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**Foreword**
Damian J. Rivers
Associate Editor

Welcome to the spring 2009 edition of *The Asian ESP Journal.* In this edition it is our distinct pleasure to publish five selected articles addressing a diverse blend of pedagogically orientated teaching and learning issues. In addition, we are also pleased to publish a 'Reply to' paper and a book review. As the *Asian ESP Journal* continues to prosper thanks to the many rich and insightful submissions we receive, our editorial team also continues to expand. Phillipa Mungra and I have recently moved into the Associate Editor position whilst we are delighted to offer our warmest welcome to all of the new members joining our expanding editorial team in a variety of capacities.

The first paper featured in this edition comes from Michael Lessard-Clouston at Biola University in the US. Michael Lessard-Clouston's paper discusses the implications for vocabulary learning through the analysis of technical definitions given in a series of Theology lectures at a graduate school in Canada. Using lecture transcriptions as a foundation, Lessard-Clouston provides a thorough quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data making links to both EAP and ESP teaching practice.

The second paper is by Yi-Ching Huang of the Central Taiwan University of Science and Technology. Yi-Chang Huang examines the extent to which Taiwanese high-school educators view their English language study group as a form of staff development contributing to their professional growth and learning. Using a case-study approach Yi-Chang Huang gathers data from a variety of sources before presenting and discussing the concerns and challenges which the teachers reported facing.

Our third paper comes from Abul-Qasim Avand of Fasa University of Medical Sciences in Iran. Abul-Qasim Avand presents a solid case for the use of the mother-tongue in the translation of ESP classroom materials and the affect which this has upon the reading comprehension of Iranian ESP learners. Abul-Qasim Avand uses two groups of medical and nursing students across 24 hours of observed interaction to conclude that the mother tongue has a significant role to play in the development of reading comprehension abilities of ESP students.

The fourth paper featured in this edition is entitled 'Content and language integration in tertiary education in China' is written by Jianying Du of Huazhong University of Science and Technology in China. Jianying Du describes the process of introducing a content based language programme at Wuhan Law College and makes a number of general observations in relation to the viability of their widespread implementation throughout China.

Our fifth research paper is from Tong Thi My Lien of the University of Language and International Studies, Vietnam National University. Through an attitudinal analysis Tong Thi My Lien focuses on the process of students preparing for, and undertaking ESP presentations. Specifically, the author addresses the various challenges which students face in terms of accessing relevant materials, selecting presentation forms and memorizing presentation content.

In our 'Reply to' article, Ahmad Sabouri Kashani of the University of Tehran, College of Medical Sciences, Iran presents a rebuttal to Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini's April 2007 article 'Real Flowers or Plastic Flowers in Learning Medical English: A Reply to Kashani, Soheili, and Hatmi'.

Finally, closing out this issue is a book review from Seyed Vahid Aryadoust at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore who reviews a new Routledge book entitled, 'Building a validity argument for the test of English as a foreign language' edited by Chapelle, Enright and Jamieson (2008). Seyed Vahid Aryadoust provides a concise and informative review of this book which should be of interest to many within the wider TEFL field.

On behalf of the entire *Asian ESP Journal* team we hope you will enjoy reading these seven contributions to the spring edition of *Asian ESP Journal.* We look forward to your own contributions in this coming year. On a final note, the *Asian ESP Journal* in collaboration with Chongqing University in China will host their first conference entitled *ESP in Asia* on May 22nd to 24th. We look forward to your support in this event.

**Erratum:**
Our apologies to the authors for the misspelling of names and affiliation in the final paper of
the August 2009 Vol. 4 (2) edition (p. 79-95) , which should read:
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Damian J. Rivers
Associate Editor
*Asian ESP Journal*

# The Asian ESP Journal

# Definitions in Theology Lectures: Implications for Vocabulary Learning

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**Biodata**

Michael Lessard-Clouston (Ph.D., Toronto) is an associate professor of applied linguistics and TESOL in the Cook School of Intercultural Studies at Biola University in La Mirada, California. He has taught in Canada, China, and Japan, as well as the United States, and his research interests include discourse analysis, second language acquisition, and vocabulary learning and teaching.

**Abstract**

English language learners studying at the tertiary level face many challenges, and developing academic language proficiency is a major one which requires the acquisition of both the academic and technical vocabulary of their disciplines. Recognizing that the natural oral input such learners receive is a key resource for relevant vocabulary learning, this article describes a case study of definitions in the introductory theology course of one graduate school in central Canada. Eight representative lectures from the semester-long course were transcribed and 269 definitions were identified in them, and then categorized using Flowerdew's (1992) classifications. The article outlines both quantitative and qualitative data, with example definitions, and draws on and compares its results with relevant previous work in the sciences. It concludes that there are many commonalities between definitions in the two fields, yet there are also understandably some major differences. Thus the article adds to an earlier taxonomy and discusses possible implications for technical vocabulary learning in theology and other fields, noting several key points for EAP and ESP professionals.

**Key words:**  academic lectures, definitions, ESP, lexis, technical vocabulary, theology

**Introduction**

ESL/EFL students studying in all disciplines need to learn the conventions of their specific academic fields, and research in various contexts indicates that EFL students in particular may struggle with vocabulary learning (e.g., Jahangard, 2007; Wei, 2007; Yang, 2005). As Cummins and Man (2007) state, "acquiring academic language is challenging for all students," as "academic language proficiency includes knowledge of the less frequent vocabulary of English as well as the ability to interpret and produce increasingly complex written and oral language" (p. 801). In recent years research has revealed that second language (L2) students face numerous challenges in understanding the lectures typical of English-medium college or university studies (Flowerdew, 1994; Mendelsohn & Rubin, 1995; Tauroza, 2001, Thompson, 2003), including learning general academic vocabulary (Nurweni & Read, 1999; Parry, 1993; Scarcella & Zimmerman, 1998), and mastering the specialized or technical vocabulary of their academic disciplines (Coxhead & Nation, 2001; Fan, 1998; Fraser, 2005; Lessard-Clouston, 2006, 2008; Liu & Nesi, 1999). One way to research the possibilities for the learning of such vocabulary is to study the natural input that students receive during their usual course lectures, and to consider what implications such input may offer for how teachers might help prepare their students to learn academic and technical vocabulary in their introductory classes. This article attempts to do this briefly by describing a case study of the use of definitions in academic lectures in theology, a field with many ESL/EFL students. Yet as the issues are essentially the same this research may be useful to teachers who work with students preparing for academic studies in English in other disciplines as well.

**Research on Vocabulary Learning and Academic Lectures**

Research into vocabulary acquisition and use has identified four types used in lectures, namely *general* (high frequency), *academic* (usually college or university), *technical* (special purposes), and other *low frequency* vocabulary (Coxhead, 2006; Vidal, 2003), and there are now general yet useful guidelines from research for vocabulary learning and teaching (see, e.g., Nation, 2008; Nation & Gu, 2007; Zimmerman, 2009). Of particular interest to the present study is academic and technical vocabulary. Early work by Xue and Nation (1984) on the University Word List (UWL) and a more recent study by Coxhead (2000) creating an Academic Word List (AWL) targeted English vocabulary that is frequent in academic texts, and common to numerous disciplines, above and beyond West's (1953) General Service List (GSL) of the 2,000 most frequent vocabulary families ("a base word, its inflected forms and a small number of reasonably regular derived forms," Nation & Waring, 1997, p. 8) in English. The UWL is made up of 836 words and the AWL 570, but it provides similar coverage (though note Hyland and Tse's (2007) critique). Nation (2001) defined technical vocabulary as words

that are "recognizably specific to a particular topic, field, or discipline" but also observed that there seems to be a continuum of "technicalness," depending on "how restricted a word is to a particular area" (p. 198). Nation (2001) thus proposed four categories, from the most technical to the least, with words in the first category normally only used in a specific field and rarely (if ever) appearing elsewhere, and those in the fourth category representing common words that are used much more frequently in that specific domain than elsewhere, but still with a more precise idea of the term than in everyday use (p. 199). For ESP students in a range of disciplines, general academic and technical vocabulary is crucial to their understanding of and socialization into their domains.

While there has been little research to date on vocabulary learning through academic listening, several studies are noteworthy. In research among advanced EFL learners in France, Kelly (1991) showed that "lexical ignorance" was the main obstacle to listening comprehension in a science faculty. In analyzing transcription errors made by his participants, Kelly noted lexical problems accounted for almost half of all errors, while perceptual ones represented 38.5% and syntactical ones just 13%. Vidal (2003) studied vocabulary learning through academic listening among first-year university students in Spain, and found that listening to videotaped tourism lectures produced a significant gain in the vocabulary learning of her ESP students. Vidal's study demonstrated the potential for vocabulary acquisition through aural academic input, and showed that students' test performance was much better with technical vocabulary than with low-frequency and general academic terms. Vidal also noted that it is important for students to learn the various types of vocabulary used in academic lectures, and that more research is needed into vocabulary use in such lectures.

One discipline where there has been some research on vocabulary use and teaching is science, and one aspect of academic lectures relevant to students' vocabulary learning is their professors' use of *definitions* of various types of words. Nation (2008), for example, suggests that teachers can help L2 students recognize and learn specialized vocabulary from definitions within texts, although there are "many less obvious forms of definition" (p. 137). In a corpus study in science classes, Flowerdew (1992) examined and categorized all of the definitions in eight teachers' randomly selected videotaped lectures for EFL students in Oman. Flowerdew found 315 definitions in about 605 minutes of lectures, with on average 20 per lecture. Some important results from that research are that definitions were common, on average every 1 minute 55 seconds, but there was considerable variation, from lecture to lecture and from speaker to speaker; definitions were spread throughout lectures, not just in the beginning; and they were sometimes grouped together like "signposts" which structured whole lectures, though sometimes definitions were "embedded" throughout lectures in

order to help students understand specific terms being introduced and used during the class (pp. 208-209). Flowerdew (1992) also noted that there were four types of definitions, as follows:

- *Formal*: Precise definitions, usually following the "structure of term, class, and distinguishing characteristic(s)... 'An A is a B which C'" (p. 209).
- *Semi-formal*: A definition which doesn't mention the class of the word and which presents a less precise meaning but the key characteristic(s) (p. 210).
- *Substitution*: A word, word-part, or phrase that fits one of three kinds: synonym, paraphrase, or derivation (p. 211).
- *Ostensive*: A definition "performed by indicating some visual stimulus such as an object, a photograph, or a diagram." Yet this was a "very minor class" (p. 212).

Flowerdew (1992) categorized formal and semi-formal definitions into four semantic types: behavior/process/function, composition/structure, location/occurrence, or attribute/property (p. 210). Syntactically, formal definitions often used relative clauses, and half of the definitions were lexically signaled with "call/mean(s)/known as", but only twice with "define(d)" (p. 212). Flowerdew (1992) also noted that "the characteristics of definitions are likely to vary according to subject matter and audience" and suggested that "further research could determine to what degree" variation exists (pp. 215-216). Accordingly, this article partly aims to do so while describing definitions in another field and noting what this means for ESP students and teachers.

One other study dealing with vocabulary in science lectures was carried out by Jackson and Bilton (1994) in ESP support classes at a university also in Oman, but they emphasized "elaboration" – the use of a base word or phrase "followed by one or more different ways of expressing" it, which they labeled reformulations (pp. 65-66). Focusing on the patterns of explanation in the first and last of two visiting British lecturers' geology presentations on a series of different topics over one month, as part of a foundations of science course, Jackson and Bilton (1994) found that on average the frequency of vocabulary elaboration was about one per minute, and the professors regularly used handouts distributed as background information (in the previous class) and later "referred to in the course of their lectures" (p. 65). The elaborations which Jackson and Bilton reported in their data were composed of one or more reformulations, and dealt mostly with technical (55.8%) or semitechnical[1] (10.6%) terms, and half of the elaborations they found were "some form of definition" (p. 73). Though the lecturers often wrote on the board or referred to lecture handouts as they gave specific elaboration ("63.1% of all definitions," p. 73), most often their "vocabulary explanations were not highlighted" (p. 76) phonologically or verbally.

The findings from these studies clearly suggest a need for further research into the use of definitions in academic lectures, and the current article does so in yet another discipline. Christian theology was chosen because considerable numbers of non-native English speakers study theology

through the medium of English around the world, including 40% of the students in the present research context, who were mainly of Chinese and Korean backgrounds.

## Research Questions

Drawing on the examples and results of the previous research outlined above, for this descriptive case study I posed four research questions: First, what similarities and differences might be observed between definitions in science and in theology lectures? Second, what types of definitions are used in introductory theology lectures? Third, what is their frequency and distribution in the lectures? Fourth, how are definitions used in both oral and written form during these lectures? Since the interpretation and production of oral and written vocabulary is key to academic language proficiency (Cummins & Man, 2007), I also considered how definitions were included both orally and in written contexts during lectures.

## Case Study Procedures

To answer these questions I collected data at a large, private graduate school of theology (GST) in a major city in central Canada, and specifically in its core, required class for all degree students, Introduction to Theology I, whose description states this is an introductory course concerning evangelical Christian teachings, with topics including humanity, creation, sin, revelation, Scripture, and the doctrine of God. The course met twice a week for 90 minutes over the fall semester, and I attended and audiotaped all 23 lectures, collected all course-related materials (texts, handouts, etc.), and kept detailed lecture notes (see Lessard-Clouston, 2005, for more detail). Later I transcribed the lectures, but for the present analysis chose eight (two from each part of the course[2]) on different topics, developed a coding sheet listing the 'word or phrase' defined and the 'type' and 'category' of definition (following Flowerdew, 1992), read through the transcripts and notes in order to track and categorize the definitions used, and then examined their use in oral or written form, based on my notes and the class materials. Later a second educator read four lecture transcripts (half of the data) and noted and categorized all the definitions, and we agreed on 120 out of 137, for an inter scorer reliability rating of 87.6%[3]. Some differences from Flowerdew's (1992) study are that this was a graduate theology class for both native and non-native English speakers in North America, while his were undergraduate classes for EFL students overseas; Flowerdew used two short (averaging 38 minutes) lectures from eight instructors, while I had eight longer (85 minutes) ones from one professor; I used eight topics and time frames in one semester; and while he used video, I audiotaped the lectures.

**Results**

*Definitions in Theology vs. Science Lectures*

In answer to the first research question, several similarities with Flowerdew's science lecture findings were observed. There are three types (formal, semi-formal, and substitution) of definitions in these theology lectures, and they reveal various levels of precision or detail. These categories of definitions in theology were not exactly the same as in the Flowerdew (1992) study, but the definitions could be further categorized, as in his data, yet with fewer possibilities. All formal definitions here were the "attribute/property" type, for example, and there were fewer types in the semi-formal and substitution categories. Definitions do tend to cluster, but are also used throughout the theology lectures. As in Flowerdew's research, definitions can be 'signposts' structuring lectures, but they are often also 'embedded' with low focus in the theology lectures. Definitions (especially formal and semi-formal ones) in these theology lectures often included relative clauses and were frequently signaled lexically using "means", "called", and even the terms "define" and "definition". Also, as Flowerdew observed, even with the same professor there can be variation in the frequency of definitions in academic theology lectures.

Various differences between definitions in science and theology were also apparent, however. For example, no ostensive only definitions were evident in these theology lectures, though visuals were sometimes used in class. Given the more concrete nature of the sciences and the clearly abstract nature of theology, it is perhaps not surprising that two formal and semi-formal categories (behavior/process/function, composition/structure) in Flowerdew's study were not present here. Something here not noted in Flowerdew's (1992) article was the translation of foreign words or phrases into English, and sometimes definitions for theological words or phrases were provided during a lecture although the term itself was not used in the definition. In addition, some terms were defined in several different ways during lectures, often using separate types of definitions. In the theology lectures there were also examples of negative definitions, specifying what particular terms or phrases do <u>not</u> mean. Finally, the total number of definitions in my data is quite a bit less than in the Flowerdew (1992) study with science lectures, as is the frequency of definitions.

*Quantitative Results: Types and Frequency of Definitions*

The answers to research questions two (on types) and three (on the frequency and distribution of definitions) are found in Table 1, which summarizes the quantitative data, listing the length of each lecture, the average time frequency per lecture (and in total) per definition, the total number of definitions, and the number of each of the three types of definitions and some subcategories. In total, 143 terms or phrases were defined (representing 129 different word families) in 269 definitions in the

eight lectures studied, for an average of 33.6 definitions per theology lecture. Some terms (like 'theology') were defined more than once, and sometimes in more than one lecture. The semi-formal type was most common in this data from theology, followed by substitutions and formal definitions, which were the least frequent. The average frequency of definitions varied, with the most frequent understandably in Lecture 2 on 'Definitions and Classifications' (one definition on average every 1 minute 33 seconds) to the least frequent in Lecture 7 on 'General and Special Revelation' (one definition on average every 3 minutes 30 seconds).

**Table 1**

The Data at a Glance: Lecture Number, Information, and Types of Definitions

| Lecture Number Information/Type | 2 | 5 | 7 | 10 | 14 | 17 | 20 | 21 | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Length of Lecture (minutes) | 81 | 83 | 84 | 87 | 77 | 83 | 81 | 84 | 660 min. |
| Average Frequency of Definitions (1 per) | 1 m. 33 s. | 2 m. 18 s. | 3 m. 30 s. | 3 min. | 1 m. 40 s. | 2 m. 52 s. | 3 m. 7 s. | 3 m. 7 s. | 2 min. 27 sec. |
| Total # of Definitions | 52 | 36 | 24 | 29 | 46 | 29 | 26 | 27 | 269 |
| Formal (Attribute/Property) | 7 | 7 | 3 | 13 | 11 | 19 | 3 | 12 | 75 |
| Semi-formal | 28 | 17 | 10 | 7 | 18 | 5 | 4 | 11 | 100 |
| ▪ Attribute/Property | 27 | 17 | 10 | 7 | 18 | 5 | 4 | 11 | 99 |
| ▪ Location/Occurrence | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Substitution | 17 | 12 | 11 | 9 | 17 | 5 | 19 | 4 | 94 |
| ▪ Paraphrase | 15 | 7 | 4 | 7 | 11 | 4 | 12 | 2 | 62 |
| ▪ Synonym | 1 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 7 | 2 | 15 |
| ▪ Derivation | 1 | 3 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 17 |

*Qualitative Results: Examples of Definitions in Theology*

The findings for the fourth research question, on how definitions are used, are reflected in examples from the lecture transcripts below (with the terms defined in ***bold italics***), showing a range of ways they were used, both orally and in written form during the lectures. First, corroborating Flowerdew's (1992) results, some definitions seemed to help structure lectures as 'signposts', as in this excerpt, which both defines "prolegomena" and signals and what the next section of the lecture is about:

*Lecture 2, Page 2 Excerpt - Semi-formal, Attribute/property "prolegomena"*
ah / the word **prolegomena** / essentially has to do / or means / ah / how one approaches the study of a particular discipline / ah how one approaches the study of a particular discipline /

Yet other definitions were embedded within the lecture narrative to clarify a term's meaning or use:

*Lecture 7, Page 6 Excerpt - Semi-formal, Attribute/property "revelation"*
**revelation** / is a process initiated by God / that may be obvious to you / from what I've said already / but let me make the observation again / **revelation** is a process initiated by God that is to say **revelation** is an act of God / it is something which God does / / it is God who does the revealing / it is God who gives the **revelation** /

The above example also reflects the elaboration that Jackson and Bilton (1994) discussed.

As Flowerdew (1992) showed, and Jackson and Bilton (1994) confirmed with elaborations, other definitions in these theology lectures were embedded in the lecture narratives in order to clarify or expand on a particular concept and its meaning or use, and some definitions were repeated orally within the lectures, obviously for students' note taking:

*Lecture 14, Page 5 Excerpt – Semi-formal, Attribute/property "transcendence"*
when we speak about God's **transcendence** / / we mean the otherness of God / we mean the sense in which God is completely or wholly other than what we are / the otherness of God / or to use Karl Barth's language / God as wholly other / that is completely / different / God as wholly other / completely uh / completely different / uh **transcendence**

Furthermore, some (usually formal) definitions were printed on, discussed, and/or later read out loud off handouts that were distributed to students during the lectures, including lecture outlines, articles, and other brief readings. Other times, as with the following excerpt, there was a clear connection between the spoken definition and the written lecture outline, which listed the bolded section below under "the meaning of providence":

*Lecture 21, Page 5 Excerpt - Formal, Attribute/property "providence"*
so when we speak about **providence** **as preservation** what we mean is the continuous / activity or agency of God / by which God sustains / the creation / by which God maintains it / uh / preserves it / conserve conserves it / preserving in existence that which God has created /

In the theology classes, lecture outlines and handouts often contained definitions of a technical nature, as Jackson and Bilton (1994) similarly noted in their data (p. 73).

In these lectures, definitions were most frequently and almost uniquely for technical theological vocabulary, although 10% were for academic or other words, such as "tradition" (an academic word on both the AWL and the UWL) in the following example:

> *Lecture 5, Page 12 Excerpt - Semi-formal, Attribute/property "tradition"*
> now ***tradition*** / simply means something handed down / from the past to the present / /
> / and in Christian faith the term embraces beliefs / and practices and institutions which
> are handed down from generation / to generation /

Echoing Jackson and Bilton's (1994) results, the above excerpt using a general academic term is elaborated upon here in order to show the specific way it is understood in this field.

   Some 30% of the words or phrases that were defined during the lectures were also written on the class white board. A number of these were substitutions with word derivation, which was also usually noted on the white board:

> *Lecture 10, Page 3 Excerpt - Substitution, Derivation "theopneustos"*
> okay yeah the word there literally is ***theopneustos*** / and pneustos from uh pneuma uh
> for spirit or breath / and theo of course is God / so literally what we've got is God-
> breathed or uh God's breath or God's spirit /

One type of substitution here was not mentioned in the Flowerdew (1992) study or in the Jackson and Bilton (1994) one but is actually a translation, usually from Greek, Latin, or Hebrew words or phrases, as in this example:

> *Lecture 20, Page 12 Excerpt - Substitution, Paraphrase "per verbum Dei"*
> The Creed says / I believe in God the Father Almighty / maker of heaven and earth /
> but creation notice ***per verbum Dei*** as the tradition says / by the word of God /
> creation takes place by or through the word of God / um / God uh / this refers to the
> divine creation of the world by the word of God's power /

While not very common, this type of substitution by translation seems to reflect the field of Christian theology, which draws on and uses the three main languages noted above.

   In two cases, I observed ostensive use of diagrams together with formal definitions. The following excerpt refers to an overhead that the professor was using and pointed to during his lecture, but it also reflects a negative definition, since the professor additionally describes what the defined phrase does not mean:

> *Lecture 17, Page 6 Excerpt - Formal, Attribute/property "doctrine of the trinity"*
> so in sum then / the ***doctrine of the trinity*** is that three persons subsist in the divine
> essence or substance without division / now at this point let me put up a picture of God
> for you / um I know you've been waiting for this all term / you've all wanted to know
> what God looks like / well this is an ancient diagram of the holy trinity / a snapshot uh
> of God taken / in uh / the second or third century / now let me just tell you what's
> going in here / this in diagrammatic form is an attempt to say what we just said / okay
> / God is Father / God is Son / God is Spirit / there is one God but three persons / God
> is Father / God is Son / God is Spirit / however / it's also important to remember uh /
> not to confuse the persons / while there is one God / the persons are not to be confused
> / so the Father is not the Spirit / and the Spirit is not the Father / the Father is not the

Son and the Son is not the Father / and the Son is not the Spirit and the Spirit is not the
Son / each / person has its own identity / yet at the same time / there is but one God /

This rather lengthy elaboration is one type of definition that also functions as a summary of previous comments the lecturer had made.

