produce easily measurable outcomes, rather than foundations built on upon pedagogical research that emphasises the importance of developing the communicative competence of learners. Findings from initial studies on MALL indicate not only the feasibility of using mobile devices for communicative purposes within classroom teaching, but also the opportunities they provide to implement a communicative approach more successfully than previously possible. Outworkings of this potential need to be established while the development of MALL remains at the "work in progress" stage.
Keywords: MALL; CLT; classroom teaching; language pedagogy

1. Introduction: the emergence of MALL

Technology in language learning began with the use of desktop computers, but, buoyed by the added functionality of mobile devices through the 'smartphone' era, has now grown to incorporate mobile assisted language learning (MALL). MALL has been defined by Viberg & Gronlund (2012) as encompassing "any technology that can be used when walking around" (p. 9). As functionality has progressed, so has the attempted usage for language instruction purposes; originally with the use of text messages for teacher-student communication, then moving on to dedicated mobile applications, and up to the present day where a vast array of uses are possible, from producing videos to incidental learning through mobile media (Trinder, 2017). Suggestions have been made that this new functionality may lead to opportunities not merely to replicate existing teaching methods through technology, but to devise new pathways to teach in desirable ways not possible before. The potential for classroom exploitation of MALL has been aided by the fact that, generally, enough students possess devices within classrooms for this to take place; a phenomenon dubbed "Bring Your Own Device" or BYOD (Burston, 2017).

A focus on MALL within research remains far short of the quantity of studies on other technology for language instruction (Burston, 2017). Even so, the sense that mobile technology needs integrating into planned learning activities is growing and will not wait for consensus from research on pedagogic methodology. As Hockly (2013) notes, "The future is increasingly mobile, and it behoves us to reflect this in our teaching practice" (p. 84). The question remains though; how best is this to be achieved?

2. ELT teaching methodology

Most teacher training courses nowadays promote a teaching style which has the development of communicative competence as its main objective. Ellis (2001) sets out the evolution of the Communicative Approach; traditionally, language teaching emphasised mastery of the correct linguistic form, a notion which began to be challenged in the 1960s as it was noticed that mere knowledge of language did not necessarily lead to real-life usage. A move generally named "Communicative Language Teaching" (CLT) developed after this, promoting the teaching of language that produced the ability to communicate effectively through the development of language skills and functions; this then extended to include autonomy and personal relevance. Consequently, language input which was seen as meaningful and authentic was granted more prominence in the classroom, along with opportunities to produce comprehensible output.

However, the Communicative Approach led to new questions. Should an upfront focus on grammar be retained or should grammar be incidentally covered in response to the students' input/output? A number of studies found problems with implementing approaches in certain contexts: monolingual groupings lacked communicative need in the target language, exam requirements pressurised teachers to focus on form, teacher role shifts from director to communicative facilitator were not received well in some cultures where the teacher was expected to have ultimate classroom authority, and large class sizes saw difficulties in making sessions personal, contextually relevant or student-led (Walsh & Wyatt, 2014).

These issues have resulted in objections to attempts to further this one teaching method as a global template for all to follow, with writers of new teaching textbooks such as Smith & Conti (2016) stating there is no longer an agreed prognosis for what would be best in all classrooms. Many now speak of teaching methodology entering into a "post-method" era, where teachers should choose their approach off-the-shelf from a range of possible approaches. However, none of the objections to CLT question its fundamental principles of relevance, authenticity, being engaging, being student-centred and the need for both input and output. Rather, objections all emphasise situations where it appears difficult to implement, and most

agree that whatever method a teacher follows, these five principles should still be aspired to. It follows, then, that if new methods became available that better facilitated these principles within the particular contextual situation of any classroom, they would be welcomed by the teacher, and, therefore, if MALL has anything to offer in creating new communicative opportunities in the classroom, this should be welcomed too.

3. MALL as a mass production vehicle rather than a teaching tool?

However, it is possible that the teaching community will not be given a chance to enter the conversation surrounding MALL if it does not do so soon, because non-teachers are rapidly shaping the future of MALL already. Mobile software technicians have driven forward the explosion of "apps" throughout societies and this is no different in the language learning app industry. This has gone hand in hand with experimentation to push the boundaries of what technology can achieve; for instance, more possibilities for automation are being tried and tested, with highly popular apps such as Duolingo (which claims to have more than 200 million active users worldwide) now offering "adaptive learning", in that its technology learns from a student's own mistakes and adapts future tasks to focus upon correcting those mistakes.

As well as technicians, businesses and large education providers are also pushing MALL forward quickly. Even within the past few years, there has been a huge take-up worldwide of online learning opportunities through online courses, virtual worlds, MOOCs and others. In some areas, governments and private institutions are already authorising the mass deployment of mobile devices for the express purpose of language instruction, such as in parts of the Gulf region (Eppard, Nasser & Reddy 2016). Realising that the portability of mobile devices enables learners to carry materials around with them on their phones, not to mention the fact that virtual materials may be more cost effective to produce than print ones, publishers are increasingly offering large portions of their materials online rather than in print (Kolbuszewska, 2015). The popularity of blended learning where students combine classroom and independent learning continues to trend, probably due again to financial reasons for both the provider and the learner. Although blended learning rose to prominence in the PC dominated era, MALL now allows a more seamless link-up between the two environments.

With large, financially-driven corporations ever more invested, the risk that the teaching community will be left behind in the process of shaping MALL is clear to see. The present danger is that these groups, primarily interested in data-driven education that gives quantifiable, measurable returns for money invested (Kolbuszewska, 2015), will create a new learning world through MALL that is devoid of the input from expertise on how languages should be learned

best, meaning that, crucially, learners will miss out. The approach of these providers to MALL appears to resemble a "build it and they will come" attitude, paying far more attention to cost-savings than content (Hockly, 2015), being more about the technology than educational expertise (Toffoli & Sockett, 2015) and predominantly reflecting a vocabulary and grammar learning approach based upon on traditional behaviourist and structuralist teaching approaches (Burston, 2017), which have been criticised so extensively by the language teaching community for many decades.

Possible implications are concerning. A move from face-to-face to virtual learning will likely result in fewer classes. In addition, MALL in its present form may result in a move away from a classroom-based Communicative Approach facilitated by a trained teacher towards a "do-it-yourself" mentality to language teaching, where a teacher incorporates mobile learning in any way simply because "she has to". One naturally asks, therefore, where this leaves the language classroom, and where this leaves the role of an expert teacher who is primed with concepts of how learning *should* happen. Moreover, considering the rebirth of traditional form-focused instruction through MALL, where does this leave the principles of the Communicative Approach?

The answer to these questions must be informed, as ever, not just by what the teacher believes, but also by what the students need. In the rush to claim ownership of the MALL industry, attention to learners themselves appears limited to studies which try to prove that a particular app has some effect in raising a user's knowledge of their target language. Little attention has been given in research to their opinions or how they choose to use mobile devices for language learning (Trinder, 2017). The next section summarises the scarce information on how learners are responding to MALL, and evaluates what this tells us about their needs.

4. Student responses to MALL

For the most part, students report positive reactions to the implementation of MALL. In particular, students appear enthusiastic about the progression it represents from computer based activities in many ways, such as its ability to make learning portable and usable both in and out of the classroom. Taking the classroom context first, a small number of concerns have been raised, such as a lack of clarity in how useful MALL is when doing in-class exercises through apps, or when attempting tasks that could be considered impractical when using a small screen such as extended writing. However, most studies have cited positive impacts on academic skills, electronic literacy and oral skills through tasks administered with the assistance of mobile devices. Ardi (2017) is one of several studies finding interaction, communication and

participation to be improved through their use. Furthermore, Viberg & Gronlund (2012) as well as many other studies clearly show that students find learning through MALL to be fun and motivating, which is of interest since motivation and better performance are often thought to collocate.

Much more attention has been given to MALL that takes place outside the classroom, with some interesting and perhaps unexpected results. Though limitations of MALL such as the restriction of small screens are acknowledged in literature, research has emphasised how mobile devices enable the boundaries that time, place and medium have traditionally been imposed on language learning opportunities to be stretched and broken through their portability (Sharples, 2007); no doubt this is the opportunity that is being exploited by app producers backed by businesses and large education providers. However, it may be that students are not as excited about using language learning applications for private study as might be supposed. A ground-breaking study by Trinder (2017) involving an Austrian group of students not only found that the majority deliberately engaged in online activities to improve their English, but also that, dictionary apps aside, they rated the informal use of English mobile media content (for instance, on videos, audio clips, online news or information websites) for learning purposes as considerably more beneficial than the use of dedicated language apps. Other research into informal language learning, though limited in quantity, provides tentative support for Trinder, such as Li (2015), who found adolescent learners were increasingly becoming engaged in social media for the express purpose of improving their language, and Lai (2015), who discovered students were turning to Facebook, Whatsapp and You Tube as deliberate language learning tools. This may indicate that students themselves believe the structured materials presented in mobile apps are not the best way for them to learn their language, perhaps stemming from a mind-set that being successful in language use is not merely about learning words and structures, but rather to do with the knowledge of how language is used in real situations. It could be suggested, therefore, that these students agree with the language teaching community line that one will not obtain everything needed from quantifiable, decontextualized language learning tasks, and that institutionalised, formulaic and mass-produced language materials, whether in the form of course books or mobile apps, are just a small part of the jigsaw when learning what is really needed to survive and thrive in an English speaking world. Such beliefs align well with the principles of CLT and would represent a distancing from behaviourist/ structuralist approaches that are not rooted in realistic language situations (such as in Duolingo), calling into question whether app usage actually does equate with language learning preference. Additionally, students in Trinder's study made the insightful observation that

communicating on a mobile was not the same as face-to-face interaction because there were no features of discourse such as emotion and body language. Though the potential to provide realistic interaction on mobiles through real-time video chat has been examined in some recent studies (for example, Sivakumar, 2015), the in-class context remains predominately the best place to provide these features of discourse which learners noted to be lacking in the out-of-class context. The benefit of the classroom is, of course, that learning and communicative practice can take place with the guidance of an expert, provides added purpose and supplies other students to practice communication with in an environment that captures a rich diversity of discourse features.

Although it is undeniable that more research is needed, what we know so far leads to this picture:

- Mobiles devices provide a world of language learning not just through dedicated apps, but where everything is a potential learning opportunity if actioned through the language one wishes to learn (i.e. mobiles provide INPUT).
- Mobiles devices do *not* provide most of the realistic communicative practice opportunities that learners need (i.e. private learning through mobiles is severely limited in OUTPUT).
- Students, on the whole, agree MALL is fun and engaging in the classroom (i.e. classes give them the MOTIVATION).

Before we look at the possible implications for the individual teacher and the ELT teaching industry in general, it is worth looking at how teachers are implementing MALL.

