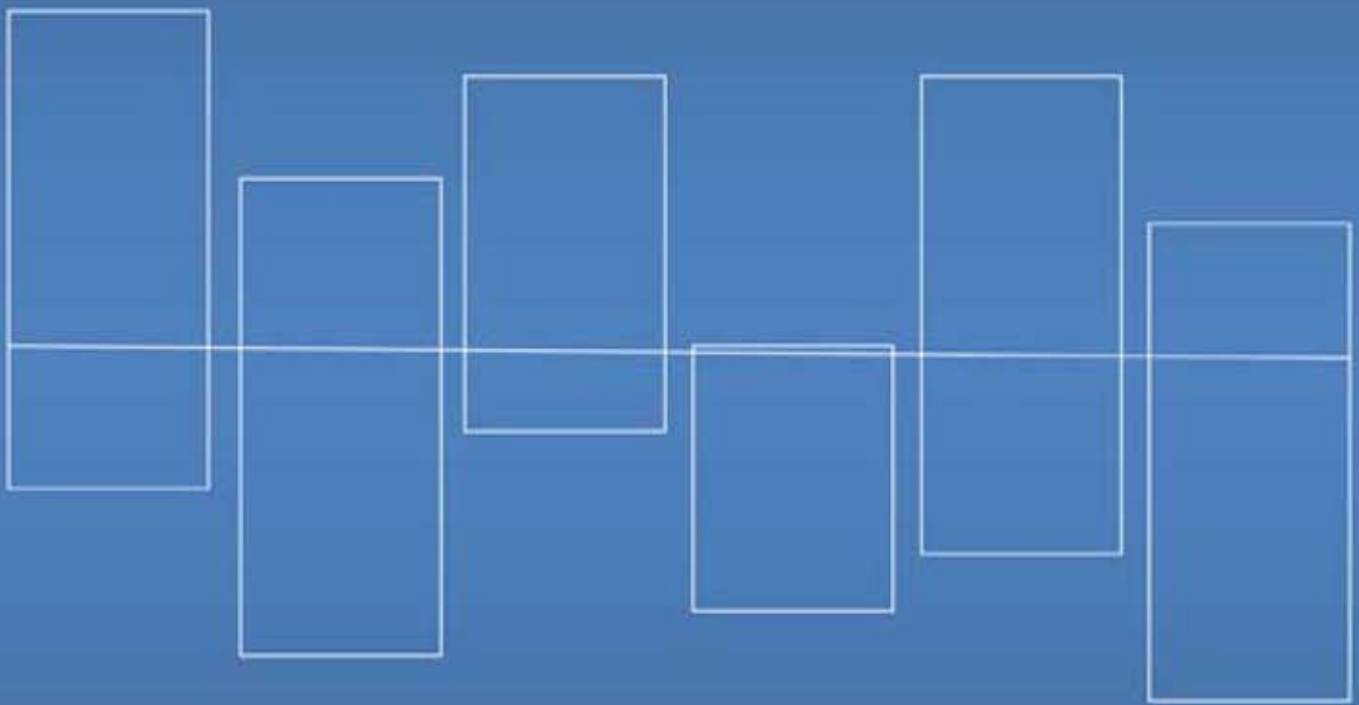


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Foreword from the editor

Above all, I would like to greet friends of the TESOL Journal with a brief self-introduction. My name is Xinghua (Kevin) Liu and I currently work as a Lecturer of Applied Linguistics at Shanghai Jiao Tong University, China. I obtained my Ph.D degree in 2012 from the University of Reading, UK and my Ph.D thesis examined Chinese university students' English writing from a cross-cultural perspective. It is my great honor to be appointed as the Chief Editor of the long-established and well-received TESOL Journal.

In the year of 2013, the TESOL Journal has welcomed some important changes. First, the journal has updated its website and it provides more user-friendly functions. Secondly, the journal has rebuilt the Editorial Board and we are much honored to have with us some world distinguished experts. If you have particular expertise in TESOL teaching and research and are interested in joining our Editorial Board, we are happy to consider your application (please send us your application via asianefl@gmail.com). Thirdly, we are working on the idea of setting up an International TESOL Forum and this annual international event will provide a platform for TESOL practitioners to exchange ideas and build networks. If you are interested in hosting this international event or have any suggestions, you are welcome to contact us via asianefl@gmail.com.

Now, I would like to introduce you to the 2013 volume of the TESOL Journal. There are seven articles in this volume. The first paper presented by Rachel DeDeyn made a worthwhile quantitative attempt to study the relationship between identity and classroom performance and a significant negative linear relationship was found between the two variables. In the second article, Jayanthi Muniandy examined Malaysian university ESL learners' cognitive and perceptual learning styles through a socio-cultural perspective. Results from this study are reported to confirm that brain dominance (cognitive style) influences an individual's perceptual learning style. In the third article, Narges Alipour Heidari investigated cross-cultural differences in the use of refusal strategies applied to reject invitations and requests by Australian native speakers of English (ANS) and Iranian EFL learners. The study found both L1 negative transfer and social status of the interlocutor played a role in the use of refusal strategies by the two groups of speakers. Nicholas P Bradley in the fourth article studied cultural nationalism

expressed through Nihonjinron (theories of Japaneseness) and found that international posture and cultural nationalism are not necessarily incompatible. Hadi Kashiha and Chan Swee Heng in the fifth article investigated the effect of role-play on improving intermediate Iranian EFL learners' retention and recall of idiomatic expressions. The study found that role-play has distinct advantages in promoting naturalness and creativity leading to learning with fun and this translates to better retention and recall of idiomatic expressions. The sixth article presented by Zhaochun Yin examined the lexical inferencing performance by Chinese EFL learners at four stages and found that these EFL learners can figure out the meaning of many unknown words and retain partial knowledge of these words, but the success rate and the subsequent vocabulary knowledge acquisition varied at different stages of Chinese EFL learning. In the last article, FereidoonVahdany ZeynabHaqiqi reported on a case study of investigating the online learners' attitudinal tendencies among different levels of proficiency towards an E-learning system and found a positive attitude towards the online course, but no significant attitudinal differences among the different levels of proficiency.

By taking this opportunity, I would like to thank our Editorial Board members for their hard work and professionalism. The following editorial members contributed to this volume:

Fan-Wei Kung

Hitomi Kambara

John Rajeski

Marina Dodigovic

Maria Martinez Witte

Mark B. Ulla

Terry Myers Zawacki

Yutthasak Chuenchaichon

Meanwhile, I would like to extend many sincere thanks to our external reviewers. Without the work of these generous professionals, the publication of *TESOL International Journal* would not be possible.

Christopher James Bedwell

Daguo Li

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Title

Quantifying Identity: An Examination of the Relationship between Student Subject Positions and Writing Performance

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Abstract

While identity research has recently become a focus in studies of SLA and TEFL/TESL, a significant majority of the research conducted has been qualitative. Due to the limited number of quantitative identity research studies, few studies have attempted to find relationships between identity and classroom performance. This study examines student identity by measuring the degree to which the subject positions international students take up are integrating or non-integrating with the culture at an American university and combines quantitative and qualitative data analysis to explore the relationship between student identity and writing performance. A significant negative linear relationship was found between the degree to which the subject positions taken up by participants are culturally integrating and writing performance for participants who showed improvement in writing performance over the course of the study.

Key Words: student identity, cultural identity, cultural integration, writing performance, study abroad

Introduction**Identity**

Globalization has increased interest in foreign languages and cultures. One area in which this trend is evident is higher education, with large numbers of university students choosing to study abroad. As English is used as an international language of communication, it is a skill that many university students around the world are eager to acquire. The United States has emerged

as a popular study abroad destination for many international students, due in part to the high level of English proficiency required of students enrolled in university courses. Living in the United States and negotiating American culture inevitably exposes international students to new cultural ideas and norms. As a result, they become more aware of their own cultural beliefs by recognizing intercultural differences (Block, 2007; Clark, 2007; Li, 2007). Li (2007) states,

All the variables involved in the construction of self lead to the conclusion that identities are constructed through difference _in the process of change and transformation.‘ [Identities] are positions that individuals are obliged to take up while recognizing that they are merely representations constructed from the place of the other and through differences (p. 25).

Thus, students‘ identities are reconstructed according to the intercultural differences they recognize in the cultural exchange that occurs while they study abroad.

According to Tajfel and Turner‘s (1979) Social Identity Theory, being a student means categorizing oneself in the student social group.

Social categorizations are conceived here as cognitive tools that segment, classify, and order the social environment, and thus enable the individual to undertake many forms of social action. But they do not merely systematize the social world; they also provide a system of orientation for *self*-reference: they create and define the individual‘s place in society (p. 40).

As students place themselves in the student social group, they are subjected to the behavioral norms that define this group. These norms provide a general framework through which students decide how to behave in a variety of social contexts (Abrams, 1996; Tajfel & Turner, 1978). However, students choose within the general framework of student norms, which to accept and which to reject in different situations based on their attitudes towards these norms (Abrams, 1996).

The student identities of international students are constructed through their educational experiences in their native country and through their educational experiences in a foreign country. International students will inevitably encounter differences between academia in their native countries and the countries they choose to study in. Through journal entries, participants in this study discussed the differences they encountered while studying at a university in the United States, citing contrasts in: the amount of work required, the type of work required, the

type of relationship students had with teachers, and the type of thinking required in classes. As Li (2007) contends, these differences help international students create their student identity, which upon arrival in American universities is made up primarily of their attitudes and behaviors in academia in their home countries. However, institutionalized academic norms are imposed on international students as soon as they enter a classroom at a university in the United States (Morita, 2004; Hawkins, 2005). International students must negotiate these foreign academic expectations, choosing which to accept and which to reject, in their reconstruction of their student identity.

Student Subject Positions and Identity

Canagarajah (2002) explores power relations in academia and their influence on international students in the book *Critical Academic Writing*. The self is made up of many unequal subjectivities, or subject positions, each of which uses a different discourse found in society. These subject positions are unequal because they are not valued to the same degree by the different communities an individual is a part of (p. 105). Basically, “[Students] are asked to be different persons in different communities/contexts” (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 15). International students in the United States come to American universities with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds which influence their choices in discourse. However, in their university courses, they face restrictive American academic discourse communities, which tend to value discourse that follows a fairly rigid set of guidelines that dictate appropriate register, genre, conventions, and terminology within a particular field. Due to the inequalities of their subject positions in this context, international students often experience tensions between various student subject positions during their negotiation of student identity (Canagarajah, 2002, p. 105). Canagarajah (2002) states,

Even as they gain relative insider status in the academic community, ESOL students may have conflicts regarding their identity and group allegiance. Their preferred identities may be different from those valued by the academy. Furthermore, they may fear that academic success will involve ostracization or alienation from their native community members. Students need ways of resolving these conflicts as they continue to

communicate to the academy. At the least they may require coping strategies to manage the (at times) conflicting identities and allegiances (p. 169-170).

Many studies have used Canagarajah's ideas on critical academic writing and his categorization of pedagogical issues in academic writing to examine issues of power in this context.

Liu (2008) and You (2007) explore ways in which students negotiate hegemonic English language academic writing standards. Through three separate episodes that occurred in his ESL writing course, You (2007) explains how his ESL writing students used rhetorical computer literacy to understand and negotiate power relations at U.S. institutions and to express identities beyond those they are expected to take up in American classrooms. Liu (2008) uses four student examples to examine ways in which international students negotiate issues of self, content, community, and form in their academic writing at metacognitive, textual, and contextual levels. Both Liu (2008) and You (2007) recognize the importance of equipping students with the critical thinking skills they need to negotiate power and assert their identities in their writing in addition to teaching more traditional pragmatic writing skills.

Another study by Liu (2011) focuses on asymmetrical power relations that emerged between Taiwanese and American students who participated in key pal exchanges. Liu (2011) identifies balance, endurance, and resistance as strategies that Taiwanese students used in their written interactions with their key pals. She states,

Under the category of *'balance'* are interactions in which the Taiwanese students did not perceive inequality and were satisfied with their communication in the end. The interactions in which the Taiwanese students were aware of but passively accepted inequality to maintain surface harmony are placed in the category of *'endurance.'* Under the category of *'resistance'* are interactions in which the Taiwanese students perceived and took action to resist inequality (p. 263).

These studies indicate that the subject positions taken up by students may conform to or reject dominant academic expectations to different degrees through various means of negotiation (Liu, 2008; Liu, 2011; You, 2007).

International students face an experience in which "belonging does not come naturally" (Block, 2007, p. 20) when they enter classrooms in the United States, resulting in a reconstruction of student identity. In this study, student identity will be explored by examining the subject positions taken up by international students in their university classes and measuring

the degree to which these positions are integrating or non-integrating with the culture on a university campus in the United States. The degree of acceptance or rejection of dominant cultural norms in individuals has been used as a measure of cultural identity in the field of psychology for many years (Cortes, Rogler, & Malgady, 1994; Ramirez, 1984; Szapocznik, Kurtines, & Fernandez, 1980); however, in the fields of SLA and TEFL/TESL, no studies have attempted to use international students' acceptance or rejection of U.S. academic culture as a measure of student identity.

Operationalization of Identity

Within the fields of SLA and TEFL/TESL, a multiplicity of definitions of identity exists: socio-cultural identity, ethnic identity, personal identity, cultural identity, and social identity (Block, 2007; Gordon, 1964; Norton, 1997). Within these frameworks, identity has been operationalized as voice; pronoun use; code switching; language choice; media portrayals of foreign cultures; students' views of themselves as a writer or speaker of a foreign or second language; and identification as a monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual (DeCosta, 2007; Fernsten, 2008; Lee, 2006; Lee, 2007; Mantero, 2007; Nelson & Malinowski, 2007; Nero, 2005; Pennycook, 2003; Rell & Rothman, 2007; Sarkar, Low, & Winer, 2007; Shiyab, 2007).

A systematic review of identity research was conducted for the purposes of this study to examine the scientific processes followed by studies that have been published on identity. A sample of six journals was selected for the research synthesis: *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, *The ELT Journal*, *Language Teaching Research*, *The Modern Language Journal*, *Second Language Research*, and *TESOL Quarterly*. These journals were selected for their influence in the fields of SLA and TEFL/TESL and the ease with which their back issues could be searched for relevant articles. Subsequently, these journals were browsed for articles directly addressing social or cultural identity. This research synthesis included 34 relevant articles.

This research synthesis shows that the vast majority of research conducted on identity in the field of SLA has been qualitative in nature. Of the 34 selected studies, 18 were case studies, seven were qualitative quasi-experiments or discourse studies, five were quantitative studies, three were theoretical papers, and one was an article on teaching methodology. 25 of the 30

articles which reported the results of a study were case studies or qualitative research, which offer insights into the construct of identity but do not measure it.

Identity is a construct that is difficult to quantify; however, a limited number of studies have succeeded in quantifying identity data through surveys or discourse analysis (Allen, Dristas, & Mills, 2007; Boshier, 1997; De Costa, 2007; Gatbonton, Trofimovich, & Magid, 2005; Harumi, 2010; Hyland, 2002; Yihong, Yuan, Ying, & Yan, 2007). No study investigating identity's relationship to any individual difference was found. The goal of this study is to add to the small body of quantitative identity research that has been conducted by measuring student identity and exploring its relationship with performance in a writing class. Additional qualitative data analysis will be conducted in order to situate any relationships found in their appropriate social contexts.

Research Questions

The present study operationalizes student identity as the degree to which international students have taken up subject positions that are integrating or non-integrating with the culture at a university in the United States. Students' attitudes towards classroom practices and standards from their native countries and the United States and their self-perceptions of their classroom behaviors are considered in order to obtain a measure of student identity. This measure was used to answer the following questions:

1. To what degree are international students integrating with university culture on one campus in the United States?
2. Is there a relationship between performance in a writing class and the degree of cultural integration of the subject positions taken up by participants?
3. What is the nature of that relationship, if it exists?

Methods

Participants

Participants were 33 international students enrolled in the ESL sections of College Composition at a state university in the United States. The purpose and procedure of this study

and the confidentiality of data collected were explained to the 38 students enrolled in the ESL sections of College Composition through a consent form approved by the Internal Review Board. Consent was given by 33 students to participate in the study.

Participants came from a wide variety of countries: China, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Venezuela, Mexico, Iran, Sudan, South Korea, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Ghana, Taiwan, and Vietnam. All of the participants in this study were undergraduate students studying a range of majors including: finance, fashion, veterinary medicine, biomedical science, watershed science, business, economics, biology, theater, food and nutrition science, computer information systems, mechanical engineering, biological engineering, chemical engineering, psychology, pre-pharmacy, radiological technology, accounting, construction management, and art.

All participants in this study were advanced English language learners. Participants were all enrolled in university level courses taught exclusively in English, which means they had either earned a score above a 71 on the internet-based TOEFL form, a score above a 525 on the paper-based TOEFL form, a score above a 6 on the IELTS, or had graduated from the university's Intensive English Program.

Data Collection

Student Subject Position

A student identity survey was developed by modifying an interview protocol created by Williams (2007). Williams' (2007) interview questions were created to prompt international graduate teaching assistants to discuss their teaching identity in an interview. The probe used for the current study was adapted to elicit international undergraduate students' perceptions of their student identities (see appendix A). The journal prompts used in this study attempt to tap into international students' attitudes towards and behaviors in the social contexts of classrooms in their native countries and in the United States, which according to Abrams is indicative of student identity (1996). The purpose of the survey was to measure the degree to which participants are taking up subject positions that are integrating or non-integrating with university culture in the United States.

The student identity survey, consisting of open-ended journaling prompts, was administered over the course of the semester. Participants answered one journal prompt per week for ten weeks. Participants were instructed to write about one page in response to each journal prompt. These weekly journaling assignments were completed as homework outside the classroom.

The data collected in the Williams (2007) study, which used the interview protocol that was the basis for the student identity survey, was qualitative in nature. The current study used the extensive qualitative data collected from participants' journal entries to rate participants on a Likert scale ranging from zero to four, thus creating a quantitative score for student identity (see appendix B). A score of zero indicated no perception of differences between American university culture and university culture in a participant's native country; a score of one indicated a highly non-integrating subject position; a score of four indicated a highly integrating subject position.

Analysis of the journal entries of each participant was conducted by four raters, who were either master's students in the TEFL/TESL program or worked in the English department at the university where the study took place. Raters participated in a two hour training session, during which time the study was explained, the rating process was clarified, and rater norming occurred. These raters did not know any of the participants and had no knowledge of the grades participants had received in the course. Analysis began by counting the number of positive statements each participant made about the United States, the number of negative statements each participant made about the United States, the number of positive statements each participant made about their home country, and the number of negative statements each participant made about their home country. Raters used this objective data in combination with the subjective impressions they had of each participant's acceptance or rejection of expectations and standards of the American educational system and their feelings of homesickness, isolation, and loneliness based on the participant's written responses to items on the student identity survey to locate participants on the Likert Scale of student identity.

Writing Performance

In the College Composition course participants were enrolled in, students were required to complete four major writing assignments over the course of the semester. Scores on these major assignments made up 90% of a student's grade in the course. Each assignment was evaluated with a grading rubric, which was made available to students prior to their submission of each assignment. Participants' scores on these four assignments were used as a measure of writing performance.

Results

Student Subject Position

Four raters read participants' responses and rated the degree to which participants' subject positions were culturally integrating or non-integrating. The inter-rater reliability was determined by calculating Spearman's rho for all possible pairs of raters and calculating the average correlation. Reliability between the four raters was $\rho=.45$. The low inter-rater reliability is probably due to the difficulty involved in defining an ambiguous construct like identity. Despite the training that raters underwent prior to the study, raters may have had different ideas about the importance of the various facets of identity and acceptance or rejection of American academic norms expressed in participants' journal entries in their determination of a student identity score.

The student identity scores assigned to each participant by the four raters were averaged to obtain a mean student identity score for each participant. One participant did not provide sufficient data in his journal entries to allow raters to assign a student identity score and was excluded from the analysis. The mean student identity score was 2.88 with a standard deviation of .57.

Writing Performance

Participants' grades on the four assignments written for their College Composition course were used as the measure of writing performance for this study. A mean writing performance score was calculated for each participant by averaging the grades each participant earned on these four assignments.

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
mean writing performance	85.07	7.86	33
assignment 1 grade	81.98	7.88	33
assignment 2 grade	84.76	18.00	33
assignment 3 grade	85.41	9.21	33
assignment 4 grade	88.00	6.39	33

Table 1: Means and standard deviations of writing performance measures

Student Subject Position and Writing Performance

The relationship between the degree of cultural integration or non-integration of participants' subject positions and writing performance was measured using the Pearson correlation coefficient (*r*). No significant linear relationships were found between this measure of student identity and mean writing performance or performance on any individual assignment.

	mean writing performance	assignment 1 grade	assignment 2 grade	assignment 3 grade	assignment 4 grade
student identity	-.125	-.110	-.105	-.014	-.203

Table 2: Correlations between student identity and writing performance ($p > .05$ and $n = 32$ for all values)

Due to the lack of significant linear relationships found between the degree of cultural integration or non-integration of participants' subject positions and writing performance, the relationship between these variables was explored further with the use of grouping variables. Performance data was used to create more homogeneous sub-groups for the basis of correlations. Participant sub-groups were formed with eight grouping variables: increase in writing performance between assignments one and three, decrease in writing performance between assignments one and three, increase in writing performance between assignments one and four, decrease in writing performance between assignments one and four, high writing performance (one or more standard deviations above average writing performance), low writing performance (one or more standard deviations below average writing performance), high student cultural integration (rating of three or above), and low student cultural identity (rating of two or below). The degree of cultural integration or non-integration of participants' subject positions was found to have a significant negative linear relationship with writing performance in the group of participants who showed improvement in writing performance between assignments one and three.

The degree of cultural integration of participants' subject positions and mean writing performance were negatively correlated for participants who showed improvement in writing performance between assignments one and three ($r=-.492$, $n=23$, $p=.017$). Additionally, a significant negative correlation existed between the degree of cultural integration of participants' subject positions and grade on assignment two for this group of participants ($r=-.438$, $n=23$, $p=.037$).

Discussion

Cultural Integration of Student Subject Positions

The data collected on student identity reveals that participants in the current study have taken up subject positions that are integrating with the university culture to a relatively high degree. The mean student identity score (2.88) is more than one standard deviation (.57) above the mid-point (2.00) of the student identity scale. This shows that most participants in this study have positive attitudes towards studying in the United States, are not experiencing major

difficulties adapting to the standards of their classes in the United States, and are building social connections.

Relationship between Student Subject Position and Writing Performance

Surprisingly, the results show a moderate negative linear relationship between the degree of cultural integration of subject positions and writing performance for the group of participants whose writing performance improved over the course of the semester. This means that participants that articulated culturally integrating student subject positions in their journals tended to score lower on writing assignments than participants who articulated culturally non-integrating subject positions. This finding is surprising because students who take up student subject positions that are integrating with American university culture tend to conform to and accept academic expectations and standards, which often results in higher grades (Hawkins, 2005; Morita, 2004). In order to explain these results, a qualitative investigation of participants' journal entries was undertaken.

Many of the students who showed improvements in writing performance during the semester had recently arrived in the United States. Eight foreign exchange students from China, who had been in the United States for less than one month at the beginning of the study, participated in this study. Seven of these eight students improved their writing performance over the course of the semester and three improved their score on assignment three by 10 percentage points or more from assignment one. Additionally, 14 of the 23 participants whose writing performance improved over the course of the semester had been in the United States for less than one year at the beginning of the study. The survey responses of these students revealed evidence of difficulties meeting new people and non-integration with the social environment of an American university. One participant wrote:

Back in my country, i was really active and social person. And i organized many events, and i attended almost every game or show that was held on campus. But here in states, i barely find the time for myself. And it makes me think twice before every time i go out.

Another participant explained:

As for me, I spend most of the time in the library to study. Since I have just been to the U.S. for 68 days, I'm not familiarized with the key terms in English. Therefore, I study hard because I want to catch up with American students and hopefully do better than

them... Additionally, I still need to take part in more activities to make friends with natives, so that I could learn more about the American culture.

The journal responses of many participants whose writing performance improved during the study compared the active social life they had back home to the relatively quiet social life they were experiencing in the United States. These students' responses also discussed the increased time spent in the library and time spent studying in the United States, in part due to having fewer social commitments. Students who are not integrating with the American university social culture may spend more time on their writing assignments than international students who are integrating with the social culture because they are not socializing as much.

Pedagogical Implications

ESL instructors strive to help their students' language skills improve and it is rewarding to know that students are invested enough in their language learning to dedicate time outside of class to their studies. However, excessive studying, which may manifest as drastic improvements on assignments, may indicate that a student is socially isolated. ESL instructors need to be aware of the importance of social support during an intercultural transition.

The language classroom can act as a social support system for students who are not integrating into the social life on university campuses. In-class discussions or online forums can provide students a place to talk or write about their experiences adapting to a new culture. Classmates can share advice, discuss problems or successes, or simply identify with each others' experiences. By creating opportunities for students to express the differences they are experiencing in a new culture, instructors illustrate that feeling different is a common experience for many international students and can encourage students to consider their cultural and student identities and changes they may be undergoing.

Research Implications

The current study includes limitations. The initial small sample size of 33 participants was further reduced using performance variables to group participants into smaller, more homogeneous sub-groups. However, the use of grouping variables allowed data analysis to take

into consideration different contexts within which participants were situated. Additionally, inter-rater reliability was low, meaning the four raters had different ideas about the degree to which participants' student subject positions were accepting or rejecting American university culture after reading their journals. These discrepancies could have been due to the large amount of written material raters had to go through to make their judgments. Different raters may have given different statements more weight in their evaluations and rater fatigue may have been an issue. Differences in ratings were managed by averaging the four raters' scores to create one student identity score for each participant.

Despite the limitations in research design, perhaps one of the most important findings of this study is that the combination of quantitative and qualitative data analysis used generated a more complete understanding of the relationship that exists between student identity and writing performance than either approach, in isolation, could have done. Quantitative analysis created a clear picture of the relationship that exists between the variables of interest, while qualitative analysis explained why this relationship exists by allowing for exploration of the social contexts of participants. Using quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods in conjunction allows researchers to utilize the benefits of each approach to gain a better understanding of the constructs and relationships being investigated.

The initial motivation for this study came from the lack of quantitative identity research that had been conducted in the fields of SLA and TEFL/TESL. However, as the study progressed, it became clear that using correlations as the sole means of data analysis would simplify and decontextualize the complex social construct of identity. While this study adds to the small body of quantitative identity research that exists in the literature, hopefully it also contributes to the understanding of the social realities and shared experiences of international students.

Much more quantitative research is needed for even basic insight into the nature of the relationships that exist between identity and other individual difference variables of interest to researchers. Yet, qualitative data analysis may help researchers answer important questions about why relationships between these variables exist. This study examined student identity exclusively in relation to writing. Exploration of identity in relation to second or foreign language performance on other language skills like speaking, listening, reading, vocabulary knowledge and use, or grammatical choices offers extensive possibilities for future research.

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Appendix A

Student Identity Survey

1. Write about your education. What country are you from? When did you begin learning English? How long have you been in the United States? Why are you studying in the United States? Why are you studying English? What is your major? Did you study in the Intensive English Program (IEP) at CSU before this course? Anything else I should know?
2. Write about being a student in the county you are from. Do students work together in class and out of class? How were class taught? How much studying did you need to do to prepare for classes and tests? Anything else you would like to write about your experiences as a student in the country you're from? Give examples.
3. Write about being a student in the United States. Do students work together in class and out of class? How are classes taught? How much studying do you need to do to prepare for classes and tests? Anything else you would like to write about your experiences as a student in America? Give examples.

4. How are teachers from your native country and United States the same or different? Do they teach differently? Do they treat students differently? Do they have different expectations of students? Any other differences you've noticed? Give examples.
5. Describe the qualities that make a good student in the country you are from. Describe the characteristics that make a good student in the United States. Which of these qualities do you have? Give examples of your actions that show these qualities.
6. How do students from your native country and the United States differ? How are they the same? Give examples. Are you more like a student from your native country or from the US? Why do you think so?
7. Describe how your role as an American student is the same or different than your role as a student in your native country. Describe specific events to show the similarities and/or differences.
8. Does being an international/nonnative English speaker influence your experiences as a student? Does using English as a second language affect how you act in your classes? Do you feel different in your classes in the United States than you did in your native country? Give examples.
9. What things do you do well as a student in the United States? What things do you find difficult or frustrating? What things did you do well as a student in the country you are from? What things did you find difficult or frustrating?
10. Do you think you are better at being a student in the country you are from or in the United States? Why? Do you enjoy being a student better in your native country or in the United States? Why?