   In summary, the quantitative results and the excerpts and qualitative data here reveal that several different types and categories of definitions were used in these theology lectures, and it was not unusual for there to be some written or visual support – in lecture outlines, on handouts, on the class white board, etc. – for these terms or phases as they were being defined orally.

**Discussion**

Before discussing the results further I should acknowledge some limitations of the present study: these are initial findings in a case study representing one discipline, from only one Introduction to Theology course, in one graduate school, and the lectures are from only one professor. However, these limitations do not discount the main purpose of the study, to describe definitions in a neglected field, nor the findings reported here.

   In a corpus study on written academic vocabulary, Hyland and Tse (2007) declared that "all fields, not only the sciences, draw on a specialized lexis" (p. 247). The present analyses of definitions in the theology lectures confirm their point but also reveal that theological vocabulary was a focus for this particular professor. In discussing "revelation", for example, he stated:

> *Lecture 7, Page 7 Excerpt*
> you know we've got all this wonderful shorthand / this biblical theological vocabulary
> / you know that Christians use / uh but part of our agenda here is to try to think in and
> uncover and unpack / what is it we're really using / what is it we're really saying when
> we mean these things / when we say these things rather / what is it we really mean /

This 'shorthand' or 'biblical theological vocabulary' was clearly considered to be important, and the professor was definitely concerned that students acquire the specific meaning and use of particular vocabulary. This objective is probable for many lecturers in a variety of disciplines, and definitions are a good place for all L2 students and their teachers to start considering the vocabulary of specific academic fields.

   It appears, as Flowerdew (1992) suggested, that the characteristics of definitions in different academic disciplines and for different audiences do vary somewhat, yet there are also a number of commonalities between definitions in science and in theology lectures, as noted earlier. Given that the lectures in Flowerdew's (1992) study were for undergraduate EFL students in Oman, however, it is perhaps not surprising that although the total length of lecture time studied was similar (660 minutes

here vs. 605 in science) definitions were fewer and less frequent in these regular graduate theology lectures for both native and non-native English speaking students in Canada. One key difference between the students in these lectures in Canada and those in Jackson and Bilton's (1994) research in Oman is that these students were very proficient in English, and thus likely familiar with colloquial English for definitions or elaborations, which seemed to pose a challenge for the EFL students in their research, "whose exposure to English had been restricted to a formal classroom setting" (p. 76).

Since theology, like many other disciplines, deals much more with abstract topics and concepts, it is also not surprising that there were no ostensive only definitions in my data, nor any behavior/process/function and composition/structure semantic definitions, which seem more suited to biology and chemistry, the science courses in Flowerdew's (1992) research. Flowerdew noted that 'ostensive' was "a very minor class" of definitions in his corpus (p. 212), and given the subject matter in my data (see the Appendix for the lecture topics) it would normally be difficult to find objects, photographs, or diagrams to offer as ostensive definitions in theology, although the professor giving these lectures did use the white board extensively and visuals occasionally, as in one earlier extract. While definitions were less frequent in the theology lectures here than in either of the science studies noted, they were nonetheless often embedded throughout these academic lectures to help listeners understand terms or concepts, and thus could be useful for L2 vocabulary learning, particularly of technical terms or phrases.

In terms of written definitions in these lectures, as the examples above indicated there were places where the words or phrases that were defined orally were included in written form in lecture outlines or the words that were defined were written down on the class white board as the professor lectured and elaborated on them. In some cases the professor used class handouts and read out printed formal or semi-formal definitions on them. This case study on definitions is part of a larger research project, and future possibilities for analyzing these and other data include 1) further description of the use of written definitions in the other lectures and 2) studying how different definitions may be related within different lectures, or how definitions for repeated words, phrases, or concepts may change over time during the Introduction to Theology course (see, e.g., Leung, 2005; Morgan, 2005).

## Possible Implications for Vocabulary Learning

For those who work in EAP or ESP education, the first thing to note here is the presence and frequency of different types of definitions for some academic and mostly technical theological vocabulary in normal, intact academic lectures. Corroborating the earlier work of Flowerdew (1992) and Jackson and Bilton (1994), we can therefore encourage L2 students by letting them know that

various types of definitions exist in their content lectures and may be valuable for learning vocabulary, and by helping and teaching them to be aware of definitions and to use them to understand their lectures and to acquire vocabulary in and through them.

In relation to learning specialized vocabulary, the present study suggests that we should educate advanced EAP and ESP students by communicating to them that in academic lectures:

• Definitions are frequently signaled lexically, with "mean(s)," "called," "that is," etc. (see also Flowerdew, 1992; Jackson & Bilton, 1994).

• Some terms or phrases are defined more than once, in different ways, and in different lectures.

• Definitions in lectures include both those for *individual terms* (e.g., "prolegomena") and *multi-word phrases* (such as "inspiration of the bible" or "doctrine of the trinity"), confirming the importance of lexical phrases for technical vocabulary learning and teaching (see also Mudraya, 2006).

If we train students to listen for lexical cues to definitions (like "mean(s)"), to recognize that specialized words or phrases may be defined more than once and in different ways, and to look for both individual technical words and phrases, they should hopefully be better prepared and able to deal with these in their content lectures as informed, active listeners.

As the earlier examples imply, there is a clear nominal emphasis in definitions in theology, and those in other fields confirm that technical vocabulary seems to involve mostly nouns and noun phrases (with adjectives), and few verbs or adverbs (Sutarsyah, Nation, & Kennedy, 1994). Also, the technical vocabulary in theology that is defined tends to be abstract, in contrast with Flowerdew's (1992) more concrete science definitions, and Carter (1998) indicates that vocabulary for abstract concepts may be more difficult to learn than for concrete ones. This observation suggests that focusing on technical vocabulary learning within EAP or ESP classes may be valuable, particularly for mathematics, philosophy, psychology, theology, or other more 'abstract' disciplines where ostensive definitions may be absent or infrequent.

Finally, in addition to the usual note taking skills covered in courses for academic listening, this study suggests that EAP and ESP students should be taught how to use class handouts and whiteboard notes written during their lectures not only to aid their aural comprehension but also to support and contextualize the definitions that their lecturers provide orally, especially since that such elaborations (including definitions) are not usually highlighted verbally (Jackson & Bilton, 1994).

## Conclusion

Though complex, definitions in academic lectures are an area for ongoing study in ESP. Taking into consideration the limitations mentioned earlier, the present research generally echoes Vidal's (2003) study, suggesting that hearing and seeing academic lectures in English offers L2 students great potential for vocabulary learning, particularly of specialized or less frequent vocabulary and where lecturers offer a rich lexical environment with written and visual support.

## Acknowledgments

## Notes

[1] In the Jackson and Bilton (1994) study semitechnical vocabulary was defined as "an everyday word which has a specific application in the scientific context" (p. 72). The example given was the word 'hardness' used as "a measure of the *resistance of a mineral to scratching*" (p. 72, original emphasis). This distinction indicates what Nation (2001) noted, and Chung and Nation (2003, 2004) and Fraser (2005) later observed, that there are various levels of technical vocabulary and that high frequency vocabulary may also be used in very technical ways.

[2] See the Appendix for the full course lecture schedule, where the numbers and major topics of the lectures that were analyzed here are *italicized*.

[3] The second rater had EFL teaching experience. In fact we only differed on categorizing one definition. The other differences were because one of us had neglected to categorize some definitions that the other rater had noted. The final totals here include all the definitions.

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**Appendix**

**The Introduction to Theology I Lecture Topics**

|  | Class(es) | Topic(s) |
|---|---|---|
| Part 1: Prolegomena | 1, *2* | *Definitions and classifications* |
|  | 3, 4 | Task and method |
|  | *5*, 6 | *Traditions and perspectives* |
| Part 2: The Doctrine of Revelation | *7*, 8 | *General and special revelation* |
|  | 9, *10* | *The inspiration of Holy Scripture* |
|  | 11, 12 | The interpretation of Holy Scripture |
| Part Three: The Doctrine of God | 13, *14* | *The being of God* |
|  | 15, 16 | The triunity of God |
|  | *17*, 18 | *The perfections of God* |
| Part Four: The Doctrine of Creation | 19, *20* | *God the creator* |
|  | *21* | *Providence and evil* |
|  | 22, 23 | Humanity and sin |

Note: The numbers and topics of the lectures analyzed here are in *italics*.

# A Case Study of Teachers' English Learning

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative research was to examine the extent to which Taiwanese educators in one selected high school in Taiwan viewed their English language study group as a form of staff development and professional learning community that contributes to their professional growth or learning. This case study employed the following data collection techniques: (1) informal observations and interviews, (2) focus group interview, (3) semi-structured individual interviews, and (4) documents and records. The site selected for this study was one selected high school in Chia-Yi City in Taiwan. Participants in this teacher study group argued that the group provides a better form of professional development than traditional professional development activities because it was a teacher-directed activity in an informal format, and provided on-going opportunities to meet their needs. The concerns and challenges of the study group identified by the participants in this study include: a) the role of facilitators, b) the impact on improving teaching practice and students' performance, and c) lack of school-wide impact. The members also believed that this collaborative group promoted both collective and individual growth in a supportive learning environment and thereby functioned as a learning community.

**Key words:** Learning community; Professional development; Study groups.

# 1. Background

Schools are communities in which learning is supposed to take place, but they do not always function well as learning communities (Watkins & Marsick, 1999). The development of school as a meaningful learning community is a primary issue for education. A number of empirical studies (Caine & Caine, 2000; Emery, 1998; Garet at el., 2001; Meyer et al., 1998; Murphy, 1992; Pfaff, 2000; Short et al., 1993) noted the significance of teacher study groups. However, there are fewer answers to the questions within the literature regarding how teacher study groups contribute to school development as a learning community. More specifically, what we need to know is what contributions do teacher study groups make to the capacity of teachers and school development as a learning community. These questions were explicitly examined in this study. Here, this study attempted to seek the way in which the conditions in teacher study groups transform school development into a learning community. Most importantly, how does a teacher study group affect school change?

According to Emery (1998); Meyer et al. (1998); Pfaff (2000); Short et al., (1993), we can see the direct link between conducting teacher study groups and the development of a school as a learning community leading the professional growth of teachers. This review supported the notion that teacher professional development is affected when schools evolve into learning communities and are supported by professional learning networks known as study groups. In other words, when teacher study groups contributed to schools evolving into learning communities, this can support teacher professional development and maintain a high level of teacher efficacy. However, even though teacher study groups can have a link to contribute school development to learning communities, these relationships had not always been reported in sufficient detail. Most studies on teacher study groups not only had limited empirical data, but also typically presented the researcher's opinions relative to the effectiveness of the staff development model. Furthermore, because of the limited information provided by studies about Taiwanese conditions of study group efforts, at this point the researcher did not have a precise view of how varying contexts specifically influenced the impact of school development as a learning community leading to teacher professional growth in Taiwan.

The significance of this study should develop an understanding of study groups as an alternative form of professional development from the perspective of teachers who have been involved in such a group. In particular, the study should provide insights into the ways in which participants view a study group as contributing to their professional development. In addition, this study may serve as a guide for Taiwanese educators who are interested in the implementation of study groups. An in-depth description of the views and experiences of study group participants may help educators understand the problems, frustrations and successes in terms of the operation of study groups.

## 2. Literature review

Research has also demonstrated that teacher study groups in K-12 schools are a promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; Lieberman, 1996). School staff who participated in groups found that learning groups contributed significantly to the achievement of school goals. Tichenor & Heins (2000) pointed out that educators can take control of their learning by actively participating in problem-centered discussions and activities. However, there is a lack of empirical data showing how teacher inquiry contributes to school development as a learning community.

Short (1993) studied elementary schools in the school district of Tucson, Arizona. Teachers in this study reported that the most valued aspect of teacher study groups was creating a strong community in a particular school. The teachers talked about the isolation they experienced as educators, their lack of knowledge about other teachers' beliefs and practice, and the lack of trust between peers. The study group provided a supportive environment for reflection on their experiences both as teachers and learners. Through study groups, these teachers developed personal and professional relationships that gave them a sense of community. Short et al. (1993) stated that the community built in the study group invited teachers to "interact on regular basis about issues of concern, gave them a chance to see how other people handled issues they were also dealing with, and often afforded them the window to see others were just as frustrated and concerned" (p. 7).

These evidences revealed that providing teachers with the opportunity to approach teacher study groups that promoted collaboration, shared decision-making, problem solving, and discourse on instructional criteria can have a positive effect on learning communities. These groups ultimately led to teacher professional growth.

Few studies on teacher study groups are available in Taiwan, although this type of activity has existed for quite some time. In the past, Taiwanese teachers were neither encouraged to attend study groups, nor were offered opportunities to perceive study groups as their means for professional growth. A group of teachers usually met to discuss or talked over some specific issues or topics related to education after school. This was regarded as a personal activity rather than a professional activity. However, due to the impact of the new educational reform movement, Taiwanese teachers and principals had begun to notice the essential need for collaboration with their peers.

Recently, the number of study groups in Taiwan is rising. According to Chao (1999), teachers who participated in study groups during the school day, or received financial support from the school for participating, commonly, used their extra time to attend these study groups. Generally, Taiwan's teachers volunteered to participate. However, teachers do not often receive recognition for their efforts from their school administrators. Generally, there was only one teacher study group in each

school in Taiwan. Meanwhile, few supervisors came to examine activities in study groups, and teachers usually took turns discussing issues or topics in their groups.

In the empirical research on teacher study groups of Liang (1998), Taiwanese teachers reported that study groups were the best approach toward classroom management and reducing isolation. These experiences helped teachers to develop communication skills in classrooms and personal teaching theory. In addition, Chao (1999) pointed out that teachers effectively benefit from personal growth and instructional content from these study groups. Moreover, most Taiwanese teachers had positive attitudes about their sub-groups such as study groups and growth groups (Hsieh, 1999; Rau, 1997; Chiu, 2001). According to Chiu (2001), Taiwanese teachers and administrators had attempted to regard teacher study groups as a formal professional development approach due to their advantages. These advantages were connection with real teaching, and the opportunities they provided for collaboration with colleagues. Chiu's (2001) study revealed that study groups positively promoted participants in personal and instructional development. In other words, according to these experiences in study groups, Taiwanese teachers had paid more attention to study groups to help them in their professional development.

However, even though teachers enjoyed the advantage of being in charge of study groups, the non-legitimacy and rewards system declines teachers' willingness to participate (Chiu, 2001). As for the role of principals, most Taiwanese principals seldom provided financial support or supplemental resources to study groups, even though they encouraged teachers to attend the activity. This is probably because of the top-down school culture. Taiwanese teachers still felt uneasy to communicate with their principals equally, even though they were empowered more in schools. Chiu (2001) also found that Taiwanese teachers and principals had different perceptions of who are responsible for the professional development of teachers. In other words, only if teachers and principals have the same perceptions with regards to the purpose and goals of learning activities, will school improvement be effective.

In relation to the new movement toward teachers' empowerment, Taiwanese teachers needed to be responsible for their professional learning more than ever. Study groups were assumed to be an effective approach for Taiwanese teachers to reach the goals of educational reform. Through study groups, Taiwanese teachers can collaborate with peers to deal with the difficulties and problems caused by the new curriculum and educational policy more quickly than other professional development activities. There is still a long way for Taiwanese educators to engage in the educational goals, which benefit students.

Here, the researcher attempted to identify the way in which the conditions in teacher study groups transform school development into a learning community. The literature failed to give the teachers reflections on their beliefs and practices within teacher study groups. Due to this lack of research, the research tended to investigate how teachers in groups influence the attitude and awareness of their students and their teaching practices. Based on teacher collaboration and inquiry, the research furthered the understanding of study groups and how they had helped teachers raise consciousness about the relationship between teacher knowledge and practice.

With respect to the research questions, little information was available about Taiwanese teachers' perceptions of the use of study groups as a form of staff development. The following were the central and sub-questions:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers in a selected Taiwanese high school of a study group as a form of staff development and as contributing to a school-wide learning community?
2. What do the teachers view as the challenges and concerns in developing

    and sustaining an effective study group?


## 3. Method

In this study, a qualitative case study methodology was used to gather data from the perspectives of the participants involved. This study investigated the perceptions of teachers of the use of study groups as a form of staff development in one selected school in Chia-Yi city in Taiwan.


### 3.1 Participants

The site selected for this study was a senior high school in Chia-Yi City in Taiwan. The English Teachers' Club at this school has been in operation for sixteen years, and functions entirely in English.

In addition to the principal, the participants in this study included eight members of the English Teachers' Club: seven teachers working at the school and one teacher working at one municipal junior high school. The group consisted of five English teachers, one chemistry teacher, one music teacher, and one guidance counselor. The eight participants range in years of teaching experience from one year to 40 years. They had attended this study group for as little as one year and as long as sixteen years.


### 3.2 Data collection techniques

This study employed the following data collection techniques: (1) informal observations and informal interviews, (2) focus group interviews, (3) semi-structured individual interviews, and (4) documents

and records. These multiple methods of data collection allowed the researcher to triangulate the data and provide a more reliable analysis.

All eight participants at the selected schools in this research interview were volunteers. The individuals were interviewed at the location most convenient to them. Interviews were tape recorded, and notes were taken during the interviews to stimulate future questions and clarification. The time for each interview was approximately one hour and followed a planned interview protocol designed by the researcher. The group interview was audio taped, and later transcribed. It lasted approximately one hour. As part of the data collection process, available documents and records are also collected. These included the agendas of study group meetings, the photos taken with a number of invited guest speakers, the record of attendance of members, and staff development or school improvement plans and policy statements such as a report of school development plans, a brochure of school introduction, and educational and demographic background of faculty and staff.

## 3.3 Data analysis techniques

In order to accomplish the goals of this study, the methods of data analysis included: searching for patterns, themes, and ideas in the data; creating coding categories as the patterns emerged; and organizing the data into these categories. As individual and focus group interviews were completed and transcribed, the information was saved in a separate file for each individual. All data were read, re-read, and analyzed by identifying question number, categories in parenthesis and a sentence, phrase, or text to identify the category. All the responses from participants were analyzed for both groups of questions and each question. In addition, each question was also analyzed based on the responses from participants. By analyzing each question from participants, additional categories were compared, contrasted or combined to clearly elicit the development of themes.

When initial themes were generated from the research data, they were coded numerically. When the themes were identified, the codes were determined and compared to discover the focus of the analysis. Once the results of the preliminary coding process for all participants were merged into the group database, data could be organized in a variety of views. The QSR-NUD*IST qualitative data analysis computer software program was used as the tool for data analysis.

## 4. Findings and discussion

This part will summarize and discuss the findings of this study, and present recommendations for professional development. In particular, the extent to which the ways in which these professional learning opportunities differ from traditional professional development were examined. Secondly, the

perceived concerns of a study group were analyzed in relation to the challenges and concerns in developing and sustaining an effective study group.

In this study, participants not only perceived the language group as form of professional development, but also a way contributing to a learning community.

The research sub-question addressed in this study is: what do the teachers and the principal view as the challenges and concerns in developing and sustaining an effective study group? The emerging concerns and challenges identified in this study include: a) the role of facilitators, b) the impact on improving teaching practice and students' performance, and c) lack of school-wide impact. These issues are discussed below.

## 4.1 The study group as a form of professional development

According to these participants, two features of the study group were particularly significant. First, they perceived the study group as providing an informal and flexible format for learning. Second, they perceived the study group as involving a process of ongoing learning that can better meet their learning needs compared to other traditional professional development activities.

In this study, teachers reported that the study group process is a teacher-directed professional activity with an informal format; in particular, they viewed this study group as an informal organization. They indicated that they prefer the freedom and autonomy of a study group that operates with an informal and flexible format rather than a formal professional activity supervised by the school. Five teachers agreed that they were afraid that this study group might become a formal form of staff development for schoolteachers, because they do not want to be supervised and forced to attend this group. As one participant said, he did not want this study group to be a formal form of staff development because he did not want to lose the flexibility and autonomy of the study group. This evidence suggested a desire not for top-down supervision by the school in terms of professional learning, but for the autonomy to take charge of one's own learning. Teachers in the study group were afraid they would lose control of the learning process if the study group became formal staff development, and the school took charge of their English learning.

Teachers in the study group indicated they wanted to be involved in deciding what they need to learn and in developing the learning opportunities and the process to be used. As Hodges (1996) argued, this kind of teacher involvement affected teachers' motivation and commitment to learn. In contrast, when teachers lose the authority and autonomy to take charge of their own learning, they are less likely to engage in meaningful learning. Therefore, it is not surprising that teachers in the study group believed the informal and flexible format for learning was important, because it provided them with the opportunity to structure their own learning. In this way, the study group differs from most

traditional professional development in which teachers' participation is typically dictated by administrators or a central office rather than teacher-developed (Kagan, 1992). The implication of this traditional approach is that "teaching is often viewed as technical, learning as packaged, and teachers as passive recipients of knowledge" (Lieberman, 1995, p. 592). Teachers ended up over-depending on higher authorities making decisions for them (Nias, 1993) so that they were reluctant to pursue self-directed professional growth on their own and to view seeking professional growth as their obligation. Compared to traditional professional development, teachers viewed the study group as a teacher-directed activity in which they had the autonomy to decide what they want to learn.

According to the participants, this teacher-directed activity also made them view this teacher study group as a practical professional development activity that increased their English ability because it offered the opportunity to practice using English, which was what they believe they needed. Teachers also reported that the experts or outside speakers in formal professional development workshops or in-service programs usually do not address their needs as they disseminate information that they do not often see as relevant. One of the participants, Michael, reported,

> I think many in-service programs or workshops for teachers are more theoretical and not practical. Speakers of these workshops in the in-service education all presented in Chinese. But for English teachers, what they lack is the training of listening and speaking of English. So, in-service education is not practical. In contrast, this study group can contribute to a teacher's listening and speaking. When listening to others' presentation in English, you can see how much you can comprehend. And when it is your turn to present, you also can see if you can present something meaningful and reasonable in English. This is indeed practical and realistic to teachers. Certainly, you also need to engage in reading to enhance your professional growth.

Traditional approaches to professional development have come under severe criticism as being ineffective and not providing teachers with sufficient time and activities for the practice of new ideas and skills or content deemed relevant to increasing teachers' pedagogical or pedagogical content knowledge (Garet, et al., 2001; Lieberman, 1995; Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998). Thus, it is not surprising that teachers in the study group complained that the traditional professional development or in-service programs they attended usually do not address their needs. However, the belief that practical professional development is better was supported by the teachers in this study group. Teachers in the study group did not assume that they must learn from experts, but needed the opportunity to practice what they are trying to learn and be able to learn from each other. As the teachers worked together, they reported becoming more aware of the complexities of the English language and its usage in a broad range of areas due to the diverse articles they read and discussed.