5. Teacher use of MALL

Latest research suggests that mobile phone based tasks are increasingly appearing within teaching. In a recent study on lecturers, half of those questioned stated their students' online practices were influencers of their teaching choices, with many mentioning their desire to integrate informal mobile learning in their practice (Toffoll & Socket, 2015). A study by Pereira (2015) on such teachers discovered that they predominately use MALL in four ways: to deliver content (e.g. videos from YouTube), to practise or revise through games (e.g. Kahoot), to allow students to create their own content, and to both share and collaborate on work (e.g. Glogster, Keynote). It is therefore evident that MALL was used by these teachers to provide input and enhance motivation, which mirrors the conclusions on student needs in the section above. Observations accompanying Pereira's study indicated that classes where teachers did these things were characterised by "a higher level of learner involvement, more engaging learning

opportunities, and a move from teacher led instruction to student centred pedagogy" (Pereira, 2015: 25). Therefore, it could be suggested that the use of MALL in these classrooms resulted in more communicative environments than might have been the case without the use of mobiles.

6. Problems and solutions

All the same, the need to convince teachers more globally that the use of mobile devices in the classroom can be effective, both practically and in terms of leading to successful outcomes, remains a challenge. MacCallum, Jeffery & Kinshuk (2014) state two barriers to a teacher facilitating MALL within classroom learning; they must first believe it is useful and, furthermore, they need to find it easy to use. In relation to the first point, Burston (2017) observes that, in general, there has been a failure in teachers, industries and in literature itself to show where the connection can be made between MALL technology and teaching pedagogy. Possibilities for rectifying this situation now exist. Pedagogic models are emerging, such as that put forward by Kukulska-Hulme, Lee & Norris (2017) which emphasises the role of teacher choice in selecting mobile application features that are beneficial, particularly those facilitating multimodal communication, collaboration and language rehearsal. Further suggestions for pedagogy are made below. As well as a pedagogic blueprint, a commitment to training in MALL pedagogy also needs establishing. Some ad-hoc courses exist, for instance, those provided by the British Study Centres and The Consultants-E, but most major teacher training courses lack proper attention to MALL, with some not even referencing the field and merely considering the technology from the students' perspectives, consequently ignoring the teacher's role in selecting mobile-sourced tasks appropriately (Kukulska-Hulme et al., 2017). Deeper exploration of the rich potential offered by MALL would be welcomed in these courses, along with a greater uptake in relevant training as part of continuing professional development undertaken by established teachers.

A further consideration is that mobile application programmers now have an established place in language education. In order that future applications can be made to work usefully for teachers and students, practitioners need to find ways to work with these programmers rather than apart from them. Some successful collaborations have already occurred, such as one outlined in Hung & Young (2015). They designed a project implementing a gamified approach in order to aid classroom interaction, and executed the project through a mobile application which they co-authored with the software solutions wing of an international innovation group. Outcomes from the study revealed "better immersion and interactions" within the classroom.

However, such examples remain few and far between, and consequently the most recent overviews of language apps still find them for the most part to ignore contextual factors within language and interactive potential (e.g. Heil et al., 2016). For more similar work to happen, there is a need to win hearts and minds of both the educators and the technicians; both need persuading that there will ultimately be financial benefits, whilst educators also need convincing of the pedagogic benefits of apps produced with communicative principles in mind. It would be encouraging to see larger education providers exploring the potential in this, both for their own and the wider benefit; this could be achieved through approaching private software producers, utilising in-house technological teams, or, in college settings, facilitating collaborations between language departments and technology departments; the added benefit of the latter two options being the possibility for teachers to own more control at the design stage of applications.

The second barrier concerning the ease of using technology needs even more careful consideration. So far, most work on MALL has focused on the use of apps, but a focus on apps alone may be unsatisfactory from the perspective of the classroom tutor, since apps require learning and installing. A teacher may be happy to learn the occasional app, but no teacher wants to continually lose hours of their week learning how to use the latest language learning software, nor do they want to regularly lose considerable periods at the start of a lesson training their students in how to use yet another an app, costing valuable learning time and making students wonder if they would have been better off studying at home. Furthermore, installing apps, then teaching students to install these apps and dealing with technical issues, is not what teachers signed up to when they entered the language teaching occupation. However, if we bear in mind the findings of Trinder (2017), the obsession with learning how to use apps may be barking up the wrong tree, and indeed may be missing a far more practical way in which MALL could be introduced effectively in our classrooms.

7. A case for smartphones and a “Communicative Approach”

If students recognise it is not learning apps but authentic input that they most need to become proficient users of a language, as Trinder’s study suggests, then teachers can meet that need by using the mobile device not as an app-store but as a source of classroom input. In this situation, the teacher no longer needs to be the technical expert, because he will merely be asking students to retrieve content by doing what they already know how to do on their phones (a few simple examples would be retrieving photos, videos, maps and weather forecasts, though the possibilities are extensive) or perhaps directing students to English content websites through

ordinary browser apps. In this way, everyone in the classroom wins. Students use their devices within the boundaries of already established usage so there is no time wasted by the teacher or student on app learning. Mobile devices are exploited for their ability to provide authentic, relevant and personal content (key pillars of a communicative classroom). The classroom context remains relevant because the teacher has a key role in providing students with guidance in content selection and in both understanding and using the language they encounter. Finally, students also have a classroom in which to hone what they have learnt and use it as a springboard towards realistic communicative output with all the benefits of a face-to-face environment.

Furthermore, for the convinced communicative language teacher, this approach also has the potential to make it easier to implement beliefs about teaching. Traditional approaches are limited to the use of one printed text or audio track for content for all students. The mobile device, however, means that any text or audio track is available at any time, so long as it is freely available through the internet. This opens up greater possibilities for students to have self-autonomy in their choice of text to study, which may make the content and learning more authentic than ever before. No more would business students have to spend a lesson, regardless of how nice it is, studying the history of Machu Pichu, just because that is how the course book wants to introduce the Past Perfect tense. Through the mobile device, students have the means for finding their own text, relevant and personal to their individual situation, and it does not need to be the same as the one the student sitting next to them is reading. This all can take place without the teacher even having to possess a mobile device in the classroom, let alone installing an app.

Burston (2017) sums up the potential well: “a constructivist, collaborative, learner-centred teaching approach can provide a solid pedagogical foundation for the effective exploitation of MALL” (p. 1). The view of MALL set out in this paper fits well with the hypothesis that smartphones do indeed have the potential to take language teaching to a place it could not have gone to before. Clearly, many of the ideas presented here need testing in order to establish what is and what is not reasonably possible, and what the pitfalls of such approaches might be. However, far from being the enemy, the smartphone may actually end up the hero if what is being suggested here is followed. In synthesising what has been set out in this article, the following principles could be put forward:

1. Students can use *mobile devices* to get authentic, relevant and meaningful input.
2. They need the *teacher* to help make sense of the input.

3. They need the *classroom*, the *teacher* and (to a lesser extent) the *technology* to produce and receive feedback on meaningful output.

It could be suggested that MALL may have resulted in control being taken away from the teacher in recent years. However, MALL can be used by the teacher to take back control for themselves and their learners, enabling the implementation of strategies that further communicative competence in learners in ways previously hard to achieve. Many spheres of society have already seen and seized the potential for mobile devices to work for their benefit. This is the moment in time for language teachers to realise that they can do the same. Otherwise, we may have to endure the agendas of others being imposed upon us.

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THE AFFORDANCES AND TROUBLESHOOTING OF AN IT ENABLED EFL CLASSROOM: FOUR PRACTICAL EXAMPLES

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide teachers with a practical guide to working in an IT enabled classroom. The paper outlines four central practical examples, with teacher reflections, of what was required in starting an actual IT enabled English listening & speaking program. The classroom environment described is board-less, meaning the teacher's presented with PowerPoint. The environment is largely paperless, meaning a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) approach was implemented for both students and teachers. The paperless philosophy also meant material creation was digital, and delivery/submission was via Google Classroom. The teachers' largely thrived in the environment, and many unexpected affordances were discovered, however, technical and pedagogical issues were also identified and the paper troubleshoots ways in which IT enabled EFL classrooms could be enhanced.

Keywords: BYOD; Google Classroom; paperless; EFL listening; EFL speaking

1. Introduction

This practical reflective article, grounded in real classroom experience, offers insights into the affordances, and troubleshoots the problems, associated with teaching in, and managing, an IT enabled classroom. The paper draws on the experiences of five teachers implementing an English listening and speaking task-based learning program at INIAD, a new innovative technology centric faculty and campus of Toyo University in Tokyo. The paper highlights four core practical IT aspects of the classroom that the teachers faced and how their assumptions and expectations matched the actual reality. Overall, the paper recognises the doubts and fears that teachers face when embarking on a new way of teaching, but largely showcases positive examples of how technology can aid teachers and students in the EFL classroom.

1.1. INIAD

The teaching took place at the Department of Networking for Innovation and Design (INIAD), Toyo University. INIAD is a newly established department at a mid-level private university in

Tokyo, Japan. It started enrolling students from the 2017 academic year aiming to attract students who can start innovations compatible with the network era after their graduation. Its main concept is "networking" between people from different nationalities, cultural backgrounds, and fields of expertise. Therefore, in order to develop practical communication skills needed to solve shared issues, all students are required to study foreign language (Japanese/English) communication in their first year, before being divided into separate courses to acquire specialist knowledge from the second year onwards.

The first year English curricula are comprised of two courses: Listening and Speaking (LS) and Reading and Writing (RW). All lessons are 90 minutes in length. There are 30 LS lessons per semester (two lessons per week), and 15 RW lessons (one per week). Both courses are mandatory subjects, meaning that all first year students (except for the international students who take Japanese lessons) are enrolled in this program. Classes are organized into four levels according to the results of a placement test taken before the start of each term, with three class groups at each level.

The rooms at INIAD are very simple and clean. The typical English classroom has eight round tables, six electricity sockets and one extension cord. The lighting, in the classrooms, is excellent with three dimmer settings; bright, medium and dark. No PCs are provided. Students and teachers bring their own devices into the room. Furthermore, the Listening and Speaking classes do not have a book, instead they rely on teacher and student generated digital materials. In principle, this is a paperless classroom and paper was in fact very rarely used.

1.2. Teachers

There have been five teachers involved in designing the Listening and Speaking (LS) program since 2016, and they have taught in the program since 2017. The teachers included 2 female and 3 male, 2 Japanese and 3 native speakers. The teachers were all aged in their 30s and 40s. In terms of IT skill they self-reported as being, average (2), above average (1) and excellent (2), for English teachers.

2. How we reached IT enabled classrooms

Warschauer (2004) outlined three stages of CALL from the 1970s to early 2000s. The 1970s into the 1980s can be termed the structural stage that made use of mainframe computers. The late 1980s and 1990s were defined as the Communicative CALL stage that made use of PCs. The early twenty-first century was termed the Integrative CALL stage that made use of multimedia and the Internet. A very important aspect of this progression was that the

technology was becoming smaller and wireless. As time has moved into the 2010s, it became possible for even a small child to carry a computing device to school, be that a tablet, smartphone or even an ultralight laptop. This lightweight capability meant the trend was moving towards bring your own device (Hockly, 2012). As it became normal for tech to be mobile, it meant the tech was ever-present. INIAD's IT enabled classrooms are based on the philosophy of bring your own device (BYOD) fused with superior Wi-Fi and online learner management systems. Could Bax's (2003) idea of normalized CALL be on the verge of fruition?