Appendix B

Rating Scale

0=no perception of student differences between their native country and US

- In the student's journals, there is no acknowledgement that the educational expectations and norms in the US and their native country are different in any way.

1=student perceives themselves as adhering more to student norms in their native country than student norms in the US.

- Student has significantly more positive things to say about their home country than the US and has significantly more negative things to say about the US than their home country (these comments may be related to education systems or life in general).
- Student reports difficulty in classes in America, specifically meeting and understanding expectations.
- Student displays feelings of homesickness.
- Student reports feelings of loneliness, isolation, and difficulties meeting other students.

2=student perceives both student norms from their native country and the US in their student identity but adheres slightly more to student norms of their native country

- Student writes more positive statements about their home country than about the US and writes more negative statements about the US than about their home country (these comments may be related to education systems or life in general).
- Student may report slight difficulties in classes in America, but overall they seem to be coping with the challenges of operating in a foreign educational system.
- Student may report feelings of loneliness, isolation, and difficulties meeting other students.

3= student perceives both student norms from their native country and the US in their student identity but adheres slightly more to student norms of the US

- Student writes more positive statements about the US than about their home country and writes more negative statements about their home country than about the US (these comments may be related to education systems or life in general).
- Student does not report any major difficulties coping with the demands of classes in the US.
- Student may report enjoying the social aspects of college life in America, but may also report slight feelings of loneliness, isolation, or homesickness.

4 = student perceives themselves adhering more to student norms of the US than student norm in their native country

- Student has significantly more positive things to say about the US than their home country and has significantly more negative things to say about their home country than the US (these comments may be related to education systems or life in general).
- Student reports that transitioning to classes in America was easy.
- Student probably reports enjoying working with other American students, meeting people, socializing, and overall enjoying their study abroad experience.

Title

Cognitive and Perceptual Learning Styles of Malaysian University ESL Learners:
A Socio-cultural Approach

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Abstract

This study investigated preferred perceptual learning styles that consisted of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile and group or individual elements among English as Second Language (ESL) learners in higher institutions based on their ethnicity and gender. It also further examined the relationship between the learners' preferred perceptual learning styles and their diagnosed cognitive (intuitive or analytical) in language learning process. The Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) assessed learning styles of ESL students (Reid, 1987) and the Cognitive Style Index (CSI) by Allison and Hayes (1996), designed to assess preferences for information processing were used to analyze significant differences among ESL learners. Ninety-two subjects were selected from four Academic English classes and their learning style preferences were measured based on their ethnicity (Malay, Chinese, Indian and others) and gender (male and female). Data from PLSPQ and CSI were examined by using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20. The overall students' perceptual and cognitive learning style preferences were identified using descriptive statistics. One-Way ANOVA was used to identify the correlation between perceptual and cognitive learning style in relation to social culture elements (gender and ethnicity) in the language learning process. Results show that ESL learners favoured kinesthetic and auditory and disfavoured individual style. The majority of male students in the English classroom were analytical compared to females. The mean scores revealed that Malay students' learning style preference was kinesthetic whereas Chinese students were more auditory. There was no relationship found between cognitive learning style preferences and races. Findings also identified that some cognitive styles matched with some of the perceptual learning style preferences. This result confirms the findings of previous research studies (Felder &

Silverman, 1988; Sadler-Smith, 1997; Wooldridge, 1995) that brain dominance (cognitive style) influences an individual's perceptual learning style.

Key Words: cognitive learning style, perceptual learning style, ESL classroom, Cognitive Style Index (CSI), Perceptual Learning Style Questionnaire (PLSPQ)

Introduction

Research shows that the performance of students is usually better if teaching skills are matched with students' learning style preference (Dunn, Dunn, & Price, 1979; O'Brien, 1989; Oxford & Ehrman, 1993). Dunn, Griggs, Olson, Gorman, and Beasley (1995) and Braio, Beasley, Dunn, Quinn, and Buchanan (1997) further illustrate that the stronger the students' preference, the more important it is to provide compatible instruction. The match of teaching and learning styles can enhance students' motivation and attainments (Brown, 1994). Several theories, models and instruments on learning styles have been developed and are widely investigated by educational and psychological researchers (Campbell, 1991). Researchers of this field have re-categorised the learning style in terms of experiential learning, orientation to study, instructional preference and cognitive and learning strategy development (Riding & Rayner, 1998). This leads to formation of many models and theories on learning styles. However, very few researchers attempt to find the relationship between sensory/perceptual learning style and students' diagnosed hemispheric dominance. Although Dunn and Dunn (1979) identified five elements of learning styles; environmental, emotional, sociological, physiological and psychological, evidence shows that the Learning Style Inventory (LSI), developed by Dunn and Dunn, has little research on psychometric properties, which includes the measurement of knowledge, abilities, attitudes and personality traits. Besides, LSI has insufficient explanation for the interaction of the five elements of learning style (Riding & Rayner, 1998).

Learning style is defined as an internal based characteristic of absorbing, processing, retrieving and retaining new information (Reid, 1995). This explains that learning style is not only about perceptual or modalities but also about information processing using left or right brain and the response to the environment in which whether information is absorbed concretely or abstractly (Dunn & Dunn, 1993). Thus ESL teachers should identify the learners' cognitive and perceptual learning style in order to achieve the objectives of their lesson plan. Research

identifies that a learning process is enhanced when the teaching instruction is matched with the learners' learning style preferences (Dunn, Dunn, & Price, 1979; O'Brien, 1989; Oxford & Ehrman, 1993). Research on cognitive and perceptual learning styles has been studied widely but there is little work on the correlation of these two types of learning styles. Therefore, this research was conducted by the researcher to identify the relationship of ESL learners' perceptual and cognitive learning styles as well as their roles in learning English as a Second Language.

Objectives of the Study

This research aims to investigate the preferred perceptual learning style (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile or in a group or individually) and cognitive style of male and female ESL students based on their ethnicity. In addition, this study also identified the correlation between the students' diagnosed cognitive (intuitive or analytical) by using the Cognitive Style Index (CSI) and their perceptual learning style preferences through the use of the Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) in the ESL learning process.

The research questions were:

1. What are the overall perceptual and cognitive learning styles preferences among undergraduate male and female ESL students in regard to their ethnicity?
2. Is there any significant relationship between perceptual and cognitive learning style in language learning? If yes, in what ways?

Cognitive and Perceptual Learning Styles in Learning ESL

Cognitive style is an innate habitual approach to processing information when engaging in cognitive tasks like problem solving, thinking, perceiving and remembering. It has a high degree of stability and consistency (Cassidy, 2004). On the other hand, perceptual learning style is about sensory modality that interacts with the environment through one of the basic senses such as kinesthetic, auditory, visual, tactile or combinations of the major senses (Liu & Ginther, 1999). Many studies on the field of learning style indicate that cognitive style and perceptual learning style have been often used synonymously but they are not the same.

According to researchers like Benati and Van Patten (2010) and Dornyei (2005), cognitive styles are more theoretical whereas perceptual learning styles are more related to practical applications. For example, cognitive learning style is more restricted to information

processing preferences while learners' perceptual learning style preferences is more about their adaptation to the environment which comprises all aspects of learning including cognitive, affective and physiological styles (Dornyei & Skehan, 2003; Keefe, 1987). Thus cognitive and learning styles are used interchangeably in most situations as their distinctions left unclear (Reid, 1987; Keefe, 1987; Liu & Ginther, 1999) but some scholars divide the two concepts distinctively.

Benati and Van Patten (2010) have defined cognitive and perceptual learning styles as learners' preferences for learning and processing information from the environment. It means learners employ different styles to perceive, absorb, process and recall new information and skills. Reid (1995) defined learning styles as, "*an individual's natural, habitual and preferred way of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills*" (p. viii). The above statement clearly indicates that cognitive and perceptual learning styles are inter-related. Moreover, Dunn and Griggs's (1995) also described perceptual learning style as biological or natural.

Theoretical Framework

Research on learning style is quite complex and has been investigated in various aspects of learning style. Some elements of learning style have been carried out as early as 1892 (Keefe, 1987). The research on learning style is rooted in the theories of learning style such as behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism. Cognitive theory that was originated by Jean Piaget in 1970s is based on the assumption that information should be acquired and retained for use in the future if learning is to become learner constructed, relevant and built upon prior knowledge. Cognitive is distinguished with *_wholist-analytic'* and *_wholist-intuitive'*. The *_wholist-analytic'* model measures the way learners organise information whether as a whole or parts whereas the *_wholist-intuitive'* model identifies the way learners present information whether in verbal or mental pictures (Riding & Rayner, 1998). It is also known as *_verbal-imagery'*, which has two basic effects. First, the way information is represented either as verbally imagery or both. Second is the internal or external focus of attention (Riding & Cheema, 1991). They also indicate that imagers tend to be internal and passive whereas the verbalizers tend to be external stimulating. Usually, the verbalizers are more related to sensory preference and these findings are supported by Sadler-Smith (1997).

The term ‘learning style’ originated from ‘modality preference’ which was initiated in 1960s until early 1980s (Traver & Dawson, 1978). They further explained that learners can be categorised as having either a ‘visual modality preference’ or an ‘auditory modality preference’. Thus, instructional method is classified as either ‘auditory’ or ‘visual’ in order to be matched with modality preferences. Research provided no evidence to support modality matching approach and it was obsolete for a while until it re-emerged in 1954 with a new name, ‘learning styles’ (Ehrman, Leaver, & Oxford, 2003; Traver & Dawson, 1978).

Studies on learning styles were expanded widely with the introduction of several learning style models and instruments for measuring learning styles. Coffield, Mosely, Hall, and Ecclestone (2004) have extensively reviewed and evaluated learning style models and their implication for practice. They have found 71 learning models and instruments and categorised 13 of these as major models. They recommended six learning style models from the 13 major ones. They are a) Jackson’s Learning Style Profile b) Apter’s Reversal Theory and Motivation Style c) Cognitive Style Index by Allison and Hayes d) Study Skills Inventory by Entwistle e) Herman’s Whole Brain f) Vermunt’s Inventory Learning Style.

Numerous dimensions of cognitive learning styles have been identified over the years. Research such as Williams (1983), Witkin, Moore, Goodenough, and Cox (1977), Allison and Hayes (1996) indicated that learning preference is determined by whether they are left hemispheric (analytical), which is also known as field independent or right hemispheric (intuitive) that is identified as field dependent. Allison and Hayes’ (1996) Cognitive Style Index that employs institution-analysis dimension underpins the various aspects of cognitive styles that were identified by previous research. *“Intuition... refers to immediate judgment based on feelings and the adoption of a global perspective. Analysis... refers to judgment based on mental reasoning and a focus on detail”* (Allison & Hayes, 1996, p. 122). Thus, the Cognitive Style Index was used to measure the cognitive learning styles of ESL learners. Schmeck (1988) adds that both types are equally good for problem solving.

The investigation of cognitive learning styles is very essential as it determines how an individual acquires knowledge through different learning styles. Some researchers pointed out that the concept of cerebral preference has some limited practical and theoretical implications. Thus, it is warned that teaching models should not be solely dependent on students’ cerebral preferences (O’Boyle, 1986; Zalewski, Sink, & Yachimowicz, 1992). This statement is

supported by Reid (1987), William (1983), and Witkins et al. (1977) as they agreed that teachers were responsible to create a favourable learning environment that will accommodate learners from different social, cultural and ethnic background with the students' preferred learning style as it can improve their attitude towards learning. Reid (1995) also defined that learning style as a learner's natural and favourite ways of understanding, processing and remembering new information or message and this definition supports the concept of sensory and cognitive learning styles as perceived by other researchers like Dunn et al. (1995). They indicated perceptual learning styles as biological rather than developmental which was clearly illustrated by Reid (1995) as being 'natural'. In this study, the researcher also discussed the role of perceptual learning styles in the learning process regarding students' demographic factors like gender and race. Therefore, the Perceptual Learning Styles Questionnaire (PLSPQ) that consists of auditory (hearing), visual (seeing), tactile (hands-on), kinesthetic (whole-body movement), group (like to work in-group) and individual (like to work individually) was used in this study (Reid, 1987).

Certainly, cognitive and perceptual learning styles play essential role in learners' achievement and performance. Hence, teachers or educators should be concerned about the ways students use, receive, construct or deconstruct knowledge (Miller, 2002) to develop active learning. Therefore, it is important to identify the cognitive and perceptual learning styles of ESL students with different gender, background and ethnicity. Educators could also focus on the importance of accommodating learners' different learning styles when designing the curriculum.

Methodology

Participants

This research was conducted in the School of Languages, Literacy and Translation, University Sains Malaysia (USM). This faculty offers English, Malay and several other foreign language courses. It also provides a degree program, English for Professional Course. The English courses are designed to expose students with receptive skills (reading and listening) and productive skills (writing and speaking). All the courses provided here develop the students with skills like creative and critical thinking and technical and business communication skills.

In this research, participants were invited from English for Academic Purpose (LSP300) classes. This course is designed with academic reading, writing, listening, group discussion as

well as critical thinking. There were 92 respondents in this study, using convenience sample. Forty-seven male students (51.0%) and forty-five female students (49.0%) participated in this research. The racial composition of the sample was Malays (53.2%), Chinese (43.5%), and other races (3.3%).

Two sets of learning styles questionnaires were used to identify students' learning style preferences. ESL students' preferred perceptual learning style was assessed by using Perceptual Learning Style Questionnaire (PLSPQ) whereas their cognitive style preference was measured using the Cognitive Style Index (CSI).

Instruments

1. Perceptual Learning Style Preference Questionnaire (PLSPQ) was developed by Reid (1987) and was used to assess language learners' preferred perceptual learning style. PLSPQ was used in this research as this questionnaire is reported to be of high validity and reliability (Riazi & Mansoorian, 2008; Peacock, 2001). This self-report questionnaire helps us identify the ways in which learners learn best and prefer to learn. The 30 statements in the questionnaire cover Reid's six learning style preferences, with five statements for each preference. The six learning style preferences are visual, auditory, tactile, and kinesthetic preferences, and two social aspects of learning like group, and individual preferences (Reid, 1987). The questionnaire uses a likert scale with strongly agree (5 points), agree (4 points), undecided (3 points), disagree (2 points) and strongly disagree (1 point).

Reid (1987) describes visual learners as those that learn best with pictures, images and graphs while studying and retaining information. Such learners perform well when they acquire messages from videos, mind maps or powerpoints slides in ESL classroom whereas auditory learners are comfortable with listening to a lecture, discussing information or expressing verbally what he or she learns. Kinesthetic learners prefer physical participation like drama and role play. Thus, this group of people would become actively involved in classroom activities as they learn best by experiences. Tactile learners like hands-on activities like using materials or taking notes during the learning process. For example, these learners write notes during lectures or engage physically in classroom activity to retain the information they have learned. Group learners learn and understand new information well when they study with others. They feel comfortable with

group discussions, class interactions or any other activity that involves communication with other learners. However, individual learners learn the other way round. They acquire knowledge when they study alone. Individual learners learn best when they work or handle projects independently.

Reid (1987) also classified learning styles preferences into major, minor and negligence categories. Major learning style preferences reveal that a learner could acquire information well and is able to perform the best. Minor learning style preferences indicate performance and acquisition at an average level whereas negative learning style preferences indicate that an individual has difficulty learning in that style. Thus, it is essential for educators to lead their students towards their preferred learning style to be successful.

2. Cognitive Style Index (CSI) is a 38-item questionnaire using trichotomous scale (true, uncertain, false) to measure the generic intuition-analysis dimension of cognitive style (Allinson & Hayes, 1996). The *‘true’* response from the first twenty-one of the items in this self-report is indicated as an analysis orientation in which, the scores for *‘true’* is 2-points, *‘uncertain’* is 1-point and *‘false’* is 0-points. Scoring for the remaining 17 items was reversed. Hence, the closer the total cognitive style index scores to the maximum of 76, the more analytical the learner, and the nearer the total scores to the minimum of zero, the more intuitive the learner. A median score of 43 was employed to distinguish high (analytic) and low (intuitive) scores of cognitive style index. Thus, cognitive style index scores were designated intuitive if less than 43 and analytic if greater than or equal to 43.

An intuitive (right brain) style emphasizes feelings, open-endedness and a global perspective whereas an analytical style (left brain) emphasizes reasoning, detail and structure (Allinson & Hayes, 1996). The researcher used CSI to assess the cognitive style preferences of a learner as it was top-rated in a review of measures of cognitive and learning styles by Coffield, Moseley, Hall, and Ecclestone (2004).

Both PLSPQ and CSI were given to the respondents. Data collected from the PLSPQ and CSI were examined by using IBM SPSS Statistics Version 20. The ESL learners' perceptual and learning styles based on their gender and ethnicity were measured using descriptive statistics whereas the relationship between perceptual and cognitive learning style was analyzed via One-Way ANOVA (Sig. value <0.05).

Result and Findings

Research Question 1

Table 1 shows the mean scores of ESL learners' perceptual learning style based on gender. There were no relationships found between perceptual learning styles and gender. Therefore the data is displayed in mean score. The table shows that both male and female students favoured kinesthetic and auditory learning style. Hence, the researcher partially agrees with Dunn and Griggs' (1995) study that male students were more kinesthetic and auditory. They further indicated that female students learn best in group style however in this research female students had similar learning style preferences as the male students. Learning style preferences like tactile, visual and group became their minor learning styles while they had negative preferences towards individual learning styles. The percentage of overall ESL learners' perceptual learning styles preferences can be seen in Table 2.

Table 1
ESL Students' Perceptual Learning Style Preference: Mean Score between Gender

Learning Style	Male	Female
Visual	2.30	2.33
Tactile	2.62	2.62
Auditory	2.68	2.67
Group	2.60	2.60
Kinesthetic	2.70	2.70
Individual	2.11	2.16
Total (N=92)		

Table 2, clearly displayed that ESL learners favoured kinesthetic (75%) as their major learning style compared to other learning styles. In addition, previous research on perceptual learning styles reported that ESL students strongly preferred kinesthetic and tactile styles and disfavoured group style (Reid, 1987). This study yielded similar results as ESL students' major learning style was kinesthetic.

Table 2

The Percentage of ESL Learners' Perceptual Learning Styles Preferences

	<u>Visual</u> (%)	<u>Tactile</u> (%)	<u>Auditory</u> (%)	<u>Group</u> (%)	<u>Kinesthetic</u> (%)	<u>Individual</u> (%)
Major LS	32.6	62.0	67.4	66.3	75.0	29.3
Minor LS	66.3	38.0	32.6	26.1	25.0	54.3
Negative LS	1.1	0.0	0.0	7.6	0.0	16.3
Total N=92						

Table 3 indicates the mean scores of perceptual learning style preferences based on ethnicity. A different way of learning was found between perceptual learning style and ethnicity. Data reveals that Malay students prefer kinesthetic (2.88) style whereas Chinese learns best as auditory (2.73) learners. Other ethnicities learn well with the tactile (3.00) style. Both Malay and Chinese students have negative preference towards individual style with mean score 1.98 and 2.30 respectively. The latter finding supports Reid's (1987) study on perceptual learning styles among nonnative speakers (NNS) of English. In her research, she stated that Malaysian students had lowest preference mean for individual learning. Furthermore this data also has similar findings with Reid's (1987) result that Chinese speakers expressed a strong preference for auditory learning and Malay students identified auditory learning as a minor learning style. Thus, it can be said that other factors like environment, emotional, sociological, physiological and psychological of an individual have great influence on his or her perceptual learning style (Dunn & Dunn, 1984). Reid (1987) reiterates that different modes of thinking and learning occur due to different cultures. Hence, Malay, Chinese and other races may have different learning style preferences as they are brought up in their own pace of culture, which includes the aspects of environment, emotional, sociological, physiological and psychological.

Table 3

Mean Scores of Perceptual Learning Style Preferences Based on Ethnicity

	Visual	Tactile	Auditory	Kinesthetic	Group	Individual
Malay	2.22	2.61	2.63	2.88	2.78	1.98
Chinese	2.40	2.60	2.73	2.58	2.40	2.30
Others	2.68	3.00	2.67	3.00	2.00	2.33
Total N=92						

Based on Table 4, further analysis was found with test of homogeneity of visual, tactile, auditory, group, kinesthetic and individual by race. Since the group sizes were unequal, harmonic mean sample size = 7.921 was used. Data indicates that learners' learning style preferences of visual, tactile, group and kinesthetic associate significantly with ethnicity (Sig. value < 0.05). Thus, it can be deduced that learners' learning style preferences are influenced by other factors like education, ethnicity and gender as mentioned by previous researcher (Reid, 1987).

Table 4:

Test of Homogeneity of ESL Learners' Perceptual Learning Style Preferences Based on Ethnicity

	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
visual	6.666	2	89	.002
tactile	30.331	2	89	.000
auditory	1.721	2	89	.185
group	8.928	2	89	.000
kinesthetic	27.386	2	89	.000
individual	1.905	2	89	.155

ESL students' cognitive style preference is displayed in Table 5. The figure shows that from out of 92 respondents, 52.2% of them are analytical learners whereas 47.8% are intuitive learners. Data also reveals that male students prefer to adopt a more analytical style (31.5%) whereas female student predominantly adopt intuitive styles (28.3%). The result has similar agreement with previous studies that male learners are more analytical compared to female learners (Aliakbari & Mahjub, 2010; Armstrong, Allison, & Hayes, 2004). Thus, it is essential for the educators to provide teaching materials that could meet both analytical and intuitive learners. In relation to the teaching materials or methods that are pertinent to perceptual learning styles like visual, tactile, auditory, kinesthetic, group and individual would be of great help to the ESL learners. Thus, educators could employ powerpoint slides, video, audio, excursion, hands-

on activities, group discussion and individual work in teaching and learning process to meet the learners' expectations.

Table 5

Percentage of ESL students' Cognitive Learning Style Preferences

	Intuitive (%)	Analytical (%)	Total (%)
Male	19.5	31.5	51.0
Female	28.3	20.7	49.0

However, CSI scores show less significant value in relation to ethnicity. This can be identified from Table 6, which data was analysed by employing One-Way ANOVA with significant value of less than 0.05. Hence, there was no significance found between cognitive learning style preferences (intuitive and analytical) and races.

Table 6

One Way ANOVA Test Between Cognitive Styles and Ethnicity

		Sum	of	Mean Square	F	Sig.
		Squares	df			
intuitive	Between Groups	1.145	2	.572	2.336	.103
	Within Groups	21.812	89	.245		
	Total	22.957	91			
analytical	Between Groups	1.145	2	.572	2.336	.103
	Within Groups	21.812	89	.245		
	Total	22.957	91			

Table 7 shows some perceptual learning styles have a significant relationship with cognitive learning styles. The use of One-Way ANOVA Test identified the relationship between perceptual and cognitive learning styles (Sig. value <0.05). Data indicate that visual, tactile and kinesthetic learners are related to the intuitive style with significant values are 0.028, 0.013 and

0.016 respectively. Students who favoured auditory learning styles were more analytical (0.039). These findings could be explained with the result of the study conducted by Herman Witkin and his team (1977) who dealt with field dependence and field independence. An individual can be identified as either field dependent or field independent through the use of a picture containing a figure and background. The individual is a field dependent or a global learner if he or she responded based on the background. If the individual responded to the figure, he or she was considered as an analytical learner (Keefe, 1979). The result is supported by other researchers that field dependent learners are intuitive as they prefer conceptual, innovative and theoretical information (Felder & Silverman, 1988; Wooldridge, 1995). They are more dependent on the social context than the analytical learners (Field Independent). Intuitive learners need guidance and prefer material that is clearly structured (visual and tactile) as well as related to their own experiences (kinesthetic) and interests (Sadler-Smith, 1997).

Research Question 2

Table 7

One-Way ANOVA Test Between Cognitive Styles (Analytical and Intuitive) and Perceptual Learning Styles

		Sum	of df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
		Squares				
visual	Between Groups	1.147	1	1.147	4.982	.028
	Within Groups	20.712	90	.230		
	Total	21.859	91			
tactile	Between Groups	1.435	1	1.435	6.377	.013
	Within Groups	20.250	90	.225		
	Total	21.685	91			
auditory	Between Groups	.943	1	.943	4.402	.039
	Within Groups	19.275	90	.214		
	Total	20.217	91			

group	Between Groups	.001	1	.001	.003	.955
	Within Groups	36.303	90	.403		
	Total	36.304	91			
kinesthetic	Between Groups	1.089	1	1.089	6.065	.016
	Within Groups	16.161	90	.180		
	Total	17.250	91			
individual	Between Groups	.791	1	.791	1.795	.184
	Within Groups	39.644	90	.440		
	Total	40.435	91			

Snyder (1999) found that most of the high school students were tactile and kinesthetic learners and the majority of them were global (intuitive) learners. She further reiterated that the students learned best by involving actively in the classroom and perceiving information as a whole picture. Present findings support previous research results that intuitive learners are visual, tactile and kinesthetic. Visual learners learn best through the use of diagram, charts, written instruction or notes, and watching television or video while tactile learners enjoy ‘hands-on’ activities, art projects, writing and learning by doing things (Reid, 1987; Felder & Silverman, 1988). Kinesthetic learners often learn best through experiences and physical activities and thus they love role-play, games and drama (Reid, 1987; Felder & Silverman, 1988).

As for the analytical learners, they process information into its component parts. Analytical learners always have a focused attention, noticing and remembering details (Sadler-Smith, 1997). They prefer doing things ‘step-by-step’ or in proper and systematic ways. This group is also better in critical and logical thinking. Thus, analytical learners are more auditory as they recall details through sequential organisation or certain directions. They are also good at dialogue, discussion and debate that evoke critical thinking (Silverman, 2000). In Silverman’s (2000) study, the researcher dealt with visual-spatial and auditory-sequential learners. She found visual-spatial learners learn from imagination of the whole concept while auditory-sequential learners learn through step-by-step process, think in words and they are good listeners and rapid

processors. She further explained that learners with left hemispheric dominant tend to be verbal, sequential, analytic and time oriented while right hemispheric dominant learners tend to be visual, perceptive, synthesizing and spatial oriented. Hence, the findings from Silverman's research and present study give clear indications that most analytical learners prefer to use auditory as their learning style preference whereas the intuitive learners prefer visual learning styles.

Previous research (Felder & Silverman, 1988; Wooldridge, 1995; Sadler-Smith, 1997) and this study support that left-brained (analytical) learners favoured auditory while right-brained (intuitive) learners preferred visual as their learning style preferences.

Nonetheless, no statistical significant association is found between group and individual learning styles with cognitive learning styles in the present study. On the other hand, Reid (1995) defined that analytic learners prefer to learn alone (individually), set their own goals, and respond to sequential and step-by-step presentation of material whereas intuitive learners learn more effectively through concrete experience, and by interaction with others (group). Intuitive learners enjoy working in groups, prefer open-ended questions, relate what they have learned to their personal life and are adaptable in a flexible learning environment. The analytical learners enjoy working individually, prefer multiple choice questions and are very comfortable in a structured learning environment. However, further research is needed to investigate the relation between group and individual learning style with cognitive styles (intuitive and analytical).

Conclusion and Limitation

This study investigated the relationship between perceptual learning styles (visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic, group and individual) and cognitive styles (intuitive and analysis) or brain dominance in terms of gender and ethnicity among ESL learners. The correlation between these two styles in this study was administered using the PLSPQ and CSI instruments. Data analysis found that both male and female students favoured kinesthetic and auditory as their major preference in learning ESL, in which Malay students preferred kinesthetic whereas Chinese students preferred auditory learning style.

Besides, the results from the CSI self-scored test indicated male students were more analytical compared to female students. In addition, this research successfully identified significant relationships between perceptual and cognitive learning styles. Intuitive learners

preferred kinesthetic, visual and tactile learning styles while analytical learners favoured auditory. The results deduced that it is important for the educators to determine students' learning styles and also to make students realise and be aware of different approaches to learning based on their dominant intelligence either intuitive (right-side brain) or analytical (left-side brain). The researcher agrees with Ehrman and Lavine (1991) that right-hemispheric dominants are highly global, visual, relational and intuitive learners whereas left-hemispheric dominants are highly analytic, verbal, linear and logical learners.