Participants also reported that they preferred the study group as a form of professional development over traditional professional development activities, because it provided time for them to meet on a regular basis, to learn from each other, share ideas, practice English, and support each other. Teachers also reported that since the study group provided on-going learning experiences, in contrast to teacher workshops which they attend only once or twice without extension, the study group was able to provide an opportunity for in-depth discussion of content, pedagogical strategies, and ideas for new practices they would try not in the classroom (Garet et al, 2001). In this study, the weekly professional learning activities contributed to teachers' subject matter knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and pedagogical content knowledge which is a feature of effective professional development (Garet et al., 2001). These findings were also consistent with other research regarding effective professional development, which indicated that professional development should provide for collaborative, ongoing opportunities for colleagues to be engaged in focused activities that are embedded in their daily professional lives and meet their needs (Guskey, 1997; Hawley & Valli, 1999; Herner & Higgins, 2000; Sparks & Hirsh, 1997). In other words, in order to be effective, professional development should be ongoing and continuous rather than be given in fragmented one-shot sessions.

For the teachers at Chia-Yi Girls' Senior High School, this study group is an on-site professional development that is convenient to attend because it is held on campus. However, that does not mean that the teachers perceive this study group as a form of school-based professional development. According to Roberts & Pruitt (2003), school-based professional development should take into account the needs of the particular students in the school and the unique culture of the school. As Michael reported, this study group is an informal organization that does not belong to the school, the library or any academic affair's division. Therefore, the teachers did not focus on needs assessment, data collection about their students, or articulating their vision in accordance with the district or school vision. They focused on increasing their English fluency. It is evident that the teachers in the study did not perceive this study group as school-based professional development but as informal on-site professional development.


## 4. 2 The study group as a learning community

The teachers consistently emphasized learning together and learning from each other in a supportive environment. They perceived the study group to be an opportunity to learn English by conversing in English with colleagues and English-speaking guests in a safe place in which they would share and discuss ideas openly, and reduce their feeling of isolation from other adults. The participants in this collaborative group took collective responsibility for their English learning in a way that was

consistent with the characteristics of professional learning community. Myers & Simpson (1998) described learning communities as "cultural settings in which everyone learns, in which every individual is an integral part, and in which every participant is responsible for both the learning and the overall well-being of everyone else" (p.2).

These characteristics of professional community members suggest that although this study group does not contribute to the school's development as a learning community, it does represent a strong learning community in itself. This sense of a learning community was viewed by the participants as one of the most valued aspects of the study group.

Teachers reported that the study group provided an opportunity in a physically close environment for them to exchange ideas, to share personal and teaching experiences, and to get personally acquainted. Their interactions seemed to establish a sense of identity based on common interests and goals (Louis & Miles, 1990). Teachers thought the study group helped their interpersonal relationships, improved their professional interactions, and provided a place of safety, belonging, and trust. The conditions that are essential for a professional learning community consist of: (1) time to meet and talk, (2) physical proximity, and (3) communication structures (Kruse et al., 1995). This study group certainly met these three conditions.

The weekly group meeting, with the agenda focused on discussing an article in English, provided opportunities to discuss personal and professional experiences, and led to the establishment of a discourse community that encouraged the exchange of ideas. When teachers have time to meet, discuss their common interests, interact frequently, and have the opportunity to exchange ideas, a study group can become a learning community.

The teachers also reported that the study group gave them a chance to get to know other teachers better and break the wall of isolation. For example, one teacher said, "I usually keep in touch with Michael, George, and Angelica in the group. I'm isolated in the school, but I can be closer to the members in the group." As a result, teachers had learned to trust each other and develop a good rapport. Trust and respect from colleagues in the study group are one characteristic of the study group as a learning community because it "helps to induce a sense of loyalty, commitment, and effectiveness necessary for shared decision making and the establishment of collegiality" (Kruse et al., 1995, p. 38). When people don't feel safe in an environment, it makes them feel uneasy. In this English Teachers Club, the teachers found a safe place where they realized they can be heard and accepted respectfully. Mutual respect and understanding were central to build trust among teachers. The trust among teachers helped them to talk honestly about their perspectives: they said they felt safe talking about their opinions, challenges, and frustrations.

Another characteristic contributing to a learning community is supportive and shared leadership (Kruse et al, 1995) that should focus efforts on "the core issues of shared purpose, continuous improvement, and structural change" (p.39). Teachers took turns to be facilitators who selected materials and guided the group conversation. This rotating leadership allowed teachers not only to develop their leadership ability, but also to facilitate equal participation among all the members. With the shared leadership, every member in the study group made an effort to enhance their colleagues' English development that is the shared purpose of the study group.

In summary, the open atmosphere, collaborative dialogue, and supportive culture in the study group encouraged teachers in their personal and professional growth in a synergistic community. Specifically, the conditions of time to meet, physical proximity, communication structures, trust, supportive leadership and socialization in the study group were crucial to developing a learning community. In this respect, this teacher study group represented a learning community where teachers took responsibility for their own learning and professional growth.

## 4.3 Concerns and challenges of the study group

### 4.3.1 The role of facilitators

The selection of topics and the techniques of leading conversation in the group were two issues that the participants were concerned about as facilitators. Murphy (1992) believed that "study groups turn all individuals into learners eager to assume responsibility for their own learning and that of colleagues," a characteristic that seemed to be true with this study group. They reported that they took members' interests and needs into consideration when selecting topics.

However, when considering the interests and needs of their colleagues, facilitators faced a number of dilemmas. One of these dilemmas was the selection of topics with which facilitators felt comfortable at the same time and were of interest to the participants. Teachers reported that they felt pressure to select good topics and felt a responsibility for and commitment to contributing to group discussion. However, some participants also expressed concern that some topics chosen were unfamiliar or boring. For example, Michael, an English teacher, stated: "some selected articles are profound, and some are hollow." A reported advantage of this particular study group was that teachers have the flexibility to select different kinds of articles as the facilitator, but a corresponding disadvantage was that facilitators had difficulty selecting articles and estimating the level of appropriate content for other members. This difficulty tended to make some teachers feel bored or left out. In essence, when teachers determine the content for their own professional development, the

level of learning is dependent in part upon their capacity of the facilitator to understand the needs of his or her co-workers.

Another dilemma for facilitators was the need not only to be attuned to the interests and English comprehension capacities of members in selecting material, but to keep the focus on learning English, the purpose of the study group. Angelica reported this difficulty in regards to one facilitator. Members proposed the idea of "let's speak in Taiwanese" to the facilitator to discuss the material that week. If he agreed to discuss the material in Taiwanese, it would follow the desires of some members. However, this agreement would lose the purpose of English learning. If he insisted on discussing in English, some members might be unwilling or unable to actively participate in the discussion.

Equally important was the limited time available in the one hour meeting. As Florence, an English teacher, reported, time constraints seem to cause problems for facilitators. Sometimes facilitators cannot direct the discussion as they would like because the time is usually up after all of the members have presented their ideas. This shortage of time prevented the facilitator from making comments after each presentation. Teachers also reported that they hoped to increase attendance; however, they complained that due to time limitations for group discussion after members' presentations, increased membership would further complicate the facilitator's ability to manage time constraints.

The sense of ownership of this study group supported Griffin's (1983) idea that study groups should form around a problem or area of interest identified by the teachers involved. In this study group, the teachers took turns as facilitators to choose the topic, provided a copy of the text for the others to read prior to each meeting, and prepared questions to guide conversation in the group. All were encouraged to participate through sharing, discussion, and reflection upon focused topics. This study group was an example of collective learning in that its members constructed meaning around an issue that was important to them by thinking and talking with others.

Although there were no specific rules for the facilitators, the rotating leadership provided opportunities for every member to develop the leadership capabilities and also generated commitment to the work being carried out by the group. For example, Angelica, a counselor, described how one facilitator dealt with the problem of leading the group discussion when members found it difficult to participate in the discussion. Due to this, she learned how a leader dealt with problems he or she had confronted from the facilitator during the group discussion. She learned how to handle the group dynamics from the facilitator that week. This finding was consistent with research indicating that rotating leadership in a study group enabled teachers to learn how to handle group dynamics (Short et al.,1993; Birchak et al.,1998; Murphy & Lick, 2001). Because leadership roles in this study group were open to every member regardless of their status or teaching background, it seemed to strengthen

the commitment of teachers to the group, broadened their vision of the study group's roles, and enlarged the scope of their personal and professional growth to include leadership development.

Although the role of the facilitator rotated among group members, not everyone was required to take on the role. Some contributed to group meetings by inviting native speakers of English to the group if they were uncomfortable leading the discussion. Although this action might limit the opportunity for teachers to practice their leadership skills, it did not limit teachers' learning of English. The facilitator still got a chance to participate while simultaneously giving participants opportunities to learn how native speakers of English lead group discussions in English. According to the group members, the presence of a native English speaking person influenced their thinking processes, the way they spoke and their interactions with each other. In fact, the native English speaking guest offered new leadership models to teachers in the study group. Furthermore, members considered that when a designated facilitator found an alternative method for leading group discussion such as inviting a native English speaker, it showed a sense of caring about the function of the study group as well and the importance of the role of a facilitator. Some writers concurred that everyone in a study group did not need to take on the role of facilitator, although they should be encouraged to consider taking that role (Birchark et al., 1998). Despite the problems and dilemmas of the role, the approach of rotating leadership as facilitators can foster the growth of teacher-leaders and create new leadership structures.

## 4.3.2  The Impact on Improving Teaching Practice and on Students' Performance

This study showed that teachers were willing to try new ideas and transfer content and experiences from the study group to their classrooms, although there were no specific skills or strategies that seem to be transferred to the classroom setting. There was also no data directly understanding the issues in terms of the impact of the study groups on lesson and curriculum planning. It was not part of this study, however, to examine the relationship between teachers' learning English in the study group, and student achievement in learning English. Certainly there was no focus on student achievement in this study group. The participants, for example, did not collect and analyze data about student work to determine student obstacles to learning. One teacher said, "To students, I have no idea about this (student achievement). My students seem not to have had any influence from it."

When asked if the experience of attending the study group changed their classroom practice, all the teachers interviewed responded that they did not target a specific skill or strategy to directly apply to classroom teaching. In my observations, there seemed to have no evidence that the study group encouraged critical teacher reflection on their teaching practice, both individually or as a group, and supported study group participants to look for other alternatives and teaching strategies that might prove helpful to certain students beyond a concern on the part of some teachers to learn about better

classroom management strategies. One teacher explained that the reason why teachers seldom reflected in study group sessions on student learning was that members were from different schools although at the time of this study only one participant was from a different school, and the problems and students they faced were different.

Interestingly, all of the participants responded that the experiences of attending the study group didn't make them work with other teachers on curriculum and instruction much more. As Michael said, "It's a personal job to prepare for teaching material. It's common for teachers to deal with these materials by themselves. It's not like teachers in western countries, who work together on their curriculum planning." The eight teachers interviewed explained that this view of curriculum planning contributes to a generally isolated teaching culture in Taiwan. As previously stated, teachers commonly indicated that curriculum planning and instruction in a classroom tends to be an individual responsibility, rather than a collaboration with other teachers. Although the study group process was supportive in helping to reduce the sense of isolation and giving teachers the opportunity to come together on a regular basis to share ideas and discuss relevant issues about teaching or education, there is still a long way for teachers to go to become reflective in their classroom practice through collaboration in the study group.

The commonly shared view that teaching is an individual personal responsibility makes teachers hesitate to reflect on their teaching practice with colleagues. Under the dominant teaching culture in Taiwan, teachers usually are not comfortable opening their classroom for other teachers to observe, let alone allowing colleagues to discuss their teaching. Taiwanese teachers do not seem to be ready to accept this challenge to their teaching. Given this isolated teaching culture, teachers' learning in the study group tended to be a somewhat superficial or limited sharing of teaching experience rather than a critical reflection on their teaching practice. Based on my observations and interviews, the teachers in this study group seldom had conversations about how they teach and foster students' English learning in classrooms and what problems they faced in their teaching. This indicated that the study group was not centered on student learning and performance but on teachers' English learning. As Pfaff (2000) & Emery (1998) argued, study groups needed further research to identify their influence on student achievement since the ultimate goal of staff development was to increase student learning and student performance.

### 4.3.3 Lack of school-wide impact

No contribution to developing a school-wide learning community was found. This was not surprising given the low participation that teachers are concerned about in the study group. The teachers were all aware of the study group's low attendance rate: Only four of twenty-one English teachers attended

the study group during the semester of this study at Chia-Yi Girls' Senior High School. The teachers reported that it would be better for group discussion if there were more members in the group. This problem raised the following questions: Why do most of the English teachers in the school not attend the study group? Does the work of the study group affect the perceptions of the other teachers in terms of professional growth? Do teachers notice the professional growth and collaboration among these teachers who attend the study group? To what extent do the efforts of the teacher study group make teachers feel more interested in promoting their professional growth?

While low attendance emerged as the most urgent concern of the participants in this study, they suggested that more information about the purpose of the study group and a display of administrative support could help motivate more teachers to attend. They also indicated that there is a need to change teachers' attitudes from competition to cooperation before attending this group, because an attitude of collaboration is important for participation. They believed that if teachers understood that the purpose of the teacher study group is to learn English collaboratively rather than competitively, more teachers might be motivated to participate. Presently some teachers who did not participate thought that this study group was like a contest rather than a learning opportunity that fostered English language development. In contrast, teachers reported that they cooperatively learned English with each other in the study group, and took other members' English learning into consideration in their learning journey.

Although competition was not a focus of the study group, some friendly competition did occur. Even though members' level of proficiency in English was varied and diverse in the study group, teacher collaboration in the study group appeared to compensate for this gap and differences in English proficiency result in a friendly, positive form of competition. For example, some teachers reported that they must study hard in English because they expected to achieve the advanced English proficiency of someone like Michael one day. Teachers did not quit their English learning but took the highest level of English proficiency of a member as their goal to move towards. They had the motivation to enhance their English development and with an emphasis on cooperation, teachers learned with each other and from each other. However, for those teachers who did not participate in the study group, they might not know the value of teacher learning through collaboration in the study group.

Encouraging other teachers in the school to understand the importance of and focus on the collaboration in the study group was difficult due to the isolated and individualistic teaching culture in Taiwanese schools. Most Taiwanese teachers view their teaching as individual responsibility so that they seldom had the opportunity to reflect on their thinking and to collaborate with other teachers. This isolation meant that teachers had few opportunities for interaction, much less

collaboration. Therefore, teaching tended to be associated with individualism, accomplished typically without benefit of collegial exchange and cooperative planning, and without support for trying alternative practices and directions. The isolated teaching culture made teachers appear unconcerned about the need for teacher collaboration, let alone their personal English development. Although the study group allowed teachers to share, debate, and work together, the isolated teaching culture made it difficult for teachers who didn't participate in the group to understand the importance of collaboration.

A display of administrative support also could help motivate teachers to attend the group. George explained that it was helpful when the principal invited teachers who attended the group to share their experiences with other teachers or provided support or verbal compliments to teachers in their school meetings. This is consistent with the research of Roberts & Pruitt (2003) and Tichenor (2000), which showed that special recognition from schools encouraged the staff to continue their learning efforts. Roberts & Pruitt (2003) claimed that the recognition did not need to be formal. It can include award assemblies, plaques, dinners, teas, making morning announcements, recognition in staff meetings, or public celebrations. For teachers who spent weekly time practicing English to promote their professional growth, special recognition from the schools could encourage more teachers to attend the group. More research is needed to determine the reason of low attendance of this in the study group for schoolteachers.

Furthermore, the teachers in this study viewed the study group as teacher directed, without any direct participation or involvement from administration. For example, one teacher explained that he did not want this study group to become a formal form of staff development because he did not want any supervision from others. However, although the participants did not want the direct involvement of the administration, they thought administrative support for the process of the study group was important.

Although the school provided the location for the study group meeting, gave release time for teachers, provided an in-service certificate for attending the study group each semester, and provided financial support for the fee of guest speakers, the teachers in the study group did not feel there was strong administrative support from the school. Teachers reported that there had been little support or encouragement from the principals from the beginning. They particularly wondered why the principal did not encourage teachers to pursue their professional development on campus rather than off campus. Significantly, the teachers wanted a more positive attitude from the principal regarding the value of the teacher study group, whether as verbal or non-verbal recognition from the school in support of their learning and growth, or encouraging other teachers to join their English learning. This finding suggested that teachers in the study group wanted the principal to encourage all teachers

in the school to understand the role and function of the study group. In other words, they hoped the concept of this study group as professional development can be supported at the school level. If this study group had the public support of the school's principal, they believed it would become a more widely respected professional development activity.

The principal, however, indicated that she prefers a school-wide teacher study group with direct school involvement by the administration. There was a big gap between the perceptions of the principal and those of the teachers regarding how the study group should be administered. It seemed that teachers want the autonomy to meet their learning needs in a teacher-initiated and directed form, while the principal wants direct school involvement by the administration. In the principal's view, an administrative school should organize and plan school-based study groups. Given that the principal and teachers had different perceptions regarding the administration of study groups as a form of professional development, it may be difficult to expand the study group in the school. Although there was a disagreement about the control and functioning of study groups between the principal and teachers, there was agreement that the study group is a good form of professional development for teacher learning.

## 5. Conclusion

According to these participants, two aspects of the study group were particularly significant. First, they perceived the study group as providing an informal and flexible format for learning. Second, they perceived the study group as involving a process of on-going learning that can better meet their learning needs compared to other traditional professional development activities. The concerns and challenges of the study group identified by the participants in this study included: a) the role of facilitators, b) the impact on improving teaching practice and students' performance, and c) lack of school-wide impact. This teacher study group provided teachers with ongoing learning experiences that meet their needs for an informal and voluntary professional activity. This study of the teacher study group at the selected school was significant because it provided information on the success, concerns, and characteristics that the teachers experienced as they became involved in the teacher study group.

## 6. Recommendation for School Policy and Practice

The following recommendations were designed not only to broaden the implications of this case study, but to serve as a resource for schools and educators who may be interested in implementing teacher study groups. These recommendations were suggested in light of the results of the study.

## 6.1 For the School Principal and Administrators:

1. The teachers were all aware of the study group's low attendance rate: Only four of twenty-one English teachers attended the study group during the semester of this study at the selected school. This study did not address the reasons for low attendance in the study group, although several concerns that were identified by participants that may be contributing to this problem included: a lack of confidence among other teachers in English language abilities, a lack of understanding of the collaborative rather than competitive learning focus of the study group. However, further research is needed to investigate the low participation of teachers in the study group in the school and the extent to which this is a problem.

2. As previously stated, the teachers wanted a more positive attitude from the principal regarding the value of the teacher study group, whether as verbal or non-verbal recognition from the school in support of their learning and growth, or encouraging other teachers to join their English learning group. This finding suggested that teachers in the study group wanted the principal to encourage all teachers in the school to understand the role and function of the study group. Furthermore, the participants also reported that a display of administrative support could help motivate teachers to attend the group. It is recommended that the school provide public recognition or rewards for teacher learning in order to validate the study group.

3. As the findings mentioned, the teachers in the study group suggested and looked forward to having the English-speaking foreigners as part of the group, to enhance their English abilities. However, it was not easy to find English-speaking foreigners or professionals to be guest speakers or regular members of the study group. Language needs practice. This was a good learning opportunity for teachers to practice their English by talking to native speakers of English. While the group had limitation or difficulties inviting native speakers of English to the group, the school should provide more resources and support such as inviting native speakers of English through the school for the participation of native speakers of English in the study group.

4. A study could be designed to investigate to what extent the English Teachers Club contributes to the teaching of English in the school, and how this study group fosters English learning in the entire school, even the community.

## 6.2 For Teachers in the Study Group:

1. The teachers in the study group seldom had conversations about how they taught and fostered students' English learning in classrooms and what problems they faced in their teaching. This

evidence suggested that this study group was not focused on student learning and performance but on teachers' English learning. However, since the results of the study indicate that teachers' English learning was related to student learning, it would be more comprehensive for teachers to integrate their English learning and English teaching if teachers pay more attention to student achievement by collecting student data, or/and work. This recommendation would make teachers reflect on their teaching practice more with colleagues as well as move to become reflective in their classroom practice through teacher collaboration.

2. Teachers in the study thought administrative support was important for the study group. However, they did not feel strong administrative support from the principals although the school provided the location, time, financial support for guest speakers, and in-service certificate for attending the study group. This feeling of weak administrative support from the teachers in the group didn't mean that the principal did not want to implement the English Teachers Club in the school. It is possible that the principal did not recognize how the study group contributes to teacher learning in the school. A lack of understanding of the process of teacher change may be the reason the principal expresses no strong feeling about the study group and the teachers therefore feel that there is little support from the principal. Therefore, this study recommends that teachers share their experiences with the principal either formally or informally in order to help the principal understand more about the study group.

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# Using Translation and Reading Comprehension of ESP Learners

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**Abstract**

Many attempts have been made to make a deliberate choice of a variety of language which is most relevant to particular group of learners. The so-called ESP (English for special/specific purposes) is in part an application of this language variety in language pedagogy.

For the last decade or so ESP has been claimed to be a productive approach to language teaching and learning. However, some practitioners foster the idea that teaching ESP through the use of the mother tongue may greatly ease and facilitate language learning.

Following this line of argument, the present study seeks to investigate the effect of using translation (the contribution of the mother tongue) on the reading comprehension of Iranian ESP learners. It is hypothesized that EFL learners, when proficient in the basics of English, may manipulate ESP texts with ease if the channel of instruction is through his or her mother tongue.

To this end, two groups of medical and nursing students, each consisting of 25 people, took part in this study. They were divided into two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The experimental group received their instruction through a rough oral translation of the text as the instructor read it over noting any area of particular difficulty, while the control group were instructed through English. Having run eight three-hour timed sessions of instruction, the performance of the two groups was compared by administering the ESP reading comprehension test as the posttest.

The results of the data analysis showed a significant relationship between using translation and reading comprehension. In short, the findings are indicative of the effective role of translation and, accordingly, the necessity of emphasizing the contribution of the mother tongue to teaching of ESP materials.

**Key words**: translation, ESP, reading comprehension

## 1. Introduction

English, the language of worldwide communication and commercial exchange, is looked on as one of the most useful subjects in the curriculum. Attempts have been made to devise the most efficient and effective ways of learning and teaching English. As a result, much greater time is spent on learning English than before.

English is considered the predominant medium of scientific discussion and programs (Swales, 1987). Hawkins and Pea (1987) regard learning and reading in English as actually a process of initiation into new culture, a transition from the culture of everyday thinking to that of formal science. This process, initiation into a new culture, however, is not assumed to be just a matter of learning new concepts and facts, but is also the acquisition of linguistic and communicative competence which enables the learners to understand scientific discourse.