3. Examples from an IT enabled classroom

Four key practical examples were identified that represented real differences between a typical Japanese university EFL classroom and INIAD's IT enabled EFL classrooms.

3.1. Teacher personal computers and projectors

Aim: Replacing blackboards
Resources: 1 HDMI cord, 1 PC and 1 projector with speakers.
IT skill level: Average

How to set it up

Each classroom is provided with a ceiling mounted projector, with audio speakers, that screens onto a bare white wall (see Figure 1). There is one HDMI projector socket in the wall next to the teacher's desk. Teachers are provided with HDMI cables with which to connect their devices. The blackboard is largely replaced by PowerPoint projected presentation. PowerPoints require large font sizes (28+) to be readable and must be designed in advance.

Step-by-step procedure

- Prepare PowerPoint materials (minimum font size 28)
- Carry PC into the room 10 minutes before class
- Plug PC into HDMI projector
- Start PowerPoint

Figure 1. INIAD classroom

Teacher impression

All of the teachers were concerned prior to teaching in the environment as to how this would work. One teacher stated, “When I first heard that we won't have white/blackboards in class, I couldn't imagine how it would be managed. I have never seen such a classroom, language or otherwise.” Other teachers were concerned with specific issues, such as the PCs slowing down the class flow, students focused on their PCs rather than the class, and the general loss of spontaneity.

Affordance

All the teachers agreed that they had adjusted to the new reality and could see the benefits of PowerPoint slides, PCs and projectors; some even felt that they had seen a new way of teaching. The new approach was visually far more colourful and stimulating with the potential to easily access and use the Internet and audio visual content.

The students were considered to be far more focused on the tasks than had been anticipated, the technical issues had been minimal and the quality of PowerPoint presentation as opposed to a blackboard was seen as a strong positive. In fact, one teacher noted that the power of the projector was useful in getting the students heads and minds out of their PCs, as a blackboard would not have the gravitational pull to do it.

Troubleshooting

Having said that, there was some lingering feeling that by not having a blackboard some communicative opportunities had been lost. The teacher concerns centred around spontaneous interaction with the students and jotting ideas onto what would have been previously a blackboard. The teachers felt that while it was possible to write notes on blank PowerPoint slides, in reality, it was rarely now a part of their teaching style. These teachers felt that by only using IT tools, or the IT tools available, they had lost some flexibility in dealing with different learner types. As one of the respondents suggests, “PowerPoint presentations allow for smoother and more professionally presented classes. However, English classes rarely move in a clean straight line, there are usually unanticipated problems that must be resolved. It is easier to deal with the untidy edges on a blackboard as it is quicker and also easier to sketch and draw.”

There are several ways in which this could be overcome. The teachers could still use low tech solutions such as a blackboard or whiteboard for these random situations. Hi-tech interactive electronic whiteboards could be used or, possibly teaching styles will evolve and there could be less spontaneous interactions in the future classroom. This might be a trade-off some teachers will be prepared to make given the higher reported student engagement.

3.2. Bring your own device

Aim: Replacing books and paper
Resources: 1 PC per student and high-speed Wi-Fi
IT skill level: Average

How to set it up

The classroom required both students and teachers to have their own personal computers in every class. All work was completed on a PC. The students made use of digital materials created by the teachers themselves and third party online resources. In addition, sometimes smartphones were used. In some senses INIAD has an advantage over other EFL classroom

university settings, as INIAD requires PCs for all classes. It was expected that students would have a fully charged PC and there was no excuse for not having one. This would need to be taken into consideration if implementing BYOD in isolation from the rest of a school.

Step-by-step procedure

Teachers

- Charge PC overnight
- Bring PC to school
- Use PC in class: PowerPoint presentation, slack messaging (teachers and administration staff), class roster – Excel file, e-mail correspondence with students, PDF files, Chrome browser (Google Classroom, YouTube, Google docs/sheets, shared cloud material, other software)

Students

- Charge PC overnight
- Bring PC to school
- Use PC in class: Chrome browser (Google Classroom, YouTube, Google docs/sheets, shared cloud material), PDF files, e-mail correspondence, other software as needed

Teacher impression

Prior to starting the program, the teachers had a wide range of views on PC and smartphone usage; some had no strong predetermined views, others had expected off-task distractive behaviour, such as game playing and texting, while one teacher stated, “I don't see what the fuss is about. It seems totally natural to me.”

Affordance

In terms of teacher usage, there were many positives identified, and they can be summarised as higher quality materials and better record keeping, for example, the ability to show high quality colour pictures, audio and video. This was extended by the capability to share digital materials immediately and to continually update the shared materials in real time. If there was a correction, or need for change, then the teacher could easily adjust the materials and resend. Sharing could also include switching to online information sources as was prudent or necessary.

The teachers were also able to track student activity via Google Classroom and the use of shared Google docs. Probably one of the biggest positives was the improvement in record keeping. The ability to collate grade data on Google Classroom and download into an Excel file was a huge time saver and likely more accurate. The final positive was that digital materials mean a paperless classroom. No paper equals less things to carry, less photocopying and less things to lose.

The positives of student usage were also manyfold. Firstly, there was more engagement as the students seemed to like using computers and enjoyed the varied tasks afforded by audio, visual and Internet resources as compared to a book paper and pen. The students were also able to create various types of documents, presentations and other media in class. Secondly, since everything was digital, it was much easier to read students' writing and students could read the teacher feedback, as one teacher said, "No struggling with bad handwriting, both student and mine." Finally, it was much easier for students to communicate via e-mail and Google Classroom with the teacher, be that to drop a note saying they would be absent or to securely submit an essay.

When asked if they had any final thoughts on the positives of PC usage, one teacher reflected that "student own notebook computers are superior to CALL labs. This is for two reasons; students own computers tend to work and they know how to use them, as opposed to CALL labs that often have technical problems, or are simply too old. Secondly, notebooks are sat low on the desk and do not cover the students. It still feels very open plan. In comparison, CALL labs tend to enclose individual students in private spaces that make classroom face-to-face communication difficult and detection of non-class activity also difficult."

Troubleshooting

While the teachers were excited about the positives, they also identified three negatives that should be noted. First, was the sense of risk. If everything is on a PC and connected via the Internet, then a failure of that PC, or the Internet, is disastrous. As one teacher put it, "I can't think of any cons, except for the risk that I'm dammed if it goes down." Technical issues are not something a teacher should be expected to deal with and are largely outside of teacher control. INIAD features a media support centre which has offered fast technical support on the few occasions that things have gone wrong. This has included fixing one student's "Dead" computer and instantly replacing broken HDMI cords.

A second negative was the sense that teachers can easily be too focused on the PC screen rather than the class. As one teacher stated, “Some focusing on a screen in a limited location (on the desk) could reduce visibility range of the teacher, in turn reducing his/her awareness of students” while a second teacher said, “There's a tendency to sit behind the computer and sort of wall off from the class, but I try to fight it.” This can be easily solved by standing up, as the laptops are at about stomach height, and then, moving around the room, following good communicative teaching practice.

Finally, there was the practical negative that it takes more time to set up the classroom and organize activities. This was solved by the teachers tending to arrive in class 10 minutes before the start of lessons in order to connect the computer and projector. PC based classes require attention to detail. In fact, most classes require a projector, student roster Excel file, PowerPoint class presentation, online Google Classroom, and potentially several digital handouts and possibly audio/video media as well. Clearly, the teacher needs to know where these materials are and how to access them quickly. This is usually done by having multiple desktop windows prepared and open (see Figure 2); one for the roster, one for the PowerPoint, one for Google Classroom in a browser and one for audio/video. This is not difficult, but does require organisational skill and preparation time.

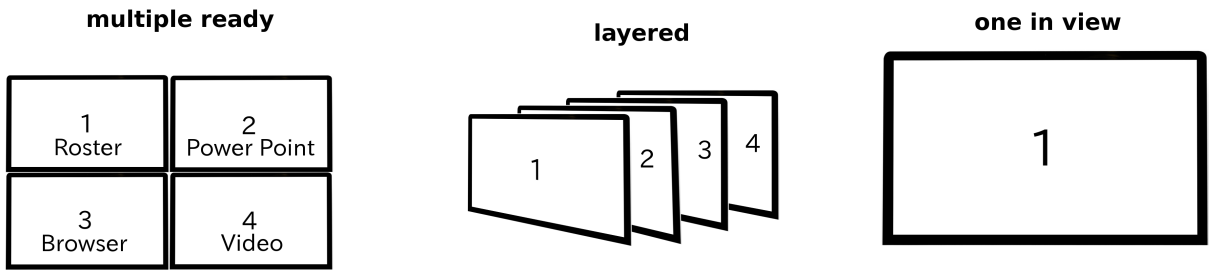

Figure 2. Multiple desktop windows

The student negatives can be summarised as non-class distractions, hardware inequality and decreased social awareness. The teachers had expected distractions and they were not disappointed. Non-class activity such as game playing, Internet surfing, texting and doing homework for other classes was identified. Unfortunately, this is the downside of excellent Internet connectivity. As one teacher commented, “students have an entire Internet's worth of distractions at their fingertips.” Several teachers noted that it can be quite difficult to notice this behaviour, especially as some students, to save their batteries and lower power consumption,

dimmed their screens. The solution was to walk around the class, be attentive and to continually communicate with individuals.

The second issue was the difference in specification of students' computers. The majority of students had bought the same standard PC that was recommended by the school, but some had higher spec and some had cheaper lower specification computers. This sometimes meant that students with lower specification PCs would need more time to undertake tasks than the average. There was no way to completely solve this problem, but being aware of it, a teacher can create tables and groups of students with a variety of computers, that way if one student has an issue they can work with a neighbour.

The third negative issue surrounded the reality of students being absorbed by their PC screens with their heads in their computers. This sometimes meant students, even in pairs, not listening to the teacher. It also meant there was at times less eye contact and communication between students than some teachers might prefer. The solution to bringing student focus back to the classroom is to use the projector, probably with something bright and noisy. Alternatively, suddenly brightening the lighting can also be very effective.

3.3. The handing out, submission and marking of digital work

Aim: Facilitate paperless assessment
Resources: Google Classroom
IT skill level: Average/Above Average

How to set it up

Google Classroom, according to Pappas (2015), is a learning management system targeted at academic institutions that streamlines the sharing of classroom documents and assignments. Pappas lists several advantages of this free system, namely ease of use, communication, effective feedback and the speeding up of the assignment process. The decision to use Google Classroom, and the positive attitude displayed by the team towards it, is supported in the literature (Al-Maroof & Al-Emran, 2018; Iftakhar, 2016; Ventayen, Estira, de Guzman, Cabaluna, & Espinosa, 2018).