However, using ESL learners with only three races may have limited the results. Thus, further research into learning styles is suggested in terms of larger groups of ethnicity, age and proficiency levels as well as attitudes, motivation and achievement.

Pedagogical Implication

There are many factors that influence students' achievement. Learning style is one of them that need to be considered. Results show that there are differences in learning styles among students from various races and between males and females. They also have different approaches to acquire language based on their hemisphericity (intuitive – analytical). Thus, educators and curriculum designers are advised to take into consideration the importance of learning styles in language learning process.

Since significant correlations between perceptual and cognitive learning styles do exist, a variety of course material should be embedded in the language classroom to meet the needs of students with various learning style preferences. Therefore, it is essential for the teachers or educators to determine students' cognitive style before developing any learning material that are incorporated using perceptual learning styles. Students with different brain dominance have different approaches to perceptual learning styles. For example, intuitive learners favoured visual, kinesthetic and tactile. Hence, the use of video (e.g. process of baking a cake), hands-on activity like word puzzles or excursions to a factory would be beneficial for ESL learners. Analytical learners have major preferences towards auditory learning styles. Thus, learning vocabulary through song, spelling memorisation of a word, and oral presentation are some of the best activities that can be conducted in a language classroom.

Educators or teachers can administer learning preference styles tests to their students to measure their learning preferences before he or she prepares the teaching material. In this way, it

would help the teacher to provide the right and appropriate lesson plan meeting the learners' expectations, which would result in improved academic achievement.

Learning styles are crucial in learning process (Dunn & Dunn, 1979; Pask, 1976). Therefore, both educators and students should be aware of their teaching and learning styles in the language learning process.

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Title

A Cross-cultural Study on Refusal Strategies between Australian Native Speakers and Iranian EFL Learners

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Abstract

First language (L1) pragmatic transfer (negative transfer) is usually considered one of the issues leading to pragmatic failure that may lead to sociolinguistic breakdowns. This study aims to investigate cross-cultural differences in the use of refusal strategies applied to reject invitations and requests by Australian native speakers of English (ANS) and Iranian EFL learners. The data were gathered using a modified version of the open ended discourse completion task (DCT) developed by Beebe, Takahashi, and Uliss-Weltz (1990), and a Persian translation of the same DCT. The subjects participating in this study were 30 Iranian Ph.D. students of TEFL, 30 Iranian native speakers of Persian (PNS), and 30 Australian native speakers of English (ANS), belonging to different educational and socio-economic backgrounds. It was observed that ANS and Iranian EFL learners differed in their use of refusal strategies, both regarding the total number of strategies applied, and the frequency of each strategy. Effects of L1 negative transfer and social status of the interlocutor were also observed in the answers received from the Iranian EFL learners.

Keywords: politeness, speech acts, social distance, social power, Australians/Iranians

Introduction

During the late 1960s and 1970s, the field of linguistics underwent a great change via the works of functional linguists, and the importance of context in the study of language was emphasized. As a result of this change, the focus, which formerly was on the study of language structure,

turned to the study of language as it is used in real situations. Hymes (1971), believed that Chomsky's (1965) notion of competence was too limited and only concentrated on language rules and forms and did not pay any attention to the social and functional rules of language. Hence, he introduced the concept of communicative competence and argued that there are rules of use without which the rules of syntax are meaningless. Since then, the terms of communicative and pragmatic competence paved their way to the field of linguistics and many scholars have worked on these concepts and proposed their models in this regards (e.g., Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale, 1983; Canale & Swain, 1980).

One of the main concerns in L2 learning is the fact that Second language (L2) learners often develop grammatical competence in the absence of concomitant pragmatic competence (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990). One of the problems that foreign or second language learners often encounter is lack of awareness of the socio-cultural aspects of the target language, and in order to compensate for this shortage, they follow the pragmatic norms of their first language, almost subconsciously, when communicating in the target language.

The study of speech acts has received considerable attention with the growing emphasis on communicative and pragmatic competence. It is essential for foreign and second language learners to use language appropriately according to the context in which it is being used. Knowledge of speech acts, as a constituent of pragmatic competence, is highly culture specific and can be negatively affected by L1 norms, so a fair amount of socio-cultural knowledge of contextually appropriate performance is required for the proper performance of these acts of speech.

Refusing, as one of the central concerns in cross-cultural communication, is a place of threat for many miscommunications if not performed in a socio-culturally sensitive, proper manner. People from different cultural backgrounds have their own specific norms for performing this inherently face threatening illocutionary act, just like many other acts of speech. It is well understood that knowledge of language system (linguistic competence) by itself is not sufficient for cross-cultural, proper communication, and learners need to be communicatively and pragmatically competent in order to avoid cultural bumps, which, as Archer (1986) explains, occur when an individual has expectations of one type of behavior and gets something completely different.

Hence, this study tries to investigate if there is any difference between Iranian EFL learners' and ANS' use of refusal strategies and seeks possible effects of social status of the interlocutor in ANS' and Iranian EFL learners' use of refusal strategies and instances of negative transfer in Iranian EFL learners' use of strategies.

Literature review

Speech acts

According to Austin (1962) and later Searle (1968 & 1969), through saying utterances, people do much more than just presenting a propositional meaning; they perform different speech acts, or illocutionary acts, such as request, complaint, apology, refusing, etc. through saying these utterances. According to this theory, what we say has three kinds of meaning:

1. **Propositional meaning:** the literal meaning of what is said.

“It's hot in here.”

2. **Illocutionary meaning:** the social function of what is said.

“It's hot in here” could be:

- an indirect *request* for someone to open the window
- an indirect *refusal* to close the window because someone is cold
- a *complaint* implying that someone should know better than to keep the windows closed
(expressed emphatically)

3. **Perlocutionary meaning:** what speakers bring about or achieve by saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring.

“It's hot in here” could result in someone opening the windows.

Yule (1996) noted that among these three types of meanings, the most distinctive one is the illocutionary force of an utterance: ~~“Indeed, the term speech act is generally interpreted quite narrowly to mean only the illocutionary force of an utterance”~~ (p. 49). So speech acts are the illocutionary meanings of the utterances that embrace the functions of the language.

An illocutionary act attempts to account for the ways by which speakers can mean more than what they say; it is also designed to show coherence in seemingly incoherent conversations, even when the speaker says one thing and means something else.

Searle (1969) classified the functions and conditions of performing speech acts into five major categories: representatives (to use the words to describe the world), directives (to make the world correspond to the words: requesting or asking for permission), commissives (to commit to future actions: offering or promising), expressives (to express the psychological state of mind: thanking, complaining or apologizing), and declaratives (an announcement). They differ in their communicative intentions and are realized by different acts. They also differ in their relative relations between the words and the world and the psychological states expressed by the speaker. Leech (1983) adds another function to Searle's classification which is called the *rogative* category and deals with the requests for information.

Landragin (2005) considered two main manners to apprehend speech acts. As he explained, we can view speech acts as semantic units and identify them using semantic criteria. But as he argued, semantics is not enough in explaining everything about speech acts and attention should also be paid to some pragmatic aspects of language use as Grice's (1975, reprinted in 1999) cooperative principle, or Leech's (1983) politeness principles. So he suggested that speech acts should be viewed as pragmatic units.

Indirect speech acts

Indirect speech acts are utterances that have two meanings: the literal interpretation and what the speaker is actually trying to convey. Think of the sentence; *can you reach the salt*, to illustrate an utterance that literally is a question regarding the hearer's ability, but pragmatically, this sentence is a request for the hearer to get the salt for the speaker. The hearer must understand both meanings in order to respond appropriately to the utterance. Indirect speech acts are used to enable the speaker to be less incisive and more polite and collaborative.

Searle (1975) proposed that there are two types of indirect speech acts and referred to them as conventional and non-conventional indirect speech acts. In conventional indirect speech acts, the speaker uses fixed linguistic expressions, such as *can you . . .* or *do you mind . . .* statements, constructed by questioning or stating one of the necessary conditions, as in (a) below. However, in a non-conventional indirect speech act, the speaker refers to the intended act only

partially. Comprehension of this type of speech act requires knowledge of context and the types of actions that are conventionally likely to take place in that context, as in (b).

(a) Can you tell me the time?

(b) I'm not sure of the time.

Face threatening acts

A point that many scholars agree upon is the fact that some acts of speech are inherently inclined to threaten the face of the addressees or even the speakers themselves. Shigeru (2004) argued that our speech is potential of damaging our interlocutor's face, so he suggested that if such damage occurs, the responsible behavior or the speech act causing the damage can be called a face threatening act. Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed a strategy map for FTAs which is illustrated in Figure 1, and suggested that the assessment of a FTA involves consideration of (1) social distance (the familiarity between interlocutors), (2) relative power (the hearer's social status level in relation to the speaker), and (3) absolute ranking of impositions (the importance or degree of difficulty in the situation) in a particular culture.

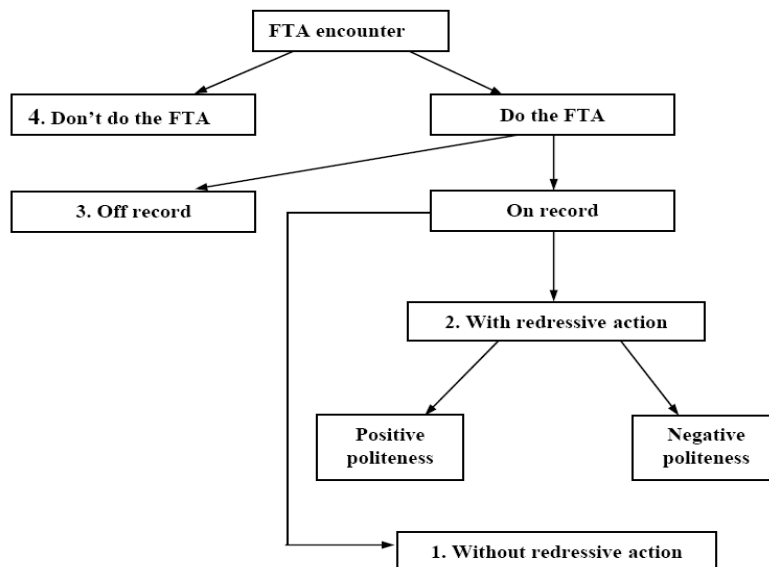


Fig. 1. Brown and Levinson's (1987, p. 69) strategies following a FTA

According to Beebe and Takahashi (1989), FTAs are sources of many cross-cultural miscommunications. They agree with Brown and Levinson's (1987) universal strategies in

performing FTAs, but argue that cross-cultural differences are important in realization of speech acts.

Directness vs. Indirectness

One of the factors that can intensify or soften different communicative acts is the level of directness. People from different cultural background have different norms as long as the level of directness is concerned. Although there are many general factors as age, gender, social status, social distance, etc. which affect the level of directness, people from different cultural backgrounds react differently to these factors and use different strategies in their speech. People belonging to indirect cultures may see direct communications as rude and even aggressive and those belonging to direct cultures think of indirect communications as *beating around the bush* or talking in a vague manner. Hence a second language learner is expected to approach the target language's norms in this view in order to use the language in an unmarked manner and avoid difficulties.

Kaplan (1966, reprinted in 2001) offers five different models that govern compositions made by people from different cultures in his famous article, Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Education, which shows how different cultures behave along the spectrum of directness.

While focusing on paragraph writing in his research, he seeks to find cultural thought patterns concerning the level of directness. He suggested different diagrams of organizational writing patterns in different cultures and languages and related these styles to the people's cultural backgrounds.

Despite the reproval of some critiques who blamed Kaplan's diagrams for being oversimplistic (e.g., Leki, 1997; Mohan & Lo, 1985; Severino, 1993), his model attracted much attention in the field of linguistics and is considered the origin of the notion now known as contrastive rhetoric.

His theory can be considered to be a weak version of the Whorfian hypothesis asserting that people's native language influences their thoughts. Kaplan claimed that each language has rhetorical conventions unique to itself and suggested some diagrams which depict English exposition structure as linear, and oriental exposition structure as circular. Below you can see Kaplan's diagrams for different cultures.

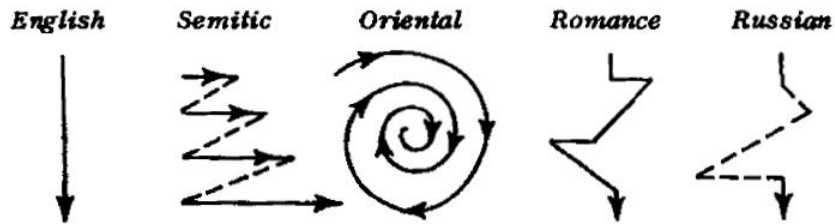


Figure 2: Kaplan's (2001, p. 21) cultural thought patterns

The oriental speakers' circular and indirect way of talking may distract the western direct interlocutors and break down the conversation. On the other hand, if they are not aware of such cultural differences, they may be offended by the direct answers they receive from their English speaking interlocutors.

Kaplan himself in his later works regretted his oversimplification and overstatement of differences between languages, but his model has not ceased to influence the second language learning and teaching environment.

Speech act of refusal

The speech act of refusal is saying *no* to an offer, suggestion, request, invitation, etc. Giving a negative response is always a difficult task to do and has a high potential of threatening the interlocutor's face. Second language learners should be pragmatically competent enough to know how this act of speech should be accomplished in order to minimize potential offence to the hearers' face.

When performing the speech act of refusal, speakers usually use some specific strategies, such as indirectness and polite expressions so that they can avoid such conflicts (Brown & Levinson, 1987). These strategies can be specific to the speaker's cultural background, so being too indirect might cause conflicts in more direct English speaking societies, while refusing someone directly may be a sign of rudeness in indirect Eastern societies as Japan, especially when refusing someone of a higher status level.

Beebe et al. (1990) found great differences between Japanese and Americans in the order, frequency and contents of semantic formulas applied when performing the speech act of refusal. They found that Japanese speakers act differently based on the social status of the interlocutor, but American speakers are more influenced by the degree of familiarity. According

to Beebe et al. "refusals are a major cross-cultural –sticking point” for many non-native speakers, and for that reason they are important for second language educators and others involved in cross-cultural communication. . . . They are also sensitive to other sociolinguistic variables, such as status of the interlocutor.) (p. 56)

Beebe et al. (1990) further proposed a classification of refusals using semantic formulas (Appendix B) which has been used in many studies as the model of refusal strategies.

Method

Participants

Three different groups of participants participated in this study. Australian native speakers (ANS) and Persian native speakers (PNS) belonging to different educational and socio-economic backgrounds, and Ph.D. students of TEFL who represented the EFL learners in this study. Each group was composed of thirty participants, so altogether 90 individuals took part in the present study. Ph.D. students of TEFL were selected as EFL learners in this study so that a fair amount of language proficiency could be confirmed. They had been studying English for over 8 years, mainly under highly controlled formal education. In addition, three American native speakers of English, working in the field of Teaching English, and who are active members of the internet TESL group; an Iranian M.A. holder of Persian Literature; three native speakers of Persian, and three M.A. students of TEFL participated in the pilot study.

Instrument

This study used a Discourse Completion Task (DCT) which was a modified version of the open ended discourse completion task developed by Beebe et al. (1990) (Appendix A), and the Persian translation of the above mentioned DCT. It should be noted that since Beebe et al.'s questionnaire was based on four stimulus types eliciting a refusal (requests, invitations, offers, and suggestions), and the focus of this study was just on requests and invitations, the questionnaire was modified in order to fit the purposes of the present study.

Open ended discourse completion tasks have been widely used in pragmatic research for the ease and accuracy that they offer to the researcher in the process of data collection and statistical analysis, and the way they help researchers acquire the desired data with minimum

irrelevant and spare answers. However, discourse completion tasks are criticized for being too artificial and not simulating real life situations for eliciting the exact response produced in a real situation. Also, due to the fact that this method is a pen and paper based instrument, Sasaki (1998) argues that it resembles a test like method and Golato (2003) supports his view by criticizing DCT for not being able to elicit exactly what people actually say under real circumstances through a written based questionnaire. DCT was used in this research because with the use of these types of questionnaires, a large number of participants can be surveyed in a relatively short period of time, and statistical analysis is more feasible in comparison with other methods of data collections as role plays or interviews. Nelson, Carson, Al Batal, and El Bakary (2002) note that one of the advantages of the DCT is the fact that they can be directly applied to participants coming from different cultural backgrounds and limitations of natural data collection in gathering data from people with different social status and ethnic backgrounds is eliminated. As they explain, in such methods it is possible to use the same situation for all groups under investigation, while in natural data collection it is impossible to replicate situations.

The discourse completion task used in this study consisted of 12 items, designed in a way that only a refusal would fit to be written in the blanks. As Beebe et al. (1990) suggested, the word refusal was not used in the direction of the questionnaire “in order to avoid biasing the respondent’s choice of response” (p. 57), but answers following the blank made it difficult for the respondents to write any socio-linguistically proper answer other than a refusal. The twelve situations were categorized into two stimulus types eliciting a refusal: six requests and six invitations, two of each required a refusal to a higher status person, two to a lower status person, and two to a status equal interlocutor.

Procedure

When the first drafts of the questionnaires were prepared, the English questionnaires were emailed to three American native speakers of English who were all specialists in the field of language teaching and were members of the internet TESL group. They were asked to answer the questionnaires and at the same time check them for possible problems and ambiguities. Needed changes were implemented based on the feedback received from the native speakers. Then, three Iranian M.A. students of TEFL were asked to fill out the revised questionnaires and check them for possible difficulties and obscurities. An M.A. holder of Persian literature read

and checked the Persian translation of the discourse completion task for punctuation and structural problems, and three Iranian native speakers of Persian were asked to answer the questionnaire and comment on possible opacities. After all feedbacks were received, final revisions were implemented and several minor alterations were made so that the questionnaires were prepared for the main phase of the study.

When the questionnaires were collected, the answers to the discourse completion tasks were coded using the sequence of semantic formulas proposed by Beebe et al. (1990) and the results were entered into SPSS software for statistical analyses. To check the reliability of the coding process, the researcher asked two raters to read the questionnaires and code the answers using Beebe's formulas as second raters. A native speaker of Persian coded the Persian questionnaires, and an M.A. student of TEFL coded the English questionnaires. The Kappa test of reliability was then run to check the inter-rater reliability for both groups.

Data analysis

Answers to discourse completion tasks were analyzed based on a sequence of semantic formulas provided by Beebe et al. (1990), which in the present study were coded in a numerical system using numbers from 1 to 20, representing the 20 strategies, 18 of which were proposed by Beebe et al. and the other two were added by the researcher in this study (Appendix B).

The frequency of each strategy and the total number of strategies used were calculated for each group. The orders in which these strategies were uttered were also determined, and differences were revealed. Chi square non-parametric test was run to determine the differences between the three groups regarding the total number of strategies and the use of each strategy. To check the reliability of the coding system and data interpretation, two raters coded each set of questionnaires, the Persian and the English questionnaires, and the Kappa test of inter-rater reliability was run.

Results and discussion

The results showed a high level of agreement between raters in both groups; therefore, the inter-rater reliability was satisfactorily confirmed.

Table 1: Symmetric Measures Persian questionnaires

		Value
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.94

Table 2: Symmetric Measures English questionnaires

		Value
Measure of Agreement	Kappa	.92

The results of the present study demonstrated a significant difference in the use of refusal strategies by ANS and EFL learners, both considering the total number of strategies used and the frequency of each strategy, however, it was observed that despite some trivial differences, they almost followed the same order in rejecting requests and invitations.

The results indicated that ANS in general used more strategies than PNS, while EFL learners used the least.

Table 3: Total number of strategies

	ANS	EFL Learners	PNS
Number of strategies	1123	1032	1057

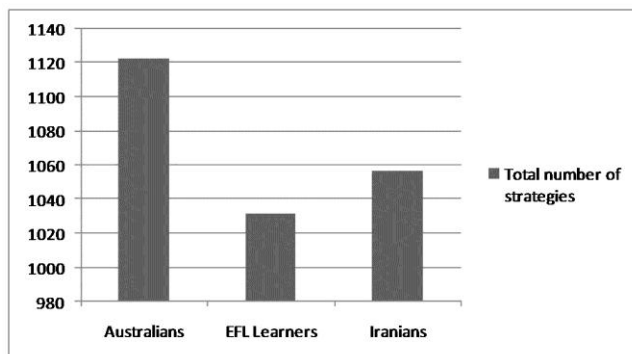


Figure 3: Total number of strategies

As the data reveals, ANS tended to be more convincing by using more strategies when they had to reject a request or an invitation, while PNS did not use as many strategies. EFL learners' use

of fewer strategies can be interpreted both as a negative transfer from their L1, and as a manifestation of their strategic competence (Canale and Swain, 1980), to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or due to insufficient competence.

Among different strategies excuses, reasons, or explanations, expressions of regret, statements of negative willingness/ability, and expressions of gratitude and appreciation received the most number of applications respectively, however, ANS and EFL learners used more expressions of gratitude and appreciation in comparison with statements of negative willingness/ability.

The obtained results also revealed that ANS were more likely to express their gratitude and appreciation in comparison with the other two groups. This difference roots in the fact that ANS tended to reject invitations from interlocutors of any status level by first expressing their gratitude for the invitation, while PNS and EFL learners were apt to use such expressions more with the higher-status interlocutors.

These results are in line with Beebe et al.'s (1990), and Geyang's (2007) conclusions stating that Japanese (as an example of Asian culture) are affected by the social status of the interlocutor or the factor of power, much more than native speakers of English.

Results obtained from the present study indicated that despite small diversities among the groups under investigation, they all followed almost the same rules in regard to the order of strategies applied, when refusing a request or an invitation.

After excuses, reasons, and explanation, negative willingness or ability usually filled the second (14.5% for ANS, 12% for EFL learners, and 17% for EFL learners) and the third spot (21.5% for ANS, 15% for EFL learners, and 17% for EFL learners).

To check if there is any difference between EFL learners' and ANS's use of refusal strategies, a Chi-square test was run with the significance level set at $P < 0.05$, for the number of each strategy used by each group in different situations and the results showed a significant difference between the two groups.

Table 4: Tests of Chi-Square for strategies used by ANS and EFL learners

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	66.370(a)	18	.000
Likelihood Ratio	70.238	18	.000

The results also showed some similarities between strategies used by PNS and EFL learners, where imprints of negative transfer could be observed in EFL learners' pragmatic competency, following the pragmatic norms of their first language in their second language, while using the language in a proper grammatical manner and displaying a good command of grammatical and language competency.

The results indicated that EFL learners like PNS were less likely to utter the word "*No*" (1.6%, and 1.7% respectively). They usually used this word when they were trying to show courtesies by saying *no* with a special ostensible tone, like item twelve, when a clerk was to reject his boss' offer for a ride home, or when they tended to appear decisive and direct in rejecting a lower status person's request, as in item nine, when a university professor rejected his student's request for changing the exam date. ANS used this word in refusing people with different social status levels more readily (2.5%).

ANS were more likely to express their regret for rejecting a request or an invitation (16.7%) in comparison with PNS (15.9%) and EFL learners (14.7%). They also surpassed the other two groups in showing their gratitude and appreciation for the interlocutor's invitation before rejecting it (9.9% versus 7.8% and 7.9%). It is interesting that PNS and EFL learners tended to express gratitude more when the interlocutor was of a higher status level, like item four, when the boss invited a clerk to his party. Besides, it was observed that when the interlocutor was of a lower status level or status equal, they were not much inclined to use such expressions. It can be argued that these instances of pragmatic transfer root in the culture specific effects of such concepts as social power and social distance (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and the differences between the direct English cultures who think of themselves as open and honest versus indirect Asian cultures who think of their style as polite and face saving.

The results also revealed that in using some strategies, EFL learners had approached the norms of the target language and resembled ANS, going away from the norms of their mother tongue. While PNS tended to give more promises of future acceptance (3.3% versus 2% for ANS, and 2.4% for EFL learners) and attempted to dissuade the interlocutors more than the other two groups (8.4% versus 6.8% for ANS, and 7.4% for EFL learners), they used statements of

principle less than ANS and EFL learners did (1.5% versus 3.1% for ANS, and 3.6% for EFL learners).

As the results revealed, while all groups were affected by the concept of social status of the interlocutor, these effects were not identical for different groups. It was observed that Iranians tended to care more about the social status of their interlocutors, while ANS treated people from different status levels quite similarly and valued the importance of equality. EFL learners like PNS were apt to be more polite with higher status interlocutors by using expressions of gratitude, avoiding statements of negative will or ability and the use of the word *no*. They also used expressions of regret more for rejecting higher status requesters, while ANS, who were pioneers in using such expressions (37% versus 30% for EFL learners and 33% for PNS), expressed their regret for not being able to accept the request for rejecting interlocutors of any status level. These results confirm Beeb et al.'s (1990), Geyang's (2007), Honglin's (2007), and Oktoprimasakti's (2006) conclusions claiming that power effects are more eminent in Asian cultures, while English speaking societies' cultures value the concept of equality and treat people from any status level quite similarly.

Conclusion & Pedagogical Implications

The results of this study demonstrate that the speech act of refusal as a FTA is rather tricky and intricate. When performed in a second language with different cultural and pragmatic norms, these acts of speech can be considered the source of many misunderstandings and miscommunications. It was shown that a proper and competent fulfillment of this tricky speech act requires the acquisition of the socio-cultural values of the target culture, as well as the structural and semantic norms of that language. Speech act theory in general has had a great influence on the field of language teaching and has played a significant role in syllabus design and curriculum development, though it can be claimed that it is still being overlooked in course books and that it can offer much more to the system of language teaching and learning.

To Littlewood (1981), the core of foreign language teaching (FLT) is to develop the ability to use a real and appropriate language to communicate and interact with others, and the goal of foreign language learning (FLL) is to extend the range of communicative situations in which the learner can perform with focus on meaning without being hindered by the attention he must pay to linguistic form. Although the competency of using speech acts appropriately is better

enhanced when learning the language in native-speaking contexts and having face-to-face conversations with native speakers, most EFL learners do not have access to such contexts and are confined to classrooms and educational contexts, and most of their knowledge come from the course books and materials used in these classes. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to provide EFL learners with the appropriate use of language in conducting speech acts and pragmatic norms of the language, so that a good and real advancement can be observed in the learners' pragmatic competence. To reach this goal, as Olshtain and Cohen (1983) note, "it is necessary for textbooks and teaching syllabuses to reflect the constantly widening scope of socio-cultural research related to speech acts" (p. 34).

Many studies (Eslami-Rasekh, 2005; Kasper & Rose, 2001; Yazdani-Moghadam, 1997) have proven that classroom instruction on speech acts can help learners to improve their performance on these acts of speech and herewith enhance their interactions with native speakers. An important question to be answered in this area is whether it is needed to teach speech acts overtly, or teachers can rely on the assumption that speech acts are universal and there is no need to teach them in classrooms. Scholars as Olshtain and Cohen (1990) and Ellis (1992) believe that teaching speech acts to foreign students has a marked effect on their performance.

Consideration of speech acts and the importance of pragmatics in language teaching triggered Wilkins (1976) to introduce functional-notional syllabus. A functional-notional syllabus is based on learning to recognize and express the *communicative functions* of language and the concepts and ideas it expresses. In other words, this kind of syllabus is based more on the purposes for which language is used and on the meanings the speaker wants to express than on the forms used to express those meaning.

As Cohen (1996) stated, an important point in teaching a given speech act such as apologizing, requesting, complaining, etc, is "to arrive at a set of realization patterns typically used by native speakers of the target language, any of which would be recognized as the speech act in question, when uttered in the appropriate context" (p. 385). Cohen also noted that lack of even partial mastery of different speech act sets may cause serious breakdowns in normal communication.

It is thus recommended that language teaching materials should benefit more from the concept of speech act sets and employ them more frequently so as to give more awareness to the learners about the nature of strategies used in performing speech acts in the target language.

The results of many studies indicate that teaching speech acts should be an important part of any language syllabus, and cross-cultural studies need to be carried out, the result of which may help curriculum developers and materials writers concentrate their attention on the areas which are apt to problem raising, in order to help language learners develop a good command of pragmatic and communicative competence, along with their knowledge of the language system.