To this end, language teaching has undergone several changes and developments. The motive behind recently conducted studies and experiments is to address the variables which may affect or facilitate the process of second language learning. Findings have shown that emphasis on the learner's needs, purposes, interests, and motivation as well as background knowledge can greatly influence the process of second language comprehension.

The studies done on the effectiveness of background knowledge (Carrel, 1983), on understanding and recalling a text, as well as content familiarity (Nunan, 1985) suggest that language teaching should not be separated from subject areas with which the learners are already familiar. By giving these suggestions, Nunan indirectly recommends the implementation of ESP courses in EFL/ESL teaching. Thus, he comes to agree with Widdowson (1978), who considered the design of ESP courses to be a productive approach to language teaching and learning. Taking the view of language as a medium of communication, Widdowson believes that the creative aspect of language can be demonstrated more efficiently through ESP courses.

Research conducted on the assessment of ESP effectiveness and usefulness as opposed to English for general purposes (Courbluth, 1975), ESP syllabus design (Todd Trimble, Trimble, & Drobnic

1978), commonality of language (Lackstrom, Selinker, & Trimble 1973), conjunction words in ESP (Cohen, Glassman, Ferrara & Fine, 1979), and ESP methodology (Widdowson, 1983; Hutchinson & Waters, 1989) and other related materials suggest a growing demand exists for ESP courses.

Due to the emphasis on learners' needs, interests and purposes, practitioners have embarked upon research which has resulted in the development and emergence of new syllabuses, textbooks and materials (Widdowson, 1978; Lackstrom, et.al, 1973; Sinclair, 1979; Strevens, 1981).

What has been done hitherto has been limited to the establishment of a theoretical foundation for ESP courses. Little attention; however, has been paid to devising specific and efficient methodology and techniques for ESP learners. Widdowson (1984) believes that "methodology has generally been neglected in ESP". Yet, the need for devising and selecting some particular methodology for ESP courses has been pinpointed by some scholars.

Widdowson (1979), for instance, believes that it is virtually impossible to separate syllabus design from methodology and "the what of language from the how of language use". What he insists on further (1984) is that the importance of the effectiveness of an approach depends upon "establishing a principal relationship between course design and methodology". He further adds that the emphasis centers around content (what) rather than on methodology (how) of ESP.

While much of the debate on ESP rests upon designing syllabuses and to what extent materials should be subject specific, the aim is to find a preferred teaching strategy: whether to adopt a "wide" or a "narrow" angle approach. The latter approach would be located at the more specific end whereas the former approach puts emphasis on general topics.

Stated briefly, Widdowson (1983) has argued in favor of a "wide" ESP approach. He has criticized the "narrow" angle approach which he sees as turning ESP into a training concept. In other words, a course of a narrow angle approach is directed at the solution of problems established in advance, where students are unable to generalize their language knowledge to other situations.

Widdowson (1979) further adds that "translation is an operation on language use and not simply on language usage aims at making the learner aware of the communicative value of the language he is learning by overt reference to the communicative functioning of his own language" (p.160)

Widdowson (1983) supports a wide angle approach to ESP courses which he sees as an education concept. It is a course of instruction which prepares the learner to cope with problems not specified in advance. This trend assumes that less subject-specific materials are more helpful than more subject-specific ones, because the latter cause the learners to neglect the procedural ability which provides them with a generative capacity for communication (Jones, 1991). In sum, Widdowson differentiates between the training concept or narrow angle approach and the education concept or wide angle approach to ESP.

In view of the pros and cons on whether to consider a "wide" or a "narrow" angle approach to ESP course design , most of the works have been devoted to the development of some syllabuses and techniques within different educational systems. According to Widdowson (1984), it does not actually matter very much what language the learners are presented with, whether a "wide" or a "narrow" angle approach is preferred. What remains of paramount importance is how they can put language to effective use.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Research on translation

Research projects conducted to assess the role of translation in ESL/EFL reveal that opting for translation is the best alternative to solve foreign language reading difficulties. An example is Valdivieso and Fuenzlaido (1990). In another study, Bensoussan (1990) claims that reading comprehension occurs on both the micro-level and macro-level. Reading comprehension ability was assessed through testing the students on translating the reading texts. The study suggested that translation can be useful in evaluating reading comprehension.

Regarding excluding the mother tongue from language teaching settings and applying direct method, another research study (Cordiro, 1984) concludes that:

Banned from the classroom by followers of the direct method, translation has been overlooked as a desirable skill in its own right and also as a valuable medium of teaching process. With this skill, the students learn to understand and utilize a dictionary, practice pronunciation, build up vocabulary, perfect writing ability and improve comprehension of the target language.

However, an attempt had already been made to make a compromise between the two methods of teaching new items, i.e. direct method versus translation. The study of Bolitho (1974) strongly argues against occasional use of the mother tongue (The mother tongue referred to is German) but a stand is made for a pure direct method. He arrived at the conclusion that there is nothing in language that can be adequately taught by the use of translation. Translation must be seen as a skill in itself which has to be learned.

### 2.2 Translation in ESP

Despite the pros and cons of the contribution of the mother tongue to ELT, one area of ELT in which the potential of translation remains largely unexplored is that of English for specific purposes (ESP).

To shed light on the issue, it is appropriate to first consider the theoretical underpinnings of the contribution of translation to ESP.

To provide foreign students of science and technology with access to knowledge in their specialist fields of study, the role of L1 should be taken into consideration. MacKay and20 Mountford (1978), on determining the texts requiring translation, quote from a 1957 UNESCO report that two thirds of engineering literature at that date appeared in English. The literature, they believe, suggests the need to teach foreign students of science and technology to read efficiently. Since scientists and technologists from many countries whose languages are not learned and used on an international level resort to translation in reporting in English, implementation of translation programs to meet their needs for the purpose of reading publications through translation is suggested.

Now that the translation exploitation seems to be justifiable, the notion of universality of science is taken into account. Widdowson (1979) upholds the universality of science. He believes "scientific discourse is a universal mode of communicating or universal rhetoric, which is realized by scientific text in different languages by the process of textualization" (p.52). He holds the view that the procedures and the processes of science are the same no matter what the mother tongue of the scientist is.

"What am I suggesting then is that fields of enquiry in the physical and applied sciences, as these are generally understood, are defined by their communicative systems, which exist as a kind of cognitive deep structure independently of individual realization in different languages". He suggests that "EST…is a particular linguistic realization of a mode of communicating which is neutral with respect to different languages".

MacKay and Mountford (1978:13) similarly stated that "scientific discourse represents a way of conceptualizing reality and a way of communicating which must, if is to remain scientific, be independent of different languages and different cultures". Since students of science and technology are already familiar with the procedures of their field and the manner in which communication are organized, demonstration of the way these procedures and principles of communicative organization can be achieved by taking advantage of this knowledge. Making use of non-verbal or partly verbal representation of information, such as graphs, tables, diagrams, flow charts and illustration is a three cornered operation, or re-creation of information. This can be diagrammatically represented as below.
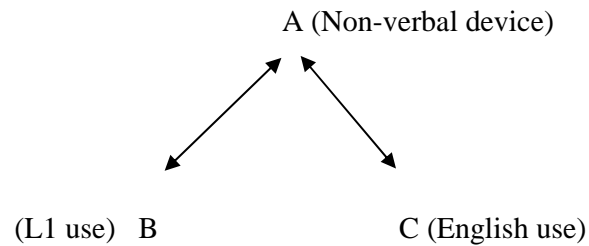
A (Non-verbal device)

(L1 use)   B                           C (English use)

**Diagram 1:  Three-way Translation**

The surface realization of a scientific discourse in any language will be a combination of verbal forms (unique to the language) and non-verbal devices (formulae and graphs) neutral with respect to different languages. From this comes Widdowson's most interesting and practical suggestion, that of a three-way translation (Robinson, 1980:24). MacKay and Mountford clearly stated that:

> "When the non-verbal information is accompanied by text in English, then the task the student must perform is that of comprehension –recreation of the information in his L1…where translation can be employed as a pedagogic procedure. It provides an opportunity for students to relate their own knowledge of science to the acquisition of English as a foreign or second language." (ibid. p.14)

As can be understood from the figure, translation is considered as a pedagogic tool in an ESP program.

Nonetheless, the appropriate amount of emphasis on developing using non-verbal devices and the students' mother tongue has remained unexplored. In the study entitled "Using Translation in ESP", Tudor (1986) concluded that "translation can serve a valuable function with certain categories of ESP learners…Translation as the process of conveying messages across linguistic and actual barriers, is an eminently communicative activity, one whose value could well be considered in a wide range of teaching (p.273)

In an article entitled "The ESP Materials of the University of Azarabedagan, Tabriz, Iran" (undated), Dudley-Evans, Shuttlesworth and Phillips commented on the role of native language in teaching methods in that:

> "There are several reasons for accepting the use of translation, at least insofar as
> terminology is concerned. ---No harm is done, for example, by translating for medical
> students the names of the diseases; indeed a lot of time and effort is saved and it could well

be that in this case there is no alternative---Where it is possible to define a term by recourse to 'common core' language, then we do so, but if it is not possible, translation can often be an acceptable technique"

Among Iranian scholars, Varzgar (1990) strongly advises using translation in ESP. She upholds that *"as translation should be a subsidiary activity in TEFL, it should be an essential activity in ESP"* (p.77). Other studies done on the effectiveness of general English courses in reading ESP texts (Shoushtari, 1989; Navabi, 1990; Alavi, 1991; Khajei, 1992) suggested that not only ESP materials should undergo redesigning of the content, but also that the methodology should be reviewed as well. Therefore, other alternatives seem to be sought. Nevertheless, there is little empirical evidence to support or reject the inclusion of translation as a component of ESP syllabus. The present study is an experiment on the effectiveness of using translation on the reading comprehension of ESP learners. In the case of designing syllabuses for ESP Iranian learners, translation has served as a part of the curriculum (in a section at the end of each unit in ESP textbooks published by SAMT, a governmental organization for the compilation of university textbooks). Theoretically, it may stem from the ideas like those of Widdowson.

## 3. Methodology

This experiment seeks to assess the effectiveness of the use of translation (the contribution of the mother tongue) on reading comprehension of ESP students of medicine and nursing at Fasa University of Medical Sciences. It is hypothesized that EFL learners, when proficient in the basics of English, can process scientific discourse with ease if the channel of instruction is through the use of the mother tongue. That is, the contribution of the mother tongue may facilitate the process of comprehension of specialized texts. This study is an attempt to detect the extent to which the contribution of the mother tongue affects the learners' reading comprehension.

### 3.1 Subjects

Two groups of subjects were chosen to participate in the experiment. They were students attending ESP classes in the fields of Medicine and Nursing conducted at Fasa University of Medical Sciences. Initially, there were 57 students attending the ESP classes. They were first given an ESP test of medicine consisting of four reading passages with twenty four multiple choice items. The ESP test had already been used in a Master's Dissertation whose validity and reliability were determined in advance. Then, on the basis of their pretest, fifty students were selected. They were divided into two

control and experimental groups. Teaching and testing ESP texts in one control and one experimental group were conducted in the following way:

a) The control group, taught and tested without explaining any kind of translation using the mother tongue.

b) The experimental group, taught by resorting to the mother tongue

The data was then elicited from fifty students majoring in Medicine and nursing .The selection of the subjects was not made sensitive to the sex variable, since no findings seem to justify it.

## 3.2 Design

Since the study is experimental in nature, the experimental design would look like the following schematic representation:

$$G_1 \quad T_1 \quad \times \quad T_2$$
$$G_2 \quad T_1 \quad \quad T_2$$

The design is a pretest-posttest control group design. In this design, there are two groups – an experimental group which receives the special instruction and a control group which does not. A pretest was administered to capture the initial differences between the two groups.

## 3.3 Instrumentation

A test of ESP reading comprehension was used in this study. The test functioned as the criterion for determining groups that were almost equal in language ability. The test also served as the posttest to capture the probable differences between the performances of the two groups after the treatment. This test of ESP reading comprehension included 24 multiple choice items on four passages containing information regarding the heart, artificial hearts, blood pressure, and childhood disease respectively.

## 3.4 Procedure

The fifty selected subjects were pretested on ESP reading comprehension test. As stated, they were assigned to two groups on the basis of the mean scores. By running an F-distribution and analysis of the variances, it was made certain that the two groups were homogeneous in their language performance. Having testified the homogeneity of the two groups, the experimental group received their due instruction through a rough oral translation of the text as the instructor read over it noting any areas of particular difficulty.

The experimental group was also required to do their translation practice at the end of each unit of their ESP textbooks. However, the instructor, on teaching the text, focused on sentence-level

expression of the message rather than on detailed translation of the text. Yet, as a source of language data, the learners were urged to make active use of $L_2$.

The control group, on the other hand, was taught their textbook through English. The mother tongue was completely banned from the classroom In a few cases, when the instructor felt that the students failed to understand, he resorted to the mother tongue.

Having run eight three-hour timed sessions of instruction, the performance of the two groups was compared by administering the ESP reading comprehension text serving as the posttest.

## 3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected from the performance of the two groups on reading comprehension was analyzed by running an F-test and a T-test for rejecting, defining, or supporting the null hypothesis adopted.

## 3.6 Variables

The use of translation (the contribution of the mother tongue) is the dependent variable and the scores of ESP learners on reading comprehension is the independent variable.

X = the use of translation

Y = the learners' scores on reading comprehension

## 4. Data Analysis

## 4.1 Computational procedures

The results of the subjects' performance on the ESP reading comprehension test have been arranged into four sets of scores. The following table shows the raw scores of each group:

| Sub.s | Pre Exp. | Post Exp. | Pre Con. | Post Con. |
|-------|----------|-----------|----------|-----------|
| 1 | 4 | 12 | 7 | 9 |
| 2 | 10 | 13 | 10 | 10 |
| 3 | 10 | 12 | 10 | 12 |
| 4 | 11 | 16 | 11 | 12 |
| 5 | 11 | 16 | 11 | 13 |
| 6 | 11 | 15 | 11 | 13 |
| 7 | 12 | 17 | 11 | 15 |
| 8 | 12 | 18 | 12 | 13 |
| 9 | 12 | 13 | 12 | 13 |
| 10 | 13 | 14 | 12 | 14 |
| 11 | 13 | 17 | 12 | 14 |
| 12 | 13 | 16 | 13 | 15 |
| 13 | 14 | 16 | 14 | 14 |
| 14 | 14 | 19 | 14 | 14 |
| 15 | 14 | 18 | 14 | 16 |
| 16 | 15 | 15 | 14 | 14 |
| 17 | 15 | 17 | 15 | 15 |
| 18 | 15 | 14 | 16 | 18 |
| 19 | 16 | 18 | 16 | 16 |
| 20 | 17 | 17 | 17 | 14 |
| 21 | 18 | 22 | 17 | 14 |
| 22 | 18 | 17 | 18 | 18 |
| 23 | 18 | 22 | 18 | 17 |
| 24 | 20 | 19 | 19 | 16 |
| 25 | 20 | 21 | 20 | 20 |

**Table 1: Raw Scores**

Analyses included the computation of the indexes of variability, the central tendency and the variance, as well as statistical tests applied to them. These indexes permit the precise interpretation of

scores within a distribution. In other words, they helped us to see whether the scores were heterogeneous or homogeneous.

## 4.2 Computing measures of central tendency and variability

To make more meaningful statements on the distribution of scores of each group, these two indexes were calculated. The results are tabulated in the following table.

Number of Valid Observations (Listwise) = 25

| Variable | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min. | Max. | N |
|----------|------|-----------|------|------|---|
| PRE_EXP | 13.84 | 3.59 | 4 | 20 | 25 |
| POST_EXP | 16.56 | 2.77 | 12 | 22 | 25 |
| PRE_CON | 13.76 | 3.24 | 7 | 20 | 25 |
| POST_CON | 14.40 | 2.53 | 9 | 20 | 25 |

**Table 2: Measures of Central Tendency**

As can be seen above, the figures in Table 2 indicate small standard deviations. The small standard deviation indicates that the scores are not scattered, but instead are closely grouped around the mean. Furthermore, the within group comparison of the central tendency gives the impression that there is no significant difference between means, except that of experimental group in posttest. To justify this claim, the following statistical procedures were utilized.

## 4.3. Group Comparison of Means and Variances through F-test and T-test

To determine whether or not the two variances of experimental and control group in pretest are homogeneous, the F-distribution was first tested. The procedures are as follows:

1) Having fed the raw scores of experimental and control group into computer, we were provided with the following table:

Number of Valid Observations (Listwise) = 25

| Variable | Mean | Std.Dev. | Min. | Max. |
|----------|------|----------|------|------|
| Pretest_EXP | 13.84 | 3.59 | 4 | 20 |
| Pretest_CON | 13.76 | 3.24 | 7 | 20 |

**Table 3:  Measures of central tendency in experimental and control group in pretest**

As the F-ratio is less than the values of F at the stated level of significance α = .05 in the F-Table (given 1/984), it is reasonable to assume that in each group the variances are homogeneous, that is , they are the same. Since the hypothesis that the two variances are homogeneous cannot be rejected, it is time to see whether the two means of the experimental group and control group in pretest are homogeneous or not.

At this point, all we need is the critical value for $t$ when the sample size is 25 and we have two groups. Each group has 25 subjects. Since there are two groups, the total degree of freedom (n1-1 + n2-1) is 48. We can turn to the T-distribution to find out whether we are justified in rejecting the null hypothesis. We find that the number of degree of freedom, 48, is not listed but falls between 40 and 60. We chose 40 as being the most conservative estimate, and check across to .05 column. The t-value needed for our selected significance level is 2.021.

Since the obtained t-value (t-value = .48) shown in the following table is less than the critical value (T-distribution Table gives 2.021) of the stated significance level, we can say that the pretest means in experimental and control group do not differ significantly from one another, that is $\mu_1 = \mu_2$. The following table shows the T-value and the critical value.

| Values of T and Level of Significance |
|---|
| Experimental & control Groups | $T_e \& _c = .08 \leq 2.021$ <br> $\alpha = .05$ <br> (υ) df = 48 <br> Thus $M_e = Mc$ ( $X_e = X_c$ ) |

**Table 4: Values of T and the Level of Significance**

### 4.4. The comparison of means in experimental and control group in posttest through T-test

The t-value is an indicative measurement testifying the probable difference between the values of the two means per experimental and control group. In this part, our concern would be to locate the effect of exercising translation on the performance of the subjects in written text processing.

Having turned to the t-distribution Table to find out whether we are justified in not accepting the null hypothesis, the t-value needed for our selected significance level of .05 is 2.0244. Fortunately, our t-value is enough above t-critical that we are quite safe in rejecting the null hypothesis. Our two groups have scored differently on the final test of ESP reading comprehension. The difference is

statistically different. That is support of our claim that our method of using translation promotes reading comprehension of ESP learners to the extent that we can strongly claim that most of the testees performed convincingly better than those counterparts in control group.

The main interpretation derived from the data analysis is that using translation (the contribution of the mother tongue) can exercise a great effect on subjects' rate of processing written discourse. This interpretation is in accordance with Tudor views (1986) on using translation. Tudor says, "Translation can serve as a valuable function with certain categories of ESP learners" (p.273). Besides, the study came to agree with Varzgar's views (1990) upholding that "Translation should be an essential activity in ESP" (p.77).

## 5. Conclusions, Implications and Suggestions

The results obtained from the analysis of the data gathered from fifty subjects majoring in Medicine and Nursing who took part in the ESP reading comprehension test revealed that using translation was an influential factor in their performance on the test. Briefly stated, the examination of the distribution of the scores indicated that the subjects in the experimental group behaved differently in the pretest and the posttest. Besides, and the small values of standard deviation denoted that the scores were distributed homogeneously. In order to determine whether or not there was a significant relationship, the T-test and F- distribution test were applied to the values of mean and variances between groups. The resultant T-value was indicative of significant difference between the values of means in experimental and control group in the posttest.

In addition, the resultant F-ratio indicated that the homogeneity of variances in both posttest and pretest in the experimental and control group. Thus, the application of these two statistical tests provided evidence that the experimental and control group in posttest performed in a different fashion on the ESP reading comprehension test. The reason behind such an observation which caused different performance could be ascribed to the method used in the instruction.

The results obtained from the comparison of means in the experimental and control group in posttest indicated that using translation exercised a positive effect on the performance of experimental group. Since the relational values existing between grammatical forms have already been known to the learners through their native language, translation may help them acquire the ability to use the various components of the linguistic system of the target language. So, the utilization of translation activates their previously learned language system so as to help them discover the relationship between the discourse values and the various components of the linguistic system of the target language.

The other suggested factor contributing to translation use, as Widdowson (1979) believes, is that the surface realization of a scientific discourse is neutral with respect to different languages. Accordingly, translation as an operation on language use makes the learner aware of the language they are learning and thus facilitate the process of learning by overt reference to communicative functioning of their language.

In general, one may conclude that teaching ESP learners through the medium of native language may lead to better results than what is presently gained.

**Pedagogical Implications**

Concerning teaching ESP, any approach dealing with ESP ought to develop two kinds of ability. As Widdowson (1979) upholds "The first is the ability to recognize how sentences are used in the performance of acts of communication, the ability to understand the rhetorical functioning of language in use. The second is the ability to recognize and manipulate the formal devices to create continuous passages of prose" (p.74).

To arm ESP students with these abilities, scholars ought to investigate linguistic and paralinguistic elements of scientific discourse and manner of this realization to express scientific facts in a stretch of discourse. In addition, in teaching ESP the language operation as an instrument of communication should be of pedagogical concern.

Of the linguistic elements of a scientific discourse, it is argued "adequate knowledge of the target language (grammar, vocabulary and reading skills ) helps the learners to cope with ESP reading difficulties and improve reading ability" (Navabi, 1990:61).

One step nearer attaining sufficient knowledge to deal with the problems of ESP readings, supposedly, is through general English courses which prepare the students to perform efficiently on the reading and comprehension of the scientific and technical discourse. Nonetheless, the need of ESP students for general English remains uncertain. The studies done on the effectiveness of general English courses in reading ESP texts (Shoushtari, 1989; Navabi, 1990; Alavi, 1991; Khajei, 1992) suggest that students' command of the structural properties of general English is a key to understanding and learning ESP texts. They argue that not only do general English courses improve the language proficiency of the subjects, but that the proficiency gained would have significant and meaningful effect on reading ESP texts. They concluded that ESP courses had almost no effect on the subjects' performance on their field. It is suggested not only that ESP materials should undergo redesigning of the content, but the methodology should be reviewed as well. If so, the elimination of ESP courses would not make any harm. In other words, in meeting the communicative needs of ESP learners, ESP courses have proven to be inadequate. Accordingly, problems of teaching ESP have remained unsolved. Therefore, other alternatives seem to be sought.

A possible way to make such a change is to reshape the ESP content so that it recompenses the present inadequacy is designing English courses for ESP students on the bases of universal features of scientific and technical written discourse, whereby they will be introduced to the rhetorical features and rhetorical techniques frequently used in scientific prose.