Inevitably, Google Classroom leads to heavy use of Google docs, spreadsheets, slides and forms (an online questionnaire and quiz maker). Google docs allows for the teacher to add comments to students' works and for groups of students to interact with and edit a single document in real-time. Google sheets allows for the easy compiling of data. Google Classroom

allows for the various assignments to be returned to students via email notification and the assignment grade points to be collated into a Google sheet. The final grade points and student personal data can be downloaded as a comma separated values (.csv) file, which can be migrated to an ordinary Excel file and grades can then be calculated.

Step-by-step procedure

Google Classroom is a system and as such requires multiple step by step guides for each function. The following section will outline some of its important functions. The system is very intuitive and little experimentation is required to use it effectively. The initial set up and logging in (see Figure 3) are probably the most difficult tasks. To be a Google Classroom teacher you require a Google account, such as a Gmail account. In order to use with students in your school, Google requires you to have permission from your school. All students will also require Google accounts. However, if you are not using with school students, accessing the system simply requires a Gmail account. A demo account has been made, and for a limited time, readers of this article can view Google Classroom from a student's perspective. Please note, no submitted works will be returned or graded. The deadline for submissions has long past. This was designed as a sneak peek for interested teachers.

Logging in

- Visit https://classroom.google.com
- Log in with an associated Google account.
- Experience a student point of view
    - Join the class using the teacher provided code (bw1hn88), which will take you to a demo account for a limited time.

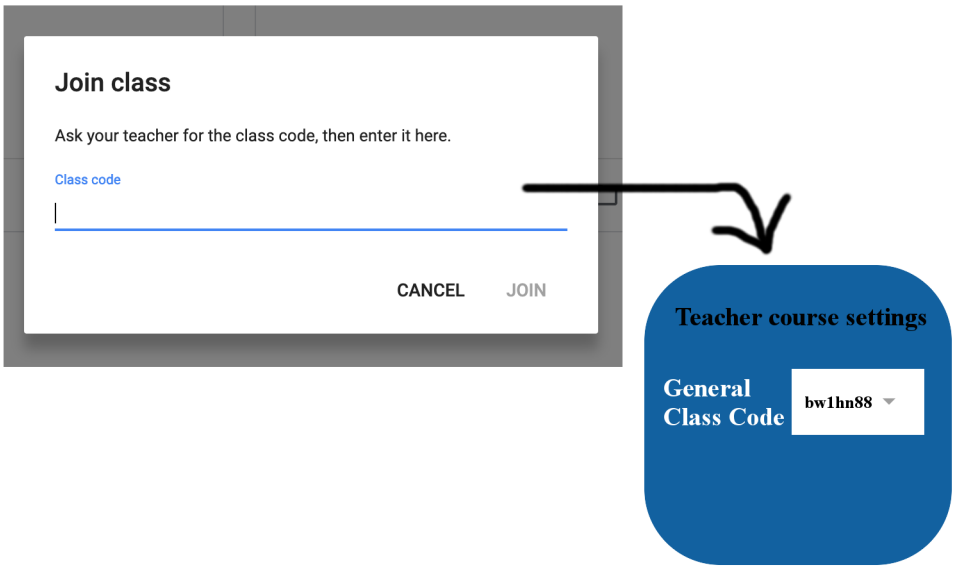

Figure 3. Entering the class code

Once you have had a sneak peek at the demo account, it is time to start you own course. First you need to sign in as a teacher, then create a new course.

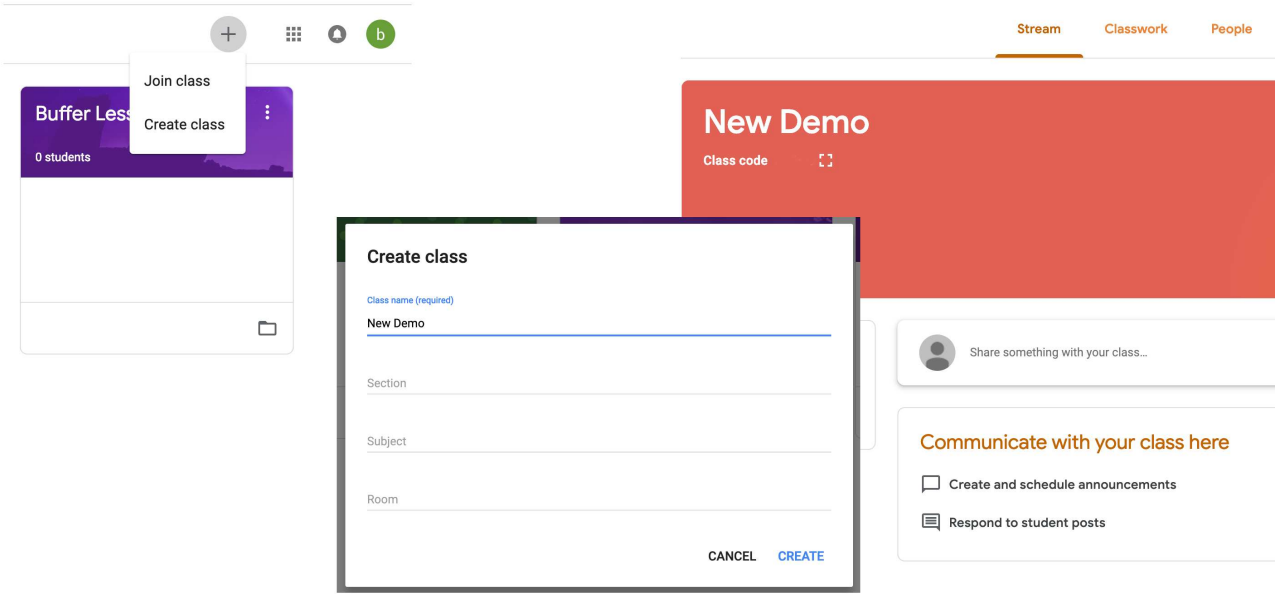

Figure 4. Creating a class

At this stage, it is fairly easy to click around the classroom. The default appears to be the stream section (see right top of Figure 4), but the classwork section is where the assignments are created and organised (see Figure 5).

Setting an assignment

- Click the create button
- Select assignment type from drop-down list (Assignment, Quiz, Question, Materials)
- Next
  - Provide title
  - Instructions
  - Attach documents
  - Set the points
  - Set the due date
  - Set topic (main menu sub-heading)
  - Schedule for sending
- The assignment will be listed in main classwork area under the topic

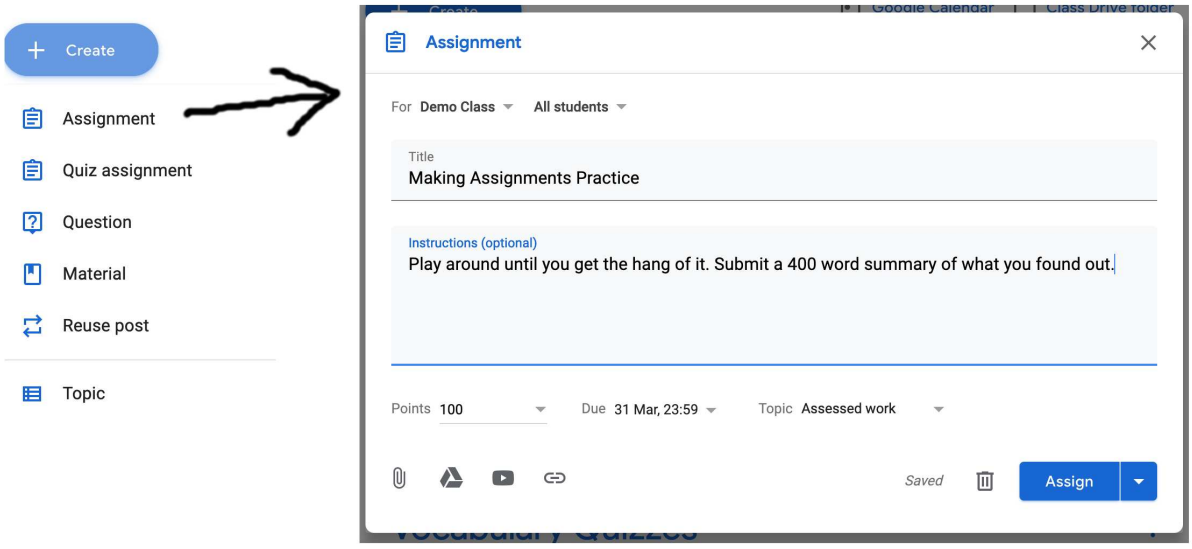

Figure 5. Setting an assignment on Google Classroom

The marking of assignments requires that the teacher click on the student's name and enter directly to the assignment. At this stage the assignments can be graded and comments attached to sections of the student's text. Once marked, the handed in assignments are designated marked. The designation *assigned* means the work was sent to the student, but they have not done it yet.

Teacher impression

Google Classroom was generally very well received, but not without some issues. On the one hand, one teacher commented, “Super convenient, I wouldn't go back if you doubled my salary.” A second teacher stated, “Google Classroom was excellent. I had not used before, but now I would be lost without it.” Yet in contrast, another teacher stated that “marking may not be quite as effective (for me) as writing comments or indicating detailed changes.” That said, all the teachers could see merit in the system, but not all seemed convinced it was totally for them.

Affordance

In terms of the delivery of learning materials, the general feeling was that it was very easy to do and there was the added bonus of having no need to photocopy. It was also commented that students do not lose the handouts and late or absent students can easily get copies. Also, if required, the teacher could make changes to materials and re-deliver in seconds, something teachers could probably not afford to do with photocopies.

The positives of the digital submission process were prefixed with the word “easy.” It was easy, as students could submit anytime 24/7. The teacher could set deadlines and the students were free to submit within the time limit. This was much better for the students and teachers than remembering to bring work to class. Also, it was much more efficient and used zero class time. Importantly, no major technical difficulties were reported with digital submissions.

Once submitted, the teachers also reported that it was easy to mark the work. One teacher noted that it was “easy for the teachers, since all the grades are in one place, and can give immediate feedback.” A second teacher stated that it was “easy to store grading records and create marking excel files for each class. Google docs are great to add comments.” A third teacher stated, “No stacks of papers.” A fourth teacher mentioned, “I think one of the greatest pros is that it's easy to read compared to handwritten work. Systematized submission tools like Google Classroom makes it easy to collect and return the work, compared to each student emailing the teacher, and makes it workable in mid to large size classes.” While the fifth teacher stated, “It's glorious. Fast, easy to grade, students get feedback quickly.”

Troubleshooting

The negatives associated with the delivery of learning materials were quite varied including cheating and technical issues. There was a concern that it was too easy to share materials for the wrong reasons. The biggest negative of the submission process is the potential ability for students to copy and paste another's work and to pass it off as their own. Plagiarism software was available at the school and a general awareness among both the students and teachers that it won't be tolerated probably alleviates the risk. The cons of the digital marking process were probably dependent upon the system being used. One teacher stated "The marking process is impacted by the file type submitted. It's slow and difficult to comment on a Word document, but very easy to comment on a Google doc." At the time of writing Google has improved the ability to mark a Word document. Google docs are still faster, but Word docs are no longer the issue that they once were. One teacher felt they were unable to comment as accurately or easily as they would wish. This may be a matter of adjusting teaching style or waiting for further Google Classroom upgrades. A second teacher was concerned with students incorrectly submitting, leading to non-submission of work. If students kept e-mail notifications switched on, then the system notified them of up-coming deadlines. Also, this can be overcome by teachers at least initially paying attention to who has submitted work and sending an email reminder to those who have not.