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Appendices

Appendix A: The Discourse Completion Task

Please read the following 12 situations. After each situation, you are asked to write a response in the blank after "you." Respond as you would in actual conversation. Please be natural and write what you would actually say, not what you think would be the best thing to say.

1. You are the owner of a bookstore. One of your best workers asks to speak to you in private.

Worker: As you know, I've been here just a little over a year now, and I know you've been pleased with my work. I really enjoy working here, but to be quite honest, I really need an increase in pay.

You: -----

Worker: Then I guess I'll have to look for another job.

2. You are a junior in college. You attend classes regularly and take good notes. Your classmate often misses a class and asks you for the lecture notes.

Classmate: Oh God! We have an exam tomorrow, but I don't have notes of the last week class.

I am sorry to ask you this, but could you please lend me your notes once again?

You: -----

Classmate: O.K., then I guess I have to ask somebody else.

3. You are the president of a printing company. A salesperson from a printing machine company calls, and invites you to an expensive restaurant.

Salesperson: We've met several times to discuss your purchases of our products. I was wondering if you would like to be my guest for lunch at Lutece Restaurant in order to firm up a contract.

You: -----

Salesperson: Perhaps another time.

4. You are a top executive at a very large accounting firm. One day the boss calls you into his office.

Boss: Next Sunday my wife and I are having a little party. I know it's short notice, but I hope all my top executives will be there with their wives. What do you say?

You: -----

Boss: That's too bad. I was hopeful everyone would be there.

5. You're at a friend's house watching T.V. He/she offers you a snack.

You: Thanks, but no. I've been eating too much lately, and I feel just terrible. My clothes don't even fit me.

Friend: Hey, why don't you try this new diet I've been telling you about?

You: -----

Friend: You should try it anyway.

6. A friend invites you to dinner, but you really can't stand this friend's husband/wife.

Friend: How about coming over for dinner Sunday night? We're having a small dinner party.

You: -----

Friend: O.K., maybe another time.

7. You are at the office in a meeting with your boss. It is getting close to the end of the day, and you want to leave work.

Boss: If you don't mind, I'd like you to spend an extra hour or two tonight so that we can finish up with this work.

You: -----

Boss: That's too bad. I hoped you could stay.

8. You are a university professor, and the semester has just ended. The students tell you that they want to have a goodbye party at a restaurant and invite you to join them. You don't feel good and prefer to go home.

Students: We are having a goodbye party at a restaurant and would be highly grateful if you could come too.

You: -----

Students: That's a pity; we really hoped that we could have your company on this last day.

9. You teach at a university. You have scheduled a test on the first date of next month, and one of your students asks if she could take the test one day earlier. You don't agree with any change in the schedule.

Student: Professor may I take the test one day earlier? We are having a holiday trip, and the tickets are for the same date as the test is.

You: -----

Student: Oh, that's too bad, so I have to change the tickets.

10. You are a hotel receptionist. One of the most important guests of the hotel asks if he can smoke in a non-smoking area. It is strictly prohibited.

Guest: Is there any problem if I smoke a cigarette here?

You: -----

Guest: O.K., no problem.

11. One of your friends asks you to take her to the airport. You have arranged to go to the movies with another friend on that very time.

Friend: I don't know the area well. Can you take me to the airport around 4 pm next Monday?

I would really appreciate it.

You: -----

Friend: Well, I may ask another friend for that; no problem.

12. You are attending a business meeting. Since it is late at night, your boss offers a ride home. You do not want to accept the offer because you know his home is in the opposite direction from yours.

Boss: It is too late for you to take a bus. Let me give you a ride home.

You: -----

Boss: Well, ok, if you're sure.

Appendix B:

Sequence of semantic formulas provided by Beebe et al. (1990)

I. Direct

A. Performative (e.g., “I refuse”) (1)

B. Non-performative statement

1. “No” (2)

2. Negative willingness/ability (“I can’t”, “I won’t”, “I don’t think so”) (3)

II. Indirect

A. Statement of regret (e.g., “I’m sorry . . .”, “I feel terrible . . .”) (4)

B. Wish (e.g., “I wish I could help you . . .”) (5)

C. Excuse, reason, explanation (e.g., “My children will be home that night”, “I have a headache.”) (6)

D. Statement of alternative (7)

1. I can do X instead of Y (e.g., “I’d rather . . .”, “I’d prefer . . .”)

2. Why don’t you do X instead of Y (e.g., “Why don’t you ask someone else?”)

E. Set condition for future or past acceptance (e.g., “If you had asked me earlier, I would have . . .”) (8)

F. Promise of future acceptance (e.g., “I’ll do it next time”, “I promise I’ll . . .” or “Next time I’ll . . .” – using “will” of promise or “promise”)

(9)

G. Statement of principle (e.g., “I never do business with friends.”) (10)

H. Statement of philosophy (e.g., “One can’t be too careful.”) (11)

I. Attempt to dissuade interlocutor (12)

1. Threat or statement of negative consequences to the requester (e.g., “I won’t be any fun tonight” to refuse an invitation)

2. Guilt trip (e.g., waitress to customers who want to sit a while: “I can’t make a living off people who just order coffee.”)

3. Criticize the request/requester, etc. (statement of negative feeling or

opinion); insult/attack (e.g., ~~Who do you think you are?~~, ~~That's a terrible idea!~~)

4. Request for help, empathy, and assistance by dropping or holding the request.

5. Let interlocutor off the hook (e.g., ~~Don't worry about it.~~, ~~That's okay~~, ~~You don't have to~~)

6. Self defense (e.g., ~~I'm trying my best~~, ~~I am doing all I can do~~, ~~I didn't do anything wrong~~)

J. Acceptance that functions as a refusal *(13)*

1. Unspecific or indefinite reply

2. Lack of enthusiasm

K. Avoidance *(14)*

1. Nonverbal

a. Silence

b. Hesitation

c. Do nothing

d. Physical departure

2. Verbal

a. Topic switch

b. Joke

c. Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g., ~~Monday?~~)

d. Postponement (e.g., ~~I'll think about it.~~)

e. Hedging (e.g., ~~Gee, I don't know~~, ~~I'm not sure~~)

Adjuncts to Refusals

1. Statement of positive opinion/feeling or agreement (~~That's a good idea . . .~~, ~~I'd~~

- love to . . .” **(15)**
2. Statement of empathy (e.g., “I realize you are in a difficult situation.”) **(16)**
3. Pause fillers (e.g., “uhh”, “well”, “oh”, “uhm”) **(17)**
3. Gratitude/appreciation **(18)**
- * 4. Justifying the alternative **(19)**
- * 5. Expression of good wishes **(20)**

(Those marked with asterisks are not in the list of Beebe et al. (1990) and have been added for the purposes of the present study.)

Title

International Posture and Cultural Nationalism among Japanese University Students

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Abstract

The concept of international posture recognises the role of learners' attitudes towards English in a global setting, and it has made a welcome contribution to developing our understanding of learners' motivation. In addition to the scientifically tested criteria that contribute towards international posture are the added assumptions that students in possession of a strong international posture will view the world beyond their national borders in a positive light and with no ethnocentric tendencies. Cultural nationalism expressed through Nihonjinron (theories of Japaneseness) and based on international comparisons has enjoyed considerable popularity in Japan for over 40 years. An examination of Nihonjinron indicates that international posture and cultural nationalism are not necessarily incompatible. By using questionnaire data obtained from students at three Japanese universities, this paper explores the relationship between international posture and cultural nationalism among Japanese students. It will be argued that cultural nationalism and international posture are not exclusive, that international posture is not necessarily as global in scope as previously thought and that the scope and focus will likely be culturally specific. Classroom implications and considerations of how international posture is fostered among students are offered based on the findings.

Keywords: International posture, cultural nationalism, ethnocentrism, Japan, Japanese, Yashima, motivation, Nihonjinron, Kokusaika

Introduction.

Increasing globalisation has given rise to a great deal of debate within the realm of TESOL. Contained within this ongoing debate are calls for greater recognition of World Englishes (Matsuda, 2003; Kachru, 1995) and awareness of English as a lingua franca (Crystal, 1997; Kuo, 2006; Jenkins, 2006), as well as more practical concerns focusing on the relevance of methods transported across international boundaries (Holliday, 1994; Liu, 1998), and the relationship between learner's global attitudes and their motivation (Dörnyei, 1990; Lamb, 2004).

Although the suggestion of a link between international factors and motivation is not new (Lambert & Gardner, 1972), the concept of International Posture (IP) put forward by Yashima (2002) places greater emphasis on the global community and has clear pedagogical implications. Though developed exclusively in Japan, it would appear that IP is a concept that is relevant to all learners, particularly those in EFL contexts, and it has been received by many (Ryan, 2009; Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Dörnyei, 2005) as a welcome contribution to the field.

A major discourse in Japan, *Nihonjinron* (theories of Japaneseness), however, may offer a different explanation for the existence of the international posture trait among Japanese learners. *Nihonjinron* creates Japaneseness by contrasting Japan and its people with its 'other', which in most cases is the United States. With language seen as a vital component of culture, much literature discussing *Nihonjinron* suggests that learning a language is a way of learning about the 'other' while developing and reinforcing one's own Japaneseness rather than any desire to be a global citizen or any acknowledgement of English as lingua franca.

International Posture

IP builds upon Gardner and Lambert's (1972) concepts of instrumental and integrative orientations (the goals sought by an individual), and particularly upon the notion of integrativeness, a key contributor to an integrative orientation (Gardner, 2001). These orientations ultimately impact student motivation and, consequently, their willingness to communicate. Yashima (2000) found that intercultural friendship, travel and interest in Anglo/American culture followed an instrumental orientation as variables that correlate highly with motivation.

Learners who displayed instrumental orientation and intercultural friendship tendencies were found to have a greater desire to learn English, and the high correlation between the two indicated that “those who have one tend to have the other” (Yashima, 2000:130). The results highlighted intercultural friendship as a strong predictor of motivation and were suggested by Yashima (2000:130) as being indicative of “the role of English as a lingua franca and the interest Japanese learners have in interacting with people of different cultures using English”. Intercultural friendship, however, differed from Gardner’s intergrativeness as students did not wish to integrate with Anglo-American groups but were simply found to have an interest in learning about them.

The importance of intercultural friendship within English learning in Japan was developed further by Yashima (2002, 2004, 2008, 2009) into the concept of International Posture. International posture is said to capture “the general attitude toward the international community and foreign language learning in Japan” (Yashima, 2002:54) and, more specifically, “a tendency to see oneself as connected to the international community, have concerns for international affairs and possess a readiness to interact with people other than Japanese” (Yashima, 2009:146). Included in this is the “openness or a non-ethnocentric attitude toward different cultures” that is present in Gardner’s notion of intergrativeness (Yashima, 2002:57).

In attempting to operationalize IP Yashima (2002) identified four subcomponents that hypothetically contribute to IP:

- (1) Intergroup approach tendency *e.g. I wouldn’t mind sharing an apartment or room with international students.*
- (2) Interest in international vocation and activities *e.g. I want to work in an international organisation.*
- (3) Interest in foreign affairs *e.g. I often read and watch news about foreign countries.*
- (4) Intercultural friendship orientation in English learning. *e.g. It will allow me to meet and converse with more and varied people.*

Ultimately, “International posture was hypothesized as a general attitude toward the international community that influences English learning and communication among Japanese learners” (Yashima, 2002:62-63).

The notion of IP is consistent with much recent research in the field from academics such as Lamb (2004) and Warden & Lin (2000) who found a lack of identification with native speakers among learners in Asian EFL contexts and would suggest that it is relevant to learners in EFL contexts outside Japan. Related studies also offer support for the findings (Kobayashi, 2001).

Despite a lack of identification with native-speaker communities, IP is seemingly characterised by a positive disposition towards other communities and assumes that those with a well developed IP recognise the value of English in a global community and are culturally open-minded. Nihonjinron, however, would seem to represent the opposite of IP, yet it is possible it may be a contributor to it.

Nihonjinron

It is not possible within this paper to describe Nihonjinron in depth and what follows is a brief overview. Good critical accounts of Nihonjinron can be found elsewhere (Befu, 2001; Van Wolferen, 1989; Dale, 1986).

Nihonjinron (theories of the Japanese or Japaneseness), is a continuing discussion that attempts to define who the Japanese are by highlighting characteristics that all Japanese are seen as possessing, and frequently offering explanations as to why they are in possession of them.

Prominent scholars of Nihonjinron, Befu and Manabe (1991:113) describe Nihonjinron as

—A set of propositions about uniqueness of Japanese derived from traditional culture. It is presented [by proponents] as if a world characterized by this set of propositions, having to do with the Japanese national character, social structures, etc., is literally alive today.”

Despite being described as the discursive manifestation of cultural nationalism (Befu, 2001; Befu & Manabe, 1991), contributions to Nihonjinron are not isolated to Japanese and many foreign writers have contributed to discussions of Japaneseness (Benedict, 1946; De Mente, 1961;

Reischauer, 1977). However, most of the theories about Japaneseness originate from within Japan and so Nihonjinron has been termed a ‘self-orientalizing’ discourse (Iwabuchi, 1994; Mouer & Sugimoto, 1989).

When attempting to orientalize, a source of reference is required. When asked why he examined Japaneseness from a ‘Western’ point of view, prolific contributor to Nihonjinron, Takeo Doi commented “In fact I could not help doing so because Japanese culture did not produce any yardstick to judge itself critically” (1986:128). From Nihonjinron literature we see that this ‘yardstick’, in the majority of cases, is the United States. Though Japan and the United States have strong historical connections and are major trading partners, part of the reason for using the United States may be as Kubota (1998:298) suggests:

“The notion of Japanese uniqueness often lacks legitimacy when Japan is compared to non-Western counterparts such as other Asian cultures”.

Nihonjinron uses nationality, ethnicity and culture almost interchangeably in its attempt to describe the Japanese (Sugimoto, 1999; Buckley, 2002). A belief at the very core of Nihonjinron is that Japanese is an ethnic-national identity and the Japanese represent a unique and homogeneous group culturally and, as often is the case, racially. From this assumption spring a multitude of notions of “the Japanese” that take for granted an unchanging Japaneseness that is in stark contrast to other peoples.

Although many ideas within Nihonjinron such as Japanese using a different hemisphere of their brain (Tsunoda 1985) or that non-Japanese are unable to play certain musical styles the way Japanese can (Shepard, 1991; Mathews, 2004) require a great leap of faith, from an examination of much Nihonjinron literature we can see that certain other ideas are dominant. Despite a vast array of contributions to Nihonjinron, (Benedict, 1946; De Mente, 1961; Lebra, 1976; Ishihara & Morita, 1989; Pritchard, 1995; O’Sullivan, 1996; Nakane, 1970; Tanizaki, 1977) one can identify the major assumptions as being the uniqueness of Japanese culture and society, the inseparability of Japanese culture and language, and the racial and cultural homogeneity of the Japanese people.

It could be argued that every country has its own equivalent of Nihonjinron and that even though such a discourse exists, it does not necessarily mean that anyone listens to it or subscribes to the ideas it transmits. It would, however, appear to be the case that Nihonjinron differs from the cultural nationalism of other states by its sheer vitality, breadth and, particularly, its popularity. Indeed, long term commentator on education in Japan, Roger Goodman (1990:59), suggests that “it would be difficult to exaggerate the extent to which Nihonjinron beliefs are held in Japan”.

Hundreds of texts have been produced in the post-war period with many authors (Nakane, 1970; Shimahara & Morita, 1989; Benedict, 1946; Reischauer, 1977) selling millions of copies. Such is the demand that bookshops in Japan have sections devoted to Nihonjinron works and the rate at which they are consumed has led to them being called a “popular commodity” (Iwabuchi, 1994) and the stereotyping of Japanese culture, a “national sport” (Sugimoto, 1999:81).

The discourse is not limited to academics. Celebrated authors such as Tanazaki (1977) and Mishima (Nathan, 1974), business leaders such as former Sony CEO, Akio Morita (Shimahara & Morita, 1989), and politicians such as Prime Ministers Ohira and Nakasone (Iwabuchi, 1994) all contribute.

From the 1990s to today, however, contributions to Nihonjinron seem less numerous and theories have been put forward for the decline (Sugimoto & Mouer, 1989). However, Nihonjinron yet lingers. Works propagating the assumptions within Nihonjinron have still been produced from the mid-1990s (Befu, 2001). Additionally, Nihonjinron beliefs continue to be distributed implicitly through TV shows such as *Kokogahen dayo Nihonjin* (This is so bizarre, you Japanese) (Iwabuchi, 2004).

Additionally, Nihonjinron would seem to be delivered implicitly via educational establishments. Cave (2007:213), examining primary education in Japan suggests that learning from an early age “involves not only education in subjects such as mathematics or Japanese, but also, and more deeply, education in what it means to be a person”.

In high schools, Yoneyama (1999:22) suggests that “the reproduction of the normative consensus, i.e. internalisation of group values and nationalistic values (Nihonjin to shiteno jikaku), has indeed been the focus of Japanese education”. Ultimately, “Japanese education plays a central role in heightening the level of acceptance of the taken-for-granted ‘reality’ among Japanese” (Yoneyama, 1999:23). This is a view of education in Japan that is shared by many (Goodman, 1990; McVeigh, 2000 & 2002; Kobayashi, 1976; Horio, 1988).

It is clear that English language teaching is not exempted from the influence of Nihonjinron. Aspinall (2003: 104) highlights the dilemma in the learning of English:

“On the one hand, they [Japanese] are subjected to the incessant message that the English language is the pathway to success (both professional and social), and on the other, they are warned that those Japanese people who become too good at English pose a threat to their own and their nation’s fundamental identity”.

Although this dilemma is not isolated to Japan (Canagarajah, 1999; Crystal, 1997), such a view is clearly consistent with Nihonjinron in emphasising the absolute inseparability of identity and language. With education and the media offering implicit reinforcement and propagation of Nihonjinron, it would seem reasonable to assume that some people subscribe, at least tentatively, to one or more of its tenets. Despite the large number of critical analyses of Nihonjinron, only one attempt seems to have been made to assess how widely believed the major assumptions of Nihonjinron are. Manabe, Befu & McConnell’s (1987) sent a questionnaire at random to 2,400 adults living in the city of Nishinomiya. The study found that over 70% of the 944 adults who responded were aware of the characterisations of Nihonjinron. In addition, 40% were found to have read at least one Nihonjinron book, however, most people (82%) were found to be interested in Nihonjinron through newspapers or television (79%) rather than through books (51%).

Despite such a high proportion of people being aware of Nihonjinron, 38% accepted its notion of homogeneity though less than 30% of respondents agreed with its assumptions on understanding Japanese culture, speaking Japanese, Japanese having mutual understanding and integrating into Japanese society. Even though such percentages may seem low, if one generalizes the results of this random sample across a Japanese population of approximately 125

million, the number of people with such beliefs becomes quite staggering. In addition, this number is for people who clearly identify their beliefs with the discourse of Nihonjinron. It may well be the case that people hold such views yet do not connect them with Nihonjinron because they are not aware of the discourse. Indeed, a recent cultural study (D'Andrade, 2008) suggests that Nihonjinron is still very much in the minds of many Japanese.

Research Questions

The main objectives of this study were to test the correlation between IP and motivation and to discover if there is any correlation between IP and subscription to Nihonjinron. Yashima (2002) had attempted something similar in her study when she attempted to operationalize 'ethnocentrism'. The items that contributed to this construct were as follows:

- I prefer to be with people of similar backgrounds than different backgrounds.
- I do not trust people with different customs and values.
- It is difficult to work with people with different customs and values
- I sometimes feel uncomfortable with the behaviour of foreigners.

Though Nihonjinron may be termed ethnocentric as the assumptions within the discourse are preoccupied with the uniqueness of Japanese culture and often portray it as being superior, it does not necessarily follow that proponents of Nihonjinron would be ill at ease among people of foreign cultures. One may believe in the superiority of their own culture and still trust, work with, and be comfortable with people of other cultures. They do not have to be exclusive.

Nihonjinron proponents and IP, as described by Yashima (2002), clearly disagree as to who the frequently mentioned 'foreigner' is. One secondary objective of the study will be, therefore, to see exactly who the 'foreigner' is in the minds of Japanese learners.

Reasons for the Study

In my time teaching English in Japan, I have always been astounded by the cultural curiosity of Japanese learners. Learning about other cultures has proven to be the most interesting subject material for many of my learners and it seems to inspire a great desire to communicate and to study English. Indeed, a survey of native speaker English teachers at universities in Japan found

that the use of culture in classes was considered to be a vitally important element of teaching (Stapleton, 2000).

Should one attempt to gauge this through Yashima's concept of IP then I am sure that many of my learners may score highly. However, the images of Japanese and foreigners that are offered freely in conversation tend to be stereotypical characterisations based on the cultural dichotomies clearly found within *Nihonjinron*. Therefore, if the development of learners' IP is to be encouraged as an attempt to increase motivation and proficiency as suggested by Yashima (2002, 2004, 2008, 2009), and cultural nationalist beliefs are found to be popular and correlate with IP, should teachers then employ and perpetuate these stereotypes and dichotomies in their teaching? This question would seem to have implications for all EFL contexts.

Regardless of the results, however, many scholars would argue that we should actively seek to avoid cultural stereotypes in language teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2008; Kubota, 1998, 1999, 2002; Littlewood, 2000; Kachru, 1995). Kubota for example suggests that using set labels to represent whole groups of people leads to determinism (1999) and cultural dichotomization between Japan and Anglophone cultures (2002). Kumaravadivelu (2008) and Kubota (2001) both agree that the images presented in TESOL be they of Japanese or other Asian learners, or their Western counterparts against whom they are contrasted, are far from accurate and built on perceived images of Asian students and ideal images of Western students.

Despite criticisms of stereotyping in TESOL, Kumaravadivelu (2008:50) points out that:

–Cultural stereotyping is very common. People everywhere practice it knowingly or unknowingly. We are all victims as well as victimizers.”

This suggests that stereotyping to some degree, is an inevitable consequence of talking about groups of people. Though we can try to minimize it, the tendency to generalise will prevail. The reason for their existence, as Kumaravadivelu correctly highlights, is that –stereotypes reduce an unmanageable reality to a manageable level”. If stereotypes can be minimised but are ultimately an inevitable part of the use of culture in the classroom, it requires us to think about which stereotypes we should use. When teaching English should we present a Western culture? Should we present different native speaker cultures typified by multi-culturalism? Or should we present culture in a way that is consistent with the ideas within *Nihonjinron* and that may be more

familiar to Japanese learners? Of course the ways to present culture are not limited to the ones suggested here.

It is clear, however, that the decision of what culture(s) to present in classes will have certain ethical implications. The transferring of certain teaching methodologies created in Western contexts and deemed superior to the native/traditional ones used Asian EFL contexts has been criticised as inappropriate and insensitive to local realities (Holliday, 1994; Pennycook, 1994; Liu, 1998). It is possible these issues of appropriacy and the imposition of ‘Western’ ideas on Asian educational contexts are relevant also to the matter of cultural presentations in the classroom as learners’ culturally inherited worldviews may be challenged, rather than broadened, by classroom content.

Methodology

A questionnaire was given to 190 students taking English modules at three different universities in Japan; Senshu University, Tokyo (40 respondents), Meiji University, Tokyo (30 respondents), Shujitsu University, Okayama (120 respondents). Students were not English majors and classes were compulsory as part of their course. The sample size and distribution was largely determined by issues of availability and access. However, using students at different universities and different locations in Japan contributes to the overall generalizability of the finding in Japan.

The questionnaire contained items from both Yashima’s (2002) questionnaire to establish student motivation, language learning orientation and, international posture, and Befu & Manabe’s (1987) Nihonjinron questionnaire. The items taken from Yashima’s questionnaire were in Japanese and were not altered in anyway before being given to respondents.

The final questionnaire featured seventy items; sixty-two items required students to answer via a Likert scale, and seven items offered a yes-no or multiple option choice. A five-point Likert scale was used in place of the seven-point Likert scale employed by both Yashima (2002) and Befu & Manabe (1987). This choice was made as the distinction between individual points on a seven-point scale from number 1 “totally disagree” and number 7 “totally agree” may not be clear to respondents answering items that attempt to gauge opinions and beliefs in relation to abstract concepts.

The items that contribute to IP and motivation gleaned from Yashima's questionnaire have already been extensively tested and found to be reliable (Yashima 2002). Though no statistical analysis of reliability was conducted by Befu & Manabe, their Nihonjinron items were chosen because, (1) Harumi Befu is a world leading Japanese-American anthropologist who has been writing on Nihonjinron for thirty years, and (2) no other attempt to gauge Nihonjinron has been undertaken.

With no available statistical evidence of reliability for Nihonjinron items, I conducted a limited pilot test of my questionnaire. The pilot version was sent to Japanese students at the University of Leeds. A total of fourteen responses were received, fewer than had been hoped for though enough to offer a rather tentative indication of reliability. The reliability results for Yashima's items that indicate IP and motivation were closely replicated. Both Strong Nihonjinron (the main tenets of Nihonjinron plus the more racial aspects) and Weak Nihonjinron (the core tenets of Nihonjinron only) gave satisfactory reliability results with a Cronbach's α of .754 and .765 respectively.

Results

Data were analyzed through the statistical software package SPSS version 16 and questionnaire items were grouped according to the dependent variable to which they contributed, and again tested for reliability. The items that contribute to international posture, motivation and ethnocentrism are those identified by Yashima (2002). The items that contribute to strong Nihonjinron are those used by Befu & Mannabe (1987) though the items that contribute to weak Nihonjinron are those I identified as the core assumptions based on the literature. This analysis confirmed the reliability of international posture and motivation as found by Yashima (2002) and the pilot version of the questionnaire, with a Cronbach's alpha score of .852 and .880 respectively. The reliability of strong Nihonjinron was confirmed (.824) as was the variable of weak Nihonjinron (.773).

No significant positive or negative correlation was found to exist between Nihonjinron and international posture (Table 1) indicating a lack of any connection between the two. This is the case for both the strong and weak versions of Nihonjinron. However, international posture

correlates strongly with motivation as predicted by Yashima. The concept of ethnocentrism as operationalized by Yashima correlates neither with international posture nor motivation though it correlates to a lesser degree with strong and weak Nihonjinron.

Table 1.

	International Posture	Strong Nihonjinron	Weak Nihonjinron	Motivation	Ethnocentrism
International Posture		-.088	-.057	.732*	-.084
Strong Nihonjinron	-0.88		.912*	.141	.277
Weak Nihonjinron	-.057	.912*		-.076	.299
Motivation	.732*	-.141	-.076		-.026
Ethnocentrism	-.084	.277	.299	-.026	

An examination into correlations between international posture, strong/weak Nihonjinron, motivation and learning orientations was also conducted (Table 2). International posture and motivation correlated with all orientations, many of them significantly. Conversely, both strong and weak Nihonjinron do not correlate with the different orientations. The two orientations that correlate most significantly with international posture are items 34 and 37, both of which are more integrative orientations. This is also the case for motivation.

Table 2.

Item Number and Orientation	International Posture	Strong/weak Nihonjinron	Motivation
27. I study English to help get a job in future.	.488	-.033 / .018	.429
28. Study English to use the internet.	.249	.108 / .112	.285
30. I study English because I need/must take an English proficiency test.	.375	-.064 / -.056	.533
32. I study English to collect information or knowledge in English.	.571	-.058 / -.038	.662*
33. I study English to get a specific job in future.	.519	.016 / .019	.505
34. I study English to make friends with foreigners.	.698*	-.033 / .008	.651*
35. I study English to be thought of more highly.	.322	.049 / .053	.415
36. I study English to understand living styles of people from UK / USA.	.528	-.088 / -.053	.538
37. I study English because I am interested in British and American cultures.	.662*	-.028 / -.022	.698*

As no positive or negative correlation between Nihonjinron and international posture was evident I attempted to see if any correlation existed between individual Nihonjinron items and international posture, motivation or ethnocentrism. From the results (Table 3) it is clear that no such correlation was forthcoming, though again, there were some slight correlations between certain Nihonjinron items and ethnocentrism.

Table 3.