This study has tried to clarify to some extent the realization of scientific discourse by using translation in ESP classes. As it is viewed, the surface realization of scientific discourse is neutral with respect with different languages combined with verbal form and non-verbal devices of the language, translation serves as an operation on language use making the learner aware of the communicative value of the language he is learning by overt reference to the communicative functioning of his or her own language.

Therefore, it is suggested further that in preceding activities of ESP textbooks, translation of words and their exemplification be included. The rhetorical functions of the text (whether of definition, generalization, classification, or description) should be clarified as well so as to help learners to comprehend the text.

Considering the rhetorical functions of the ESP discourse as well as the potential of the contribution of the mother tongue in expressing the relations between them, translation may lead to a more significant result than what is presently gained through the implementation, better or worse, of ESP courses.

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**The Asian ESP Journal**

# Content and Language Integration in Tertiary Education in China:
# A Case Study in Wuhan Law College

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**Biodata**

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**Abstract**

Content-based instruction (afterwards CBI) is a pedagogical approach in which language classes are integrated with students' content subject(s). The approach has enjoyed increasing popularity in the second and foreign language classes in North America. In Europe, the term Content Language Integrated Learning (afterwards CLIL) is widely accepted. Although the terms CBI and CLIL remain new in China, the integrated approach itself has great potential for Chinese students as EFL learners.

Following a synopsis of literature review, a CBI programme at Wuhan Law College is introduced in the paper. The programme serves as a case study for the research project about the effectiveness of CBI in higher education in China. Action research characterizes my role in the programme. It is expected that the outcome of this programme can provide some useful information about researching and practising the CBI approach in China and other Asian EFL contexts.

## 1. Introduction

As pointed out by Williams (1995), the integrative approach provides a meaningful basis for language teaching and speeds up the process of L2 mainstream success. However, some sociolinguistic factors are overlooked. First of all, in some EFL contexts like China, English as the target language neither has official status nor is frequently used for daily communication. Most learners do not have eventual opportunity to use the language. Nor do they have linguistic demand for immediate content success. Secondly, the learners may not be motivated to learn the language, which they do not see the practical value of. Thirdly, it might be ideal but impractical for a teacher to have full information about the learners' language and content learning experiences. As argued by Hu (2002), there is a 'lack of solid empirical research' in CBI and that the approach should be restricted to 'a small number of elite schools'.

A CBI case study was carried out in Wuhan Law College (afterwards WLC) between January and March of 2006. Outcomes of the programme indicated that the students developed their language abilities, content knowledge and cognitive skills in CBI classes. Close co-operation between the language and the content teachers was critical to the programme. Team-teaching was an effective means of CBI teacher development.

## 2. Literature review

CBI has been generally understood as an integrative approach with dual focus on language skills and content mastery. However, a diversity of definitions of CBI has been proposed by researchers and educators from different aspects. Different perceptions of *language*, *content* and the balance between them in *integration* raise the diversity of the concept of CBI as a whole.

From a functional linguistic aspect, Mohan (1986) insists that language and content should be learned at the same time. This statement is based on his Knowledge Framework, in which Mohan argues that any social activity is a combination of knowledge (theory) and action (practice). He sees language as a type of social activity within various discourse contexts. One can only learn the language code through contextualised content messages. Mohan's Knowledge Framework emphasises the significance of language and content integration. However, as claimed by Mohan (2001), the framework is not a teaching methodology in itself and cannot be used as pedagogical guidance.

Based on Mohan's argument, Brinton and her colleagues (1989) and Snow and Brinton (1997) define CBI as the 'integration of particular content with language-teaching aims', while content refers to regular subject matter that students are currently learning such as mathematics, geography, and history, etc. They identify three basic types of CBI: theme-based instruction, sheltered instruction and adjunct instruction. In theme-based instruction, language activities are organized by a major theme or a series of themes related to non-linguistic areas. Language skills are the primary target. Sheltered instruction is provided as a content course to L2 students. These students are sheltered from their peers who are native-speakers of the target language. In the adjunct model, L2 students are enrolled with mainstream students in a content course, and are sheltered from them in a language course.

A complex definition of CBI is provided by Stryker and Leaver (1997), who view CBI as a philosophical orientation, an instructional method, a pedagogical design, or a framework for the language teaching system as a whole.

We have seen that different practitioners view CBI in many different ways. For the purpose of this study, though, a working definition of CBI needs to be clarified. This definition applies to the research programme at WLC. CBI is an approach in which the teaching is focused on a subject matter. The target language, i.e. English in the WLC case, is the main medium of instruction, while L1 is used to facilitate teaching and classroom communication. During the course, students are expected to develop their content-related target language competence and knowledge in the content area itself.

### 3. Methodology

Case studies are regarded as the most appropriate approach for teacher-generated research. This is because studies of single cases enable teachers to appreciate descriptions of individual situations in education and relate them to their own teaching practice (Simons, 1987). There are different types of case study. A case study can be based on hours of structured participant observational materials or on years of unstructured non-participation observation (Cohen *et al.* 2000). It can also be classified as exploratory, descriptive and explanatory (Yin, cited in McDonough and McDonough, 1997). According to the purposes of the study, a case study can be intrinsic, extrinsic and instrumental (Stake 1995, cited in McDonough and McDonough, 1997).

In this paper, the case refers to a two-month CBI programme in WLC. The rationale lies in Simons' (1987) statement that case studies must be based on actual schools and report authentic situations, and

that they must also be authentic, detailed, rigorously accurate and impartial. Nine years of teaching experience at WLC enables me to understand the background of WLC and thus provides access to little known information about WLC. The experience also helps me to receive full academic and administrative support. Methods like descriptive observation, narrative and analytic diaries as well as on-line contact with the staff contribute to an impartial report on my case study.

During the CBI programme in WLC, I reflect on experience in each CBI class and seek an appropriate teaching mode. This process resembles characteristics of action research. As argued by Cohen and Manion (1994), the purpose of educational action research is for the teachers to improve their own practice.

Action research is seen as a learning process involving a self-reflective spiral of 'planning, acting, observing, and reflecting' (Kemmis, 1993). According to Kemmis, Action research is self-reflective, practical and collaborative. The process of self-reflection is also continuous and developmental. As McNiff (2002) suggests, there is always achievement, but there is never a final result. Although action research is research into one's own practice, it is rarely conducted individually. The outcome, as well as the process of action research as practice, may influence other people's practice. Action research therefore bears personal and social values.

A number of research methods are used in the programme at WLC, including questionnaires, interviews, teacher and learner diaries, participants' report and observation etc. This helps to increase the generalizability of the research results. However, it is risky to apply the results without adaptation to other specific settings. Meanwhile, outcomes of the CBI practice in WLC are to be evaluated critically if the CBI approach is used for a long-term effect.

## 4. The case study

### 4.1 Background

English is not the medium of subject matter study for college students in China; however, the importance of English as an international language is well recognized by the central government. Since 1977 English has been taught as a compulsory subject in China, from primary schooling to university education (Boyle, 2000). The educational policy of compulsory English learning might have provided some Chinese with a 'neutral language for commerce' and a 'standard currency of international travel and communication' (Bowers, 1996). A higher level of English language

proficiency may enhance the chance of employment. However, not many students will go abroad for further education or engage in international trade.

Wuhan Law College (afterwards WLC) was established in 1982 under the administration of the Judicial Ministry of China. The students, aged between 16 and 18, are graduates of junior secondary schools. They have received at least three years of formal education in English as a subject. However, their English language proficiency is not as advanced as senior secondary students.

Law is their major subject and most students are going to work in the judicial field when they graduate. Law courses at WLC include civil law, criminal law, economic law, legal litigation and basic legal theories. Chinese, the students' L1, is the only medium for communication in these classes. Traditional methods including grammar-translation are the major existing EFL approaches at WLC, aiming at language use for general purposes. Most of the spoken interaction in English classes is conducted in Chinese. Students read, listen, speak and write in English solely for the sake of learning English as a linguistic 'code'.

This outline of the institutional context of WLC reveals a situation whereby students are required to learn English, but the English they have learned in traditional language classes may not be used effectively in real life. Therefore, it might be sensible for language classes to integrate some subject knowledge that the students are concurrently learning. A major advantage of this integration lies in its potential to enhance the students' motivation for English language learning. This potential has been proved by anecdotal examples at schools and universities in Europe (e.g. Grenfell, 2002), the United States (e.g. Schleppegrell, *et al.*, 2004) and China (Wang, 2007).

4.2  Preparations of the CBI programme at WLC

Attaining official approval was the first step in gaining general support. The Principle was concerned about the effectiveness of CBI as a little known approach to most teachers at WLC. Out of personal friendship and professional interest, however, she agreed that a two-month CBI programme would run as a credit-free training course open to all the students. 106 students joined the programme, although the number dropped to 36 by the end. This considerable drop-off was related to students' unfamiliarity with English-medium teaching and the fact that the course was not credit bearing.

Frequent contact with staff in the law departments at WLC was conducted before the programme. Two law lecturers, one was specialised in civil law and the other criminal law, offered to join the CBI teaching team. A CBI group with one language teacher, two law lecturers and two students were established. While the teachers took advantage of their respective specialties, the student members worked as representatives, reporting on students' reactions and their requirements for the CBI classes. They proved to play a significant role in linking the CBI teaching team and the programme students. It was the aim of the group to develop the teacher-student relationship to a constructive level, enhance students' responsibility and reduce teachers' workload. All the pedagogical decisions were made through the group meeting, which was held twice a week.

As an important group decision, four legal units were selected from *English for the Legal Profession* (Dong & Zhao, 1999). These materials covered several law subjects instead of focusing on in-depth instruction in a particular area. The first unit, *Definition, classification, and sources of law* aimed to introduce general vocabulary and sentence structures used in the legal area. The units on *Lawyers* and *Contract formation and classification* were closely related to most WLC students' future careers. Finally, the unit on *Civil litigation* extended students' vocabulary from substantive law to procedural law. The four units were not simply a repetition of students' legal courses. Additional information on Western legal systems, for instance, lawyers and legal systems in the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as some classic law cases, including Marbury v. Madison, were introduced for teaching and group discussion.

It was initially agreed by the CBI group that students would take a set of exams at the end of the programme. English language and law knowledge would be assessed as the form and content respectively in the exams. This means of assessment was changed after the first two weeks of the programme as it was found to be very demotivating. Instead, students were required to write diary entries every other day and course reports every week in during the programme. Both the diaries and course reports needed to be written in English. They were collected and marked by the CBI teachers as record of student development during the programme. The students also use these materials as means of self-assessment. This was felt to be more appropriate for a non-credit-bearing course.

### 4.3 Programme implementation

There was frequent modification in the CBI course procedures in WLC. Adjustments were made in conjunction with the decisions of the CBI group meetings. A WLC-specific CBI model was

established as the result of the two-month programme. This process can be summarised as three stages.

At the initial stage of the CBI programme, the content subject was taught completely in English. However, the language was modified and simplified to students' average level. The teaching embraced elements found in the traditional EFL classroom. The classroom activity followed the procedure of PPP (presentation, practice and production), as shown in table 1. The term PPP in this case differs considerably from the one introduced and criticised by many ESL/EFL researchers like Harmer (1998) and Ellis (2003), where PPP is seen as essentially a way of language learning and teaching.

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Presentation in L2 by language teacher  │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                     │
                     ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Practice and production by students     │
│  with interventions by teachers          │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
                     │
                     ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Summary in L1 by content lecturer       │
└─────────────────────────────────────────┘
```
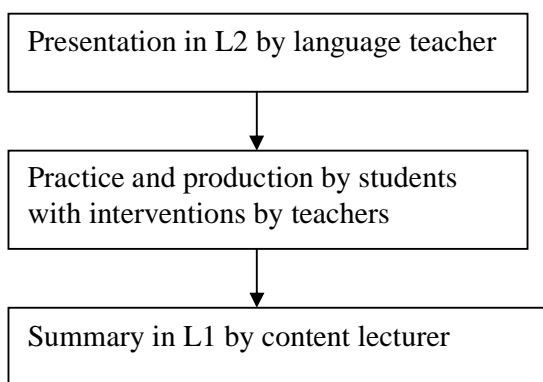
Table 1 Initial CBI procedures at WLC

During the stage of presentation, two types of knowledge were introduced by the language teacher: the language point and the content point (see table 2 for examples). The language point included English for specific academic (i.e. law in this case) purposes (ESAP) and English for general academic purposes (EGAP) (Blue, 1988). The former referred to legal terms that were obligatory for understanding legal texts, while the latter included lexis and sentence structures that might also exist in texts in other academic disciplines. The content point included some conceptual and controversial issues involved in the legal area. In addition to legal English skills, the aim of the course was to deepen students' understanding of legal concepts and to encourage critical thinking.

| Language point | ESAP items   (e.g. tort, statute, legislation, etc.) |
|---|---|
| | EGAP items    (e.g. depend on, classify into, etc.) |
| Content point | Conceptual issues  (e.g. classification and sources of law) |
| | Critical issues (e.g. why should law be classified? Compare legal systems between China and the United States.) |

Table 2 Content and language points based on the core text of Unit One of the programme

After the presentation, students were divided into groups to practise the language and content knowledge acquired in the CBI class. A representative from each group was required to give an oral summary in English. Linguistic and content prompts were provided by teachers in advance on the white board in the classroom. The law lecturers joined the groups as peer language learners and content assistants. With little experience of this kind of discussion, most students were rather rusty on many of the English-medium content-related discussions. Chinese was used for most explanations due to the students' preference and time pressure in the CBI class.

The control of the CBI class was then handed over to the law lecturers. The content knowledge was recalled and reinforced in Chinese to ensure the accuracy of what had been presented in L2.

CBI classes at the initial stage proved that English as a medium of instruction could be an access rather than a barrier to content study. However, students' learning diaries revealed very limited language and content output, which contrasted with the abundant input in the CBI class. Some changes (see table 3) were made between the third and the fifth weeks of the programme. These changes aimed to enhance students' language opportunities and broaden their access to content information.

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Student Oral Presentation in L2             │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                     │
                     ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Content Instruction by language             │
│ teacher in L1 + L2                          │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                     │
                     ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Practice and Production by students in L2   │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```
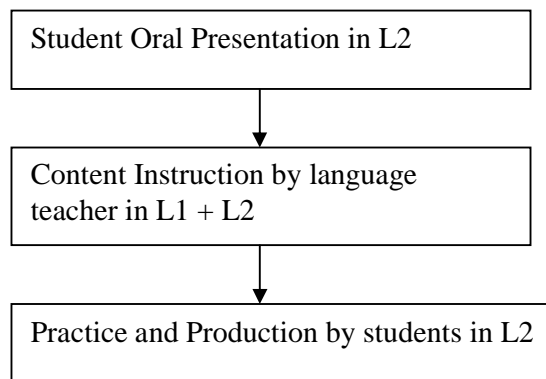
Table 3 Modified CBI procedures

Student oral presentations were designed as the start of each CBI class. Two to three students were nominated by the teacher to give a short speech (around five minutes). The classes allowed free choice on the topic of the presentation. At the beginning stage, non-content topics such as 'my favourite season of the year', 'my family' and 'an interesting film', etc., were very popular. From the fourth week, there was an increased range of content-related topics for student presentations. Presenters found it easier to practise the language skills and discuss the content knowledge that they

were learning in CBI classes. Due to the programme students' learning experience, however, their presentations at this stage merely reflected on using legal lexis and interpreting legal concepts in English.

A second change was related to students' reaction to English-medium instruction. According to a student interviewee,

> The English language used in the class was not really difficult; it is by no means easy either. Moreover, I can only concentrate for so much time on the language. I was terribly exhausted after the class.
> (Translated from the L1 conversation)

From week three, Chinese was used to present complicated but fundamental content knowledge. It also appeared in Power Point to introduce content-related information (see appendix). The time and energy saved could be used for practice on key language items and content concepts embedded in the core text. The clear-cut distinction between EGAP and ESAP began to vanish at this stage. There was no linguistic emphasis on the meanings and structures of the new words. Both the students' and the teachers' attention were on the content knowledge and the language used for interpreting the information. For example, in the unit on 'contract formation and classification', there was a statement that

> A contract is a manifestation of the mutual assent of the parties.
> (Dong & Zhao, 1999: 165)

Instead of guiding the students to study the meaning of the words *manifestation*, *mutual* and *assent*, the teacher explained the sentence in English by saying that

> The validity of a contract is based on meeting of the minds. Or
> A contract is valid if one party accepts the offer of another party. Or
> A contract may have legal effect when the contracting parties reach an agreement.

It was at this point, i.e. when the focus was fully on the knowledge itself, that language became a tool rather than a subject.

A formal L1 summary by content teachers (see table 1) was removed from the course procedures. However, their role as teaching assistants appeared to be even more important. Since the two content

lecturers also taught programme students in law classes, they were able to provide feedback on programme students' content demands and development. Therefore, they played a central role in course preparation and course assessment at this stage. In short, the two main changes at the second phase aimed to reduce language-teaching time and increase students' language using opportunities.

The modification was conducted gradually and continuously. The procedures were developed to a WLC-specific CBI model (see table 4) during the last two weeks.