3.4. Introducing tech into task-based learning (TBL)

Aim: IT based TBL
Resources: Chrome browser, excellent Wi-Fi, other free software.
IT skill level: Above average/excellent

How to set it up

The school EFL program was initiated from the point of view that technology would be used in the classroom. Given this, it was decided that a task-based learning approach would probably be the most suitable and potentially innovative use of the facilities available. For example, the school requires all students to have Google's Chrome browser. This was somewhat opportune, as it meant the EFL program could make ready use of Google Hangouts which is embedded into the Chrome browser. Google Hangouts is a free p2p video call software, similar to Skype or Facetime. Clearly for speaking tasks it has enormous potential. In addition, some activities were based on Shotcuts, a free open source video editing software.

Step by step procedure

Hangouts

- Open Chrome browser
- Top right side of screen – click Google Apps button
- Click more and scroll
- Open Hangouts
- + new conversation
    - enter partner's Google (gmail) address
- Make video call

Shotcuts

This is interesting free software for Windows and Linux users, but Mac users will most likely prefer to use iMovies. It can be downloaded from https://shotcut.org/ (for Windows, Mac and Linux), while tutorials are available at https://shotcut.org/tutorials/.

Teacher impression

The use of information technologies within a task based learning approach probably offered up the most diverse opinions of the four challenges outlined. One teacher felt there was no need to do this, another felt INIAD, TBL and IT were a logical match, one felt they could match but was dependent on the task, still another reflected that it was very challenging for both teachers and students alike, while one considered it widened the opportunity for a teacher to observe student proficiency and participation.

Affordance

In terms of the pros of using IT in TBL, it was noted as being very doable and the teachers were able to add a certain level of real world difficulty relevant to the students' lives. One teacher commented that it catches the students' interest much better than a conventional style of teaching, involving skills that some students are already familiar with, encouraging them to learn vocabulary related to the task. The pros of Hangouts centred on the perception of output. One teacher stated, "I was quite surprised to see the level of interest and the amount of English

output during the hangouts sessions." Shotcuts, on the other hand, was seen as interesting and engaging, but little else was stated.

Troubleshooting

The cons of using IT in TBL seemed to be more numerous and clearly showed that this challenge was the most taxing for the teachers. The first concern was that since the tasks were computer centric, they could tend to be quiet and take a long time to complete. There was also a feeling that teachers needed extensive training to be able to explain the task and help the students undertake it. The solution was naturally for the teachers with greater IT knowledge to offer support and explanations to those who were struggling. There may also have been more technical issues with TBL tasks than with general IT usage. For all the positives noted with Hangouts, it did suffer the most technical issues. Usually one group per class would have difficulty connecting. Attempts were made to overcome the connection issue by spreading the students around the school, using different, and more, Wi-Fi access points. However, the issues persisted. The problem was solved, via a work around, by having some groups communicate via an alternative video conferencing application called LINE. This would suggest that the problem was not local to the Wi-Fi network, but more likely a Hangouts throttling limit or student PC issue. This was noted by every teacher and was a consistent and repeated issue. It should also be stated that at least one teacher was doubtful that the perception of increased spoken output using Hangouts was actually real. Since some group members were very active, while others were extremely quiet and passive. The overwhelming stimuli of loud activity may have been misleading. The solution to this issue is research. It would be interesting to know if the teacher was right or wrong. In addition, Shotcuts, while interesting, was seen as time consuming and also tended to create quiet time. One teacher was concerned that a Shotcuts lesson became a movie making lesson, and may not have been completely appropriate to a language classroom. The solution in this case may possibly be to limit software usage to homework activity and revamp the syllabus.

4. A final consideration: The importance of simplicity

One of the primary reasons that this program's progress has been so smooth is the teachers' confidence and competence with computers. This is not a boast of the teachers' superior skills. On the contrary, many of the teachers have fairly average IT backgrounds. In truth, the teachers' abilities represent the technological change in society and the streamlining, simplification and normalisation of CALL. Twenty years ago, a CALL lab felt like a space

station, it was very different to the typical daily teaching and learning experience. INIAD's classrooms, on the other hand, are simple. The teachers and students use their own computers and they use them for every class. The weight of adaptation to the environment is much lower for all concerned. The teacher experience with Google Classroom follows this pattern. It was highly intuitive and since the teachers used it for every class, the experience of using led to proficient use.

PC and smartphone usage brought to the fore the twin issues of distraction and engagement. All of the teachers noted that student engagement and focus seemed higher than a typical book-based class. The PCs were largely deemed a success. Some concerns with Internet distraction were noted, but it did not define the classroom. One of the reasons students were able to engage was the low level of technical problems. Undoubtedly, the reason there were so few technical problems was the simplicity of the set up. The students were working on a wireless set up and the teacher required one HDMI cord to connect to the projector. Simplicity impacts perception of difficulty and the reality of difficulty. CALL labs can often bring forth a stream of complex non-English issues. The combined Internet, projector, and Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) approach greatly decreased the technical issues faced.

When things are not simple, problems tend to follow. Introducing tech into the task based learning activities was probably the least well received area by the teachers. It provided the greatest level of technical difficulty, it took some teachers outside of their own comfort zone and some of the teachers felt it was unnecessary. In terms of IT and TBL, it would appear the teachers' confidence and knowledge was somewhat low for the range of tasks they needed to perform. Many of the teachers' computing fears of technical meltdowns and lack of IT ability were, to some extent, realized while undertaking the IT specific pedagogical tasks.

5. Conclusion

It seems quite apparent that with a BYOD approach that simplifies the technical burden of teachers and schools, IT can be used to help facilitate EFL learning in a board-less classroom environment. In addition, classroom management software, lesson material creation and lesson presentation all fall within the likely IT ability range of many EFL teachers. Only when the activities step into the area of IT content did teachers find themselves outside of their comfort zone. Overall, the five teachers had a largely positive attitude towards IT enabled EFL classrooms. When the teachers were asked, as a follow up, if they would prefer to go back to a more traditional blackboard style, they all stated that they preferred to work in the IT enabled classrooms.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank Ken Ochi, Jeff Moore & Jennifer Toews-Shimizu for their help and support.

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SOCIAL MEDIA TREASURE HUNT – PRACTICAL LESSONS USING TWITTER IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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1. Introduction

Today's students – a generation electronically connected since birth – are trying new innovative technology before they reach university. Integrating technology tools in classes has never been more accessible. Research supports using social media in the classroom to boost student engagement and is a good idea for many different subjects (Rheingold, 2008). As Abe and Jordan point out, the creation of intentional instruction regarding social media is key to advancing student learning (Abe & Jordan, 2013, p. 17). Rheingold furthers this assertion by saying; "Moving from a private to a public voice can help students turn their self-expression into a form of public participation" (Rheingold, 2008, p. 25). As Joosten, Pasquini, and Harness note in their 2013 article referring to the book *Social Media for Educators: Strategies and Best Practices*, "technologies such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have the potential to enhance learning and strengthen instructors' pedagogical practices" (Joosten, Pasquini, and Harness, 2013, p. 126; see Joosten, 2012). Moreover, students also demand intercultural experience as a result of the formation of the "global village" (Gullekson, Tucker, & Coombs Jr., 2011).

Resent research has shown that implementing social media can help foster these types of international communication interactions for students and can boost their perceived improvement with English vocabulary (Dashtestani, 2018). This translates into an opportunity for English classes to encompass activities that include social media to promote intercultural competence and conversation practice. Instructors can introduce these tools to boost engagement by mirroring the tools used in global interactions with favorite channels such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.

This practical paper explains the rationale behind using Twitter in class, outlines a pilot program that was done in South Korea, and provides two lesson plans that instructors can adapt using Twitter as the primary technology tool.

2. Choosing Twitter for a class activity

Choosing Twitter may seem counter-intuitive as a class choice for social media use as Facebook and YouTube remain the most popular platforms (Smith & Anderson, 2018), and of course there are ways to incorporate those tools into class. However, Twitter is the platform that is known for keeping up-to-date with news, stories, and events in real time. Twitter is an interactive tool that also enhances collaboration (Taskiran, Gumusoglu, & Aydin, 2018). As Parmar noticed,

> We used Twitter, which has the benefit of being the most transparent big social network today. It also encourages back-and-forth conversation, unlike Facebook which tends to be a broadcasting medium. Moreover, Twitter is used by virtually all big Western companies either for marketing or to respond to customers – and sometimes both (Parmar, 2015, para. 6).

It is exposure to this kind of interaction that is the appeal for using tweets as a way to challenge students to interact with the target languages using news and other interactions in real time.

The idea of using Twitter is twofold one to teach social media or 21st century skills and two for students to practise communication in English anywhere instead of having to wait to interact in person (Taskiran et al., 2018, p. 103). Implementing Web 2.0 tools such as Twitter is easy because students are quick to adapt to the new technology (if they are not already using the platform) and many have noted positive experiences after the classes were finished; as Andy Jones (2013) found by adding Twitter elements to his literature class. Jones used Twitter for a literature class to facilitate discussions outside the classroom and found that there were definite improvements to other class elements including improved in-class discussions and better class attendance (Jones, 2013, p. 97). Giving credence to his project advocating that "more than anything else, what distinguishes a great class from an adequate class is the attitude of the participants" (Jones, 2013, p. 92).

Other research supports the use of Twitter for academic purposes. One study showed how using Twitter with exit tickets to facilitate formative assessment for literacy classes provided real-time feedback to instructors and ensured that more student voices were heard no matter the class size (Amaro-Jiménez, Hungerford-Kresser, & Pole, 2016). With the encouragement of the background information on the use of Twitter in classes, a pilot assignment was designed and implemented in a Business English Writing Class in South Korea.

3. The pilot assignment

The Twitter pilot assignment was designed as a long-term activity for a University Business English Writing class in South Korea. The rationale behind this comes from the idea that social media are more than an engagement booster for students; they are also a powerful business tool. As Mikolaj Piskorski implied to Alistair Davidson in a 2014 interview about his book *A Social Strategy: How We Profit from Social Media*, some companies have achieved their success through the use of social media (Davidson, 2014; Piskorski, 2014). Successful companies have changed their social media strategies from broadcasting (talking at) to engaging (talking with) their customers (Davidson, 2014, p. 42). Thus, students would benefit from learning how to use these tools while still at school. This is also why business communication textbooks dedicate chapters to discussion of social media as an integral part of business communication. Understanding and applying social media in business contexts is essential for university business students and their English business communication competencies.