Item Number	Wording	IP	Motivation	Ethnocentrism
A1	Foreigners cannot understand Japanese culture completely.	-.120	-.084	.256
A2	Foreigners cannot completely master the Japanese language.	.022	-.033	.129
A3	Japanese culture cannot be understood completely in foreign languages.	-.048	-.049	.228
A4	Foreigners cannot totally assimilate into Japanese society.	-.077	-.095	.286
A5	Total mutual understanding between Japanese and foreigners is impossible.	-.114	-.168*	.140
A6	Those who share Japanese blood can understand each other.	-.073	-.176*	.144
A7	Those who have the Japanese blood can speak Japanese	-.052	-.104	.158*

A8	Those who have the Japanese blood can understand Japanese culture.	-.072	-.159	.143
A9	Those who have the Japanese blood can be part of Japanese society.	.129	-.171	.132
A10	Learning English is more difficult for Japanese than people of other cultures.	.001	-.036	.031
A11	I will never be able to master English because I and Japanese.	-.112	-.115	.190
A12	Japanese are a homogeneous people.	.171	.095	.114
A13	Japanese culture is the most unique.	-.046	.003	.108

When examining Nihonjinron items, weak Nihonjinron items (A1-A5 & A10-A13) were found to score significantly higher than the others (Table 4).

Table 4.

Item	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9	A10	A11	A12	A13
Mean	2.60	2.19	2.90	2.06	1.54	1.52	1.57	1.65	1.50	2.92	2.59	2.72	2.95

In the final section of the questionnaire, only 6 respondents answered that they were aware of Nihonjinron and answered the questions about what extent they thought Nihonjinron discussion is useful in satisfying certain needs. Though this is too few for them to factor into any interpretation of the results overall, I analysed the results as a matter of curiosity and found that respondents who were aware of Nihonjinron tended to be more supportive of its tenets (Table 5).

Table 5.

–To what extent do you think Nihonjinron discussion is useful in satisfying the following needs?”

Item	Mean	Item	Mean
58. To know oneself.	3.2	63. To satisfy intellectual curiosity.	3.8
59. To keep up with developments in the world.	3.3	64. To think about Japan’s role in the world.	3.2
60. To satisfy self-pride.	3.5	65. To be respected by others.	2.0
61. To know who the Japanese are.	3.5	66. To create a better society.	3.3
62. To have pride as Japanese.	3.7	67. To tell the world who the Japanese are.	3.5

Certain questionnaire items allowed respondents the opportunity to write their answers rather than choosing from a list. This was done to avoid limiting any answers or prejudicing the results. The response rate for these open answer items 14 and 15 (Figure 1-2) and 56 (Figures 3-4) was very good being 94.2%, 96.7%, and 100% respectively. However, the response rate for item 16 dropped to 39.2%. Some respondents offered more than one answer to questions 14, 15 and 16. Each answer was taken and recorded so the final number of answers may exceed the number of respondents. All responses are included in the tables below.

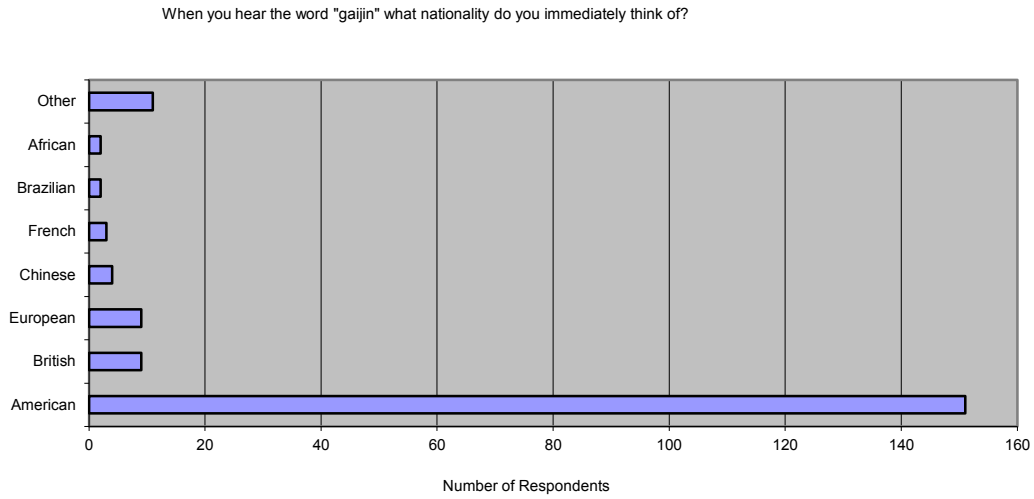


Figure 1

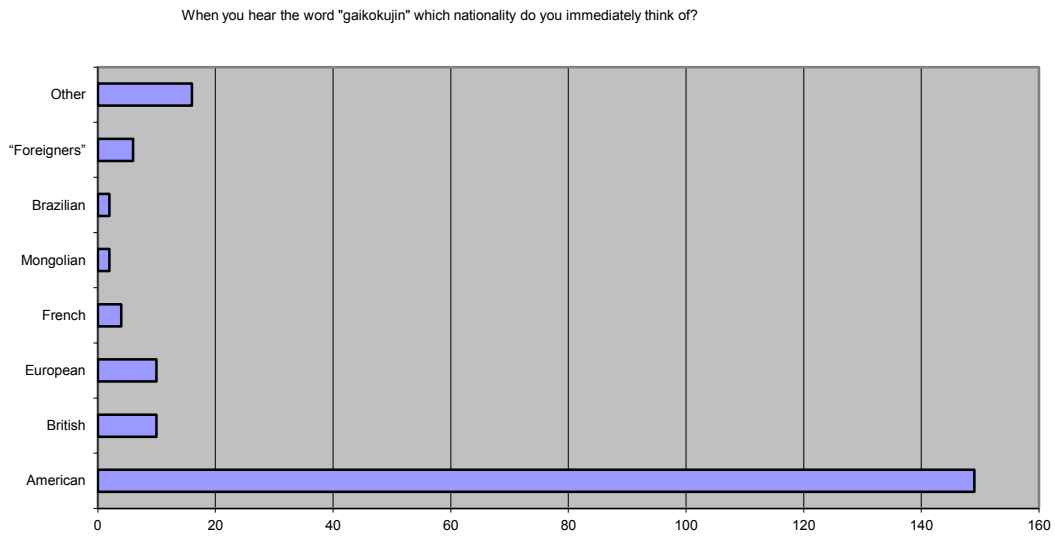


Figure 2

Do you sometimes contrast yourself with other peoples? If yes, which people?

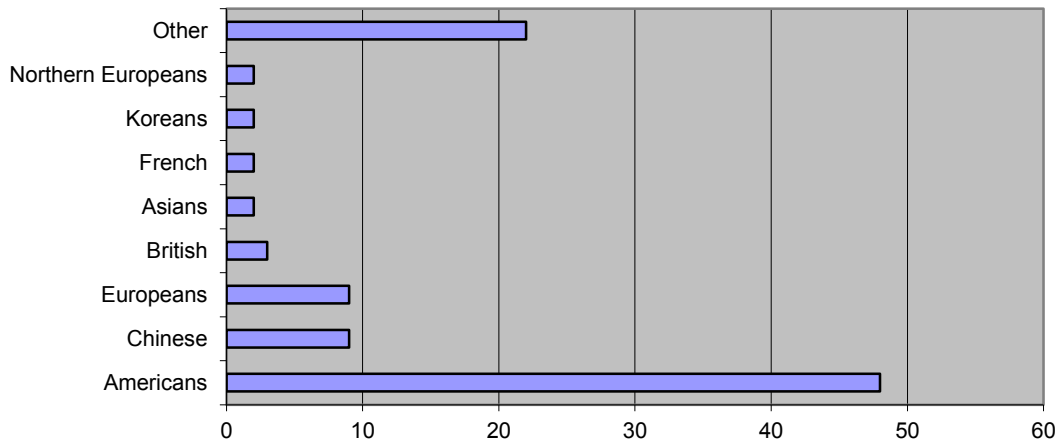


Figure 3

When respondents did provide more than one answer it was most frequently ‘American and European’ or ‘American and British’. Americans are clearly who respondents thought of when they heard the word ‘gaijin’ (‘foreigner’ though often considered to have slightly derogatory undertones), or ‘gaikokujin’ (a more politically correct word for ‘foreigner’ and the one used in media / politics etc) and were the people against whom most Japanese contrasted themselves (Figure 1, 2 ,3). It was also found that most respondents had not travelled outside Japan

Have you ever travelled abroad? How long for?

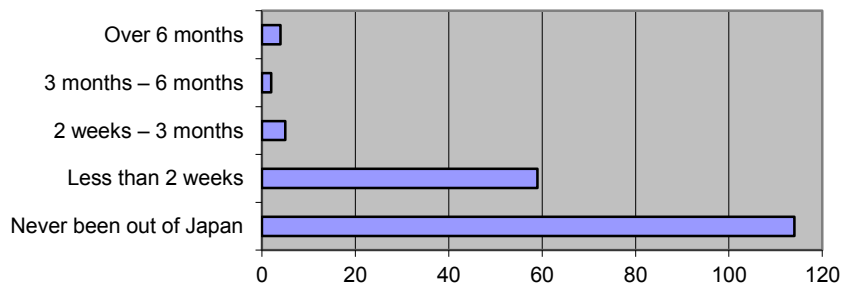


Figure 4

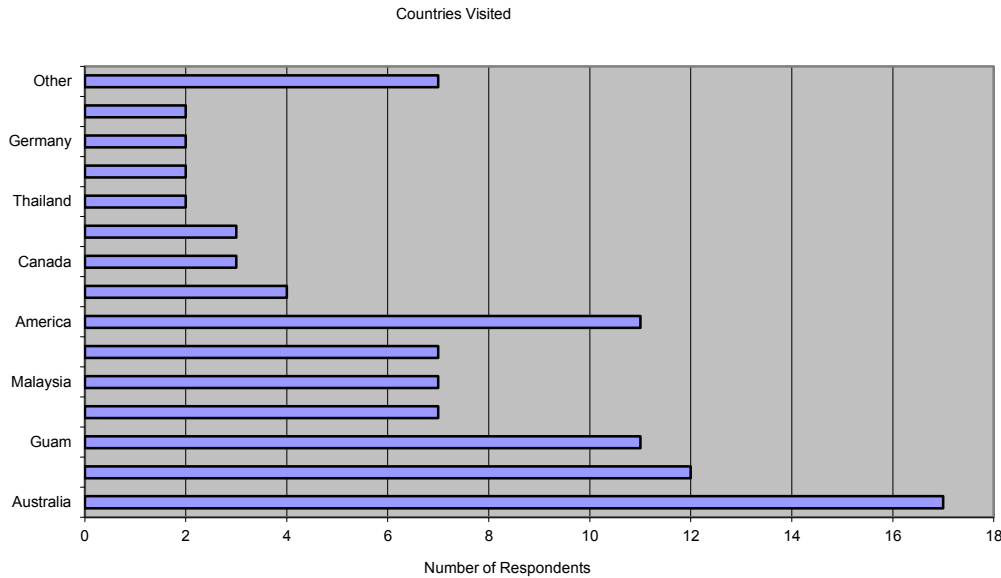


Figure 5

Analysis and Discussion

My first research question asked whether a correlation between a strong or weak version of Nihonjinron, and IP existed. The results show that no correlation exists between Nihonjinron and IP. Additionally, it seems the case that Nihonjinron does not correlate with motivation. The lack of any correlation at even the item level would indicate that subscription to the assumptions within Nihonjinron is not an indicator of IP or a barrier to it. This would seem to be confirmed by the lack of any correlation between Nihonjinron and items capturing motivational orientation (Table 4). Despite no correlation being found between Nihonjinron and IP, some respondents did score highly in both which suggests that learners can possess both and that they are not mutually exclusive.

A lack of correlation did not characterise all relationships. The correlation between IP and motivation suggested by Yashima (2002) was present in my study and found to be significant. Indeed, this figure represents a more significant correlation than was found by Yashima herself (2000, 2002).

The connection was further confirmed by IP correlating significantly with motivational orientation items. As suggested by Yashima (2000, 2002) the orientations that correlated highly with IP and motivation were both instrumental and integrative. However, unlike Yashima (2000) the orientations that correlated greatest with motivation and IP were found to be integrative. The orientation item that correlated highest with IP was “study English to make friends with foreigners”. Though it could be argued that this orientation is both instrumental through the desire to make friends, and integrative through the wish to interact with foreigners, the popularity of the item brings to the fore the question asked at the very beginning of this paper; who are the ‘foreigners’ in the minds of Japanese learners?

According to Yashima (2002:57) IP does not identify a particular nation or culture for identification but rather encapsulates the feeling that “for many learners, English symbolizes the world around Japan, something that connects them to foreign countries and foreigners”. Based on the findings, the world around Japan would appear to be America, and its people have been clearly identified as the ‘foreigners’ by the majority of the young Japanese in this study. Such findings would, therefore, seem to disagree with Yashima’s (2002:57) suggestion that “English seems to represent something vaguer and larger than the American community in the minds of young Japanese learners”. Interacting with foreigners to achieve some identifiable goal is at the heart of IP and so, with Americans identified by 75% of respondents as ‘the foreigner’ it seems that international diversity in the minds of the majority of young Japanese learners is not as broad as Yashima (2002) concluded.

It could be argued that the identification of Americans as ‘foreigner’ exists for a number of reasons such as, historical ties, media focus, or even the frequency of Americans among English teachers. It is also conceivable that the materials used in class, which may focus on Americans, creates such identification and leads one to a ‘chicken and egg’ dilemma. However, one reason suggested by the results that we can discount, is the possibility that ‘the foreigner’ is a native of places learners have visited. Some 62% of respondents had never left Japan and of the 38% that had, only 11% had been to the mainland United States. The disproportionate association of ‘foreigner’ with Americans would therefore seem not to be a consequence of travel experience.

Though in no way proven by the results, it is possible that the focus on Americans is an enduring legacy of Nihonjinron. The assumptions of Nihonjinron were found to differ greatly in popularity though were far from being extinct. Though most learners ‘somewhat disagreed’ with strong Nihonjinron (mean 2.17), when the more racial elements were removed to leave the core beliefs of Nihonjinron, the average score increased to between ‘somewhat disagree’ and being neutral to its assumptions (mean 2.48). The top three scoring Nihonjinron items represent three of the core beliefs found in Nihonjinron; that Japanese culture is the most unique, is largely incomprehensible to foreigners, and that the Japanese language is an inseparable part of it. It is note worthy that when presented with the statements, ‘Japanese culture cannot be understood completely in foreign languages’, ‘Learning English is more difficult for Japanese than people of other cultures’, and, ‘Japanese culture is the most unique’, 36.8%, 35.8% and 32.4% of respondents respectively somewhat agreed or totally agreed.

These findings suggest that support for the key notions in Nihonjinron can still be found. This is particularly important to the language teacher because, if one subscribes to the Nihonjinron beliefs of the inseparable link between Japanese culture and language and the impossibility of people of other cultures and languages mastering Japanese, L2 proficiency maybe seen as something that is unachievable, or if it is achievable, it comes at the price of your native culture. Proponents of Nihonjinron would suggest this is the case though more research into the area, particularly through interviews, is needed. With the results of this study suggesting that a third of learners fall into this category, further research would seem vital.

However, when compared to the results obtained by Befu & Manabe’s (1987) survey we can see that awareness of Nihonjinron has declined. Though only six respondents were aware of the discourse of Nihonjinron, compared to 70% in Befu & Manabe’s (1987) survey, most saw some small amount of value to it (Table 7) with “to satisfy intellectual curiosity” and “to have pride as Japanese” being reasons that respondents felt most useful.

The decline of Nihonjinron seems to be confirmed by the literature though most scholars agree that it is far from being a thing of the past (Befu, 2001, Kubota, 2002), something supported by the results of this study. Nihonjinron may not be as explicit as it once was, and Japanese may not embrace it as they did in previous decades but it is clearly still there. The perseverance of Nihonjinron, albeit in a much weaker and more implicit form, is perhaps

unsurprising considering the popularity it once had and the influence of its proponents. Beliefs at the core of one's own identity die hard and certainly do not change overnight.

Kobayashi (2001:71) suggests that “Japanese university bound high school students’ attitudes toward their current and future English learning are embedded in the Japanese social and educational context for English learning”. With Nihonjinron permeating these social and educational contexts (Goodman, 2007, Benu, 2001) it is perhaps surprising that subscription to Nihonjinron assumptions has declined at all. In answer to the question of the relevance of Nihonjinron therefore, it seems clear that while learners are moving toward “somewhat disagreeing” with its assumptions it still is seen as valuable by some and is far from being “totally disagreed” with as one (a “Westerner” in this case) may assume would be the case with young, educated learners in a leading modern nation.

Implications

Before discussing the implications of the study, it is necessary to highlight the fact that implications drawn from the results are ultimately my own interpretations of the data based on my own experience and the literature in the field.

One implication, though not a new one, would seem to be the need to develop an international posture among learners as this related to the motivation to learn English. How this international posture is developed, however, is more problematic. Yashima (2002:63) suggests that “EFL lessons should be designed to enhance students’ interest in different cultures and international affairs and activities”. This suggestion is reasserted in Yashima’s later work (2004, 2008, 2009). Yet, if IP hinges on developing an awareness of how English can serve them in their international interactions, the EFL lessons surely must be designed to build upon the notion of the foreigner with whom they see themselves interacting with, and the international setting in which they would do so. The results of this study have shown that Americans are seen as the foreigner and the people against whom the largest proportion of Japanese students compare themselves (Table 8). If international interest is to be promoted in class then it would seem reasonable to suggest that Americans and the United States have a central focus within it, particularly in the early stages of doing so.

Such a suggestion might sit well with the those writing on the subject of world Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) who would likely support Yashima's multi-national/cultural international view (Kachru, 1995; Widdowson, 1994, Jenkins, 2006). Indeed, this seems to be an increasingly popular view within TESOL and one underlined by the belief that TESOL professionals should "serve the goals of liberation more than those of domination" (Edge, 2006:xiv).

A similar issue is also present in Japan with writers challenging the view that 'foreign language' learning in Japan equals learning English (McVeigh, 2004b), with North American or British varieties being favoured (Kubota, 2002). Yet if 'foreign' equals 'America' in the minds of most Japanese learners and we promote a multi-national/cultural world view in class, would we not be as guilty of 're-education' as much as the moral educators of the 1950s who are criticised by Kubota (2002) for focusing on the United States as a means of cultivating and reinforcing Japaneseness through cultural comparisons? Do attempts of liberation actually result in domination?

A Nihonjinron inspired world view may not sit well with an idealised 'Western' international view where no nation is placed higher than others and cultural pluralism is taken for granted, but is this sufficient enough cause to discard something that would seem to impact on the identity of Japanese, particularly the significant number that subscribes to some of the ideas of Nihonjinron? An attempt to 'enlighten' learners to a multi-national world view that focuses equally on other cultures and/or forms of English would seem contradictory as by the very means of promoting this view it ignores the value of the learners own international view and ultimately belittles it.

Such an issue is not without precedent as a similar debate exists over the importation and assumed superiority of certain pedagogies (Holliday, 1994; Liu, 1998). Would an attempt to alter learners' world view be much different? Indeed, Brumfit (2006:42) offers a caution:

It is easy to slip into the imperial, or at least arrogant, mode when arguing that English using radicals, know better than English learners what is good for them and their countries".

Despite such ethical considerations, it is also suggested that a forced shift to recognising the value other varieties of English is pedagogically unsound. Kuo (2006:220) recommends focusing on a native speaker model as it “serves as a complete and convenient starting point” and ultimately, “learners should be able to decide which English to learn”.

Canagarajah (2006) offers a compromise suggesting that global awareness be developed among learners while also reinforcing, preserving and adhering to the value and conventions of national culture. Therefore, if, as the results suggest, international posture among Japanese students is actually more a case of ‘American-posture’ then surely establishing the value and uses of English for students in an international environment dominated by America/Americans would seem prudent.

I do not suggest that one should exclusively use the United States however. The results suggest that IP be promoted and that America/Americans, as the most familiar nation/people offer a familiar international setting from which to do so, the base upon which to develop students’ IP. Adopting methods to increase IP such as the Model United Nations recommended by Yashima (2008) may work well with students at the schools with a dedicated Global Studies department staffed by foreign teachers (as used in her study), but such schools are the exception and not the rule.

Although developing cultural/international awareness is a part of English teaching today, the point of departure should be dictated by the culture and beliefs of the learners. This is something that may be relevant also to other EFL contexts as different countries/contexts will likely have widely held notions of who the ‘foreigner’ is and, therefore, require a different point of departure from which to develop IP.

As a teacher, I do not wish to impose world views upon learners that are not of their own creation and that may even contradict ideas relating to their own identity. Of course, however, contributors to discussions of ELF and World Englishes may suggest that such a day may never come as a focus on one particular nation/people will contribute to its perpetuation. I would answer that a multi-national international perspective can and should be used in the classroom but that this should focus on the nation/people identified by learners as the foreigner that is central to IP. As teachers we should promote the value and use of English in a multi-national

context, as required in IP, but to do so in a way that is consistent with and sensitive to the international view familiar to learners.

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Title

Using Role-play to Enhance EFL Learners' Long-term Retention and
Recall of Idiomatic Expressions

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Abstract

The present study investigated the effect of role-play on improving intermediate Iranian EFL learners' retention and recall of idiomatic expressions. Idiomatic expressions are important in language competence especially when there is a desire for EFL learners to be more native-like in the use of the language. Learning methods are always a concern in learning, since effectiveness of the methodology will lead to a more efficient acquisition of the language. In this experimental study, 80 students formed the sample in order to test the effectiveness of a communicative strategy that was taught over a month. The variable of gender was also taken into account in the learning. The methodology followed a principled approach of meaningful learning which is appealing to learners' interest which can lead them towards better long-term retention. This can give an added advantage over mere rote learning which focuses mainly on memorization. The experiment involved role-playing according to a given social context in which 80 common idioms were used. The approach was contrasted with the control group where idioms were taught through definitions and memorization. The results were indicative of the fact that greater exposure to role-play promotes the Iranian EFL learners' retention and recall of idiomatic expressions and thus encouraged better learning and use. Role-play has distinct advantages in promoting naturalness and creativity leading to learning with fun. This translates to better retention and recall of idiomatic expressions.

Key words: Idiomatic expressions, recall, retention, role-play

Introduction

In everyday conversations, speakers rely heavily on preformatted utterances which are determined by the language culture. For example, they may talk about the new business they are looking forward to, but such utterances may not be considered as speakers' new constructions. Instead, according to Sprenger, Levelt and Kempen (2006), the speakers may be using sets of fixed expressions that belong to the usual repertoire of the native speaker of a language and they are used with only minimal variation in their forms that are accompanied by meanings which are standardized. These multi-word fixed expressions have long played an important role in building communication among speakers of languages. In other words, the use of such expressions is so extensive that comprehension of these multi-word units is without doubt essential to successful communication. The expressions are types of phrasal units formulated across a variety of ranges such as phrasal verbs, restricted collocations, idiomatic expressions, and proverbs. Idiomatic expressions or idioms are particularly interesting variant of fixed expressions because their meaning is partly or completely non-compositional (Sprenger, Levelt, & Kempen, 2006. p.44). It could be said that these compositional units are culturally defined to convey idiosyncratic meaning. Research in the area of idiomatic expressions has always been confronted with this initial question that addresses the constituting elements of an idiom. Idioms are not always well-defined since their definition varies from one study to another or from one researcher to another researcher. Therefore, it is considered essential to arrive at a general consensus regarding the definition of idioms.

There is a well-established belief among scholars that understanding the meaning of idioms cannot be accomplished by translating their individual parts. Most of these scholars define an idiom as a set of words whose meaning is not a function of the meaning of its parts and the way these are syntactically combined (Ashby, 2006; Carter, 1998; Cooper, 1999; Irujo, 1986; Linder, 1992; Nippold & Martin, 1989). Grant and Bauer (2004) asserted that idiomatic expressions include a large range of multi-word units. They defined a multi-word unit as a fixed and recurrent pattern of lexical material sanctioned by usage (p. 38). In fact, what distinguishes idioms from other types of multi-word units is the degree to which their meaning cannot be retrieved from the meaning of individual words which make them up. This can be considered as a defining characteristic of idioms. Carter (1998, p. 231) also considered idioms as restricted

collocations which cannot be normally understood from the literal meaning of the words which make them up. For instance, someone who *kicked the bucket* is a person who died. Clearly, its idiomatic meaning cannot be derived from the literal meanings of the words *kick and bucket* (Wright, 1999). Simpson and Mendis (2003) believed that idiomatic expressions make the language look and sound more entertaining, engaging, casual, charming, colorful and memorable. They also defined an idiom as a group of words that occur in a more or less fixed phrase whose overall meaning cannot be predicted by analyzing the meaning of its constituent parts (p.423).

In recent decades, several researchers became increasingly interested in the central role of lexis, especially in the form of idiomatic expressions and their acquisition in language learning. They all have pointed out the significance of idioms in the process of second language acquisition (e.g. Cooper, 1999; Irujo, 1986; Wu, 2008). It is possible to claim that, there is a significant relationship between improving the understanding of foreign language learning and the understanding of how one learns the lexicon of that language. Meanwhile, idioms are considered important because they are frequently used in spoken language. In other words, it is impossible to use language without coming across idiomatic expressions. Besides, it is fun to learn and use idioms as they have special meanings and are indicative of language performance of some prestige. One will also sound more natural if his/her English contains more idioms, since using idioms appropriately can generate confidence and respect in learners as it shows approximation to native-likeness in language use with some link to their cultural expression.

Language learners may learn grammar and through time, acquire adequate vocabulary, but often without sufficient knowledge of idioms, his/her speech can still remain awkward and simplistic. Ellis (1996) addressed the issue of communication, stating that appropriate use and adequate knowledge of idioms are main indicators of language learners' communicative and cultural competence. Meanwhile, teachers of English have long realized that idiomatic expressions add grace and exactness to the language valued as a cultural expression. They all agreed that such expressions are a rich indication of English or American culture that could be acquired by ESL or EFL learners especially when the expressions are frequently used in the Western daily life (Cooper, 1999). Besides, if the language one is learning is more colorful and interesting, there is more chance that one will remember it (Wright, 1999). This vividness and

attractiveness played a key role in encouraging L2 learners especially intermediate and advanced students to learn more idioms. Therefore, it is apparent that learning and teaching such ubiquitous expressions have a significant place in developing a higher proficiency level among language learners and should continue to draw much more attention.

Learning Idiomatic expressions

According to Cooper (1998), idioms coupled with metaphors, similes, and proverbs are grouped under the category of figurative or non-literal language. Out of the four types of figurative language, idiomatic expressions are considered the most prevalent as they are frequently used in spoken and written discourse and their mastery is needed for naturalness and native-likeness of the language. Previous research in the domain of idiomatic expressions has indicated that despite their pervasiveness, learning such multi-word expressions is never an easy task for language learners, especially for EFL learners (Buchwald, 2000; Cooper, 1999). One possible reason might be that the EFL teachers' tend to ignore idioms as they are considered difficult to learn. Some teachers prefer to concentrate more on the basics of a language. Perhaps, that is the main reason why the teaching of figurative language in general and idiomatic expressions in particular has not received much attention in EFL contexts. Ellis (1985) argued that in such contexts, the main emphasis is still on the acquisition of traditional grammatical system, and this emphasis of the acquisition of grammar would distract the learners from other features of language competence such as the ability to understand idiomatic expressions of the target language.

One of the most important issues regarding the acquisition of idiomatic expressions is the need for long-term retention and recall. Retention has long been considered as one of the most important aspects of language learning. Retention is simply defined as the ability of the learners to recall or remember things after an interval of time (Richards, Platt, Platt, & Candlin, 1992, p. 457). Here the notions of short-term and long-term retentions must be distinguished; in a way that, short-term retention refers to the ability of students to recall the information right after a session of instruction. Long-term retention, on the other hand, is usually evaluated and evident after a longer intervention. In this connection, retention and therefore remembering the meaning of English idioms has always been a major concern among language learners when

communicating in English with others. The problem could be traced to the very beginning of learning idioms. When learning them is a difficult process if teachers are not acquainted with effective strategies, it will lead to poor retention whether long term or short term. EFL learners, for example, in Iran, may have studied English through different textbooks which include many idioms or they may have practiced learning idioms through different techniques. However, when it comes to practical use, orally or graphically, it has been observed that a majority of them failed to recall the figurative meaning of idioms. Irujo (1986) believed that this difficulty may result partly from first language interference and partly from their unfamiliarity with such multi-word combinations. One fundamental reason is that it is not always possible for learners as listeners or readers to recognize that an idiom exists in a text or speech. Accordingly, they may either assume a literal meaning or substitute one word for another and provide a translation while, without having access to a good dictionary accompanied by examples and pictures, an idiom cannot often be translatable (Bowring, Carter, Goddard, Reah & Sanger, 2013).