```
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│          Student oral presentation          │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│      Student-led content-based discussion    │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│    Content-based instruction by the L2 teacher │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                      │
                      ▼
┌─────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│  Students' refined language – content integrated │
│  output                                      │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────┘
```
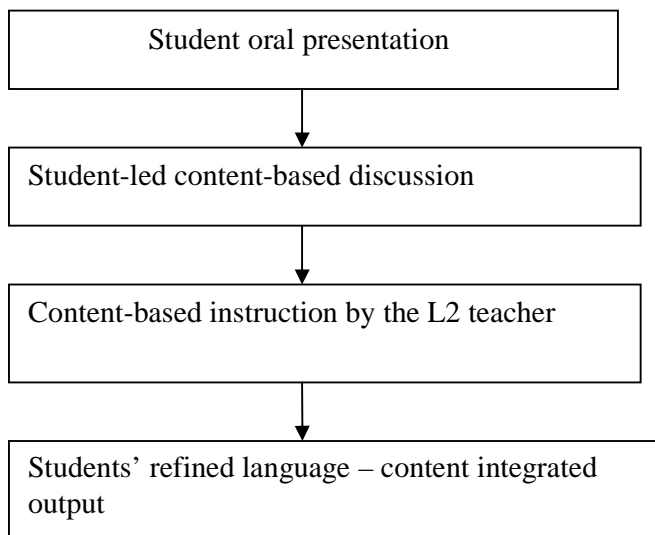
Table 4 WLC-specific CBI procedures

As shown in the table above, a feature of the CBI model at WLC was the increased student opportunities to communicate in English. This feature was reflected by the student-led content-based communication as a new procedure added to the WLC model.

In order to broaden the students' exposure to the L2 content information, teachers encouraged students to prepare their own reading materials. Collecting L2 articles from relevant journals, newspapers, other course books and websites was recommended. This kind of information was introduced and discussed in L2 by students in the form of oral presentation. In order for all the students to share their materials, student-centred discussion was added after the presentations by their fellow learners (see table 5).

Student-led discussion and student-prepared materials established an effective learning environment with the learners as leaders and participants. After the student oral presentation, all the other students

were required to provide comment, discuss the topic, and compare the information that they had collected themselves from different sources. English language was preferred during the process of discussion.

Content and language teachers played a role of assistants during student discussion. They supported the discussion with their respective specialties. The language teacher delivered the core information after the group discussion. The instruction followed a traditional language approach. That is, each paragraph in the core text was explained sentence by sentence in order for most, if not all, students to understand the meaning.

After intensive explanation of the content text, students accomplished content-related tasks or exercises individually or as group members. They might also be asked to summarize in L2 what they had learnt in the class either in the form of oral presentation or as a written report.

The establishment of a CBI model at WLC reflects the practice of CBI in a specific education setting. It also indicates the strength of teachers as assistants in a learner-centred CBI class, although this model is by no means final and must be subject to further research and practice.

## 5.  Analysis and findings

The CBI programme at WLC was proved successful by the end-of-programme questionnaires and feedback from teachers and students. However, the implementation of CBI requires efforts in a variety of dimensions. Stoller (2004) highlights eight common challenging issues in a CBI programme. These issues relate to interdisciplinary cooperation between the language and the content departments and address administrative support of the local educational setting. In addition to Stoller's list, the impact of educational culture on the teacher's role and the students' involvement in classroom activities is not to be ignored. This section introduces and analyses findings in the WLC programme concerning organizational challenges and experiences of CBI teachers and students.

### 5.1  Organizational challenges

The WLC the programme could not start without the agreement from the administrators. The importance of administrative support was shown through its role in helping with the course design, financial issues and inter-disciplinary co-operation.

The duration of the programme was the first concern of the administrative staff. It was regarded as risky to allow a whole semester for the practice of a new approach. Meanwhile, it was doubted whether a short-term CBI programme was sufficient for the students to acquire a reasonable amount of knowledge in an academic area. As an administrative decision, the CBI programme was approved as a two-month training course in addition to other regular subjects in WLC. It was believed that the CBI classes might at least result in extra opportunities for the students' language development. Moreover, the administrators were convinced that the programme could be a good way of trialling CBI in WLC.

Financial wise, administrative leaders in WLC agreed to make these courses free to all the students. Since the CBI classes were running as extra training courses in addition to the teachers' normal workload, the two law lecturers received a higher salary during the two-month CBI programme.

Inter-disciplinary cooperation has been suggested as key to a successful CBI programme. However, there was no cooperation between the language and the content departments in the history of WLC. The administrators were worried that the cooperation might not be conducted successfully if it was only announced as an official requirement. Teachers would make more effort if they were willing to cooperate.

## 5.2 Staff experiences

There was consistent cooperation and collaboration between the language teacher and the two law lecturers. A close interpersonal relationship between the CBI teachers seems to play a significant role in the inter-disciplinary cooperation, which might confront difficulties within any educational settings due to the teachers' status problems of cultural differences (Benesch, 2001).

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) and Dudley-Evans (2001) identify three levels of cooperation between the language and the content departments: co-operation, collaboration and team-teaching. On the first level, i.e. co-operation, the language teacher contacts the content teacher for information about students' learning experience in the content area, expectations of the content department, the use of content-related tasks, and so on. Collaboration means that the language and the content teachers work together outside the classroom to design a collaborative curriculum. Team-teaching, as the highest level, involves the dual presence of the language and the content teachers in the same classroom.

In the CBI programme at WLC, the language teacher, I myself, worked as the leader of CBI teaching team. I took the responsibility for materials selection, programme design and negotiations with the administrative departments. Law lecturers devoted more energy to the appropriateness of content materials. In addition to monitoring the programme students' content development, they also developed their English language skills with the students by attending each CBI class. In sum, the roles of content teachers were as content consultants, language learners, and programme advisors.

Interestingly and fortunately, there were no tensions between the language and the content teachers during the group work. A shared understanding of the local culture at WLC and a good personal relationship between the CBI team members seemed to account for the smooth progress of the programme.

### 5.3 Students' experiences

Data collected from student diaries, content teachers' course report and end-of-programme questionnaires indicated that students developed their language skills through increased motivation, focused language learning and enhanced opportunities. Students regarded relating language study to students' future careers as the major attraction of the programme.

According to their responses to the end-of-programme questionnaire and communication during the programme, the students attended the CBI classes with the feeling of 'being required to learn' at the beginning, 'wanting to learn' at the middle stage of the programme and 'enjoying the learning' at the final stage of the programme. The CBI procedures in WLC (see tables 3 and 4) also enhanced student' practice opportunities. The involvement of content information in the CBI classes encouraged students to take the opportunities and participate in various language activities, although there was a stage when some students had to be pushed to take up the opportunities.

The programme also helped students' content development through increased learning and practice opportunities. The particular teaching mode in the programme (e.g. student presentation and student-led discussion) facilitated students' autonomy in the content study. The students were encouraged to search other sources for content information so as to obtain a broader access to content knowledge.

Finally, the CBI courses at WLC helped students to develop critical thinking and learning strategies. As commented on by the teachers and students in the programme, the CBI classes provided students with opportunities to decide on what to learn and how to learn it effectively. Once

students started learning strategically, they gained independence and their learning became more personal. The students' role therefore changed from being passive receivers (i.e. learn what is taught or given) to active searchers (learn what they want to know).

Being aware that the programme was also a research project, students showed more interest and concern about the success of the CBI courses. This indicated that the position of the students was not opposed to that of the teachers as in many traditional classes. Instead, they stood on the same side of education with their teachers, helping the teachers to know what they already knew and what they still wanted to know. In this sense, both teachers and students were working for the same purposes.

**Conclusion**

It can be seen from the case study in WLC that CBI is an appropriate approach for college education in China. It links English language teaching to students' content learning and therefore meets their language, academic and professional needs. The programme also provides an opportunity for teachers and students to develop an in-depth understanding of CBI and relate it to their educational reality.

The case study also raises three new questions for future research and practice in CBI. First, it is yet to know how much effort will be needed in order to maintain students' motivation and the effectiveness of CBI if it runs as a long-term regular course. Another unanswered question is how to make the CBI approach meet the teacher's needs. The research showed that team-teaching is an effective method in a successful CBI programme. However, Components of successful team-teaching and its effectiveness should be subject to future research and practice.

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**Appendix**

**PowerPoint for Unit Three**

Unit Three   Contract Formation and Classification

**What to learn?**
1.  Reading, understanding, applying/using legal knowledge in the text

2.  Legal words and language structures in the text

**Background**

1. 在美国，合同法主要是州法律，而不是联邦法律。合同法的主要渊源是普通法或判例法。

按照美国合同法的规定，一项合同成立的基本条件是有约因或对价(consideration)，即双方有交换的要求(requirement of exchange), 而且一般应有书面形式.如果某项约定对一方来说属于不当得利(unjust enrichment), 则该约定不应由法律来强制执行.
18
2. 合同的构成(contract formation)主要包括要约(offer)和承诺(acceptance). 如果一项合同的构成中包含有诈骗(fraud), 虚假陈述(misrepresentation), 强迫(duress), 显失公平(unconscionability)等因素,则气不应该受法律保护.

3. 在合同履行(contract performance)的问题上,对合同的解释(contract interpretation)具有特别重要的意义.当合同一方或双方违约(breach)时, 美国的合同法倾向于赔偿金(damages)形势的补救方法(remedy).

**Classification**
Valid, void   &   voidable
Bilateral   &   unilateral
Executed   &   executory
Implied-in-law  & implied-in-fact

# Assessing the Perceptions and Difficulties of Students at COT, VNU in Making ESP Presentations

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**Abstract**

Making a presentation, especially in English, sometimes becomes a demanding task for a large number of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. Thus, the study was conducted as an attempt to examine the perceptions of students at College Of Technology, Vietnam National University (COT, VNU) towards making English for Specific Purposes (ESP) presentations, and find out possible difficulties that those students might encounter in making ESP presentations. It was carried out with 100 second-year students and two teachers of English at the Department of Information Technology (DIT) at COT, VNU. The data were collected during a period of two weeks by a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, including the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The findings of the study revealed students' mixed attitudes towards making ESP presentations and their clear perceptions of achievements through making ESP presentations. Their most significant problems in making ESP presentations included searching for relevant materials, selecting presentation forms, memorizing presentation contents, and lacking presentation skills.

**Key words**: ESP, presentations, difficulties, perceptions

**INTRODUCTION**

According to Arnold (2003), one of the most popular methods in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) learning and teaching is asking students to make presentations on particular topics in front of their classmates. However, as he states, when exposing linguistic weaknesses to others, one's self-image tends to be more vulnerable, which easily leads to anxiety. Therefore, making a presentation, especially in English, might possibly become a demanding task for a large number of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students (Kavaliauskiene, 2004).

So far, there have been a variety of publications on the issues of speech preparation and delivery. Nevertheless, in the world of ESP learning and teaching, very few investigations have been made into the perceptions and difficulties of students in making ESP presentations. With regard to Vietnam's setting, this has been little touched upon. Hence, the need to tackle it has strongly emerged. The urgency to do research becomes much more significant when it comes to the ESP teaching context at College Of Technology, Vietnam National University (COT, VNU). Although making presentations is a familiar ESP teaching method at this college, it is considerably new for the majority of students who have had little previous experience with self-made presentations at secondary school. Moreover, because all of them major in technology rather than English, very few possess good command of English. Thus, applying the method of ESP presentations has inevitably posed enormous challenges for both teachers and students at this site.

Accordingly, the present study was carried out and addressed the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of students at COT, VNU towards making ESP presentations?

2. What difficulties might those students encounter in making ESP presentations?

The first question was broken into two sub-areas, namely students' attitudes towards making ESP presentations and their perceptions of achievements in this activity.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

So far, research has revealed ESL/EFL students' mixed attitudes towards making ESP presentations. In her study (2002), Kavaliauskiene came up with the following major findings. First, the majority of the participants were well aware of the importance of making ESP presentations for

future careers. However, unfortunately, presentations were out of favour for most of them, especially for first-year students who had little previous experience on making presentations in secondary school; in fact, they ranked it at the bottom of the level of importance. Another study of hers (2005) on another group of learners at another university showed that the majority of learners expressed a positive attitude towards making ESP presentations. Nevertheless, there still existed a relatively large number who disliked the activity for three main reasons, namely time-consuming preparation, inconvenience in using PowerPoint software, and lack of time for relaxation. In general, the literature found both negative and positive attitudes of ESL/EFL learners towards making ESP presentations.

In addition, as far as the researcher was concerned, there was only one study by Carmody (2004) examining students' perceptions on achievements through making ESP presentations. He found out that the participants had considerably vague perceptions of these benefits with only half of them remarking on their personal gains. Those included improved pleasure in sharing research with a receptive audience, pleasure of having their work valued, self-confidence, a sense of accomplishment, personal growth, improved self-esteem, and pride. Among those, improved pleasure in sharing research with a receptive audience was acknowledged by the highest proportion, followed by pleasure of having their work valued and achieving self-confidence. Improved self-esteem and pride stood at the bottom of the list. It can be concluded that the respondents in Carmody's research (2004) paid much attention to accomplishments related to confidence levels and none of them mentioned knowledge-related or skill-related benefits.

In addition, research to date has focused mainly on learners' anxiety in public speaking. Arnold (2003) discusses anxiety as a hindrance to effective communication. The main reasons for anxiety in public speaking appear to be a lack of confidence, an unfamiliar situation, a sense of isolation, self-consciousness, fear of looking foolish, and fear of being judged by others (Public Speaking Anxiety, 2007). Moreover, speakers are concerned with various difficulties in grammar, lexis, and pronunciation. Referring to pronunciation problems of language learners, Morley (1994) points out that those with poor intelligibleness encounter great obstacles in becoming confident and successful speakers.

Only Kavaliauskiene (2005) went deeper into the matter of students' difficulties in making ESP presentations. As she indicated, her students encountered a range of difficulties in preparing presentations. Specifically, memorizing contents was the greatest hindrance (60%) while selection of information was ranked second. Search for information, use of PowerPoint software, and boredom of rehearsing troubled about a quarter of the participants. When delivering presentations, over half had

fear of speaking in public, followed by the evaluation mark (28%) and the audience's reaction (28%). Question time stood at the bottom of the list for causing hindrances to a quarter. It is worth noting that the number of hindrances might vary from student to student.

As shown, research related to ESL/EFL students' perceptions and difficulties in making ESP presentations was small in number- Carmody (2004), Kavaliauskiene (2002) and Kavaliauskiene (2005). Furthermore, all the related studies applied quantitative methods to collect data; accordingly, those might inevitably display certain limitations of adopting a single approach (Nunan, 1992). Besides, there was only the study by Kavaliauskiene (2005) whose inquiry was close to this research; however, it aimed at first-year and second-year students at Faculty of Social Work, Mykolas Romeris University. Lastly, to the best knowledge of the researcher, the issue under investigation has been little touched upon in Vietnam. Thus, the present research on a group of Vietnamese EFL second-year students at DIT, COT, VNU, was an effort to tackle the matter in the Vietnamese ESP learning and teaching context specifically, and could bring new perspectives to the field for its different context, participants, and methodology.

**METHODOLOGY**

The population of the study consisted of 100 second-year students from two randomly-chosen classes and two teachers of ESP subject at COT, VNU who were teaching those classes. To address the research questions, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were applied in order to reduce potential limitations of relying on a single approach and enhance confidence in the data as recommended by Nunan (1992). The data were collected during the period of two weeks by two instruments: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

In the study, the questionnaires (see Appendix 1) were aimed at collecting statistical data to answer the two research questions. The first version of the questionnaires was piloted with eight second-year students at COT, VNU in order to gain constructive feedback. Then, it was carefully revised to ensure its accuracy, conciseness, comprehensiveness, and focus. After that, the questionnaires were delivered to 108 students directly in class. Finally, among 108 questionnaires, 100 were chosen for convenience in data presentation and analysis.

Additionally, in the study, the interviews were used to triangulate and enrich the questionnaire data. The interview schedule (see Appendix 2) was intended to collect almost the same information as the questionnaires. Due to time limit, it was just piloted with one teacher of English at COT, VNU through email. Despite that, useful comments were received and taken into consideration. Then,

interviews of 8-10 minutes were conducted in English with the two teachers in a relaxing, friendly setting.

Finally, the questionnaire data were condensed, quantified, and analyzed. Then, they were illustrated and systematized by graphs and charts. As for the interviews, the recordings were transcribed carefully. Furthermore, a color-coding system was used to synthesize those data. All the data collected from the instruments were grouped under two main areas: *students' perceptions towards making ESP presentations* and *their difficulties in making ESP presentations*, which served to answer the two research questions.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS MAKING ESP PRESENTATIONS

### Students' attitudes towards making ESP presentations

In the first place, students' attitudes towards making ESP presentations were explored through the interviews with their teachers since it is worth investigating whether there was any mismatch between teachers' views on students' attitudes towards making ESP presentations and their real attitudes. The findings showed that both of the teachers agreed on their students' negative feelings; nevertheless, they appeared to be a little pessimistic. As the first teacher (T1) pitifully stressed, "*I know that most of them lack interest in making ESP presentations. They rarely do them enthusiastically. It seems that they make presentations just because of the requirement of the subject and marks*" (see Appendix 3). The second teacher (T2) tended to have a clearer view of the situation: "*some like presentations but a large number do not. They believe that it is so boring and difficult for them to make a long speech in English"* (see Appendix 3).

With regard to the data from student questionnaires, as shown in Figure 1, optimistically, nearly 50% of the respondents liked making presentations in ESP lessons. However, approximately one third just held a neutral attitude towards this learning method. Notably, there was one fifth who even expressed a negative attitude. Thus, in general, although making ESP presentations was favored by the majority, there still existed a certain number who either neutrally accepted or disliked it.
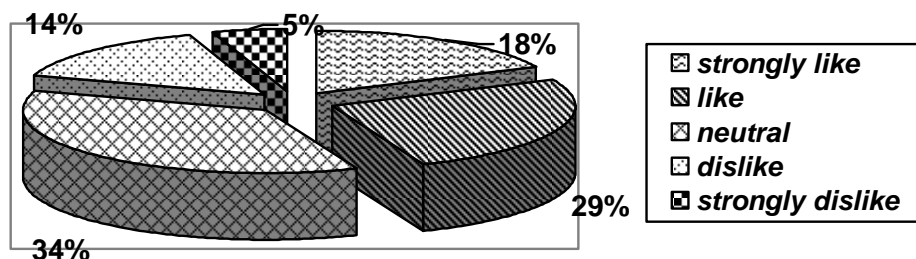
**Figure 1: Students' attitudes towards making ESP presentations**

Comparing and contrasting the results from the two sources indicated that the participants' attitudes towards making ESP presentations were a mixture of negative and positive feelings. Moreover, there was a slight mismatch between the teachers' views and the participants' real attitudes. Specifically, the teachers seemed to strictly and pessimistically judge their students' attitudes whereas the majority of students still expressed positive feelings towards this learning activity. This might be because of two reasons. First, the number of students in one group was very large and the time of ESP lessons was limited; therefore, the learners rarely had chance to show their real thoughts in front of teachers. Second, those teachers might bear some negative experiences concerning students' manners or behaviors when making ESP presentations.

The findings are similar to those identified in the study by Kavaliauskiene (2005). Although the participants in Kavaliauskiene (2005) were EFL first-year and second-year students at Faculty of Social Work, Mykolas Romeris University, they held the relatively same attitudes towards making ESP presentations as those Vietnamese EFL second-year students at DIT at COT, VNU in the present study. However, those findings are more optimistic than those in another study by Kavaliauskiene (2002) where most of the participants expressed their strongly negative feelings. Therefore, it can be concluded that ESL/EFL students' attitudes towards making ESP presentations might vary from one context to another and even within a particular context. This might be because of different influential factors existing in each context, which is out of the scope of this study and a gap for other studies to fill.

## Students' perceptions of achievements through making ESP presentations

The teacher interviews did not reveal much about students' perceptions of achievements through making ESP presentations. In general, the teachers were not well aware of their students' views. T2 admitted: "*I am not so sure. I have never thought about this matter and my students have never told me about it*" (see Appendix 3). They just mentioned three gains that might be perceived by students, namely improved speaking skills, enhanced confidence, and enhanced ESP vocabulary. As T1 guessed, "*maybe they expect their speaking skills will be improved after having presentations. And they hope to become more confident when speaking in front of the class*" (see Appendix 3), while T2 stated, "*they might think they can widen their vocabulary in ESP subject, which they will find more difficult to learn by other methods*" (see Appendix 3). Notably, two of those were involved in skills and knowledge.

In contrast, the questionnaire data brought a much clearer picture of the issue investigated. As illustrated in Figure 2, the participants were considerably aware of the benefits they could obtain by ESP presentations. Unsurprisingly, the three biggest gains agreed by the highest proportion of the respondents (58%) included enhanced knowledge, improved speaking skills, and improved presentation skills. Three other prominent benefits turned out to be enhanced knowledge about a particular topic, enhanced ESP vocabulary, and improved reading skills with 49%, 40% and 31% respectively. The last group acknowledged by the smallest number consisted of personal growth, pleasure in sharing research with a receptive audience, a sense of accomplishment, improved self-esteem, pleasure of having one's work valued, and improved pride. Unpredictably, improved pride was ranked the least. As seen, similar to what their teachers predicted, all the most significant benefits perceived by the participants were related to enhanced knowledge and skills. The least prominent were  feelings of self confidence. Thus, it could be concluded that their perceptions of gains might somehow reflect their expectations about what they could get through making presentations.
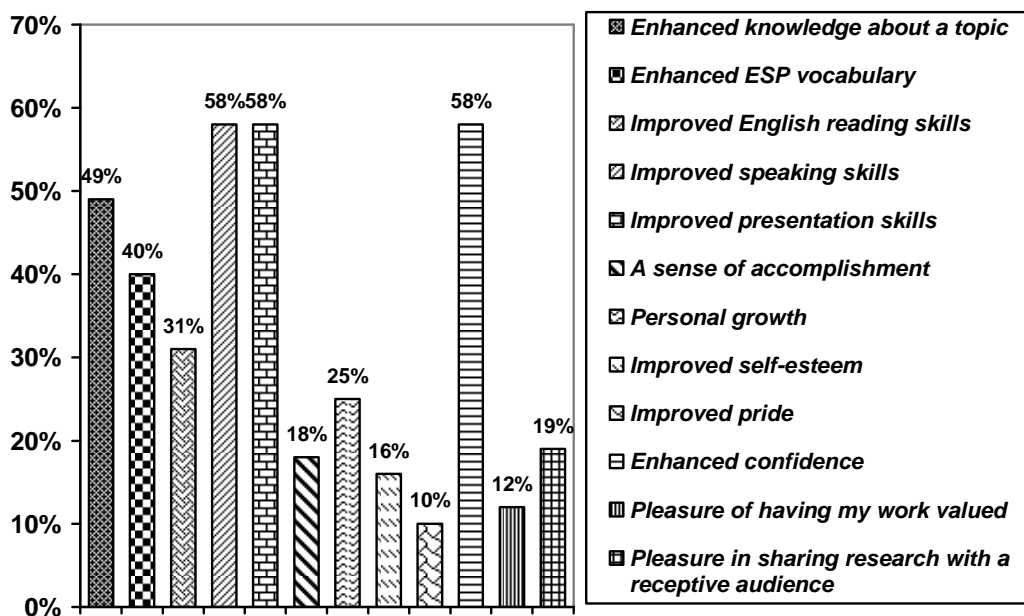
**Figure 2: Students' perceptions of gains through making ESP presentations**

The two sources of data reflected that the respondents had strong awareness of the benefits of ESP presentations with much emphasis on enhanced knowledge and skills and little concern about feelings of confidence. However, their teachers were not really conscious of their perceptions. This might be because, in reality, it would be a demanding and time-consuming task for teachers to explore their students' views.

In comparison with the previous study by Carmody (2004), the participants in the present research showed clearer perceptions of the gains they could get through making ESP presentations as they expressed a larger number of ideas. Some of those, namely personal growth, pleasure in sharing research with a receptive audience, a sense of accomplishment, improved self-esteem, pleasure of having one's work valued, and improved pride, were consistent with what was figured out in Carmody's study (2004). Nonetheless, the level of concern differed much. In Carmody's study (2004), pleasure of having one's work valued was the most prominent as perceived by the participants whereas in the present study it was ranked second to last. This can be explained by the participants' higher expectations about achievements in terms of knowledge and skills in the present study. Moreover, the participants in this study stated a range of different benefits, including enhanced knowledge, improved speaking skills and improved presentation skills, enhanced knowledge about a particular topic, enhanced ESP vocabulary, and improved reading skills. As seen, the participants in the present study were more concerned with knowledge and skill success whereas those in Carmody's

(2004) cared more about emotional accomplishments. This might be because different students in various contexts would have different expectations about a particular event.

## STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN MAKING ESP PRESENTATIONS

### Students' difficulties in preparing the presentation contents

The teacher interviews revealed two major difficulties involved in comprehending ESP vocabulary in materials and selecting necessary information. First, both of the teachers agreed that lots of ESP vocabulary in materials strongly hindered the students. As T1 stated, "*many students lack vocabulary, especially in English Informatics. There are so many ESP words that they have never heard about. Thus, they often encounter difficulty when reading materials to prepare for presentations*" (see Appendix 3). This was understandable because this was the first semester those participants studied ESP and, therefore, their vocabulary was considerably limited. Second, one of them pointed out students' problems in choosing essential information to include in their presentations. T2 noticed from her personal teaching experience:

"*There is such abundant information available to them; thus, they easily get stuck among the whole load of information and get confused about what to include in their presentations. This is shown clearly through many presentations my students had during the first semester. Some were too broad with so much unnecessary information while some were too poor with little information provided*" (see Appendix 3).

Meanwhile, the questionnaires showed a larger number of difficulties. As shown in Figure 3, in preparing the presentation contents, the biggest problem facing half of the respondents was searching for relevant materials among available ones. It was understandable since there was so much information available and accessible, especially on the Internet. Expressing the presentation' contents and selecting an appropriate topic among a wide range of topics caused the students much trouble with 43% and 40% respectively. Organizing selected information and selecting adequate information turned out to hinder them the least. Notably, the two difficulties viewed by the teachers were not the most significant acknowledged by the students themselves. Even one of them was indicated as the least troublesome to the participants.
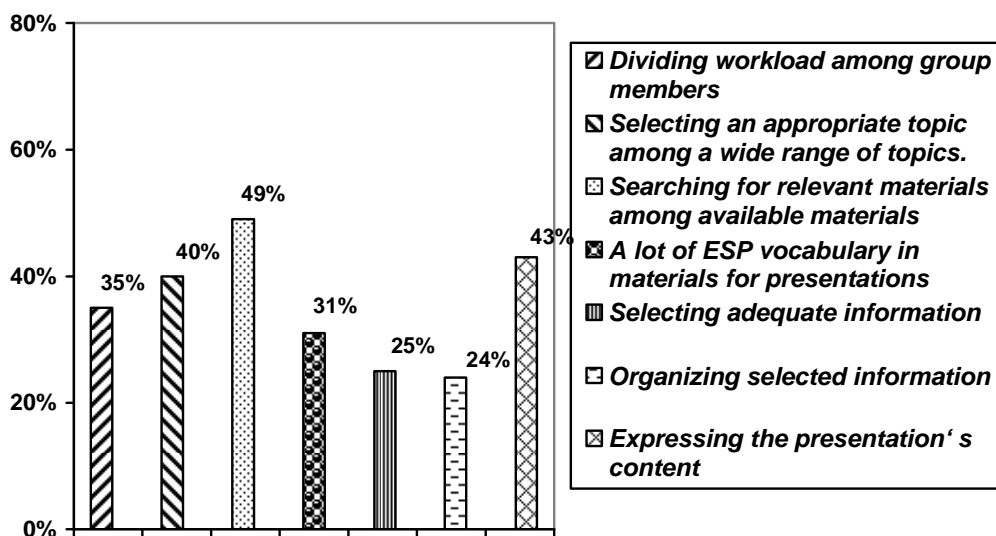
**Figure 3: Students' difficulties in preparing presentation contents**

Legend:
- ☑ *Dividing workload among group members*
- ◩ *Selecting an appropriate topic among a wide range of topics.*
- ☐ *Searching for relevant materials among available materials*
- ☒ *A lot of ESP vocabulary in materials for presentations*
- ▥ *Selecting adequate information*
- ☐ *Organizing selected information*
- ☒ *Expressing the presentation' s content*

## Students' difficulties in preparing the presentation form

The teacher interviews indicated that deciding roles of group members and selecting presentation forms were perceived by the teachers as the biggest hindrances to their students. T2 said:

"*I find that they often find it hard to divide the workload among group members in the presentations, especially deciding roles of group members. Some are too shy; some are too lazy; they often avoid playing the main roles in the presentations*" (see Appendix 3).

In addition, T1 remarked "*choosing the form of the presentations is obviously challenging for them because they have not had much experience in this field*" (see Appendix 3).

In terms of questionnaire results, as demonstrated in Figure 4, selecting the appropriate presentation form was the most striking difficulty (52%), which was completely consistent with the teachers' perceptions. Selecting visual aids ranked second with about one third, followed by deciding roles of each group member in the presentation (25%). It is interesting to notice that deciding roles of each group member was not as troublesome as predicted by the teachers. Unsurprisingly, using PowerPoint software stood at the bottom with 8%.
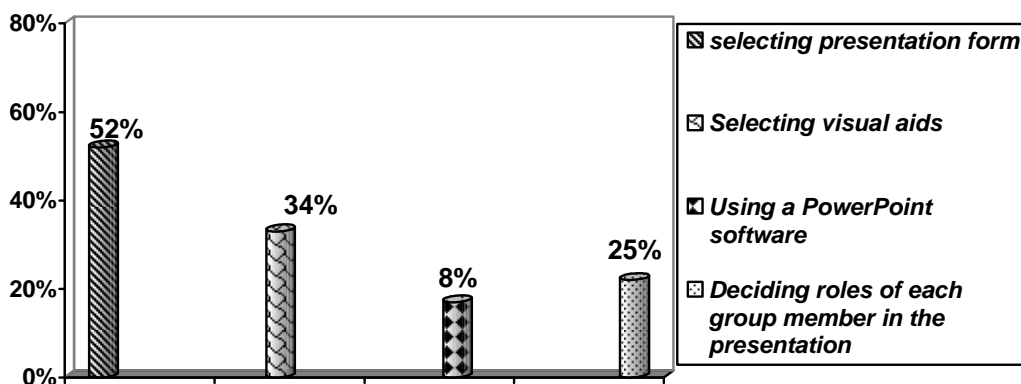
**Figure 4: Students' difficulties in preparing
presentation forms**

## Students' difficulties in rehearsing presentations

According to the data from teacher interviews, both of the teachers peceived memorizing presentation contents and lacking time to rehearse as the most serious hindrances to the participants. As T1 said, "*memorizing the contents of presentations is quite challenging for many of them. It's because they are not good at English; thus, learning something in English is considerable hard work*" (see Appendix 3). Moreover, T2 emphasized students' lack of time to rehearse: "*I know that many of them do not spend much time on ESP. Consequently, when deadlines come, they are often overloaded with preparation and rehearsal. Many do not even rehearse before having presentations*" (see Appendix 3).

With regard to questionnaire findings (see Figure 5), most strikingly, appropximately half of the respondents found it hard to memorize the presentation contents which was also acknowledged by the teachers. The second prominent problem was their lack of concentration during the rehearsals (36%). Astonishingly, unlike what the teachers anticipated, just a small number (a quarter) had difficulty managing time as only one fifth admitted lacking time to rehease their presentations.
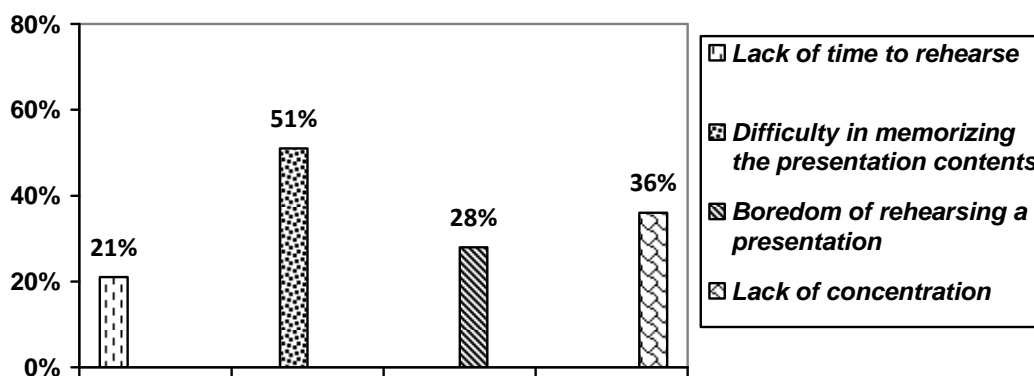
**Figure 5: Students' difficulties in rehearsing presentations**

## Students' difficulties in delivering presentations

In the teacher interviews, the teachers pointed out the hindrances their students often had when delivering presentations. First, both agreed that lacking presentation skills caused much trouble to them. T1 affirmed: "*they are not used to delivering presentations or talking in front of the class; thus, they lack essential presentation skills. For example, many of them cannot maintain eye contact with the audience; instead, they tend to look at me during their presentations*" (see Appendix 3). T2 also explained, "*they do not know how to use body language like hand gestures or postures effectively; many fail because they just act as statues in front of the audience*" (see Appendix 3). Second, the teachers acknowledged students' fear of speaking in public as one of their problems. As T2 stated, "*many do not have the courage to present in front of other people. They are afraid of being observed and judged. Some are even trembling when standing in front of the class*" (see Appendix 3). Other problems perceived by the teachers consisted of fear of teacher evaluation and lack of confidence. According to T1, fear of teacher evaluation also hindered the students as she concluded: "*They tend to be in fear of marks during the presentations. This makes them tense and stressed*" (see Appendix 3). Moreover, T2 mentioned the lack of confidence as another difficulty the students often face: "*many are not confident. They came from non-specialized schools in the countryside; the majority does not have good English proficiency*" (see Appendix 3).

As revealed from the questionnaires (see Figure 6), the participants tended to meet a large number of hindrances when delivering presentations. The most troublesome included their lack of presentation skills (55%), lack of confidence (45%), difficulties with pronunciation (40%), and ESP vocabulary (40%). As seen, lacking presentation skills was ranked first. Surprisingly, fear of speaking

in public only troubled about 30%. Predictably, technical problems stood at the bottom with just 10%. It is interesting to note that the most common difficulties the participants met when delivering presentations were closely associated with the gains that they thought they would have after making presentations. Meanwhile, as inferred, their perceptions of gains might somehow reflect their expectations about what they could get through making presentations. Thus, there might be a visible link between their expectations and difficulties. Specifically, the gains they tended to expect are rooted in the difficulties of delivering presentations.
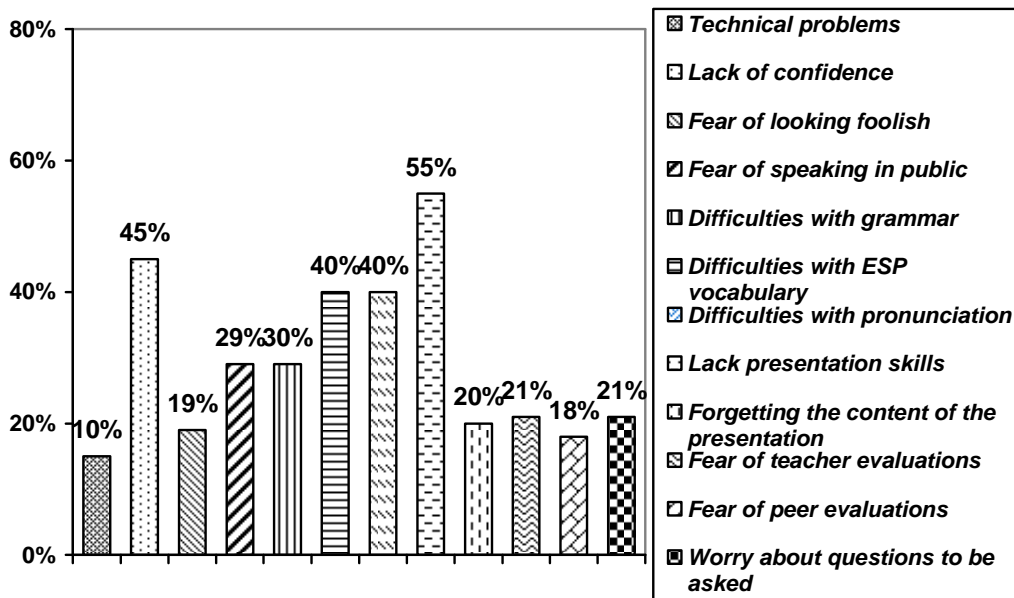


**Figure 6: Students' difficulties in delivering presentations**

In summary, the two sources of data revealed that the participants encountered a large number of problems associated with making ESP presentations, among which the most serious were searching for relevant materials, selecting presentation forms, memorizing presentation contents, and lacking presentation skills.

Like previous studies (Kavaliauskiene, 2005; Morley, 1994; Arnold, 2003), the findings about difficulties faced by the Vietnamese EFL second-year students in this study indicated that the main problems were searching for information, selecting information, using PowerPoint software, memorizing contents, feeling boredom from rehearsing, fearing speaking in public, having difficulties with grammar, ESP vocabulary, and pronunciation, lacking confidence, fearing looking foolish, fearing the teacher's evaluations, fearing peer evaluations, and worrying about questions asked. However, only a few, such as memorizing the content, were evaluated alike in terms of level of

seriousness. Meanwhile, many others were different. Unlike the findings in the study of Kavaliauskiene (2005), in this study the least troublesome included using PowerPoint software and technical problems. This was to be expected because the participants in the study were second-year students majoring in information technology at COT, VNU and, consequently, the majority of them had good computer skills.

Second, surprisingly, fear of speaking in public only troubled about 30% instead of being a big hindrance as pointed out by Arnold (2003). The participants in this research did not appear to have all the problems identified in the literature review. Instead, they met other hindrances not found in previous studies, namely expressing presentation content, organizing selected information, finding large amounts of ESP vocabulary in materials, selecting topics, selecting presentation forms, selecting visual aids, deciding roles of group members, lacking the time to rehearse, lacking concentration, and lacking presentation skills. Interestingly, lacking presentation skills and selecting presentation forms were among the most prominent issues facing the participants.

**CONCLUSION**

The present study was conducted as an attempt to assess the perceptions and difficulties of a group of Vietnamese EFL students at COT, VNU in making presentations in ESP lessons. Its findings highlighted those students' mixed attitudes towards making ESP presentations and a slight mismatch between the teachers' views and the students' real attitudes. The study also indicated the participants' strong awareness of the benefits of ESP presentations and their teachers' vague perceptions of those. Furthermore, the research identified the participants' problems in making ESP presentations, among which the most serious were searching for relevant materials, selecting presentation forms, memorizing presentation contents, and lacking presentation skills. Those findings were either consistent with what had been identified in previous studies or backed up by relevant literature.

Due to time constraints and the scope of the study, the present study displays several limitations. First, it only investigated a group of second-year students at one department at COT, VNU; thus, the results might not be generalized for all students at this university. Second, due to objective conditions, only two teachers were involved in the research, which might somehow affect the richness of the data collected. Additionally, it could not go deeply into the reasons why students dislike presentations. Moreover, it did not discuss influential factors on ESL/EFL students' attitudes towards making ESP presentations.

The limitations of the present research leave several gaps for other researchers to fill in. Other studies might further investigate reasons why students dislike presentations and influential factors on ESL/EFL students' attitudes towards making ESP presentations. They should also widen the research scale with a larger and more varied group of participants.

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**APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE (ENGLISH VERSION)**

> *My name is Tong Thi My Lien, K37A1. I am currently conducting my research entitled* "perceptions and difficulties of students at College of Technology, VNU in making presentations in ESP lessons".
> *There are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Please give your answers sincerely as*
>
> *only this will guarantee the success of the research. Your information will be kept*

1. Circle the answer to show your general attitude toward making presentations in ESP lessons?

Strongly like       Like       Neutral       Dislike       Strongly dislike

2. Put a tick to indicate what you have gained through making ESP presentations. You can tick any that is true of you.

| | |
|---|---|
| Enhanced knowledge about a particular topic | |
| Enhanced ESP vocabulary | |
| Improved English reading skills | |
| Improved speaking skills | |
| Improved presentation skills | |
| A sense of accomplishment | |
| Personal growth | |
| Improved self-esteem | |
| Improved pride | |
| Pleasure of having my work valued | |
| Pleasure in sharing research with a receptive audience | |
| Others: (please specify) | |

3. What difficulties have you encountered in preparing the presentation contents? You can tick any that is true of you.

a. Dividing workload among group members

b. Selecting an appropriate topic among a wide range of topics.

c. Searching for relevant materials among available materials

d. A lot of ESP vocabulary in materials for presentations

e. Selecting adequate information

f. Organizing selected information

g. Expressing the presentation' s content

h. Others: (please specify).......................

4. What difficulties have you encountered in preparing the presentation form? You can tick any that is true of you.

a. Selecting presentation form

b. Selecting visual aids

c. Using a PowerPoint software

d. Deciding roles of each group member in the presentation

e. Others: (please specify).......................

5. What difficulties have you encountered in rehearsing the presentation? You can tick any that is true of you.

a. Lack of time to rehearse

b. Difficulty in memorizing the presentation contents

c. Boredom of rehearsing a presentation

d. Lack of concentration

e. Others: (please specify)................................

6. What difficulties have you had in delivering presentations? You can tick any that is true of you.

| | |
|---|---|
| Technical problems | |
| Lack of confidence | |
| Fear of looking foolish | |
| Fear of speaking in public | |
| Difficulties with grammar | |
| Difficulties with ESP vocabulary | |
| Difficulties with pronunciation | |
| Lack presentation skills | |
| Forgetting the content of the presentation | |
| Fear of teacher evaluations | |
| Fear of peer evaluations | |
| Worry about questions to be asked | |
| Others: (Please specify)................................................. | |

Thank you very much!!!

## APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. In your opinion, what are your students' attitudes towards making ESP presentations?
2. In your opinion, what are their views on gains that they can get through making ESP presentations?
3. What difficulties do they encounter when preparing the presentation contents?
4. What difficulties do they encounter when preparing the presentation form?
5. What difficulties do they encounter when rehearsing the presentation?
6. What difficulties do they encounter when delivering presentations?

## APPENDIX 3: TRANSCRIPTS OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

### Teacher 1 (T1)

Interviewer: *In your opinion, what are your students' attitudes towards making ESP presentations?*

Interviewee: I know that most of them lack interest in making ESP presentations. They rarely do them enthusiastically. It seems that they make presentations just because of the requirement of the subject and marks. I've been teaching ESP for some time, and things have been the same. Actually I don't know how to change the situation. The students major in technology, so they do not like English, I know.

Interviewer: *In your opinion, what are their views on gains that they can get through making ESP presentations?*

Interviewee: I'm not really sure. Maybe they expect their speaking skills will be improved after having presentations. And they hope to become more confident when speaking in front of the class. Many of them lack confidence and have had little chance to speak in public.

Interviewer: *What difficulties do they encounter when preparing the presentation contents?*

Interviewee: Vocabulary. Many students lack vocabulary, especially in ESP subject. There are so many ESP words that they have never heard about. Thus, they often encounter difficulty when reading materials to prepare for presentations. I know that it often takes them a long time to read and comprehend the materials in English, and this discourages them a lot.

Interviewer: *What difficulties do they encounter when preparing the presentation form?*

Interviewee: Choosing the form of the presentations is obviously challenging for them because they have not had much experience in this field. Many students even contact me to ask for help. Many times there are even big arguments in their groups about this.

Interviewer: *What difficulties do they encounter when rehearsing the presentation?*

Interviewee: Memorizing the contents of presentations is quite challenging for many of them. It's because they are not good at English; thus, learning something in English is considerable hard work. You know, even memorizing something in Vietnamese is sometimes a big problem as well. I see that most of them try to learn the contents by heart; but then, when they are presenting, they forget all or the majority; many have to look at the written version all the time.

Interviewer: *What difficulties do they encounter when delivering presentations?*

Interviewee: They are not used to delivering presentations or talking in front of the class; thus, they lack essential presentation skills. For example, many of them cannot maintain eye contact with the audience; instead, they tend to look at me during their presentations. They tend to be in fear of marks during the presentations. This makes them tense and stressed. I don't think marks are so important, just something compulsory; the most important thing is what they can learn from their achievements and weaknesses. However, unfortunately, many are not aware of this; and many just do it for high marks.

**<u>Teacher 2 (T2)</u>**

Interviewer: *In your opinion, what are your students' attitudes towards making ESP presentations?*

Interviewee: Some like presentations but in fact, a large number do not. They suppose that it is so boring and difficult for them to have a long speech in English. You know, they are not English-specialized students. Many dislike English as a subject.

Interviewer: *In your opinion, what are their views on gains that they can get through making ESP presentations?*

Interviewee: I am not so sure. I have never thought about this matter and my students have never told me about it. But I can guess something. They might think they can widen their vocabulary in ESP, which they will find more difficult to learn by other methods. You know, vocabulary is very important in learning ESP.

Interviewer: *What difficulties do they encounter when preparing the presentation contents?*

Interviewee: There is such abundant information available to them; thus, they easily get stuck in the whole load of information and get confused about what to include in their presentations. This is shown clearly through many presentations my students had during the first semester. Some were too broad with so much unnecessary information while some were too poor with little information provided.

Interviewer: *What difficulties do they encounter when preparing the presentation form?*

Interviewee: I find that they often find it hard to divide the workload among group members in the presentations, especially deciding roles of group members. Some are too shy; some are too lazy; they often avoid playing the main roles in the presentations. They tend to be dependent on stronger members.

Interviewer: *What difficulties do they encounter when rehearsing the presentation?*

Interviewee: I know that many of them do not spend much time on ESP. Consequently, when deadlines come, they are often overloaded with the preparation and rehearsal. Many do not even rehearse before having presentations. This leads to very poor presentations.

Interviewer: *What difficulties do they encounter when delivering presentations?*

Interviewee: They do not know how to use body language like hand gestures or postures effectively; many fail because they just act as statues in front of the audience. Many do not have the courage to present in front of other people. They are afraid of being observed and judged. Some are even trembling when standing in front of the class. Many are not confident. They came from non-specialized schools in the countryside; the majority does not have good English proficiency.

## Freire's Bottom-Up Bridges Student-Centeredness:
## A Rebuttal to Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini

**Ahmad Sabouri Kashani, PhD**

*University of Tehran, College of Medical Sciences, Iran.*

### Introduction

In the co-authored article "Teaching English to Students of Medicine: A Student-Centered Approach," based on the work-in-progress research report on two different approaches to teaching English to students of medicine, published in the November 2006 issue of *The Asian ESP Journal*, my colleagues and I offered a wide spectrum of ideas and teaching methods often referred to as "student-centered second language education." Our efforts, however, seem to lack clarity and have led to some misconceptions. As a result, one of the tutors involved in that study, Seyyed-Abdolhamid Mirhosseini, in a brief note "Real Flowers or Plastic Flowers in Learning Medical English: A Reply to Kashani, Soheili, and Hatmi" published in the April 2007 issue of *The Asian ESP Journal* has raised a number of concerns that need to be (re)addressed here.

To this end, in this paper, first I attempt to elaborate on the complicated place of the English as Foreign Language (EFL) teacher in the whole spectrum of EFL pedagogy in order to demonstrate why it cannot always be filled by tutors who are insufficiently trained in the area of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), a point which seems to be often ignored in the literature on student-centered education. Secondly, I try to provide EFL teachers with some useful insights into Paulo Freire's (1971) ideas which enjoy popularity in the third world countries. This, I hope, will contribute to clarifying some misunderstanding concerning learner-centeredness in general as well as those specifically voiced in Abdol's (2007) response to our published article.

### EFL Pedagogy/Andragogy: The Role of Teachers

EFL pedagogy/andragogy is a complex interdisciplinary area of applied linguistics. In this article, I use the more common term "pedagogy" while I find "andragogy," developed as a theory of adult

education by Knowles (1975), more suitable to refer specifically to adult FL education. To this enterprise, linguistics, sociology, psychology, pedagogy, and educational technology to date have made invaluable contributions. Likewise, research on EFL pedagogy has brought innumerable empirically valid observations to light. Yet, success depends very much on the ability of an EFL educator to isolate and manipulate each particular variable in its own light and in his/her own local teaching/learning context. The variables are numerous, but eventually they all converge on the following interrelated elements: (1) the teacher, (2) the teaching materials, and (3) the learner.

I would like to stress at this point something which seems to be less understood, that the EFL teacher is really required to do a much more complex job than the teacher of other subjects. In cases of such content-based instruction, the input for the student, at least at the basic levels, is a more straightforward communication of the subject matter, commonly in the form of a prescribed textbook. The desired output, besides, is almost identical with the input itself. And the medium of instruction is most often the student's native language. This, it appears, has a dual utility. On the one hand, it helps the teacher to easily devise his pedagogical techniques; on the other hand, it offers the student a chance to read and review the materials on his own. In addition, there is usually a number of people in the student's environment whose help he can enlist when he faces particular difficulties. It is also worth noting that the very learning process is often aided by the intense parental and social pressures in favor of education. This is not to say that teaching and learning in the situation indicated above is uncomplicated. Rather, there is, it is claimed here, a number of socio-cultural variables which favor the teacher. In fact, learning is a process of tremendous complexity, and many of the learner-related variables in relation to EFL pedagogy are equally applicable to all formal learning. Nonetheless, there are clear indications that EFL programs must make more conscious uses of these variables.

EFL programs, often wrongly considered to be the same as or similar to other school subjects, appear to be implemented in a very different situation. The input for the EFL student is not so commonly a straightforward description of the language being taught, carrying a bunch of grammatical, phonological, semantic and/or pragmatic rules. Rather, these merely form the theoretical basis on which an EFL course is conventionally designed, although even in such contexts the transactional/communicative function of the language usually takes or should take precedence.

It should also be pointed out that modern EFL language teaching pedagogy hardly uses the native tongue of the student in the class. Hence students cannot independently review a point that has been misunderstood or not understood well. At the same time, there are few people available in an EFL student's environment who may help him/her resolve the complications in his or her native language. This seems to be a severe disadvantage in EFL contexts. Our native home country, Iran, is no

exception, where frequently the kind of help that is often offered is actually detrimental to the very developmental process of second language learning.

Under the present circumstances, the foreign language program itself has to create the needs and pressures central to learning, and the EFL teacher has to conduct her class with an eye to such learner factors as self-evaluation, motivation, verbal intelligence, attitude toward FL speakers, egocentric and ethnocentric tendencies, intro-/extroverted orientations, etc.

It is also essential, at this stage, to note one more aspect of such a foreign language program: its creative output. The student of a foreign language does not use memorized sentences from his course-books for purposes of real communication. Rather, he internalizes the language materials he has been exposed to and creates novel sentences in communicative situations. The instructional task of the EFL teacher is to present language in authentic transactional situations in such a way that the student becomes subtly aware of the underlying structure in materials and can impose his own organization on them. This is done by inferring the input's rules (not to be confused with "formal grammar" rules) and by generalizing those to other communicative situations. Added to these complexities is the fact that in Iran the national language is usually enough to acquire a "good" education and the acquisition of a foreign language is, unfortunately, not perceived as an essential feature of education in popular thinking. Therefore, there exist none of those social pressures which are often helpful to the teachers of other school subjects.

Far-sighted educators, however, who have realized the importance of foreign languages in the social advancement of Iran note with satisfaction that a new trend is already underway, and it will not be long before bilingualism becomes an ideal trait in every educated person. In fact, after a temporary decline in the early 80's, the EFL industry in Iran has undergone both quantitative and qualitative changes. The number of learners of English in both public and private sectors has markedly increased, and regular courses in TEFL have been offered by several universities at the M.A. and PhD levels. This has contributed to a scientific attitude towards EFL in both areas of instruction and research.

Freirian Pedagogy and Learner-centeredness: A Response to Mirhosseini (2007)

It was in this context that my colleagues and I framed the educational research project partly reported in the November 2006 issue of *The Asian ESP Journal*, which has led to an "honest challenge" (p. 85) by Mirhosseini (2007). He has raised a number of questions that I attempt to address here in this article.

Mirhosseini (2007, p. 85) starts out by accusing us of "misrepresenting the educational

practice." His main argument is whether we were allowed at all to call what was practiced "student-centered." Based on the briefings of the main contractor of the project, and with reference to what we observed in the classrooms, and the course developers' own reference to Freire's (1972) ideas, I believe that orientation could be classified as student-centered. Besides, Mirhosseini's major references in his response article such as Fasheh (2001), Leggo (2004), Norton and Toohey (2004), and Wiske (1998) also offer some evidence whether or not we have been justified in calling that project "student-centered."