The simple goal was to find a 21st century tool that was new to some of the students and have a way to practise and engage them in using English between classes. This assignment focuses on the "how-to" of using Twitter by leveraging the many functions and media possible with the service while still using English (except for one task). The assignment was facilitated over a six-week period and designed as a treasure hunt. Ten tasks were completed outside of class time. Table 1 is a list of the tasks used for treasure hunt assignment.

Table 1. Tasks used for pilot assignment

Task Number	Tweeted Instructions	Task Familiarity	Assignment Attribute
#TASK 1	#Task1 for #UniqueClassTag Take a selfie with yourself and at least one other person (more people is okay) with flowers or near #cherryblossom trees or at a coffee shop and #tweet the image to the class. Remember to use the #UniqueClassTag in all the posts you use for class.	Familiar	introduction, discovery, creativity,
#TASK 2	#Task2 for #UniqueClassTag Find a current event article in our discipline – business, technology, leadership, management, etc. – from an English News Service (No Korean News Sites). Tweet a link to the article and comment as to how it relates to Business Communication.	Unfamiliar/ Familiar	search, critical thinking, news, English language use
#TASK 3	#Task3 for #UniqueClassTag ✍• find a classmate & ask a question . Two ✌ •choices 1 •)Reply to the Tweet from #Task2 with a question about the article. OR 2 •) Ask a question about midterm week. Answer & respond to each other [in	Familiar	memory, response, class content, dialogue, peer-to-peer

Task Number	Tweeted Instructions	Task Familiarity	Assignment Attribute
	English] make dialogue		
#TASK 4	#Task 4 for #UniqueClassTag Take a break from English Tweets, find some amazing KOREAN accounts and #follow them. Choose a Tweet from 1 (or more) of these accounts and make a response (한국말로) BONUS if the professional account answers you on Twitter!	Familiar	inquiry, response, interaction, data, learning the tool further in native language.
#TASK 5	#Task 5 for #UniqueClassTag Ask a question (related to business, communication, coding, blockchain – anything from our discipline) using the poll feature on Twitter. Vote on your classmates polls & re-tweet the polls to others. Bonus points if you can get more than 250 votes!	Unfamiliar	personal interest, engagement
#TASK 6	#Task 6 for #UniqueClassTag GO LIVE! on Twitter broadcast something interesting that you are doing or watching. Answer questions that come up on your broadcast from live watchers – any language. Broadcast should be more than 5 mins. Bonus points if you get 100 or more live watchers.	Unfamiliar	early adopting, new technology, social media trend
#TASK 7	#Task 7 for #UniqueClassTag Search the word #earthquake on Twitter and find the most recent earthquake (within the hour). ✌ • Steps --> Step 1 •)reply to this tweet where the earthquake is & Step 2 •) retweet the tweet you found to your followers	Familiar	search, life relevance, news, data, research
#TASK 8	#Task 8 for #UniqueClassTag Watch this video on #persuasion https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O2dEuMFR8kw … and reply to this message about your main takeaway from watching it.	Unfamiliar	personal voice, business, customer, inquiry
#TASK 9	#Task 9 for #UniqueClassTag Make a post of 4 pictures (of anything) on the SAME tweet and say something about them (be creative).	Familiar	social, interaction, personal, dialogue
#TASK 10	#Task 10 for #UniqueClassTag Use "Threaded Tweets" (https://help.twitter.com/en/using-twitter/create-a-thread …) to tell us your opinion about the value of different social media tools in business communication and explain how you personally can use Twitter in the future for your benefit.	Familiar	conclusion, creativity, personal, engagement

4. Lesson procedure

4.1. Setting up Twitter for classroom use:

This section is to help instructors set up Twitter for lessons. Many of these elements are shared with students when they set up their accounts. This list includes optional attributes and tools

that may help with the implementation of the lessons and help instructors manage the information efficiently. A list of the exact tools that were used in the pilot assignment can be seen in Table 2.

Necessary elements

- **Account Set-up:** Twitter accounts can be created by going to the Twitter homepage https://twitter.com/ and registering for an account. Students can use their native language register. If a student is already using Twitter and does not want to use their account for class, encourage them to create a new account just for class. A unique email is required for each account that is made.
- **Choose a unique user name:** Create a unique username or "handle" the "@" name that becomes the address people can find the account. By default, Twitter creates one that is long with a mismatched combination of letters and numbers, but it is only meant to be temporary.
- **Fill out a short bio:** Create a short and simple bio, place a quick bio of who you are and perhaps some interests and hobbies.
- **Upload a profile and background picture:** Use a profile picture and a background photo to personalize your profile.
- **Have students follow each other:** Twitter works best when accounts follow each other. Since many of the students are new to Twitter they will not have many followers or be following many accounts yet. Having students follow each other helps class collaboration. Students can always choose to "unfollow" when class is finished.
- **Custom Hashtag:** For all Tweets, create a unique class hashtag – a method of adding a "#" mark before a word for easy search – should be used (e.g. #Eng101HUFS). A hashtag for the task number should also be used (e.g. #Task). This will help students and instructors find the relevant Tweets for the assignment. Including the hashtag is necessary to find and keep the assignments organized.
- **Private Account Notes:** The pilot assignment was tested with university aged students and is most appropriate for older students (i.e. adults) because of the public nature of Twitter. Twitter is public by default and works best with a public account. If a student is adamant about a private account, make sure they are following everyone in class and allow everyone in class too see their Tweets at least during the semester or they will be unable to fully participate. Private accounts make Twitter behave more like Facebook, however, it is only one way to use Twitter with high school students.

Optional Elements

- **3rd Party Scheduling Tool**: Third party scheduling tools such as Buffer or Hootsuite can be helpful for allowing instructors to set up and schedule the desired Twitter tasks ahead of time so that focus can be on interacting and replying to students. The tool used for the pilot lesson was Hootsuite and all of the Tweets were scheduled in advance.
- **Lesson "Branding"**: This is also optional but using consistent images on the different tasks and questions can help students identify and find the tweets easier. Many professional Twitter chats use images to disseminate the questions. Use graphic software such as Canva or Photoshop to create images that are consistent and fit the class style. Examples shown in *Figures 2 and 3.*
- **Emoji Use:** Not for everyone but using emojis may help with engagement and one way↕・ to beat the character limitations of Twitter.
- **Gathering Data**: This is also optional but can be very helpful for keeping track of all the activities. Using a combination of the app IFTTT (If This Then That) and Google Sheets; create an "applet" that automatically adds Tweets with a specific hashtag to a Google Spreadsheet.

Table 2. Technology tools used in pilot assignment

Technology	Website	Used For	Who Used	Optional?
Twitter	http://twitter.com	Main assignment tool: Tweeting, searching, lists, live, photos, polls and other tools were used.	Instructor/Student	NO
Hootsuite (Or other scheduling tool)	http://hootsuite.com	Used to schedule the 10 tweets automatically over a 5 or 6-week period.	Instructor	YES
Google Sheets	https://www.google.com/sheets/about/	Used to collect tweets with the specific class hashtag.	Instructor	YES
IFTTT	https://ifttt.com	The tool that ties Twitter with Google sheets to collect the data. With the class hashtag	Instructor	YES
Adobe Spark (Or another graphic tool)	https://spark.adobe.com	Social graphic app for iPhone and Android that was used for assignment photos and branding	Instructor	YES
Note: All students in this particular class had their own mobile phones, with different operating systems and used them for the assignment.				NO

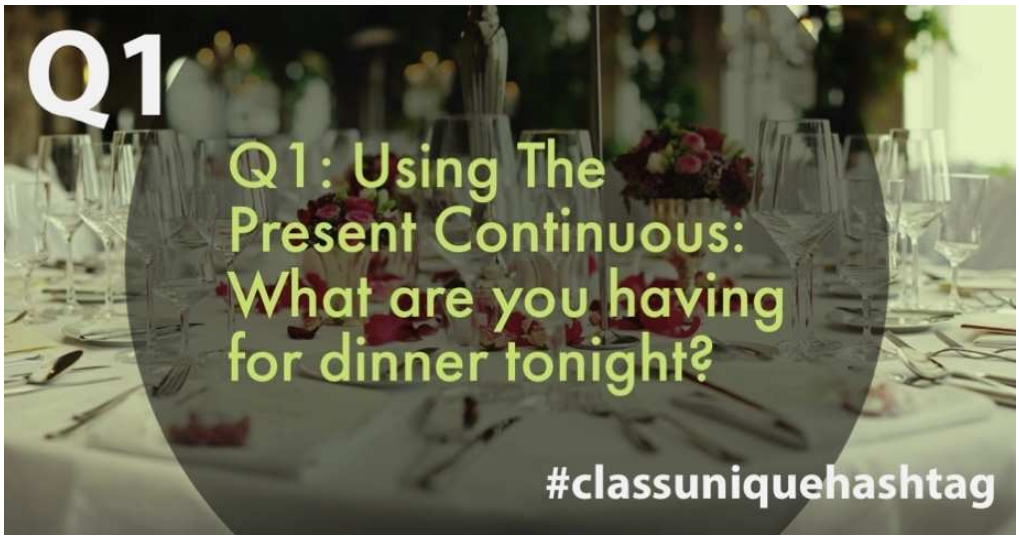

Figure 1. Branding example question in Graphic (Twitter Chats)

Figure 2. Branding Example - Question Number Graphic (Used in pilot assignment)

4.2. Using Twitter

If an instructor is new to Twitter, it is a good idea to "play" around with the service for a few weeks before implementing it with students to become familiar with how it works. Students will ask for help when they are setting up their own accounts and may need guidance with some of the basics. There are more instructions and help at Twitter website and a simple Google search will also help if confusion arises. The following are some basic terms to use with lessons.

Basic Tweeting Terms:

- **Feed -** Where the messages or "Tweets" appear

- **Tweet** - A message posted on Twitter that is a maximum of 280 characters (Originally 140). It can be text only, or include links, images, and videos.
- **Followers** - The accounts that follow a given account
- **Following** - The accounts that a given account is following
- **Reply** - A response to a tweet
- **Re-Tweet** - A forwarding of a specific tweet to a given account's followers, the account's followers see the original tweet from the original account
- **Re-Tweet with Quote** - A forwarding of a specific tweet to a given account's followers, the account's followers see the response before the nested original tweet
- **Likes** - A simple way to acknowledge a tweet without replying or retweeting
- **Search** - Twitter's powerful tool to find topics and interests
- **Polls** - A questionnaire that can be posted to followers to find out more information. At the time of this paper the polls can have up to four options and available for seven days.
- **Live** - A broadcasting tool that allows accounts to broadcast live video to followers
- **Twitter Threads** - This is a newer attribute (as of 2017) tool that Twitter implemented that allows longer threads of tweets to be tied together
- **Twitter Chats** - These are scheduled events where users are online answering and asking questions at the same time

4.3. Lesson Plans

Lesson Plan Outline 1: Treasure Hunt/Scavenger Hunt*

Language Level: Variable

Age: University/Adult Learners with Twitter accounts

Duration: Single class period duration (1-2 hours), up to a semester-long ongoing activity

Subject: Adaptable/Flexible

Objectives:

- To leverage the real-time genuine information available on Twitter for class English practice in relation to class topics.
- To add engaging English practice (reading, writing, and speaking) between class times

Materials needed:

- Mobile devices with cameras, microphones, access to the internet, and ability to download the Twitter app

Preparation:

- Instructors and students set up accounts on Twitter and complete profiles
- Establish unique class/lesson hashtag
- Create the tasks appropriate for the class ahead of time using word processing software (see task examples in Table 1 and Table 3)
- Inform students of the duration of the hunt and number of tasks that need to be completed. Suggested minimum of 5 tasks, maximum is up to the instructor and the time allotted for the activity and comfort level of the students.