With the advent of the communicative approach, an unlimited range of techniques, exercise types and activities were also introduced. Through this, it enables learners to attain communicative goals and to engage them in communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). However, among the various techniques suggested in the framework of Communicative Approach, *role-playing* seems to be the most common and entertaining. The significance of using role-play in the process of language learning has been emphasized by many researchers. Nunan (2003) accentuated that role-play provides students with the motivation they need for learning to occur. Tompkins (1998) also asserted that role-play helps language learners to promote thinking and creativity while speaking in a safe environment like a classroom. This would help to prepare them to speak in a real environment. Meanwhile, language teachers use many different techniques and strategies in order to help the students overcome the problem of recalling idioms. In this regard, role-play is believed to be one of most effective and efficient ways of assisting language learners in their long-term learning of idiomatic expressions. In other words, a wider range of English idioms can be acquired and retained in long-term memory as a result of having a greater amount of exposure to role-play. This can be accomplished by having students role-play situations in which idioms are presented meaningfully in the class environment. It is generally believed that students will learn best through this active interaction and participation. Thus, they will have the personal experience to learn and reflect. It would also

help them to learn with feelings of both security and confidence (Hayati, 2006), and share and enjoy learning English idioms with each other. Thus role-play immersion leads to better retention and recall because learners enjoy what they are learning, and they would then have a better chance to remember what is learnt.

Related studies

Most of the studies on idioms deal with the frequency of use or how to improve the comprehension of these expressions (Biber, Conrad & Reppen, 1994; Grant, 2007; Liu, 2003; Moon, 1998; Simpson & Mendis, 2003). However, rarely has anyone touched on the issue of finding an efficient way to enhance the retention and recall of idiomatic expressions. Among the related studies on the comprehension of idioms and their figurative meaning was the study of Wu (2008), which investigated the effect of dialogue writing on idiom comprehension. He found out that dialogues can provide situations for students to practice ordinary conversation with basic speaking skills in context. Dialogues can be viewed as short plays and can be used by students to act out rather than simply indulging in reading aloud. Moreover, the dialogues the students are asked to write function as basic communication at all levels (Wu, 2008). He concluded that dialogues offer students opportunities to act out and practice oral skill before encountering the real world.

Some other studies introduced a number of techniques and practices in enhancing language learners' acquisition and understanding of idioms. Boers and Lindstromberg (2008) emphasized that relying on literal meaning of idioms could be helpful for the students to learn and remember them. In one study, they used this technique to connect the figurative meaning of idioms with those of non-figurative origin. The results of their study indicated some improvement in learners' acquisition and retention of idioms. They concluded that making connection between literal and figurative meanings of idioms could be an effective way to improve the learners' retention of idioms. Lennon (1998) focused on problem-solving tasks and exercises as effective ways to help the learners to find out figurative meaning of idiomatic expressions. It is believed that since idiomatic expressions are ambiguous in nature, they need to be taught using some problem-solving tasks which means that language learners have to make use of their cognitive ability to become familiar with their task settings. Lennon also found out

that comparison in the form of translation from L1 to L2 is very effective in learning idioms because in this way, language learners become familiar with the metaphoric differences between their native language and the target language.

Due to the important role of idiomatic expressions in second language acquisition and the difficulties EFL learners face while recalling them, coming up with a way to promote their retention and recall is pedagogically of high significance. By reviewing the existing literature, it was revealed that research on the effect of role-play on improving the retention and recall of idiomatic expressions is enormously low. This lack is felt even more when gender plays a role. Therefore, such scarcity encouraged the researchers to investigate the question of whether and how the use of role-play through dialogues influences the EFL learners' retention and recall of idioms, and whether there is any difference between male and female learners regarding their retention and recall of idiomatic expressions in the context of role-play. This study guides EFL learners to improve their vocabulary acquisition, more specifically their understanding as well as recalling of idioms. Moreover, it demonstrates the pedagogical value of role-play in EFL classrooms and lead instructors to make their selection of materials for teaching idioms in a more effectively way.

Methodology

Participants

Two hundred intermediate Iranian EFL learners (both males and females) were selected on the basis of non-random sampling. In order to evaluate the homogeneity of the subjects, the researcher administered a sample interchange placement test (Richards, 2005). Afterwards, eighty students whose score fell between one standard deviation above and below the mean were assigned randomly into four groups of twenty subjects, two experimental groups (one male and female) and two control groups (one male and one female). Experimental groups were taught idioms through role-play activity and control groups were provided with the same idioms through the strategy of definition. Their age ranged from 17 to 25 years and their classes met twice a week for four weeks. It should be mentioned that none of the students had been exposed to any previous research on teaching idioms in an empirical way. Students in the two groups

were regarded as having equal language proficiency level and command of English idiom use. It is also worth noting that the participants had already passed six terms of English classes. The study was done at the end of their English language class session for approximately 20 to 25 minutes.

Materials and procedure

During the first phase, students of two experimental groups, Experimental Group Male (EGM) and Experimental Group Female (EGF) were divided into teams. In each session, they were provided with certain scripts including ten dialogues which contained a rich use of English idioms embedded naturally. Altogether, 80 target idioms were selected for this study. The idioms were selected on the basis of their suitability for use in natural situations which required the students' interaction and participation in the groups. Thus, the naturalness encourages them to communicate with one another. Moreover, the researchers consulted with some university lecturers to select the most interactional and frequently used idioms. The participants were then given time to work in their groups and practice the situations in which idioms were presented before they were asked to appear in front of the class to perform them. When necessary, they were asked to seek peer feedback when they came up with any question regarding the meaning of target idioms embedded in situations. It was hoped that the natural tone and rhythm of the language of the situations in which idioms were presented would help to convey the texture of the idioms and the circumstances under which they may be used. Examples of some of the situations were presented below and the idiomatic expressions were underlined; as in the use of the English idiom *work ones out*:

Student A: Imagine you just came back from work and feel really tired.

Student B: Show your reaction towards the above situation by using the idiom.

Another situation involved two classmates who discussed next week's exam on which one of them was really concerned. The other classmate tried to comfort him by saying:

Don't worry my friend, I will *bend over backwards* to help you with that.

Another group used the past form of this idiom by role-playing two co-workers criticizing one another's behavior. One of them said:

I *bent over backwards* for you but you showed no respect and thanks.

On the other hand, the two control groups, Control Group Male (CGM) and Control Group Female (CGF) were provided with the same idioms in each session but instruction was simply in the form of giving definition of the idioms in English. In addition, they were provided with different cultural descriptions and synonyms for the idioms with multiple examples extracted from the dictionary. Sometimes, students were asked to guess the meaning of the idiom and discuss it in pairs or groups before they were provided with the definition and related explanations regarding the idiom in focus. To make sure that the learning of the idioms was completely mastered, at the end of each session, all the participants took a short fill-in-the blank test related to the target idioms. They were given the correct answers right after the exam. The whole procedure was repeated during the instruction period.

To examine the effect of the treatment on retention and recall of idioms, two posttests were developed by the researchers. Each post-test included 20 multiple-choice items, covering 20 idioms out of the entire 80 to test their recall but not their retention. They were also tested on a translation task including 10 sentences to be translated into students' native language using appropriate idioms in order to test their retention. The researchers used two other raters in order to score the translation task objectively. The first posttest was administered to all the participants immediately after the instruction on week 8, in order to test whether the two different types of instructions had been effective in the process of learning idioms. After an interval of two weeks, the four groups took the second posttest in order to ensure whether participants could preserve the learning of the English idioms and also to find out the long-term influences of the treatment on retaining the idioms. This design taps on the ability of the students to retain and recall idiomatic expressions learnt and thus shows the level of acquisition. It is worth noting that participants in the four groups were not aware of the administration of the second posttest in order not to deviate from the purpose of the study. Both first and second posttests were identical in format and content. The scores obtained by the groups were compared with one another to provide evidence of possible differences in each group regarding their recall and retention of idiomatic expressions.

Result

The analysis of variance of participants' post-tests scores in four groups

An analysis of variances (ANOVA) found the scores of the four groups in the first and the second posttest to be different. In the first posttest, no significant difference was found in the scores of the four groups, but in the second posttest which was taken after an interval of two weeks, there was a major difference between the means of the scores of the experimental and control groups. The results of ANOVA test showed that after two weeks, the mean values of the two experimental groups gained in the study were higher than those of control groups. In other words, in the second posttest, experimental groups performed better than control groups.

Details of the four groups' performance on the first and second posttests

All the four groups took the first posttest immediately after the experiment. The test included two parts, one contained multiple-choice items and the other a translation task. Table 1 indicates the result of four groups' performance on the multiple-choice items and Table 2 shows the result of the groups' performance on the translation task.

Table 1. *First posttest scores on multiple-choice items*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df.	MeanSquare	F	Sig.
First Post-Test Scores (multiple-choice items)	Between Groups	95.7	3	.5.2	85.1	0.32
	Within Groups	8335.11	92	859.8		
	Total	83751.9	97			

Table 2. *First posttest scores on translation task*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
First Post-Test Scores (multiple-choice items)	Between Groups	9.900	3	.633	8.025	0.387
	Within Groups	87.5322	92	.5.92		
	Total	.235.2 2	97			

A low value (typically less than 0.05) for the t-test indicated that there was no significant difference between the performance of the experimental groups (EGM & EGF) and control groups (CGM & CGF). In order to test the hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance, a value of 2.000 was needed. When the scores of the experimental and control groups in the first posttest were checked, the significance value of the multiple-choice item performance was 0.23 (as shown in Table 1) and the value for the level of significance of the translation task was 0.38 (as shown in Table 2). Both values obtained were much higher than 0.05 ($\text{sig} > 0.05$), so the differences were found to be not significant. The results of the first posttest, therefore, confirmed that participants in the experimental and control groups performed almost the same at that point of learning. After an interval of two weeks, the four groups took the second posttest which was similar to the first one to see if there were any differences regarding learners' scores as well as their retention and recall of idiomatic expressions. Tables 3 and 4 illustrate the results of the second post test on multiple-choice items and translation task.

Table 3. *Second posttest scores on multiple-choice items*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
First Post-Test Scores (multiple-choice items)	Between Groups	.35727	3	8.5232	15212	.222
	Within Groups	82753.9	92	85.22		
	Total	82753.9	97			

Table 4. *Second posttest scores on translation task*

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df.	Mean Square	F	Sig.
First Post-Test Scores (multiple-choice items)	Between Groups	.35.39	3	89518.	885.22	.222
	Within Groups	88952.2	92	85.42		
	Total	8925.19	97			

As shown in Table 3, there was a significant difference between the scores of the experimental and control groups on the multiple-choice items ($\text{sig} < 0.05$). Table 4 also indicated that both groups performed differently on the translation task since the significance value between the scores was lower than 0.05 ($\text{sig} < 0.05$). With the differences being significant, the researcher administered a Scheffe test to find out where these significant differences lied. Tables 3.5 and 3.6 illustrate the results of a Scheffe test on the scores of the four groups regarding their performance on the multiple-choice items and translation task respectively.

Table 5. Comparison of four groups' second posttest scores on multiple choice items

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) MC3	(J) MC3				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
EGM	EGF	-.1000	.40626	.996	-1.2616	1.0616
	CGM	1.6750	.40626	.001	.5134	2.8366
	CGF	1.0500	.40626	.011	-.1116	2.2116
EGF	EGM	.1000	.40626	.996	-1.0616	1.2616
	CGM	1.7750	.40626	.001	.6134	2.9366
	CGF	1.1500	.40626	.053	-.0116	2.3116
CGM	EGM	-1.6750	.40626	.001	-2.8366	-.5134
	EGF	-1.7750	.40626	.001	-2.9366	-.6134
	CGF	-.6250	.40626	.504	-1.7866	.5366
CGF	EGM	-1.0500	.40626	.011	-2.2116	.1116
	EGF	-1.1500	.40626	.053	-2.3116	.0116
	CGM	.6250	.40626	.504	-.5366	1.7866

- The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 6. Comparison of four groups' second posttest scores on translation task

		Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
(I) TR3	(J) TR3				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
EGM	EGF	.1500	.39245	.986	-.9721	1.2721
	CGM	1.9500	.39245	.000	.8279	3.0721
	CGF	1.3500	.39245	.011	.2279	2.4721
EGF	EGM	-.1500	.39245	.986	-1.2721	.9721
	CGM	1.8000	.39245	.000	.6779	2.9221
	CGF	1.2000	.39245	.031	.0779	2.3221
CGM	EGM	-1.9500	.39245	.000	-3.0721	-.8279
	EGF	-1.8000	.39245	.000	-2.9221	-.6779
	CGF	-.6000	.39245	.509	-1.7221	.5221
CGF	EGM	-1.3500	.39245	.011	-2.4721	-.2279
	EGF	-1.2000	.39245	.031	-2.3221	-.0779
	CGM	.6000	.39245	.509	-.5221	1.7221

- The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

Table 5 revealed that in relation to the multiple choice test performance, it could be concluded that the experimental groups outperformed the control groups in the second posttest which was believed to be a result of exposure to role-play instruction. Table 6 also showed the same result about the translation task; in that, the level of significance between the means of the scores of the experimental and control groups was lower than 0.05. Therefore, the difference seemed to point again to the experimental groups outperforming the control groups in the translation task.

Regarding gender differences, Tables 5 and 6 indicated that there was no considerable difference between male and female participants in the experimental and control groups concerning their scores on the posttests as well as their retention and recall ability. The level of significances between male and female scores in the study were higher than .05 ($\text{sig} > .05$), which meant that the differences between the mean scores were not statistically significant. In other words, both male and female participants in the two experimental and control groups performed almost similarly on the posttests.

Discussion

This study investigated the effect of role-play activity on long-term learning of idioms. To this aim, four groups of participants (two experimental and two control groups) were compared to see whether there were any significant differences regarding their retention and recall of idiomatic expressions. Results of the analysis indicated that in the first posttest which was taken immediately after the instruction, the four groups of participants performed almost the same at that point of learning. But in the second posttest, which was administered after an interval of two weeks, there was a great improvement in retention of idiomatic expressions among the experimental groups who were exposed to role-play during the treatment. In other words, the participants of the experimental groups who enjoyed the experience of learning idioms together through role-play outperformed those in the control groups who were only provided with the definitions or examples of the idioms. The reason for the better performance of the experimental groups could be attributed to their exposure to role-play situations in which the idioms were presented, and this contributed to better retention and recall of them. This is in line with the findings obtained by Hayati (2006) concerning the effect of role-play on the enhancement of idiom comprehension. He stated that the ability to learn and comprehend idiomatic expressions can be highly improved through active participation in role-play activities.

The findings of this study support the claim that role-plays have a meaningful effect on the long-term learning of idiomatic expressions. The role-play activity creates a stimulating environment that enables language learners to intensify their understanding of the situations in which English idioms are introduced. The naturalness of the situations could help the participants remember the idioms better at the time of use. Role-play assisted the learners to develop a sense

of both security and confidence which enabled them to enjoy what they learn. Without feeling secure and confident, the learner is unlikely to engage in critical thinking and creativity in learning. In addition, when he does not enjoy what he is learning, he will not be able to remember what has been taught. One of the efficient ways to create satisfaction and enjoyment in learning is through working with others. Therefore, it is essential to encourage students to participate in interactional activities such as role-play in order to help them acquire the materials in an efficient way. Through interaction, students feel responsible to provide feedback to their peers, and this requires them to listen carefully and analyze the received information in their minds; therefore, interaction generates both learning and communication.

Conclusion

EFL learners can improve their retention and recall of idiomatic expressions to a great extent through having a significant amount of exposure to role-playing the situations in which those idioms are presented. The findings of the present study showed that role-play brought about a significant change in the two experimental groups including one male and one female group regarding their long-term learning as well as comprehension of idiomatic expressions. The time interval that allowed the significant difference to show was two weeks after the first posttest. It appears that a month long period of instruction had born meaningful results.

In sum, this study administered multiple-choice items and translation task in the first and second posttests in order to test participants' retention and recall of idiomatic expressions. In the first posttest which was taken immediately after the initial stage of the experiment, there was no significant difference between the scores of the experimental and control groups, but in the second posttest which was administered after an interval of two weeks, the experimental groups scored better than the control groups. This better performance seemed to be the result of the treatment which was the use of role-play activity. Consequently, the learners in the experimental groups were capable of keeping idioms in their memory during the interval between the tests and were able to remember and recall them better in the second posttest.

The findings of this study provide some positive evidence for teachers' and students' insights. Role-play, as a beneficial technique can be administered in English language centers, at

schools and even at universities. In addition, syllabus designers could also benefit from the findings of this study by relegating role-play activities in their teaching syllabus. Teachers of English who still follow traditional ways of teaching idioms such as through giving definition or memorization are also encouraged to apply more communicative and practical techniques such as role-play in their classrooms. Teachers are suggested to provide learners with dialogues including the most frequent English idioms, and give them time to practice in pairs or groups the situations in which idioms are presented before asking them to appear in front of the class to perform them. It is hoped that the natural tone and rhythm of the language of the situations in which idioms are presented would help to convey the texture of the idioms and the circumstances under which it may be used.

Many EFL students have low self-confidence because they prefer to work individually rather than cooperatively. In this regard, role-play could generate peer learning in classrooms, in which language learners have a chance to take risk-free positions by acting out characters and give and take feedback in hypothetical and predefined situations. Besides, in most EFL contexts, students only memorize the meaning of idiomatic expressions, but when it comes to practical use, both orally and graphically, a majority of them would fail to remember the figurative meaning of the idioms. Therefore, it is advisable that EFL learners, intending to enhance their retention and recall of idiomatic expressions, make natural dialogues and act out the situations in which those idioms are presented in pairs or groups. It can also be considered as a valuable feedback for the teachers to make sure whether the long-term retention of idioms is entirely acquired or not. A more proficient use of idiomatic expressions shows greater EFL sophistication in the shaping of language use. This accords the language user a certain prestige standing valued by the society in which the language operates, often interculturally, to achieve various purposes.

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Title

The Success of Chinese EFL Learners' Lexical Inferencing and the Subsequent Vocabulary Knowledge Acquisition

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Abstract

The present study aims to explore whether Chinese EFL learners at different stages can infer the meaning of an unknown word (or, *unknown words* depending on what this author is exploring) successfully in reading, and retain the vocabulary knowledge inferred. Participants of four stages (tertiary final, tertiary middle, tertiary initial and senior secondary) were asked to read a sample text and infer the meaning of target words through thinking aloud. Additional information of their lexical inferencing was elicited through stimulated recalls. Pre-testing and post-testing were employed to check participants' initial and final knowledge of target vocabulary. The results show that Chinese EFL learners can figure out the meaning of many *unknown words* and retain partial knowledge of these words, but the success rate and the subsequent vocabulary knowledge acquisition varied at different stages of Chinese EFL learning.

Keywords: EFL, lexical inferencing, success, vocabulary acquisition

Introduction

In reading, lexical inferencing is referred to as guessing the meaning of an unknown word (or, *unknown words* depending on what this author is exploring using available linguistic and other clues (Haastrup, 1991). Lexical inferencing is the *primary lexical processing strategy* that L2 learners rely on when encountering unknown words while reading (Fraser, 1999). Studies also reveal high correlations between lexical inferencing success and reading comprehension, vocabulary knowledge acquisition, and reading skill (Herman, Anderson, Pearson, & Nagy, 1987). Lexical inferencing, in most cases, is the initial stage of incidental acquisition of

vocabulary. Investigation in (sounds / reads less awkwardly) lexical inferencing can potentially cast extra light on incidental vocabulary acquisition. The aim of this study is to explore whether Chinese EFL learners at different stages can successfully infer the meaning of an *unknown word* / unknown words and subsequently retain the vocabulary knowledge inferred.

Literature Reviews

Lexical Inferencing and Vocabulary Acquisition

It is widely accepted that vast majority of L1 vocabulary has been acquired incidentally in L1 activities. In the context of second or foreign language, there is much controversy over the role of incidental acquisition in the development of L2 vocabulary knowledge. Researchers have identified a number of factors that might have an impact on the incidental acquisition of L2 vocabulary, such as the exposure frequency of unknown word (again, see previous commentary) (Waring & Takaki, 2003), learners' lexical processing strategies to unknown word (same as before) (Fraser, 1999), and the contextual richness (Huckin & Bloch, 1993), etc.

Since the 1990s a number of studies have been conducted to explore the initial stage of incidental vocabulary acquisition: the process of inferring word meanings from context. A variety of clues (cues or knowledge sources) have been identified in L2 learners' lexical inferencing. According to Wesche & Paribakht (1999), clues can be classified into linguistic knowledge sources and non-linguistic knowledge sources. Linguistic knowledge sources consist of word level knowledge (such as collocation, association, morphology and homonymy), sentence level knowledge (such as sentence meaning, sentence grammar, and punctuation), and discourse level knowledge (such as discourse meaning, formal schemata, and text style & register). Non-linguistic knowledge source refers to world or background knowledge.

Besides clues, various strategies have also been identified in L2 learners' lexical inferencing, such as breaking up the word into its different parts, repetition of the word, self-inquiry, evaluation, monitoring, and analogy (Nassaji, 2004).

Furthermore, the success of lexical inferencing and the subsequent vocabulary knowledge acquisition have been examined (Bengeleil & Paribakht, 2004; Pulido, 2007).

Lexical Inferencing and Proficiency

The role of proficiency in lexical inferencing has been explored in a variety of studies (Bensoussan & Laufer, 1984; Haastrup, 1991, 2008; Schatz & Baldwin, 1986; Wesche & Paribakht, 2010). But findings were not consistent. Some researchers found that there was no significant difference between high and low proficiency learners (Bensoussan & Laufer, 1984; Fraser, 1999; Schatz & Baldwin, 1986). While others found there was a significant difference between high and low proficient learners in clue use, processing type, and success of lexical inferencing (Haastrup, 1991, 2008; Nassaji, 2004; Pulido, 2007; Wesche & Paribakht, 2010). Bengelil & Paribakht (2004) explored the impact of reading proficiency on EFL learners' lexical inferring. Results revealed that participants of advanced level were more successful than intermediate level participants in inferring the meaning of unknown words. There was an absolute rate of learning and retention over time about target words after inferencing, but these gains were not statistically significant either within or across groups.

Besides the overall proficiency, there are also other studies exploring the impact of several specific language proficiency components upon the performance of lexical inferencing. Nassaji (2004) conducted a study to examine the relationship between the depth of ESL learners' vocabulary knowledge and their strategical use in lexical inferencing as well as their success in generating the meaning of *unknown words* from context. The findings revealed that depth of vocabulary knowledge made a significant contribution to inferential success over and above the contribution made by the learner's degree of strategy use. Haastrup (2008) found that Danish participants in different stages of English learning employed different processing type with varied processing adaptability in their lexical inferencing. Pulido (2007) carried out a study to explore the impact of passage sight vocabulary and topic familiarity on lexical inferencing and retention. The results showed a robust impact of passage sight vocabulary and topic familiarity on the success of lexical inferencing and subsequent retention.

Further studies revealed that lexical inferencing was an interaction between procedural knowledge and declarative knowledge (Haastrup, 2008); lacking in either of them may result in the failure of lexical inferencing.

Research questions

Learners at different stages of language learning might perform their lexical inferencing in different ways. In most previous studies that investigated the relationship between proficiency and the success & acquisition in lexical inferencing, participants were in similar stages of English learning, without palpable variations. They were just roughly divided into low and high proficiency group. There is an urgent call for studies with more diversified participants on a wider spectrum of language proficiency and in different stages of English learning. This study aims to explore the lexical inferencing of Chinese EFL learners at four different stages of learning, to explore whether they can successfully figure out the meaning of unknown words and retain them in reading.

The research questions of this study are:

1. How successfully can Chinese EFL learners infer the meaning of an unknown word (or, unknown words) and retain the vocabulary knowledge inferred?
2. What are similarities and differences in the lexical inferencing of Chinese tertiary final, tertiary middle, tertiary beginning, and senior secondary year-2 EFL learners?

Methodology

Data elicitation methods

Think-aloud and stimulated recall were employed to capture the details of Chinese EFL learners' lexical inferencing. The combination of two introspection methods is widely used in the research of related area. Participants were requested to read an article and infer the meaning of target words, at the same time, to verbalize all their thoughts while inferring. This was also supplemented by the retrospection of participants on the process and the outcome of their lexical inferencing.

VKS (vocabulary knowledge scale) (Wesche & Paribkht, 1999) were used to capture participants' initial and delayed post vocabulary knowledge of target words. As shown in Appendix 2, it is a 5-point self-report scale, which allows students to indicate how well they know items of vocabulary. It can capture small gains in vocabulary knowledge.

Participants

Participants in this study consisted of four groups of Chinese EFL learners: tertiary final(TF) participants were at the end of their tertiary education, tertiary middle(TM) were right at the middle of their tertiary education, tertiary beginning(TB) participants had just began their tertiary education, and senior secondary(SS) year-2 participants were at the beginning of their academic year. The time interval of English learning between two successive groups is two years. All tertiary participants majored their study in English language and literature. The details of participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: *Participants of the study*

	Introspection Participants		Age	Major in English	Female/male
Senior Secondary	11	20.0%	16-17	No	8/3
Tertiary Beginning	14	25.5%	18-19	Yes	11/3
Tertiary Middle	15	27.3%	20-21	Yes	12/3
Tertiary Final	15	27.3%	22-24	Yes	11/4
Total	55	100%	16-24		42/13

Text and target words

As shown in Appendix A, an 876-word article with the title *“Olfactory Diagnostic---Smelling Bad”*, selected from the *Science and Technology* section of *The Economist*, was used to elicit participants' lexical inferencing behaviour. There were 12 target words, which accounted for only 1.7% of the running words. All target words were content words and unknown to most of the learners at the same level of tertiary final participants in previous pilot test. All other potentially unknown words to senior secondary participants were covered by a glossary attached to the article.

Procedures

One week before individual think-aloud session, all participants of introspection took part in one-hour think-aloud training program. The training consisted of the introduction of think-aloud and practice on number computation, anagram, and reading comprehension.

During the think aloud sessions, each participant was presented with the article and glossary and requested to read and infer the meaning of underlined target words. Participants were also requested to verbalize what they were thinking while reading and guessing in either English or Chinese language at their will. The researcher who was the author of the article sat behind silently except prompting participants to verbalize what they were thinking.

Immediately after reading and inferring, participants were presented the article again and requested to recall the entire process of the inference of each target word. After that, participants were interviewed about the problems popping up within their guessing. The time of the process for individual participant varied from one and a half to two and a half hours. And all sessions were audio-recorded.

One week after the think-aloud session, participants were requested to report their vocabulary knowledge based on VKS in a surprised test, in which all target words were incorporated.

After completing and submitting their surprise test, participants were requested to report their previous knowledge of target words before the think-aloud session, as well as the treatments to target words after the session. This can be treated as a pre-test.

Data analysis

All verbal report protocols, including think-aloud and stimulated recall, were segmented, and then the sections related to the lexical inferencing of target words were transcribed. A Researcher, listened to the audio sections of each inference twice carefully before transcribing them sentence by sentence with noticeable indication of pauses, fillers and intonation. The transcriptions were also checked against the audio record. The subsequent analysis was based on these written transcripts, notes taken by researchers, and the sheets of text used by participants.

Data were analyzed qualitatively to reveal several aspects of Chinese EFL learners' lexical inferencing, including the success and retention, which is the focus of this article. The proposed meanings of each target word were identified first. In most cases, there was a final conclusive proposal in each inference. Then the proposed meaning was checked against the meaning of the target word and the acceptable meaning in the context. All proposed meanings of lexical inferencing were classified into four categories: *Correct*, *Partially Correct*, *Incorrect but Logical*, and *Wild Guess*. *Wild Guess* was referred to as proposals that were inappropriate and illogical in that context. There were also two other kinds of instances: participant generated multiple proposals without any conclusive meaning, or gave up the task of inferring with no proposal at all. The inferencing results of multiple-proposal inconclusive inferences were classified based on the most favourable proposal, and the inferencing results of give-up inferences were classified into the category of *Wild Guess* for further analysis.