In order to better understand Paulo Freire and his "eclectic" thinking (see Taylor 1993, p. 34), it seems to us that one should refer to the "specific" historical epoch, the sociocultural, and intellectual conditions in which he was ingrained, and the elements which may have formed and/or deformed him: that is, Brazil 1950s' developmental capitalist nationalism. His rudimentary ideas later developed into what can be referred to as *Liberating Theology*, an influential movement within Christianity, especially the Roman Catholic Church, which views Jesus Christ as the champion and liberator of poor and oppressed people. It seems to us this, in essence, is an "eclectic" novel conjecture, strongly influenced by Karl Marx. Applying this conceptualization to an understanding of history, Freire (see Gutierrez, 1988, pp. 24-25) holds that:

> This understanding provides a dynamic context and broadens the horizons of the desired social changes. In this perspective the unfolding of all the man's dimensions is demanded -- a man who makes himself throughout his life and throughout history. The gradual conquest of true freedom leads to the creation of a new man and a qualitatively different society. … Christ the Savior liberates man from sin, which is the ultimate root of all disruption of friendship and of all injustice and oppression. Christ makes man truly free … he enables man to live in communion with him; and this is the basis for all human brotherhood.

Paulo Freire, the son of a police officer of the Pernambuco armed forces, and a spiritualist, clearly states "my relationship with Marx never suggested that I abandon Christ." (cf. Lownd, 1995).

The question is whether Freire's experience primarily in literacy of the lower strata in Brazil in the 1970s is the best choice to educate Iranian medical students, considering the diversity of English language needs they have for successful medical education. In fact, Freire's educational philosophy can simply not be applicable to us, though it has been an inspiration to many educators in their quest for a more equitable society.

In 1971, Paulo Freire writes (in response to literacy teachers in Chile):

> You need above all to have faith in human beings. You need to love. You must be convinced
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> that the fundamental effort of education is to help with the liberation of people, never their
>
> domestication. You must be convinced that when people reflect on their domination they begin
>
> a first step in changing their relationship to the world. (p.61)

Freire should be, in fact, praised for his emphasis on dialogue and students' realities as the starting point and his dedication to the oppressed. However, unclear terminology, incongruity between the ethical imperatives he postulates in theory and the real world as well as his attempt to graft his Christian ethical categories onto his Marxist concept of historicity, and finally, overlooking the variety and nuances of social reality, leads to the failure of Freire's pedagogy to take into account the diverse sources of limitations to human freedom.

I would like to end this section with a reference to Paulo Freire's mystical language and his use of metaphors taken from Christian sources which may lend itself to a rather simplistic political analysis or to the construct of a pseudo-science of education at the service of a totalitarian theocracy. The following extract cited by Taylor (1993, p. 53) is revealing:

> The educator for liberation has to die as the unilateral educator of the educatees, in order to be
>
> born again as the educator-educatee of the educatees-educators. An educator is a person who
>
> has to live in the deep significance of Easter.

Insofar as the question of "student-centeredness" is concerned, I should refer the readers to Freire's criticism of the traditional educational system whose "undemocratic" and "teacher-centered" methodologies, termed "banking pedagogies" by Freire (1972), treat students as vacuums just waiting to be filled up with the teacher's expertise. These "top-to-bottom" traditional teaching strategies stifle creativity, induce the dependence of learners on their teachers, and encourage an uncritical acceptance of knowledge from experts, often creating "undemocratic" and "un-collaborative" social relationships. Besides, Freire (1972) insists that any educational endeavor must start from the thematic realities of the student. He proposes a "pedagogy in which students and teachers share a horizontal relationship, in which even the teachers learn through the educational process" (Smith, 2002).

Similarly, adult learning theorists of a humanist and constructivist school propose a "learner-centered" pedagogy which values the students' unique realities that are often multifaceted and reflect every learner's differing needs, beliefs, abilities, as well as their motivations and prior knowledge. Therefore, as a bottom-up educator, Freire's ideas can simply be translated into a student-centered

theory in foreign language pedagogy/andragogy.

Mirhosseini's second question (p. 108) asks "Why did people [subjects] with two radically different types of learning experiences have to take the same test?" In response, first, Iranian law dictates that all medical students should pass certain tests at a national level. Accordingly, schools should provide them with appropriate learning situations to achieve such goals. Second, it is generally the norm that candidates' English knowledge is measured by standardized tests, regardless of their widely varied personal learning experiences. In fact, nobody questions the "types of learning experiences" of those who sit for the TOEFL or IELTS or Michigan, FCE, CPE tests. Candidates from different nationalities who learn English through a wide variety of methodologies, by teachers of different teaching backgrounds, and through different textbooks, take such standardized tests to measure the level of their English knowledge. Third, do better ways exist to examine how well different teaching-learning methods may contribute to better student achievement than assessing their English abilities through such standard tests?

Mirhosseini's next comment is of greater interest. He asserts that "what the authors label as a "'student-centered approach' is what I would name a real flower" (p. 108). These terms *real flower* and *plastic flower* are borrowed from Muinr Fasheh (2001). It appears, however, that the smell of Mirhosseini's real flowers soon became intolerable for his whole group who stopped the course after some time. Thereafter, our college, which used to be ranked first on 16 consequent national comprehensive exams run by the Ministry of Health and Medical Education at the end of the basic science phase was demoted to the sixth rank mostly due to the efforts of the community of scholars who were "pursuing an honest challenge to bring about transformations in the institutionally ossified practices of English language education at Tehran University of Medical Sciences" (Mirhosseini, 2007, p. 107). Then, he raises an important point:

> What would it mean to correlate interval-scale type scores based on 'standardized objective
>
> tests' with nominal/ordinal type grades based on a 'subjective evaluation system'? "Would it be
>
> reasonable to expect any kind of go-togetherness? (Mirhosseini, 2007, p. 109)

In our research report, in fact, all measures are clearly shown to be based on an interval scale. Besides, Table 2 in our original article (Kashani et al, 2006, page 91) shows no significant correlation between the scores of the same students on the final exams of the three English courses the students took consequently. General English, medical English 1 and medical English 2 tests were all rated by the student-centered team and reported to the school dean of education (i.e., the lack of internal consistency). Furthermore, neither did the said scores show any meaningful correlation with

the students' performance on the standardized screening test of September 2002, nor with the scores on the English test administered by the Ministry of Health in March 2005 (i.e., the lack of external consistency).

Mirhosseini also accuses us of "limiting 'student-centeredness' to *older* students" which apparently "is a major cornerstone of the authors' discussions and conclusion" (p.110). He also asks: "could we view people who are selected as the national top students … as people not mature enough for an approach which requires some maturity on the side of the students?" (Mirhosseini, 2007, p. 111). Here he is referring to that part of our article where we stated that:

> … it seems to us that students at the lower end of the proficiency continuum would benefit more
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> from the established curriculum with its regular monitoring and objective evaluation system but
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> would be obviously harmed in a costly, though lenient, student-centered approach employing
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> younger facilitators and/or teachers.
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> (Kashani et al, 2006, p. 91).

And, with reference to the students at the upper end of the proficiency continuum, we maintained that:

> …. these students, being interested in English language and enjoying a fairly good knowledge
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> of it, seem to be mature enough to take responsibility for their learning and, being so, they
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> might benefit from any English program regardless of how well-structured such programs might
>
> be. (Kashani et al, 2006, p. 91).

As clearly expressed here, we are concerned here not with the student's actual age but with the richness of their EFL learning experience. Thus we proposed that "a student-centered approach requires the learners to accept responsibility for their learning, but taking responsibility can be expected from only mature learners" (Kashani et al, 2006, p.92). It appears that Mirhosseini has failed to see that, in this context, the age of those regarded as national top students is irrelevant. One may select the ten or the eighteen-year-old national top students, but if they are placed at the beginner level for their English learning experience, they might be considered not mature enough to accept the responsibility for a certain job. Finally, Mirhosseini says:

The authors interestingly refer to the students whose scores were analyzed as "participants" (p. 88). However, I failed in my search through the paper for evidence of any type of 'participation'. I doubt that any of the students of either group or any of the people involved in the so called 'student-centered approach' were even basically aware of this research. (Mirhosseini, 2007, p. 111).

This comment is perplexing to us since participants in a school which runs two different English language teaching programs involving primarily more than 100 learners would naturally interact and become aware of the various programs in operation. To counter this claim in concrete terms, I would like to refer to preparations at the very outset of the project. In November of 2002, in the presence of the project coordinator, all participants were briefed on the project, which was about to be launched, by the Director of Language Studies of the university language center. In January of the following year, when the first set of data were collected from the two groups, detailed explanations were given to participants to assure them that their answers to the specific questions would never affect their final exam scores. During the following years it was a major source of complaint by the students who wanted to join or leave Groups I/II.  Much controversy was seen at all meetings of the project directors and language center officials held in the office of the vice-president for education. That was, in fact, one reason why the authors of the first report on this project noted that "administrators would serve the university more effectively, it seems to us, if they apply research findings for the betterment of the educational plan of action in all departments" (Kashani et al, 2006, p. 94).  This was obviously not heard. In September 2006, despite the dissemination of the lucid findings of the research, as might be expected in many developing countries, the established English syllabus at the medical school was ordered to stop. The student-centered project took the responsibility for all English courses at that school.

## Conclusion

To support my claims here, I should like to refer to the study by Meshkani *et al*. (2007). It is interesting to note that in their qualitative study, the participants in the study were asked to comment on the quality of their "general medical curriculum" in the university, but, interestingly, made  some side-comments on their "English courses." Specifically, they report that "all students in focus groups complained of [about] the content of their language courses" (p. 17). Students are directly quoted as complaining that "Instead of English, the teachers taught us research methods and Persian essay writing" (p.19). Most "students believe that the new approach to teaching English does not meet medical students' needs" (p.34). "The content of the new approach does not help students with

reading comprehension and lectures" (p. 36). Furthermore, the students' representatives in their focus group discussions complained that "the new approach is neither general English nor academic English" (p.143). Male students claimed that "in general, the new approach to teaching English is of no use" (p. 160).

I would like to end this short review of Mirhosseini's *Real Flowers or Plastic Flowers in Learning Medical English* with an emphasis on our message in our original article that teaching approaches are to be tested for different proficiency levels and that the same approach might not be equally helpful to different learning groups. Students at different learning levels appear to benefit more from different level-specific evaluation systems.

## Acknowledgement

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# The Asian ESP Journal

# Book Review

Reviewed by Seyed Vahid Aryadoust

**Biodata**

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The most important property of a measurement tool is the validity of uses and interpretation of its scores. Test developers attempt to establish validity by exploiting different techniques. Conventionally, validity has subsumed content, criterion, predictive, and construct classes. However, the new argument-based approach to validity adheres to the use and interpretations of test scores. The argument-based approach to validity has been introduced to the field by Kane (1992, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2006) (see also Mislevy, Steinberg, & Almond, 2003; Kane, Crooks, & Cohen, 1999; Mislevy, 2003; Koenig and Bachman, 2004; Bachman, 2005).

The book *Building a validity argument for the test of English as a foreign language* which reports on the first large scale usage of the argument-based validation (ABV) is an attempt to validate a high-stakes test of English for academic purposes. This report is in fact a treatment of a paper presented in 2004, which enjoyed a novel validation framework. Figure 9.1 (p. 321), in essence an expansion of Mislevy, Steinberg, and Almond's (2003) assessment argument based structure, can serve as a map that shows us where this process has started and where terminated. This map also uses the "three-bridge argument structure" introduced by Kane, Crook, and Cohen (1999, p.9).

The book has been divided into nine chapters, chapter eight being the lengthiest and chapter one the shortest, and has three appendices and an index. The work appears well-organized and the transition from one chapter to another chapter is very smooth especially when readers find that different authors refer them to other chapters to get a clearer picture of the validation process. Since the ultimate objective of the book is building a strong validity argument for the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL), the book states that all stages in argument-based validity (ABV) are crucial and required for the final decision-making about the test. The first three chapters focus primarily on the theoretical ground of the argument and as the reader moves through the book, they find more practical steps taken to provide answers to different research questions.

A feature that distinguishes this book among other books focusing on testing is its scope. For validation and test development enthusiasts, it provides a unique reference which sheds light on the new validation approach used for developing the new TOEFL. In this sense, it has used a new method in a high-stakes context. Both validation method and the test itself are new to the field. That is why the reader will most probably find the ideas encouraging and provocative to employ in other contexts and with similar or different tests. A host of tables and figures have illuminated the long-lasting process of developing and validating of the high stakes and scope of Internet-Based (iBT) TOEFL.

Chapter one, written by the editors, Chapelle, Enright, and Jamieson, is in 25 pages and is entitled *Test Score Interpretation and Use*. It distinguishes between "competency-centered" and "task-centered" as the main "conceptual frameworks emerged for test design and score interpretation" (p. 3) which are mainly drawn from Messick (1994). The authors find the competency-centered perspective accommodating to the new TOEFL aims and claim to have adopted it throughout the argument construction stages (although this is not always observed). Chapter one is further intended to illuminate the structure of interpretive arguments. Thus, taking into account the consideration of Toulmin's (1958, 2003) informal reasoning, the authors bring an example of a speaking test in Figure 1.3 (p. 7) to explain grounds, rebuttals, backings, and warrant. In order to complete the grounds of the argument, they draw on Mislevy et al. (2003) and propose that grounds can be branched into the properties of students and test tasks. This will also bridge the gap between the two test development perspectives mentioned above. Observations (grounds) are connected to conclusions (claims) through inferences which are evaluation, generalization, and extrapolation. Generalizing this structure to the TOEFL, they provide a figure (1.7) that entails six stages (p. 19). This is a very useful and extensive explanation which provides examples of warrants, assumptions, backings, and inferences in the TOEFL interpretive argument. Overall, "By articulating assumptions underlying the warrants, the interpretive argument serves as a guide for the collection of the backing needed for support, and a preliminary argument validity can be drafted" (p. 23).

Chapter two, *The Evaluation of the TOEFL* (pp. 27-54), written by Carol A. Taylor and Paul Angelis is a historical account of the new TOEFL from 1961 to the present day. This chapter establishes its scope by asking four questions: "Did similar issues exist in 1961 when the first version of the TOEFL was conceived? How was the construct of language proficiency defined for the first TOEFL? What type of test tasks did the test consist of? How was validation approached?" (p. 27). Answering these questions will broaden the horizon for the reader of the book in that they will get a clue how different language theories such as that proposed by Carroll (1961) affected the structure of the TOEFL. The first TOEFL description is summarized in Table 2.1 (p. 29) and test content and all validation issues in this phase of test construction are mentioned in brief. The book then moves to the second and third revision programs of the test and arrives at the "Goal for the New TOEFL" depicted in page 43. This chapter concludes in pointing at the "advisory meeting" and the studies on the computer-based version of the test by experts and researchers.

Chapter three (p. 96), *Frameworks for the New TOEFL*, is written by Joan M. Tamieson, Daniel Eigner, William Grabe, and Anthony John Kunnan. This chapter is the extension of the previous chapter and takes on from where chapter two concludes, i.e., the 1990s. In this episode of the TOEFL history, "the challenge was to articulate a framework incorporating communicative competence to underlie score interpretation" (p. 55). As mentioned above, readers can find referencing to chapters prior to or following any section throughout the book, which makes the book uniform. This chapter also refers to the previous chapter to elaborate on the score interpretation. So, all assumptions and inferences which start from domain description _ in the new TOEFL to define the domain, Jamieson, Jones, Kirsch, Mosenthal, and Taylor (2000) have suggested considering situation, text material, and test rubric _ and end in extrapolation are raised and tabulated clearly. Also, some frameworks are proposed for the four language skills assessed in the new TOEFL, i.e., listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The usage of the Item Response Theory to handle polytomous data and also the rationale behind the integrated tasks, which are unprecedented in the history of EAP testing, are two more issues explicated in this chapter. For readers who would like to learn about the TOEFL 2000 Framework, this chapter is the most informative section of the book.

Chapter four (pp. 97-143) written by Mary Enright et al. is entitled *Prototyping New Assessment Tasks* and starts in a summary of "assumptions underlying warrant" in the TOEFL project in the stages of domain description, evaluation, and explanation. Following this short introduction, the readers are provided with general abilities in listening and reading along with the test/task types to measure these skills. Also, for each skill, investigations relevant to the evaluation and explanation of that skill are discussed through touching on the main results of some studies. For instance, three studies are mentioned to advocate the explanation of the listening section of the test. This chapter is

in fact a summary of the first prototyping phase of the new TOEFL. But prototyping of the TOEFL does not stop here and is pursued further in the successive prototyping stage, which is stated in chapter five.

Chapter five (pp. 145-186), written by Mary Enright, Brent Bridgeman, Daniel Eignor, Yong-Won Lee, and Donald Powers, is *Prototyping Measures of Listening, Reading, Speaking, and Writing*. The second prototyping phase took one year from 2000 to 2001. "The research on this phase was motivated primarily by the need to support the generalization inference" (p. 145). Readers can find a report on the use of the test blueprint constructed in the first prototyping and its expansion. This chapter sheds further light on the composition of the four skills tested in the TOEFL, e.g., the "appraisals of speaking samples by English language specialists" (p. 158), scoring criteria, and provides a summary to account for the generalizability of the findings in each skill. Another element in this chapter is the viability of reporting a composite score which is the total score of students on the test. Readers will be benefitted by the comprehensive Tables 5.13 and 5.14 (pp. 182-184) which provide a helpful summary of the results and findings of this phase of research.

Chapter six (pp. 187-225), *Prototyping a New Test*, by Kristen Huff, Donald Powers, Robert Kantor, Pamela Mollaun, Susan Nissan, and Mary Schedl, reports on a "field study of the proposed new test" (p. 187). On page 188 is a summary of the questions which are focused on in this phase and relevant to all assumptions underlying inferences and warrants in "the TOEFL Interpretive Argument." This section presents a field study with 3,000 participants using two forms of the new test as the "concrete examples" of it. One of the interesting sections of this chapter to me is the report of demographics and background characteristics in the field study. Generalization and reliability of the results are inspected again alongside a factor analysis of the prototype of the new TOEFL. A study on the strategy use in the TOEFL reading by Cohen and Upton (2006) is also briefly discussed to make a strong case for the new TOEFL structure in this section.

Chapter seven (pp. 227-258) is entitled *Finalizing the Test Blueprint* and authored by Mari Pearlman. Pearlman starts off with a brief summary of what has happened from 2002 onward highlighting the fact that evidence-centered design (ECD) has been employed, though not fully, to design the task in the new TOEFL. The remainder of this chapter provides a wealth of tables supporting this claim directly or indirectly. Given this, task shells along with examples are presented in tables and the final blueprint of the four skills is presented in this chapter. Summaries of listening, reading, speaking, and writing are finalized and presented to the reader clearly. This chapter further provides information on the iBT (Internet-Based Testing) system of test delivery, and on-line scoring networks are also briefly discussed.

Lin Wang, Daniel Eignor, and Mary Enright have written chapter eight, *A Final Analysis*, (pp. 259-318). This chapter is the lengthiest one throughout the book. It starts with a set of guiding questions from the evaluation phase through the utilization of the test scores. Each assumption underlying the inferences and warrants is examined carefully in this chapter. The issue of computer familiarity is also considered in the report. Once more, reliability and generalizability of the test are discussed, which lays some stress on the importance of this issue in high-stakes testing. Also, "comparability of parallel speaking and writing task types" are discussed and a summary of this field study is then provided. In the following section of this chapter, all outcomes relevant to the explanation stage in the argument case are discussed, with figures and tables presenting the relevant findings. The following section in this chapter discusses the evidence relevant to the utilization of the test scores and interpretations. For this purpose, the scores from the Computer-Based TOEFL and iBT TOEFL are linked and a study of TOEFL preparation courses in Eastern Europe is mentioned. Score and scale descriptors in four skills are also described.

Chapter nine (pp. 319-352) by Carol Chapelle is entitled *The TOEFL Validity Argument*. It refers the reader to the first chapter to remind them of the definitions required to understand this section. The distinctive property of this chapter is the presence of a lot of figures. The main TOEFL interpretive argument is figured in the first graph (p. 321) which recapitulates briefly the grounds (main and intermediate), inferences, and the conclusion or claim of the argument. Readers will find the assumptions and the conclusion from the domain definition inference. As a reader of this book, I agree with Chapelle's closing remarks that "for the audience of applied linguists and measurement experts, the narrative of the TOEFL validity argument presented through this volume should demonstrate the validity of TOEFL score interpretation as an indicator of academic English language proficiency and score use for admissions decisions at English-medium universities" (p. 350). There are three appendices enclosed to the book, i.e., Appendix A: *1995 Working assumptions that Underlie an initial TOEFL$^®$ 2000 Design Framework*; Appendix B: *Summary of 1995 Research Recommendations*; and Appendix C: *Timeline of TOEFL$^®$ Origins and the New TOEFL Project—Key Efforts and Decisions*. The last attachment to the book is an index to the book contents.

The entire content of the book is very cohesive and the reader will get the answer to the questions raised in their mind about the results. However, in some sections, the book falls short to provide a clear picture of data analysis. In some cases, some deviations from the main competency-based perspective are observed despite that editors claim that the book's approach is competency-based. In the meantime, these deviations have augmented building the validity argument. In fact, it is more useful to merge task-based and competency-based approaches in validation (Buck, 2001).

Overall, the exhaustive review and clear explanation of a lengthy line of research reported in the book *Building a Validity Argument for the Test of English as a Foreign Language* is a precious attempt to put into practice the new theoretical framework of the argument-based validation and also to learn about the alteration and treatment plans throughout the vicissitudes of at least 20 years, the offspring of which is the current iBT TOEFL. That the book _ in fact the projects reported in the book _ does not overlook the fact that the TOEFL is an international test of English for academic purposes is a plus which can distinguish the volume and eventually the TOEFL from other tests of English for academic purposes. This research line navigates through different phases of the TOEFL studies and finally concludes that the uses and interpretation of the test scores are sufficiently valid. The simplicity of the language used throughout the chapters can also make this book a good choice not only for researchers but also for other users who like to study about validation.

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