Implementation:

- Tweet the tasks: Schedule the tweets ahead of time using a scheduler, or manually tweet the chosen tasks when ready.
- Students complete and respond to the tasks.
- When the activity is finished have students prepare a written reflection.

Table 3. Task examples

Twitter Functions	Task	Skills Used
Standard Tweet	[add task number hashtag] Take a picture of something beautiful, post it on Twitter and explain why you chose the subject [add your unique class hashtag]	Writing, creativity
Search and Re-Tweet with comment	[add task number hashtag] Find an article linked on Twitter, retweet with a comment about your main takeaway from your reading [add your unique class hashtag]	Reading, critical thinking.
Reply	[add task number hashtag] 1. Watch this video [add Video Link] 2. Reply to this Tweet about your favorite part of the video. [add your unique class hashtag]	Writing, listening
Live Video	[add task number hashtag] Find someone in class, and "Go Live" on Twitter and practice the dialogue from class [add your unique class hashtag]	Speaking and listening
Tweet and Reply	[add task number hashtag] Find a classmate on Twitter and ask them a question in English, respond to each other and have a written dialogue [add your unique class hashtag]	Writing

Lesson Plan Outline 2: Scheduled "Twitter Chat" *

Language Level: Variable

Age: University/adult Learners with Twitter accounts (Younger learners – high school – with protected Twitter accounts see Section 4.1)

Duration: 1 hour scheduled – there may be responses outside of the schedule time.

Subject: Adaptable/Flexible – questions can match what is asked in class.

Objectives:

- To schedule English practice online using Twitter between classes

Materials needed:

- Computer with internet ability and access to Twitter or a mobile device access to the internet, and ability to download and use the Twitter app
- Graphic app or service to create the create the accompanying graphics for the question tweets.

Preparation:

- Instructors and students set up accounts on Twitter and complete profiles
- Establish a unique chat hashtag
- Create the questions and graphics for the chat
- If using a scheduling tool schedule the chat

Implementation:

- Begin tweeting the questions starting at the scheduled time and finish by the scheduled end time
- Respond, re-tweet, and like the answers from chat participants

Table 4. Twitter chat definitions

Twitter Chat Code	Definition	Location	Who Uses
Q	Symbol used to indicate a question for the chat	NA (needs to have a number)	Chat host (instructor)
Q1	Symbol used for a question, with the addition of a number that corresponds to a question.	Beginning of Tweet	Chat host (instructor)
A	Symbol used to indicate an answer for the chat	NA (Needs to have a number	The participants (students)
A1	Symbol used for a question, with the addition of a	Beginning of	The participants

Twitter Chat Code	Definition	Location	Who Uses
	number that corresponds to	Tweet	(students)
#ChatHashTag	Unique identifier for the class chat (should be should be included in every tweet for the chat)	End of Tweet	Chat host (instructor) and the participants (students)

4. Student feedback

At the end of the pilot assignment students from the class were given a questionnaire using Google Forms and 33 students responded. Many of these students did not use Twitter before the class. Students' understanding of how to use Twitter gradually progressed from the majority not understanding very well it at the beginning of the assignment, to the majority understanding it very well end of the assignment. The class' perceptions of the value of Twitter was mixed, with some giving it high value and some giving low value. However, the majority (60.6%) placed a high value on learning via social media with most of the students feeling that learning about Twitter. The turning point for many students in their understanding of the value of the exercise in their own life was the live video activity; they were able to see real-time video from other students.

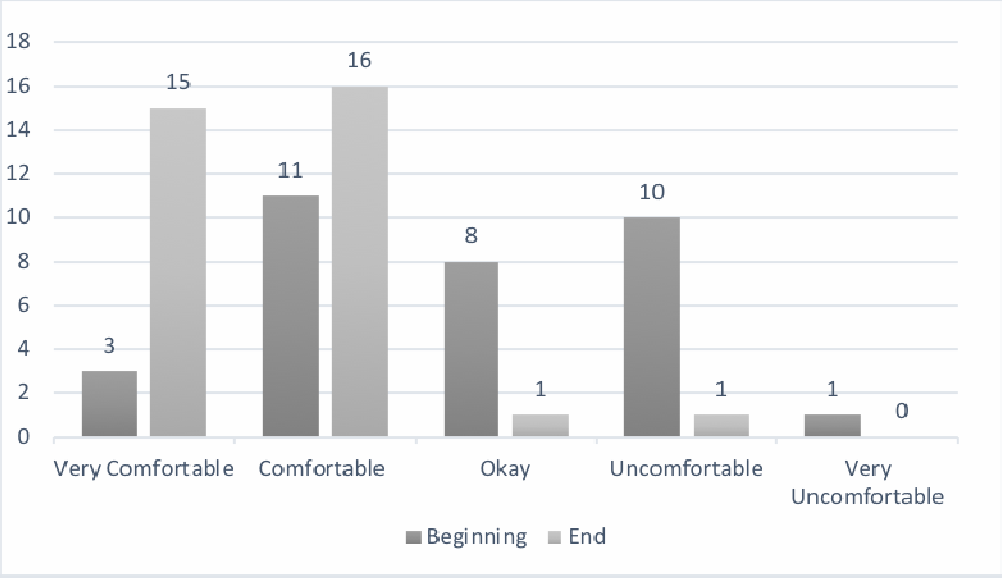

Figure 3. Twitter comfort level compared before and after assignment

5. Conclusion

The goals of the pilot program were to find a tool that was easy to use that students could practice using English between classes and relate them to class topics – outside a regular study

session. This simple evaluation is only the beginning. Looking further with Twitter and Social Media, these early results suggest that experiential and practical assignments that include learning a new technology may help students in other areas. More comprehensive studies that cover a more robust and diverse sample are needed; topics that can be looked at a range from language acquisition and English testing to cultural barriers and international communication. If more instructors are implementing social media-especially Twitter-in their classes, these research questions can be explored.

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LEARNING ENGLISH LISTENING AND SPEAKING THROUGH BBC VOA PODCASTS: AN APP REVIEW

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Abstract

Knowing another language other than the first language is stereotypically regarded as a prestigious feature, distinguishing an individual from the rest of the community while providing him/her with more job opportunities. Nowadays, language classes are easily available through the expansion of recent technologies such as MALL (Mobile-Assisted Language Learning) and language learning applications (apps). App developers have been competing to design the most efficient apps to facilitate meaningful language learning by focusing on oral production and auditory reception to increase language learners' communicative competence. A characteristic app of the kind is *Learning English Listening & Speaking BBC/ VOA News* which offers learners a massive archive of updated BBC and VOA podcasts both online and offline. The current review intends to present a detailed description of the important features of this app.

Keywords: mobile-assisted language leaning, learn English listening & speaking BBC/ VOA news, listening, speaking

Application Details:

Publisher: Learning English BBC, VOA News

Product type: Smartphone Application Software

Language(s): English

Level: Advanced

Media format: APK

Operating systems: Android

Hardware requirements: Smartphone/Internet Connection

Supplementary software: A Virtual Private Network (VPN) in some regions

Price: Free

1. Introduction

With an exponential and progressive increase in the usage of iPhone and Android operating systems, the range of activities using mobile phones has expanded from downloading music tracks and images to downloading and running hundreds of applications (apps) designed for a variety of purposes, including educational goals (Godwin-Jones, 2011). Therefore, technologically-prompted educators have attempted to improve teaching and learning conditions through developing and utilizing educational apps (Shen, Wag & Pan, 2008). The evidence for the effectiveness of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) apps in consolidating the teaching and learning of a second or foreign language has been suggested in a large number of studies (see Burston, 2013 for a review).

Mastering a second language (L2), especially English, is of great significance to survive today's educational and economic challenges through majoring in the century's top disciplines and finding a well-paid job. Many apps (e.g., Dulingo, Memrise, Magoosh, Mosalingua, etc.) have been developed in the field of English language learning with their focus on oral, receptive, or all the basic language skills. It has been a while that podcasting, with a focus on listening and speaking skills, have gained the interest of many learners and educators (Hasan & Hoon, 2013; Yeh, 2017) since both of these skills have been considered as learners' tools in communication (Brown, 1994). Research has shown that listening is the most important skill and should be prioritized over other skills as it plays a pivotal role in the improvement of other language skills (Masalimova, Porchesku, & Liakhnovitch, 2016; Rost, 2002; Vandergrift, 2007). Hence, it is vitally essential for learners to develop their L2 listening competence. However, despite its significance, L2 learners are not well-taught on this skill and its requisite strategies such as contextualizing (LeLoup & Pontiero, 2007; Mendelsohn, 2006). As an instance, the results of a study by Kim (2013) demonstrated that contextualizing MALL advances listening skills.

Owing to the variety of accessible apps, it might probably be difficult to select only one app as a learning tool, especially one that is really efficient for improving English listening skill. Being informed of general and particular advantages and downsides of available language learning apps might help learners choose the suitable app. Therefore, in the present study, the researchers would discuss the efficiency and effectiveness of Learn English Listening and Speaking BBC, VOA news, briefly called Learning English.

2. Detailed description

Learn English listening & speaking BBC, VOA news with the rating of 4.7 at Google Play is freely available to download and install on Android devices which support 10 and more application programming interfaces. It can also be downloaded and run with android emulators like big nox app player, bluestacks and koplayer. The app has been developed by http://hotgame247.com. The developers of this app have claimed that the app is and will be a free one forever. It is worth noting that new lessons and podcasts are automatically and freely updated on this app.

As soon as one installs and opens the app, an extensive list of podcasts is displayed. In order to play them, they have to be downloaded of course. The podcasts are among the most popular channels of BBC news including: Words in the News, 6 Minute English, Lingo Hack, The English We Speak, News Report, English at University, and so on. This tool is designed specifically to learn English listening and speaking with daily conversations and the latest news from BBC, VOA, and many other podcast programs comprising a wide array of topics such as education, technology, daily life, world news, etc. (see Figure 1). In this app, a collection of more than 10,000 lessons and a huge number of vocabulary items related to the lessons are provided. That is why this app has been recommended to improve one's vocabulary, listening, speaking, and reading skills. One interesting feature of this app is that it allows learners to learn English listening both in online and offline modes.