Five percent of protocols were analysed by two researchers to check the reliability of coding. The inter-rater consistency reached 90%.

As shown in Figure1, the knowledge level of target words reported by participants was assessed and recoded into *_1*, *_2*, *_3*, *_4*, *_5* five categories. *-1* stands for *The word is not familiar at all*, *-2* stands for *The word is familiar but its meaning is not known*, *-3* stands for *A correct synonym or translation is given*, *-4* stands for *The words is used with semantic appropriateness*, *-5* stands for *The word is used with semantic appropriateness and grammatical accuracy in a sentence*. The data were also analysed quantitatively, the proportion of each category were computed.

Self-Reported Knowledge Level	Possible Score Category	Meaning of scores
I	1	The word is not familiar at all
II	2	The word is familiar but its meaning is not known
III	3	A correct synonym or translation is given
IV	4	The word is used with semantic appropriateness in a sentence
V	5	The word is used with semantic appropriateness and grammatical accuracy in a sentence

Figure 1: VKS scoring categories and meaning of scores

The result of lexical inferencing and the subsequent vocabulary knowledge acquisition of Chinese EFL learners were also explored across groups. The outcome and the subsequent acquisition of each group were computed and compared. One-way between-subjects analyses of variance (ANOVAs) and post hoc measures were performed to explore the differences of the success of lexical inferencing and the subsequent vocabulary knowledge acquisition among Chinese EFL learners of different stages.

Findings

The Result of Lexical Inferencing

The overall outcome of Chinese EFL learners' lexical inferencing is illustrated in Table 2. Less than one fourth were Correct, more than one third were Partial Correct, and about two fifth were incorrect.

Table 2: Result of inferencing

	Result of Inferencing				Total
	Wild Guess	Incorrect but Logical	Partially Correct	Correct	
Count	35	225	244	155	659
%	5.3%	34.1%	37.0%	23.5%	100.0%

The results of lexical inferencing across groups are shown in Table 3. The *expected count* was computed based on the proportion of each type in overall performance. Compared to the expected count, the SS group had more *Wild Guess* and *Incorrect but Logical*, less *Partially Correct* and *Correct*. For the TB and TM group, the results were quite close to the expected outcome. The TF group achieved more *Correct* and *Partially Correct*, and less *Wild Guess* and *Incorrect but Logical* outcomes than the expected. It seemed that there was a tendency of increase for *Correct* and *Partially Correct*, and a tendency of decrease for *Wild Guess* from senior SS to TB, TM, and the TF group.

Table 3: Result of lexical inferencing across groups

		Result of Inferencing				Total
		Wild Guess	Incorrect but Logical	Partially Correct	Correct	
SS Group	Count	20	46	43	23	132
	Expected Count	7.0	45.1	48.9	31.0	
TB Group	Count	9	62	61	36	168
	Expected Count	8.9	57.4	62.2	39.5	
TM Group	Count	6	64	67	42	179
	Expected Count	9.5	61.1	66.3	42.1	
TF Group	Count	0	53	73	54	180
	Expected Count	9.6	61.5	66.6	42.3	
Overall	Count	35	225	244	155	659
	Expected Count	35.0	225.0	244.0	155.0	

The quantitative data were analyzed with individual participant as analysis unit. Instead of being classified into different categories, each outcome of lexical inferencing was assigned a score. The score schemes were: three points for ‘correct’ proposal, two points for ‘partially correct’ proposal, one point for ‘incorrect but logical’ proposal, and zero points for ‘wild guess’ proposal. There were 12 target words for each participant, and maximum score was $12 \times 3 = 36$ points.

Table 4: Description of lexical inferencing results across groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
SS Group	11	18.00	2.449
TB Group	15	20.67	2.664
TM Group	15	21.73	2.840
TF Group	15	24.07	2.463
Overall	56	21.34	3.304

The mean of lexical inferencing result is illustrated by Table 4. Overall the mean score was 21.40, and 18, 20.86, 22, 24 for the SS, TB, TM and TF group respectively. It seemed that there was increase tendency from SS to TB, TM, and TF groups. (This sentence seems incomplete?)

Data were subjected to one-way analyses of variance (ANOVAs) to explore the significance of the difference of lexical inferencing result across groups. The results of ANOVA tests showed that the differences across groups were statistically significant, $F(3, 52) = 11.809$, $p = .000$. The Tukey HSD post hoc measures showed only the differences between SS and three tertiary groups and between TB and TF group were statistically significant.

Vocabulary Knowledge Development in Lexical Inferencing

Excluding the cases with any special treatment, the results of the vocabulary retention test are presented in Table 5. It showed that in one-fourth of the cases, the result was still at level 1

(target words remained unknown); but majority of them was at level 2; one fourth was at level 3 or above.

A pair samples t-test was conducted to compare the initial vocabulary knowledge and post-delay vocabulary knowledge. There was a significant difference in the initial vocabulary knowledge ($M=1.02$, $SD=.20$) and post-delay vocabulary knowledge ($M=2.03$, $SD=0.815$); $t(571) = -29.772$, $p = 0.000$. The results suggest that there is considerable acquisition of vocabulary knowledge as the result of this lexical inferencing activity.

Table 5: Post-delay vocabulary knowledge with no treatments

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	1	140	21.2	25.0
	2	282	42.7	50.4
	3	125	18.9	22.3
	4	2	.3	.4
	5	11	1.7	2.0
	Total	560	84.8	100.0
Missing		100	15.2	
Total		660	100.0	

Table 6: Details of vocabulary knowledge development

			Current Vocabulary Knowledge Level					Total
			1	2	3	4	5	
Previous Knowledge level	1	Count	140	282	120	1	11	554
		%	25%	50.4%	21.4%	.2%	2.0%	98.9%
	2	Count			2			2
		%			.4%			.4%
	3	Count			3			3
		%			.5%			.5%
	4	Count				1		1
		%				.2%		.2%
	Total	Count	140	282	125	2	11	560
		%	25.0%	50.4%	22.3%	.4%	2.0%	100%

The detailed development of vocabulary knowledge in lexical inferencing is illustrated by Table 6. The vast majority (98.9%) of target words were totally unknown words (with previous knowledge at level 1) to all participants before lexical inferencing activity. After the activity, 25% of unknown words with previous knowledge at level 1 were still at level 1 (no vocabulary knowledge was acquired); half (50.4%) turned out at level 2 (some receptive orthographic knowledge was acquired); above one fifth turned out at level 3 (partial semantic knowledge was acquired); the rest were at level 4 or 5 (semantic meaning and appropriate use was acquired).

As to the target words with previous vocabulary knowledge at level 2, 0.4% turned out at level 3. But words with previous knowledge of 3 and 4 remained at their original levels.

Vocabulary Knowledge Acquisition across Groups

Each individual participant was treated as the analysis unit to explore the difference of vocabulary knowledge acquisition across groups. The score of vocabulary knowledge acquisition was computed for each target word. The score equals to the post-delay vocabulary knowledge level subtracted by its equivalent initial level. For any lexical inferencing with extra treatments (such as looking it up in a dictionary, or asking the teacher, etc.), its score was replaced by the average score of that participant. The maximum vocabulary knowledge acquisition score for individual participant is $12 \text{ (target words number)} \times [5 \text{ (highest level of latest vocabulary knowledge)} - 1 \text{ (the lowest level of initial vocabulary knowledge)}] = 48$.

As revealed in Table 7, the overall mean score was 12.46, and 7.25, 11.64, 12.27, 16.20 for the four groups respectively. One-way ANOVA result indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between groups ($F(3, 48) = 8.672, p = .000$). A Tukey post hoc test revealed that statistically significant differences existed between SS and TM ($p = .036$), between SS and TF ($p = .000$), and between TB and TF group ($p = .022$).

Table 7: The description of vocabulary knowledge acquisition across groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
SS Group	8	7.25	4.166	1.473	3.77	10.73	0	12
TB Group	14	11.64	4.069	1.087	9.29	13.99	4	17
TM Group	15	12.27	3.807	.983	10.16	14.38	4	19
TF Group	15	16.20	4.362	1.126	13.78	18.62	9	26
Overall	52	12.46	4.937	.685	11.09	13.84	0	26

This seemed to indicate that Chinese EFL learners at the higher stages of learning tended to acquire more vocabulary knowledge in their lexical inferencing than their counterpart(s) at a lower stage.

Discussions and Implications

Success of lexical inferencing

The results of Chinese EFL learners' lexical inferencing suggest that overall less than one-fourth were correct, one third were partially correct, another one third were incorrect but logical in context, and the rest were wild guesses. The rate of correct and partially correct rose steadily from senior secondary stage to tertiary final stage. The differences were significant between the senior secondary and tertiary beginning, between the tertiary beginning and tertiary final group. These results seem to suggest that the success rate of Chinese EFL learners' lexical inferencing increased steadily but slowly with their English learning.

The findings of this study are partially consistent with previous studies (Bengeleil, 2004; Haastrup, 1991; Bensoussan and Laufer, 1984). Compared with previous studies, the success rate of this study was higher. This could be explained by the research settings, such as the optimal performance of lexical inferencing and the use of glossary.

The findings can provide a possible explanation for the inconsistency of previous studies. The discrepancies might result from the features of the participants and the way participants were divided into a high and low proficiency group. Since success rate increases along with learner' language learning (or proficiency as in some studies; we assume language proficiency rises along with stages of learning.) in a relatively slow manner. Study with more diversified participants with in a wide spectrum of language proficiency may yield the significant difference (Haastrup, 1991). But studies with participants on similar stages of language learning (Bengeleil, 2004) were less likely to witness the significant difference.

After a closed examination on the protocols of Chinese EFL learners' lexical inferences, Yin (2011) posited that most of the failures in lexical inferencing due to learners' inadequate declarative and procedural knowledge. During reading, they spent most of their time on decoding and comprehending the text. Their weak reading skills and limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge consumed most of their working memory, leaving only a limited amount of resources left for lexical inferencing. During the inferencing, due to the lack of declarative morphological knowledge, learners often failed to recognize the internal clues of target words. The lack of procedural knowledge often resulted in their failure to integrate morphological clues into the

proposal based on contextual clues. For contextual clues, only the information closed to the target word (often within the sentence) was activated, while others often remained deactivated. Limited clues often led to a simple procedure of lexical inferencing. Learners frequently drew the conclusion by simply relying on the meaning of the sentence without cross checking other clues.

With the rapid development of declarative and procedural knowledge, the success rate of lexical inferencing increased fast from the senior secondary stage to the tertiary stages. In the tertiary stages, learners' declarative knowledge seemed to be the main contributing factor to the development of Chinese EFL lexical inferencing success.

Subsequent vocabulary acquisition

The findings were consistent with previous studies (Waring & Takaki, 2003). In this study, measurable vocabulary knowledge was acquired and retained, but in most cases only some receptive orthographical knowledge of words was acquired. Compared with Waring & Takaki's (2003) study, this study observed an apparently higher rate of vocabulary knowledge acquisition and retention after the initial encounter. This could possibly result from the impact of the research setting, such as the requested inferencing and the verbal report. According to Hu & Nassaj (2012), there is inverse relationship between the ease of inference and subsequent vocabulary knowledge retention. In fact, these researcher-initiated tasks were very similar to lexical instruction because learners were forced to focus attention on the targeted words; the task demanded learners to guess the meaning of the target words. Consequently, this resulted in a processing load, which was much higher than that in daily reading activities. Such a finding therefore supports the importance of conscious raising in teaching (Schmidt, 1990).

These findings also confirmed the claims that vocabulary knowledge acquisition was an incremental process, demanding multiple exposures in different contexts. Vocabulary acquisition by lexical inferencing in reading was not a rapid or efficient vocabulary learning procedure. But, given the vital importance of reading in learner's academic and daily life, the accumulation of vocabulary knowledge acquired through lexical inferencing in reading over time would be undoubtedly massive and substantial.

The difference of vocabulary knowledge acquisition across groups might partially result from their success disparities of lexical inferencing. The success of lexical inferencing is the precondition for subsequent vocabulary knowledge acquisition. The proposal of irrelevant meaning in lexical inferencing could not bring about the acquisition of relevant meaning.

As mention above, the success of lexical inferencing was affected by learners' declarative and procedural knowledge, especially by the declarative morphological knowledge in tertiary stages when procedural knowledge levelled off. The retention of vocabulary knowledge inevitably was affected by learners' declarative knowledge, especially the morphological knowledge. Morphological information is an internal clue to a word. Knowledge of them would be conducive to the acquisition of the word.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have some pedagogical implications. In the earlier stages of learning, it might be difficult to acquire vocabulary through lexical inferencing in reading. Since learners at this stage lack enough declarative and procedural knowledge, the results of lexical inferencing might not be encouraging. Even if the results of lexical inferencing are successful, the subsequent acquisition and retention of vocabulary knowledge may still be dissatisfying. Therefore, at earlier stages of English learning, explicit instruction and learning should be the primary method to increase learner's vocabulary. It is truly worthwhile to acquire the most frequently used 2,500 words with some time and attention.

The finding that learners at higher stage were more likely to acquire and retain vocabulary knowledge in lexical inferencing provides a promising prospect for vocabulary expansion by lexical inferencing and reading. With the development of vocabulary knowledge, the rising success rate of inferencing, and the increasing rate of acquisition and retention, learners at higher stages should be encouraged to acquire vocabulary by reading. This is particularly true, when new words are not so frequently used and not worth spending extra instruction time on.

Limitations

There are some limitations in this study. The success rate of lexical inferencing and the subsequent vocabulary knowledge acquisition was inevitably influenced by the method of data collection. From the socio-cultural perspective, it was not just an activity of lexical inferencing; it was an activity of lexical inferencing mediated by think-aloud. Learners' performance in lexical inferencing might be accelerated or hindered by think-aloud processing. Further exploration with another method of data collection should be carried out to examine the result of Chinese EFL learners' lexical inferencing.

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Appendix 1

Olfactory diagnostics

Aug 28th 2008

From *The Economist*

Smelling bad

Doctors may soon have a new diagnostic tool in their kit bags

SINCE time immemorial, or at least as far back as Hippocrates, novice physicians have been taught to smell patients' breath for signs of illness. Though unpleasant for the doctor, it is a useful trick. The sweet smell of rotten apples, for instance, indicates diabetes. Liver disease, by contrast, often causes the breath to smell fishy. But the human nose cannot detect all the chemical changes brought about by disease. Science, therefore, seeks to smell what human doctors cannot. The aim is to create a diagnostic nose as discriminating as those of perfume mixers or wine buyers. Such a nose would, however, be sensitive not to life's pleasures, but to its pains.

The idea of creating a diagnostic nose goes back to the 1970s. In that decade Linus Pauling, a Nobel-prize-winning chemist, performed the first serious scientific analysis of human breath. He used a technique called gas chromatography, which enables complex mixtures to be separated into their components, to detect some 250 volatile organic compounds in the air exhaled from

lungs. Gas chromatography by itself, however, does not allow you to identify each component; it is merely a way of separating them. To make the identifications, you need to add a second step, called mass spectrometry. This, as its name suggests, works out the weight of the molecules in each component. Often, weight is enough by itself to identify a molecule. But if two molecules happen to have the same weight, they can be analysed by breaking them up into smaller, daughter molecules. These are almost certain to differ in weight.

Using gas chromatography and mass spectrometry, researchers have, over the years, identified more than 3,000 compounds that are regularly exhaled, excreted or exuded from the body. The search, now, is to understand how changes in the mixture of these compounds may indicate disease, and to find ways of recognising such changes routinely and robustly.

Exhaustive analysis

One of the first practitioners of the field of olfactory diagnosis, Carolyn Willis of Amersham Hospital in Britain, decided to contract the job out to dogs. They, she reckoned, have the necessary nasal apparatus to sniff out illness, and there was already some anecdotal evidence that they could, indeed, smell people with cancer. It worked. For the past four years her sniffer dogs have been diagnosing bladder cancer. She is now training them to detect prostate cancer and skin cancer as well.

But training dogs is probably not the best solution. It takes time and needs special skills, so mass-producing sniffer dogs would be hard. Moreover, a dog can give you only a yes-or-no answer. It cannot describe nuances, even if it detects them. Boguslaw Buszewski of Nicolaus Copernicus University in Torun, Poland, compares this approach to checking for fever by touching a patient's forehead. That tells you he is ill. However, it is only by measuring his temperature with a thermometer that you can discover how serious his condition is. In Dr Buszewski's view the breath-analysis equivalent of the thermometer is the mass spectrometer, and that is where effort should be concentrated.

Other researchers agree. Earlier this month Michelle Gallagher, of the Monell Chemical Senses Centre in Philadelphia, announced the results of a study that uses this approach. She confirmed that the early stages of basal-cell carcinoma, a type of skin cancer, can be detected by analysing the odour of a person's skin using gas chromatography and mass spectrometry. To do so, she sampled the air immediately above the tumours and compared its composition with that of air from the same sites in healthy individuals. She also checked the composition of the air in the room when nobody was present, as an extra control. She found that although air collected from both groups contained the same chemical substances, there was a difference in the amounts of some of them. This finding allowed her to produce what is known as a biomarker profile for the illness. That means it can be diagnosed reliably, and crucially early on.

The combination of gas chromatography and mass spectrometry thus works. It can, nevertheless, take up to two days to run the tests. Dr Buszewski hopes to refine and speed up the process so that it can be carried out within an hour.

To do this, he has developed a device that can be tuned to pick up and concentrate the most relevant molecules. With patents still pending, he is cagey about the details, but the principle is to trap relevant molecules using columns made of metal or silica that are the width of a human hair. Each column is coated with special polymers tweaked so that they bind preferentially to particular compounds found in the breath. Pass a sample through a forest of these columns and the molecules of interest will be sucked out. They can then be flushed into the analytical machinery and a result quickly emerges.

Dr Buszewski is now tweaking his device so that it works with the biomarker profiles of a range of diseases. If he can do this successfully, olfactory diagnosis could become mainstream without a wagging tail in sight.

Appendix2

Vocabulary Knowledge Test

This is a test on your knowledge of vocabulary. Different options indicate different levels of knowledge of the word tested. Some words are target words in previous activity, some are new words. Please check your knowledge of the words by ticking and completing the appropriate items. If you came across any of these words after previous reading activity, please indicate in marginal area how you dealt with it.

这是词汇知识掌握情况的测试，有些词在以前活动中使用过，有些是新词。知识程度由不同的选项代表。请根据自己的知识来完成本测试，不要查词典等工具书。请把所选的行下划线或/并填充。如果参加研究后曾专门学习过其中的词，请在该词附近空白处注明如何学习的。

1. Bladder

- I) I've never seen this word
- II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
- III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
- IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

2. Cagey

- I) I've never seen this word
 II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
 III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
 IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

3. Carcinoma

- I) I've never seen this word
 II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
 III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
 IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

4. Excrete

- I) I've never seen this word
 II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
 III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
 IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

5. Exude

- I) I've never seen this word
 II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
 III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
 IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

6. Fishy

- I) I've never seen this word
 II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
 III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
 IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

7. Immemorial

- I) I've never seen this word
 II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
 III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
 IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

8. Nuance

- I) I've never seen this word
 II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
 III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
 IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

9. Olfactory

- I) I've never seen this word
 II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
 III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
 IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

10. Prostate

- I) I've never seen this word
 II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
 III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
 IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

11. Tweak

- I) I've never seen this word
 II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
 III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
 IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

12. Volatile

- I) I've never seen this word
 II) I've seen this word, but I don't know its meaning
 III) I have seen this word and I think it means _____
 IV) I know this word; it means _____

- V) I can make a sentence with reasonable use of this word (If you do this section, please also do section IV):

Title

The Study of Attitudinal Tendencies of the EFL Learners across Three Different Levels towards E-Learning System: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study investigated the online learners' attitudinal tendencies among different levels of proficiency in Hakim Arya Online Institute. The institute used Longman English Interactive Online Course to teach English online since it was believed that the course materials and delivery could influence the learners' attitude. The course was evaluated through an evaluation questionnaire. To find out about learners' attitudinal tendencies, a researcher-made questionnaire was distributed in two ways, online and on paper. The questionnaires were mailed to 17 experienced teachers from which two teachers were interviewed. The questionnaire was designed to measure attitudes towards materials, teacher and learners' role, system facility, and test administration. Generally, their ideas showed that the course was effective. The data analysis results indicated their positive attitude towards the online course. In addition, it was proven that there was no significant attitudinal difference among the different levels of proficiency. It was also revealed that there was a significant difference between EFL learners' in terms of their attitudes towards materials while disregarding the other factors. Moreover, the study showed that gender plays no significant role in the learners' attitudinal tendencies.

Keywords: Attitude, e-learning, e-learner, online course.

Introduction

The need to learn another language is an opportunity seen by most learners who take part in language classes. Sometimes, factors like time, distance and lack of proper education stop learners to attend language classes. Distance learning, which delivers education to students who are not physically present in a traditional educational setting such as a classroom was already practiced in the 19th century, in order to create and provide access to learning when the source of information and the learners are separated by time and distance, or both (Distance_education, para. 1).

Distance learning which was started by delivering teaching through the postal service, continued teaching through television and radio programs, however, it could not gain much popularity and success until the introduction of technology. The idea of distance education has suddenly come within the reach of individuals and institutions that were previously facing considerable barriers to becoming distance education providers (Visser, 2008, p. 1). Merisotis and Phipps (1999, p. 17), mentioned that distance learning was once a poor and often unwelcome stepchild within the academic community and the emergence of the internet, made distance education increasingly more visible .

Blending internet and computer technology into distance learning has become so popular that the e-learning or virtual learning becomes a more known term within the scope of distance learning. E-learning, which is a term in CALL domain is defined as the instruction delivered electronically via the internet, intranets, or multimedia platforms such as CD-ROM or DVD (Smart & Cappel, 2006, p. 201). It is also named web based learning since it includes the creation and delivery of knowledge via online services in the form of information, communication, education and training (Wong, 2007, p. 55).

With the popularity of the internet around the world, E-learning as a new trend attracts many learners. Rumble and Latchem (2004), cited that E-learning is used by institutions in various countries to provide opportunities and to meet the needs of a growing and increasingly diverse student population (Hartnett, St.George, & Dron, 2011). This itself lead to growing numbers of studies in this field. There were bulks of studies dedicated to e-learning and its efficacy comparing to traditional face-to-face one. Among these studies is from Russell (1999)

who reviewed 355 literature studies and published the result of his study in his website as The No Significant Difference Phenomenon.

Merisotis & Phipps (1999), did a review on prominent studies during the 1990s to investigate the validity of no significant difference. They found out that three broad measures of the effectiveness of distance education were usually examined. These include: student outcomes, such as grades and test scores; student attitudes about learning through distance education; and overall student satisfaction toward distance learning (ibid, p. 13). In all these three areas, the idea of no or little significant difference was supported. However, e-learning is usually unsuccessful in sustaining learner into the system, and this system faces the high risk of dropouts. As Zaharias (2006) mentioned that most e-learning programs exhibit higher dropout rates when compared with traditional instructor-led courses. Schmidt and Wang (2007, p. 73), in their studies reported this rate up to 70% stating that if there was no significance difference, what could be then the source of such high dropout. Brown (2000, p.64) believed that the answer to the mysteries of language acquisition lies in the affective side of human behavior. He regarded affective domains as an open list related to human behavior, which are responsible for human success or failure.

Attitude, which has been frequently cited as one of the primary factors in successful second language acquisition (SLA) is defined by Sonda (2010) as beliefs, emotional reactions and behaviors which gives the learners a stance on a situation., held that attitude directly affect success in online courses. In addition, Shaikhi Fini (2008) argued that effective extension of electronic instruction without considering the attitude of professors and students will not be successful. This was supported by Ozgur and Tosun (2010) in (Ertuğrul, 2011) in their report on students positive attitudes toward online-learning.

Lo (2004) carried out a pilot study to find out the differences between face-to-face and online study by the Chinese learners. He considered two groups of dependent variables, one on learners' score measured by pre and posttest, and the second on learners' attitudes, learning interests and self-efficacy measured by the questionnaire. Participants of the study showed strong senses of self-efficacy and positive attitude toward online learning. However, the main study revealed that there was no significant difference between the attitudes of e-learners and traditional face-two-face ones.

A six-week long study was conducted in a Turkish university for learning English online. Basal, Gurol, & Sevindik (2012) used a 40-item questionnaire to measure the learners' attitude toward the course. In the light of research findings, it was determined that learners had positive attitudes towards online language learning.

Beauvois (1998) examined student attitudes toward learning a foreign language on a real-time electronic network. The five week study carried on 41 students who were in their third semester French course. An attitudinal survey designed to find out students' attitude in pre and post survey. The research outcomes and students' interviews showed their strong enthusiasm toward this web based course.

Yang and Chen conducted a research in 2007 on a web based language learning program. When the project on high school language learners completed, a questionnaire was administered to elicit relevant information on participant perceptions of, and attitudes towards Internet English projects. The collected data showed learners' positive attitude.

Ushida in fall 2002, conducted a research on online Spanish and French language courses in order to measure learners' attitude and motivation on Spanish and French learner. She used a modified version of Gardner' AMTB questionnaire at two points of time, at the beginning and the end of the term. The results of her study indicated that students' motivation and attitude toward the study and learning of French or Spanish were relatively positive and appeared to be quite similar across the online courses. She found out further that students appeared to retain their positive motivation and attitudes over the 15- week semester.

Merisotis & Phipps (1999) reviewed Russell's The No Significant Difference phenomenon, a study which focused on students and faculty attitudes and perceptions of distance learning. They typically concluded that students and faculty had a positive view toward distance learning (ibid, p.13). However, they warned against jumping to conclusion about the online course, as they mentioned that a closer look at the research, it may not be prudent to accept these findings at face value. Several problems with the conclusions reached through this research are apparent (ibid,p.13). Having no adequate control over feelings and attitudes of learners and teachers is one of the mentioned shortcomings. They argued that research on e-learning usually

overlooks reactive effect. One of these reactive effects is, the Novelty Effect, which refers to increased interest, motivation, or participation on the part of students simply because they are doing something different, not necessarily better (ibid, p. 14).

Taking into account Merisotis & Phipps' (1999) caveats and considering Gardner (1985) who believed that attitude is dynamic and novelty and experience could change it it is wise to regard time as an effective factor in measuring attitude. Since to include time in this research is usually problematic, it only aimed to measure it through different levels.

Since the present literature believes that course itself could lead to students satisfaction, which has an important role in course acceptance and learners attitude, it was decided to evaluate the course first then to measure the attitude. Therefore, the present study tried to answer the following questions: Do teachers evaluate this online system positively? Is there any statistically significant difference among teachers' evaluation in terms of course content and instructional design, learners' support, and assessment and feedback?, Is there any statistically significant attitudinal difference between elementary, intermediate, and advanced learners? Is there any difference between EFL learners' in terms of their attitudes towards the materials, teachers' and learners' role, system facility, and test administration?, Is there any attitudinal difference between male and female users?

The system and Institute

Hakim Arya Online Language Institute is one of the successful online language schools in Iran which attracts many Language learners, and full-time employees. The institute has over 1000 e-learners, and it uses a Longman English Interactive as its online course, which proved to be a comprehensive and useful course.

Longman English Interactive provides students an account which allows them to access the course anytime, anywhere. Course objectives and guidelines are accessible in the format of PDF; the system itself has no translation for student in Persian, though the **Hakim Arya Institute** translated the guideline and the course objectives and sent them to the enrolled students.

After students log into the course, a page includes My Course, My Study Plan, My Gradebook and Other Resources will appear. _My course' contains a welcome note, and

instructor's note which gives students enough information on how to use the system and how to contact the instructor. 'My Gradebook' gives access to latest grades of the students in the lessons or modules. 'Other Resources' allow students to access and to use uploaded instructor's files and useful links such as online Longman dictionary.

The main part is 'My Study Plan' which contains an introduction to the characters, and orientation, three modules and end of the course test. Each module has five lessons.

Resources and contents are what students handle with, in this part. 'Communication Companion' is a downloadable pdf file which sets the scene, and also gives some communicative activities and games. 'Learning Objectives' and 'Unit Summary' are designed to give a brief and an in-detailed overview on the unit's objectives.