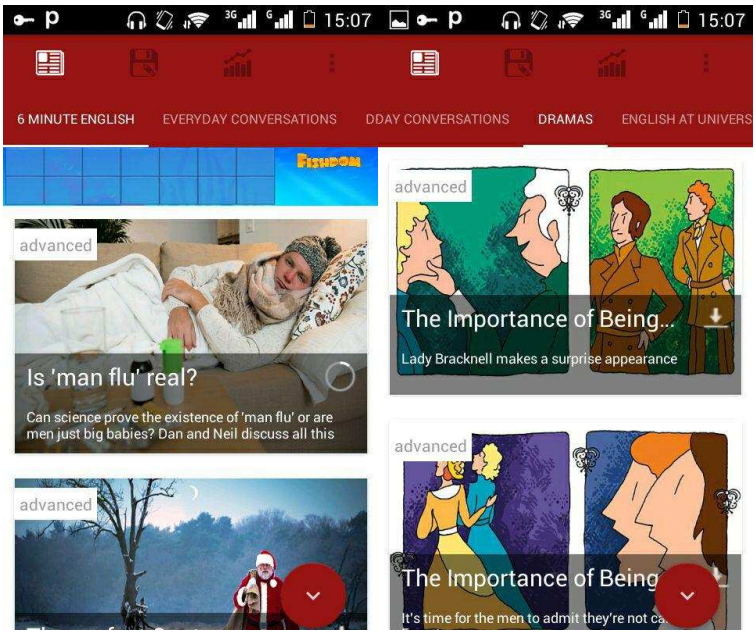

Figure 1. Different podcasts from BBC and VOA channels

As it is shown in Figure 2, each podcast includes an audio file, its transcription and a vocabulary list which makes the task of listening easier and more effective for educational purposes. The expansion of one's vocabulary list may enhance his/ her listening and reading skills. Another prominent feature of this app is that the selected words can be saved into one's own note to help users remember the words along with their sounds. A minor quiz section is also available for a quick review over the taught vocabulary after each lesson.

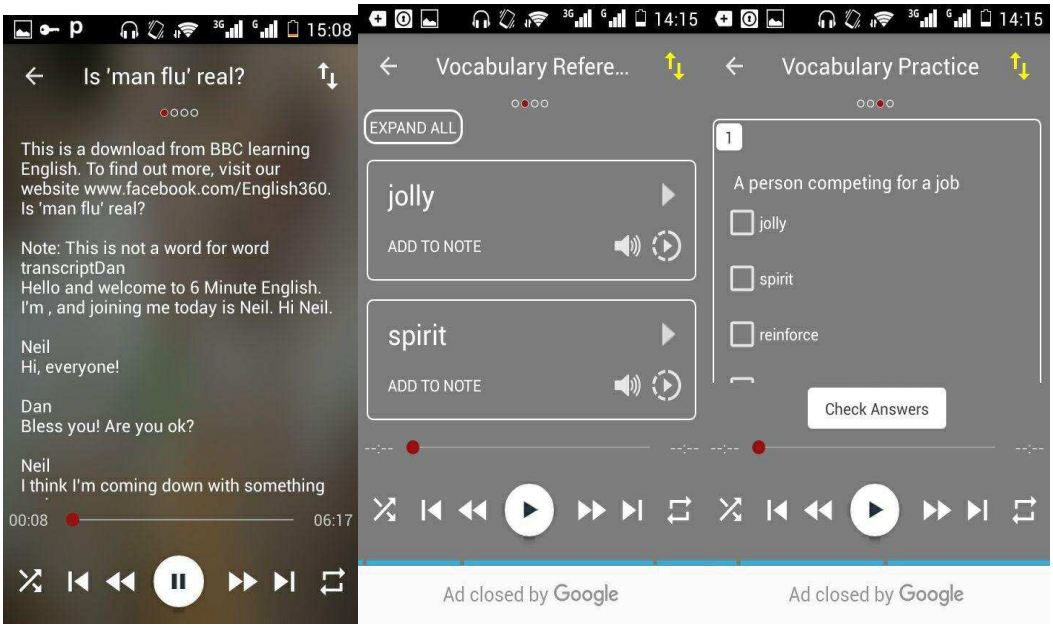

Figure 2. The audio file, transcription, vocabulary list, and word quiz related to a podcast

For each word in the vocabulary list, there are two buttons which read the word with the normal pace and slow pace to teach the correct pronunciation of every single word. As it is demonstrated in Figure 3, there is a speaking button in *my vocabulary* section which allows the users to record their voice and compare it with the standard version played by the app. It points out where your mistakes are, and you will know how to improve yourself.

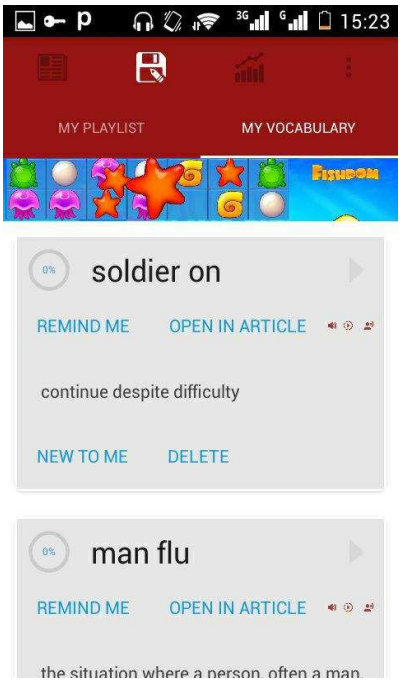

Figure 3. My vocabulary section and its options

The user-friendly interface and advantageous functions, such as chatting online with other members of the community, offered by this app distinguishes it from many other similar apps on the market. This app with its motto, “It is the time to change the way you learn English, let's learn English together” provides a number of potentially useful features for English learners.

3. Evaluation

Chatting with English learners from all over the world is a great opportunity in the language learning process since it facilitates real-life communication with real native and native-like speakers and puts into practice the materials the learners have already covered (see Figure 4).

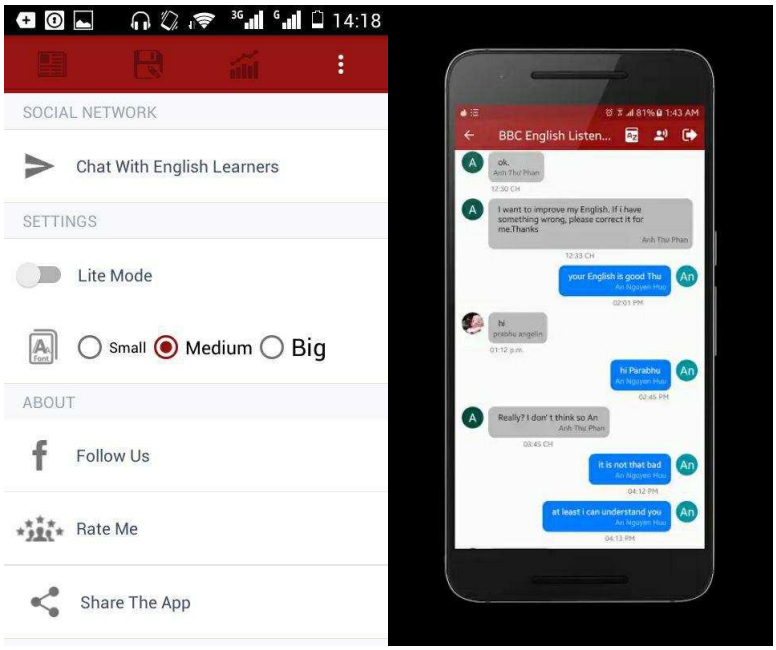

Figure 4. Chat with English learners and some other minor settings of the app

Another option of this app, as can be observed in Figure 5, is that learners are able to set alarm for their vocabulary list to be reminded of the words which were difficult for them. In other words, English language learners are free to choose the time they want to be randomly reminded of their vocabulary list.

Figure 5. Setting vocab reminder alarm

By tapping on any word in the transcription of each audio file, its meaning appears on the screen. It is of great importance to know that the app supports a multiple language dictionary;

therefore, as it is seen in the following figure, through the dictionary header one is able to change languages.

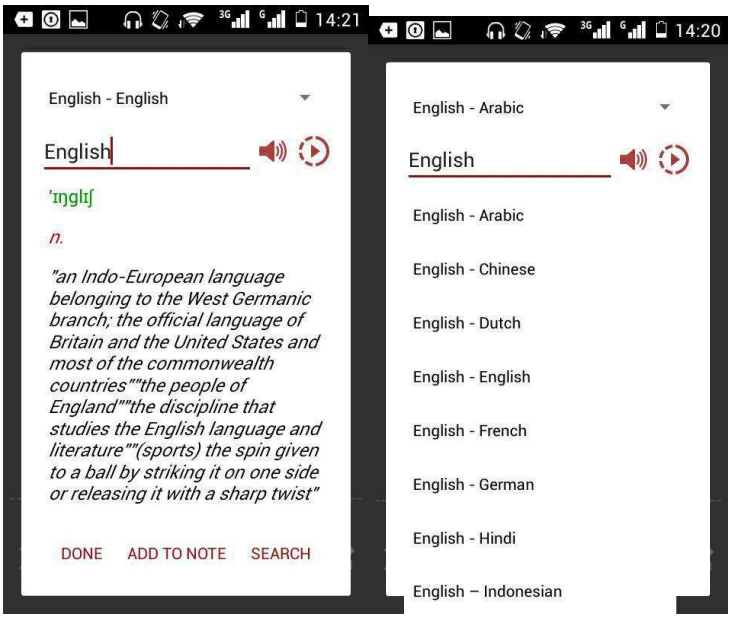

Figure 6. Multiple language dictionary

The auto scroll transcript guides learners throughout the lesson while playing audio. The app also gives learners feedback by displaying a statistics chart which demonstrates one's listening and vocabulary progress.

Leaning English is like every other app, bearing some advantages and at the same time suffering from some disadvantages. One of the shortcomings of this app is the computerized voice used to produce the correct pronunciation of words. Due to the fact that there are some apps such as MosaLingua (see Makiabadi & Abdi, 2018) which offer a real human voice, apps with computerized voice may not be very useful. In addition, in some countries, there is a need to a virtual private network (VPN) program to be able to use the app with all its suggested options. Another negative point which is eye-catching is that there are not any grammatical explanations for the learners to refer to while having structural questions an ambiguities. Although the chat section is a distinguishing feature in this app, due to lack of bright colors or fancy stickers, it might not be as interesting as that of some other language learning apps such as HelloTalk. One more issue which needs the attention of the developers of the app is providing a special version of this tool for iPhone users.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, Learn English Listening and Speaking BBC, VOA news is as an effective language learning tool despite its slight disadvantages. It is a professionally-designed app with scientific and creative basis. The variety of podcasts from the most famous, sophisticated, and popular radio channels with their transcriptions and word lists might be really effective. However, this collection of audio files needs to be reformed in some aspects. For example, the lack of grammatical details of English language and its chat section requires certain modifications. The developers of this app had better alleviate the aforementioned problems, or the learners would not consider this product as their prioritized language learning app as much as they should. In addition, due to an increase in the population of iPhone users all over the world, developing an iPhone version of this app could make it more popular and noticeable.

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