The 'Content' (Figure. 2) exposes students to different skills and a quiz. In 'Listening' and 'Listening Challenge' part, students watch a film and answer the related questions. To facilitate listening, some culture notes, listening tips and the listening transcription are provided.

Lesson	Unit	Topic	Duration	Access
Unit Summary	1	Unit Summary	00:00	Available
Lesson 1	1	Lesson 1	00:00	Available
Lesson 2	1	Lesson 2	00:00	Available
Lesson 3	1	Lesson 3	00:00	Available
Lesson 4	1	Lesson 4	00:00	Available
Lesson 5	1	Lesson 5	00:00	Available
Lesson 6	2	Lesson 6	00:00	Available
Lesson 7	2	Lesson 7	00:00	Available
Lesson 8	2	Lesson 8	00:00	Available
Lesson 9	2	Lesson 9	00:00	Available
Lesson 10	2	Lesson 10	00:00	Available
Lesson 11	3	Lesson 11	00:00	Available
Lesson 12	3	Lesson 12	00:00	Available
Lesson 13	3	Lesson 13	00:00	Available
Lesson 14	3	Lesson 14	00:00	Available
Lesson 15	3	Lesson 15	00:00	Available
Lesson 16	3	Lesson 16	00:00	Available
Lesson 17	3	Lesson 17	00:00	Available
Lesson 18	3	Lesson 18	00:00	Available
Lesson 19	3	Lesson 19	00:00	Available
Lesson 20	3	Lesson 20	00:00	Available
Lesson 21	3	Lesson 21	00:00	Available
Lesson 22	3	Lesson 22	00:00	Available
Lesson 23	3	Lesson 23	00:00	Available
Lesson 24	3	Lesson 24	00:00	Available
Lesson 25	3	Lesson 25	00:00	Available
Lesson 26	3	Lesson 26	00:00	Available
Lesson 27	3	Lesson 27	00:00	Available
Lesson 28	3	Lesson 28	00:00	Available
Lesson 29	3	Lesson 29	00:00	Available
Lesson 30	3	Lesson 30	00:00	Available

Figure 1 the Contents

The 'Speaking' part is a role-playing that needs a Java plug-in to run; however, it is somehow difficult for Iranian students to get it from the provided link.

A recorded film of a teacher and audible examples teach learners the grammar points and this knowledge of grammar would be checked through different exercises.

Pictures and examples facilitate vocabulary learning especially because they give context and audible pronunciation. The next step is checking students understanding through a variety of exercises.

Pronunciation part contains some explanations and audible examples on pronunciation and intonation. In the following activity, students listen to some samples then they should record their voices.

The next activity is Reading which contains a text and its comprehension questions and some culture notes. The last activity is the Writing which provides students with some guiding questions and a model. Then they should type in the box and submit it. The teacher will receive it afterwards.

The lessons end with a quiz. In each course, there are three modules containing five lessons.

Method

This study aimed at evaluating an online course and seeking attitudinal tendencies of its users. Since the study meant to draw a comprehensive picture of the course and attitude, the advantage of using both qualitative and quantitative method of gathering data was considered.

On the quantitative side, the study explored its research questions through questionnaires. The questionnaire method for gathering data was selected based on O'Maley and Chamot (1990). Questionnaires are easy and practical means of gathering data and they require little time. In determining opinions and attitudes, Likert-scale proved to be useful (Turner, 1993). In addition, Dörnyei (2003) believed that questionnaires are more useful in attitudinal studies and L2 course evaluation. (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

However, questionnaires are not able to give an in-depth picture of what is under study; therefore, it was demanded to use qualitative data collection which involves careful and detailed description (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Thus, interview was also used to have an in-depth view toward the system and learners' attitude.

Participants

Regarding the course evaluation, a modified version of the current course evaluation questionnaires was mailed to 17 experienced teachers. In addition, two teachers shared their views through interviews.

This case study also aimed at investigating learners' attitude who participated in online general English courses of Hakim Arya Online language institute. The institute has set up its courses based on Longman English Interactive online course. After 100 hours of learning online, the students take part in a face-to-face session. The institute headquarter is in Tehran, though it has students from different cities in Iran. The students were 20 to 50 years old, mainly Iran Air's staffs who have taken part in the course as a need for their jobs. The questionnaire was distributed in two ways, paper-based and online, in order to facilitate filling the questionnaire out.

One of the learners was chosen to share her experience in taking part in an online course. She has learned English in a traditional course, though, due to lack of time, she left the course incomplete. Then she tried learning English by taking an online language course in a beginner level.

Instruments

One of the major data-collecting instruments was questionnaires distributed in two situations. One of them evaluated the course which was mailed to the teachers; the other seeking attitudinal tendencies distributed online and on paper. The other instrument was the use of interviews.

To evaluate the online system, a modified version of the following checklists was used:

- Evaluation Checklist for Online and Blended Courses, by Awcole ,On July 31, 2012.
- Checklist for Evaluating Online courses by SREB's Educational Technology Cooperative and funded by the BellSouth Foundation.
- Quality Assurance Checklists for Evaluating Learning Objects and Online Courses, February 2009.

- Online Learning Quality Evaluation Checklist by Cranfield University.

Then the modified version was sent to 17 experienced teachers. The descriptive data were gained via SPSS.

In order to investigate the learners' attitude, a five-section cross-sectional questionnaire was made. The first section probed demographic information while other sections looked into attitude towards materials, teacher and learners' role, system facility, and test administration (Appendix. B).

The questionnaire consisted of 4 background items and 77 Likert item which consisted of 37, 5-likert scale and 40, 3-Likert ones. The data gathered through questionnaire were subjected to descriptive and inferential analysis through SPSS.

After gaining expert validity, the questionnaire was piloted. The reliability of the researcher- made questionnaire was examined by running Cronbach's Alpha reliability test on the results and its reliability was proven to be 0.9 (Table .1).

Table .1: Reliability Statistics

Table.1.Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach Alpha	N of Items
.965	81

Procedures

First, the modified evaluation questionnaire was sent to seventeen English teachers through their email addresses and their responses were collected. Then two of them were agreed on sharing their comprehensive views towards the course and system.

In the second phase of the study, the attitude questionnaire became available at esurveyspro (<http://www.eSurveysPro.com/Survey.aspx?id=c4951e9d-342b-49e5-8cf1-a521487b2604>). However, the number of learners answering the questionnaire was low. Since the institute did not allow direct access to learners, the institute was made to collect responses on paper. In addition, one learner was made to study the course and be observed and interviewed.

Results

EFL Teachers' Evaluation of Online Courses

The gathered data through questionnaire were submitted to the Statistical Package for Social Students (SPSS), and descriptive analysis containing Mean and Standard Deviation was calculated as follows (Table.2). The calculated mean does not stray far from the neutral 3.5 mean, which at very least indicates that most teachers do not have a negative view to Longman English interactive online course.

Table 2: Item Statistic 1

Item Statistics	Mea n	Std. Deviation	N
Course content and instructional design	3.705	.84887	17
1. The course goals and objectives are measurable	3.9		
2. Topics are clearly identified(the participants will know or be able to do at the end of the course) and subtopics are related to topics	4.176 5	.88284	17
3. The course content and assignments are nationally accepted content standards, culturally and technically.	3.882 4	1.05370	17
4. The content is fair and unbiased	3.941 2	.89935	17
5. Content is sequenced logically and effectively	4.058 8	.42875	17
6. A clear, complete course overview and syllabus are included in the course.	4.176 5	.72761	17
7. Course content is accurate and up to date	3.705 9	1.10480	17
8. Enough resources are available (bibliography,	4.000	1.00000	17

Glossary of key terms, grammar and culture notes, useful links and etc.)	0		
9. The workload for each unit is appropriate.	3.470 6	.71743	17
10. Each lesson includes a lesson overview, content and activities, assignments and assessments to provide multiple learning opportunities for students to master the content.	4.176 5	.88284	17
11. Language of written material is friendly and supportive	3.823 5	.72761	17
12. Clear directions are given for each task or assignment	3.764 7	1.09141	17
13. Skills are relevant to subject matter and to the “real world” in which the content may be applied;	4.000 0	1.00000	17
14. meaningful and authentic learning experiences are encouraged in the course	3.764 7	1.09141	17
15. The artwork used in the course is relevant and updated.	3.823 5	1.01460	17
16. The course design and instructional design is relevant to the level.	3.411 8	1.27764	17
17. The course instruction includes activities that engage students in active learning.	3.352 9	1.05719	17
Learner support			
18. Tips for being a successful learner is given	3.529 4	1.06757	17
19. Contact information for technical support is available.	3.235 3	.90342	17
20. Tutorial or aids for how to use the system is given.	3.529 4	1.06757	17

21. Netiquette guidelines are given	3.235 3	.90342	17
22. Contact information for the instructor is available.	3.176 5	1.18508	17
23. Educational links to support the instructional materials are given.	3.058 8	1.08804	17
24. Minimum computer hardware and software is required.	3.882 4	.92752	17
25. Links to appropriate campus library resources and services are given (e.g., reference librarian, electronic- reserve, and online library tutorials).	3.529 4	.87447	17
26. Sources for any required plug-ins (and links) are available.	3.352 9	.78591	17
Assessment and feed back			
27. The types of assessments selected measure the stated learning objectives and are consistent with course activities and resources.	3.764 7	.90342	17
28. Rich and rapid feedback are provided – self-grading assignments released immediately	3.411 8	.93934	17
29. students received frequent and substantial feedback from the instructor	3.352 9	.86177	17
30. Samples of assignments illustrate instructor's expectations	3.176 5	1.07444	17
31. Detailed instructions and tips are provided for completing assignments	3.764 7	1.03256	17

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Course content and instructional design	17	3.8374	.646
Learner support	17	3.3922	.597
Assessment and feed back	17	9.6000	1.607

The three sections of the questionnaire were submitted to Kendall's W test to examine whether there is a statistically significant difference between the teachers' evaluation of different parts of the online courses or not. By applying the Kendall's W test, it was found out that there was a significant difference between their evaluations of different sections of the online courses. In other words, the teachers reported their highest attitudes towards assessment and feedback of online courses (as it was shown in table 4.3). Moreover, in comparison to learner support, they indicated a positive view towards course content and instructional design of online courses.

Table 4 Kendall's W Test

Ranks	Mean Rank
Course content and instructional design	1.62
Learner support	1.38
Assessment and feed back	3.00

Table 5 Test Statistics

N	17
Chi-square	26.358
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Interview

Two teachers agreed to be interviewed about the system which they reviewed. They replied to the following questions.

- Q.1 Could you explain your ideas about course content and instructional design?
- Q.2 Could you explain your ideas about learner support?
- Q.3 Could you explain your ideas regarding assessment and feedback?

The first teacher interviewed was coded teacher A. She is holding a B.A. in Language teaching and has 16 years of teaching experience. She teaches in traditional classes and also online through Skype program.

Teacher B is the next participant having seven years of teaching experience and evaluating different language-learning software. She is holding an M.A in language teaching degree.

Teacher A's responses to the questions are as follows:

Q.1 Could you explain your ideas about course content and instructional design us?

This is a valuable site for learning English at different levels, and different skills. As I got from this site, it has a good and outstanding focus on listening skill. There are many small and short episodes for learning general English (greeting. starting to speak ...) that I think it is a good point in this site. Fortunately, there is a good attention to grammar and vocabulary, and a vast

explanation about them. These explanations will sometimes make the learners bored, and prevent them from doing all the tests. The guideline is the same for all lessons, so the learners will know that what they will be faced with the next step. So it can make the lessons a little boring.

After each lesson, there are good assignments for learners to master the content and a good assessment after finishing every content.

Q.2 Could you explain your ideas about learner support?

Regarding the learner support, I think the tutorial mailed to learners is comprehensive. And as I observed the site gives learners easy opportunities to contact the instructors and technical support.

Q.3 Could you explain your ideas regarding assessment and feedback?

Actually, I reviewed a sample feedback on a writing assignment. It was good since the instructor did not only check it for grammatical and mechanical stuff but also for the style, something which usually ignored by teachers.

In addition, it was useful when students can check their pronunciation through recording their voice; I believed that this kind of self-grading task is of a good support for shy learners.

However, I felt that some of the tests are repeated many times, which allow students guess rather than check their knowledge.

Teacher B's responses:

Q.1 Could you explain your ideas about course content and instructional design to us?

I liked the course; it is really updated and it provides useful materials for everyday speaking. Having Cultural Notes and Learning Tips can help learners understand the situations and use appropriate strategies for doing the tasks.

However, in the grammar section, I think, the coach's language is not appropriate to students' level, but it is ok as far as the examples of the guide learners are concerned just to get the point.

Q.2 Could you explain your ideas about learner support?

Having access to online dictionaries is a good support, however, as I think, the course can be supported by adding more online resources like encyclopedias or fun games for language learning.

Moreover, for recording the voice, I was asked to download an application which I found it difficult to do.

Q.3 Could you explain your ideas regarding assessment and feedback?

Regarding assessment and feedback, there are many questions there, I mean, some parts are really lengthy. In addition, Questions sometimes get too repetitive.

I believed that the online portfolio, which is provided, is very useful for learners. They can easily check their progress which can motivate them.

Attitudinal Tendencies

The main goal of the second research question was to investigate the attitudinal differences among elementary, intermediate and advanced EFL learners towards online courses. For this purpose, a questionnaire including two sections (thirty seven 5 Likert –scale items and forty 3 Likert –scale items) was employed to collect data from the participants about their attitudes towards online courses. Afterwards Kruskal-Wallis Test was run to get the results of the questionnaires. The findings were presented in the following section.

Attitudinal Tendencies among Learners in Different Levels of Proficiency

To examine the possible differences among the three groups (elementary, intermediate, and advanced), Kruskal Wallis Test was run to the results of the questionnaire (Table. 4.5). This non-parametric test for the three independent samples was used to determine whether or not the values of attitude towards online courses differ among these three groups.

The Kruskal-Wallis test which was a one-way analysis of variance by ranks tested the null hypothesis that these independent samples came from the same population and thus there was no statistically significant attitudinal difference between elementary, intermediate, and advanced learners.

Table 6: Kruskal Wallis Test (Ranks) 1

Ranks			
	Lg. proficiency	N	Mean Rank
Attitude mean rank	Longman interactive 1 elementary	23	23.26
	Longman interactive 2 intermediate	17	21.71
	Longman interactive 3&4 advanced	10	37.10
	Total	50	

Table 7: Kruskal Wallis Test (test statistics)

Test Statistics^{a,b}	
	Attitude mean rank
Chi-square	8.027
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.018
a. Kruskal Wallis Test	
b. Grouping Variable: level of language proficiency	

The Kruskal-Wallis statistic measured how much the three groups' ranks differed from the average rank of all groups. The chi-square value was obtained by squaring each group's distance from the average of all ranks (Table 6.4). The degrees of freedom for the chi-square statistic were equal to the number of groups minus one ($3-1=2$). The asymptotic significance estimated the probabilities of obtaining a chi-square statistic greater than or equal to the one displayed, if there truly are no differences between the group ranks. The above table tells us the ratings of the EFL learners' attitudes differed by their level of language proficiency. So the first null hypothesis was rejected implying that there was no statistically significant attitudinal difference between elementary, intermediate, and advanced learners (figure 4.1).

Attitudinal Tendencies toward the Materials, Teachers' and Learners' Role, System Facility, and Test Administration

Examining the possible differences among EFL learners' in terms of their attitudes towards the materials, teachers' and learners' role, system facility, and test administration in online courses was done through Kruskal Wallis Test (Table 4.7).

Table 8: Kruskal Wallis Test (ranks) 1

Ranks			
	Level of lg. proficiency	N	Mean Rank
Attitudes towards materials	Longman interactive 1 elementary	23	22.35
	Longman interactive 2 intermediate	17	21.15
	Longman interactive 3 advanced	10	40.15
	Total	50	
Attitudes towards teachers' & learners' role	Longman interactive 1 elementary	23	25.00
	Longman interactive 2 intermediate	17	21.38
	Longman interactive 3 advanced	10	33.65
	Total	50	
Attitudes towards system facility	Longman interactive 1 elementary	23	23.35
	Longman interactive 2 intermediate	17	24.71
	Longman interactive 3 advanced	10	31.80
	Total	50	
Attitudes towards test administration	Longman interactive 1 elementary	23	25.46
	Longman interactive 2 intermediate	17	25.32
	Longman interactive 3 advanced	10	25.90
	Total	50	

The sig obtained for Attitudes towards materials was .002 which is lower than 0.05 indicating that there was a significant difference between EFL learners' in terms of their attitudes towards materials (Table 4.8).

Table 9: Kruskal Wallis Test (test statistics)

Test Statistics^{a,b}				
	Attitudes towards materials	Attitudes towards teachers' & learners' role	Attitudes towards system facility	Attitudes towards test administration
Chi-square	12.708	4.585	2.430	.011
df	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.002	.101	.297	.995
a. Kruskal Wallis Test				
b. Grouping Variable: level of language proficiency				

Based on the Mann-Whitney Test (table 4.9 and 4.10), the obtained sig is higher than the P value (0.05) resulting to no significant difference between female and male EFL learners in terms of their attitudes towards online courses.

Table 10: Mann-Whitney Test (ranks) 1

Ranks				
	sex	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Attitudes towards materials	male	27	23.20	626.50
	female	23	28.20	648.50
	Total	50		
Attitudes towards teachers' & learners' role	male	27	25.59	691.00
	female	23	25.39	584.00
	Total	50		
Attitudes towards system facility	male	27	26.04	703.00
	female	23	24.87	572.00
	Total	50		
Attitudes towards test administration	male	27	25.96	701.00
	female	23	24.96	574.00
	Total	50		

Table 11: Mann-Whitney Test (test statistics)

Test Statistics^a				
	Attitudes towards materials	Attitudes towards teachers' & learners' role	Attitudes towards system facility	Attitudes towards test administration
Mann-Whitney U	248.500	308.000	296.000	298.000
Z	-1.208	-.049	-.283	-.247
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.227	.961	.777	.805
a. Grouping Variable: sex				

Attitudinal Tendencies Regarding Gender

In order to examine the second research question, Mann Whitney U test was run to the results of the questionnaire. Mann-Whitney Test which was a nonparametric test was used for the two independent samples (females and males) to determine whether or not the values of attitude towards online courses differed significantly between males and females. The findings were presented in the following section.

Table 12: Mann-Whitney Test (ranks) 1

Ranks				
	sex	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
attitude mean rank	male	27	24.00	648.00
	female	23	27.26	627.00
	Total	50		

First, each case was ranked without regard to group membership. Cases tied on attitude received the average rank. After ranking the cases, the ranks were summed within groups. Average ranks were adjusted for differences in the number of participants in both groups. For females, the average ranks were just 3.26 points higher than the males'.

Table 13: Mann-Whitney Test (test statistics)

Test Statistics^a	
	attitude mean rank
Mann-Whitney U	270
Z	-.788
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.430
a. Grouping Variable: sex	

The negative *Z* statistics indicated that the rank sums are lower than their expected values. The two-tailed significance value estimated was higher than 0.05 and thus the null hypothesis was supported indicating that there were no significant attitudinal differences between male and female users.

Interview and Observation

One student was made to take part in the interview. Accordingly, she started learning English in a Face-to face course. However, since she has a part time job with irregular work hours, she dropped the course.

Before starting the course, she was asked for her reasons for choosing the course. She replied that learning English anytime anywhere and Longman brand were her main reasons, however she believed that the course is more expensive than a traditional one.

Then she took part in online Placement test, the test results indicated the Longman Interactive 1.

After registering for the course, she received a welcome note from the instructor with email address and phone number.

The instructor asked her to start with a section named “meeting people” to get to know the characters.

She was asked to talk about her feeling and ideas about the course after doing a module.

After finishing a module, the following questions were asked in Persian, and here is the translated interview.

Q1. While doing the online activities and test, have you ever felt anxious?

No, Actually, I don't like speaking in front of others. I mean, in an ordinary class. I am afraid of making mistakes and being laughed at. However, here there's nobody to laugh at me, if I make mistakes, I could think about it and do it again and again.

Q2. Which part and section do you enjoy doing and which one you do not?

It was all fun, but, I think recording my voice on the system was fun. I also like writing, since the provided model was easy to copy and instructor's feedback was so helpful.

Q3. Which skills or ability was increased due to using the course?

I think pronunciation and listening are two skills that gained due to using the course. I felt easy practicing pronunciation, since I can record my voice as many times as I want with no interruption or laughing. The listening activities were also straightforward and the situations were natural and easy to understand. I think the course helped me in writing too.

Q4. Did you find the instruction useful?

Sometime, yes. However, it happens that I did not get the instruction, because they are all in English.

Q5. What are the things you like about the course and you do not?

Using it anytime anywhere is really facilitative for people, I mean people not having a regular time to take part in a class. In addition, at first it encourages me to talk using English.

Moreover, you feel confident and never feel embarrassed. Though, little by little, I thought I may not be successful, since, I haven't talked in front of others. Some activities were lengthy that was boring. In addition, tests and quizzes were sometimes repetitive, which made it easy to guess and there was no need to study. And more things, I think the placement test was not correct, I could study in higher levels.

Q6. Are you going to continue using the system?

Oh, I'm not sure, I like it, but I would like to see my classmates. Sometimes, I think I proceed slowly, I don't know is it the same for them or not. And I think the course is very easy. I know everything.

Another student was introduced by the institute to answer the six questions and here is his interview.

Q.1 While doing the online activities and test, have you ever felt anxious?

No, for me the system was really straightforward, therefore I felt relaxed.

Q.2 Which part and section do you enjoy doing and which one you do not?

I love working on listening and vocabulary exercises, because topics are fun and most of the time my guesses were correct. However, I do not like writing and grammar section. To tell the truth, writing is easy but I do not like it, no matter on line or on campus courses.

Q.3 Which skills or ability was increased due to using the course?

Listening, yeah, it is the part I love and it was increased due the system.

Q.4 Did you find the instruction useful?

Instruction were useful, however, I get along with examples better, because instructions sometimes needed dictionary to translate.

Q.5 What are the things you like about the course and you do not?

I love the course as a whole, everything is fine with it.

Q.6 Are you going to continue using the system?

Yes, for me the system is a chance. I do not have fix time to take part in regular classes.

Discussion

This study aimed at evaluating Longman Online Language Course and investigating learners' attitude toward it. The study was conducted through the use of two methods; questionnaires and interview. The first questionnaires with the aim of evaluating an online course was distributed to 17 experienced teachers. The questionnaire divided the evaluation into three parts as, course content and instructional design, learner support, and assessment and feedback.

The second part was to investigate the learners' attitude toward the system which was done through distributing questionnaires and conducting an interview. This section questionnaire consisted of 37 items exploring learners' attitude in terms of attitudes towards the materials, teachers' and learners' role, system facility, and test administration and the possible differences between genders. The obtained data gathered through online and paper questionnaire among learners in different levels of proficiency. The following sections briefly discuss the obtained data through both questionnaires.

Teachers' Evaluation of Longman Online Course.

The main goal of this study was to measure the attitude. However, based on the related literature, one of the affecting factors on attitude is the system itself. As mentioned by many scholars (Shaikhi Fini, 2008; Ushida, 2005; Beauvois, 1998; Lo, 2004; Yang & Chen, 2007), receiving enough support, and a straightforward system, which promotes ease of use, are prominent factors in a successful online course.

Therefore, it seemed important to evaluate the system first and then to measure the attitude. The reviewed literature revealed that the course content and the instructional design, the learner support, and the assessment and feedback were the most effective factors that influence attitude which were used in this study, to evaluate the system. The same was revealed in the interviews, where teachers evaluating the system believed that in order to stop the possible dropout, some modifications should be considered. The modification which believed to be needed by the system, mostly relates to the content and instructional design.

The obtained data revealed that teachers' attitude toward the system was positive. They believed that the course is successful especially in terms of assessment and feedback. Moreover, in comparison to learner support, results indicated a positive view towards course content and instructional design of online courses.

Students' Attitude towards Online Learning

Many studies have been done with the aim of measuring attitude, since it plays a key role in a program success. However, attitude is an abstract phenomena and measuring it could be difficult. There are many models and ways of measuring attitude. Ushida (2005) used the Gardner's AMTB model and Computer Attitude. She found positive attitude toward e-learning which has the same results of the present study. She believed that the positive attitude of the students is self-selected to take the courses; and all students were confident with the use of computers. Students, in general, evaluated the teachers and courses positively (Ushida, 2005, p. 65). The present study also predicated that one reason of learners attitude is the property of the system as the evaluation of the course and the interview indicates.

The interview revealed that the learner mostly enjoyed spending time learning on the system. From one of the comments, it could be concluded that she has a fragile ego. Therefore, one of the reasons that stopped her from learning in a face-to-face class, rather than time, was her low self confidence. The system gives her opportunity to correct her mistakes without worrying about being mocked. Since the affective factors play an important role in language learning and course success, it was revealed that the system was successful in engaging learners suffering of affective factors like anxiety and low self confidence.

However, she did not like feeling alone as she mentioned that she needed some classmates to talk with her worries. It seems that peer roles could not be omitted from the language learning situation even if they cause anxiety.

In the absent of the role of peers, she believed that lengthy activities and some complicated instruction is a pitfall. When teachers were interviewed about the instructions, they mentioned the same thing though they believed that the examples and model can solve this problem. The other pitfall indicated by teachers and the learner was the test contents which both

think to be repetitive. Since the pitfalls mostly related to content which is noticed by the learner, it may cause probable drop out.

The other model, highly accepted and used in most studies, was the TAM (Technology Acceptance Model) model. The model sets its questionnaire based on Perceived usefulness and Perceived ease-of-use. This model used by Shaikhi Fini (2008) to measure the attitude. He found learners' positive attitude by including variables as self-sufficiency, interest, usefulness and intent of using electronic learning tools. He stated that the result gained was due to learners' happiness and ease of use, which itself could be the result of structure of educational system. In this present study, it indicates the attitude toward materials which plays a prominent role in the students positive attitude which is in line with Shaikhi Fini (2008) study.

Beauvois (1998) revealed learners' positive attitude, which accordingly, delayed error correction promoted their interest in the system. Her findings could support the findings of this research. As it was revealed through the questionnaire and interview, receiving immediate feedback on the errors in front of others is bothering and would increase stress.

Using AMTB or TAM model or any other model and variable, most studies showed positive learners and teachers attitude which is in line with the present study. (Shaikhi Fini, 2008; Ushida, 2005; Beauvois, 1998; Lo, 2004; Yang & Chen, 2007).

In conclusion, the data analysis revealed a positive attitude of teachers towards e-learning. The mean registered a value around 3.5 (measured from 1 to 5). Analyzing the teachers' idea, it was revealed that there was a significant difference between their evaluations of different sections of the online courses. In other words, the teachers reported their highest attitude towards assessment and feedback of online courses. Moreover, in comparison to learner support, they indicated a positive view towards course content and instructional design of online courses as well.

The interview, however, revealed that teachers thought that the instructor's language of the recorded grammar films was not appropriate to the learners' level. In addition, quizzes and test needed to be revised since they seemed to be repetitive.

The other purpose of the study was to analyze students' attitude towards e-learning at different levels of proficiency and to determine some factors that have an influence on it. The researchers concluded four aspects of attitude as attitude toward materials, teachers' and learners' role, system facility, and test administration in online courses. The results highlighted the prevalence of favorable e-learning attitudes among learners, which were in line with most studies as Basal, Gurol, and Sevindik (2012), Beauvois (1998), Yang and Chen (2007), and Ushida, (2005). However, it was proven that there was no statistically significant attitudinal difference between elementary, intermediate, and advanced learners. Regarding the different aspects of attitude, it was shown that there was a significant difference between EFL learners' in terms of their attitudes towards materials. Moreover, it was revealed that there was no significant difference between female and male EFL learners in terms of their attitudes towards online courses.

The interviewed learner revealed that she felt lonely, as she said she did not like to have classmates but sometimes she would like to talk to them about the course. She was not satisfied with the quizzes and test as well. Therefore, it is suggested that the system would have developed an application to let students be connected online together in groups for some conversations. In addition, it is strongly recommended that the questions and quizzes used will be revised.

As a whole, it could be concluded that a positive evaluation will lead to positive attitude, however, still the question of dropouts remain. The study showed that the level of attitude does not change as the level of proficiency changes, though the manager of the institute mentioned the high rate of course withdrawal. Therefore, researchers should find the reason in areas rather than concentrate on attitude.

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