UNIVERSITY *of* CAMBRIDGE
ESOL Examinations

Research Notes

Research Notes

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Editorial Notes

Welcome to issue 44 of *Research Notes*, our quarterly publication reporting on matters relating to research, test development and validation within Cambridge ESOL.

In this issue, we report on collaboration between English Australia (EA) and Cambridge ESOL in the form of supporting action research and promoting the professional development of teachers who teach English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas students (ELICOS) in Australia. The idea behind action research in general and the EA/Cambridge ESOL Action Research programme in particular is that teachers are best placed to notice, investigate and address issues and challenges in the classroom. Therefore, action research is best conceptualised as a cycle: the issues arising in the classroom inspire teachers' research which then feeds back into teaching practice. The research model adopted in the programme consists of four stages: planning (an intervention), acting (carrying out the intervention), observing (the effects of the intervention) and reflecting. The last stage evaluates the findings and discusses the insights gained by teacher-researchers as the basis for further action.

The opening article by Katherine Brandon sets the scene by discussing the background and rationale of the EA/Cambridge ESOL Action Research programme. Anne Burns places the programme in a wider context, by elaborating on the origins and nature of action research. She then discusses the approach adopted in the action research project reported on in this issue, the structure of the project, and finishes by evaluating its outcomes.

The remaining articles, written in the voice of the teacher-researcher, share with us the process and outcomes of the research conducted by six teachers. Laura McCrossan, the winner of the EA/Cambridge ESOL Award for Action Research in ELICOS, investigates ways of increasing progress and motivation in high-proficiency English language learners who have lost motivation due to perceived lack of progress. Kathryn Koromilas delves further into the complexities of motivation and explores two motivational strategies: explicit goal-setting behaviour and promissory obligations. The article by Coral Campbell reports on how she used extensive listening as a basis for increasing active participation in listening and speaking activities and, consequently, for improving students' listening and speaking skills. Jock Boyd explores students' use of digital devices during language-learning activities, which has implications for vocabulary acquisition. The last two articles investigate the use of extensive reading in the classroom: Sylvia Cher introduces extensive reading to beginning students, while Dimitra Papadimitriou Aidinlis explores the role of extensive reading in increasing higher-level learners' vocabulary development and motivation.

We finish this issue by reporting on the events Cambridge ESOL has supported. Martin Nuttall from the ALTE secretariat reports on forthcoming ALTE events, while Gad Lim announces the winner of the Caroline Clapham IELTS Master's Award 2010. This announcement is followed by the abstract of the winner's dissertation.

The English Australia/Cambridge ESOL Action Research programme: Background and rationale

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English Australia

English Australia (EA) is the professional association for over 100 member colleges that offer English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) in Australia. Member colleges are diverse, ranging from publicly funded as well as private institutions attached to universities, vocational colleges and high schools, to branches of international English language schools through to standalone private providers. Member colleges offer a wide range of courses, the most popular being English for Academic Purposes and preparation for exams, such as Cambridge ESOL General English examinations, and IELTS. English Australia is the peak body for ELICOS, assisting, strengthening and promoting the interests of more than 270 accredited ELICOS providers in Australia.

The strategic direction of the association is guided by a 14-member council of elected member delegates. The association's operations are implemented by a secretariat team which is led by an Executive Director and includes a full-time Professional Support and Development Officer (PSDO). This latter position was created in 2007 to help the association further a strategic goal of providing leadership in raising educational, professional and ethical standards within member colleges. The strategic goal is achieved in a number of ways including:

- organisation and/or support of professional development at branches in Australian states

- management of a national conference, the English Australia Conference, held in September each year

- preparation of Guides to Best Practice in ELICOS, collated from member contributions (available only to members)

- publication of a biennial peer-reviewed journal: the *EA Journal*

- promotion of the annual English Australia awards for contribution to ELICOS, contribution to professional practice, academic leadership and innovation in ELICOS.

For more information on English Australia and ELICOS, please go to www.englishaustralia.com.au

Background to the Action Research programme

In order to further professionalise the ELICOS strand of the international education sector, English Australia has continually called for teachers to disseminate outcomes of their graduate research through submitting an abstract at its annual conference. In recent years this approach has had limited effect and it was felt that EA could do more to encourage and support teachers to examine their own

practice and to share outcomes of this with their peers. EA was also keen to engage with teachers, not just academic researchers, to ensure a classroom-based, practical approach to research that was directly relevant to current classroom issues.

English Australia was aware of the action research programme funded by the then Australian Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs through its Adult Migrant English Programme in the late 1990s. In 2008, EA approached Professor Anne Burns to act as key reference person for a similar, but smaller scale programme for ELICOS. The EA PSDO and Professor Burns prepared a proposal which was approved by the EA Council, and once funding was secured from University of Cambridge ESOL Examinations (Cambridge ESOL), a pilot programme of six projects, led by Professor Burns, was implemented. The participants in this pilot programme are presented in the photograph below.

Following the success of this pilot, funding was again offered for a similar programme in 2011 and extended to cover up to eight participants.

The goals of the English Australia/Cambridge ESOL Action Research in ELICOS programme are as follows:

- to equip teachers with the skills to enable them to explore and address identified teaching challenges in the context of Australian ELICOS

- to share outcomes of this research in the form of presentations at local events and at the English Australia conference, as well as through publication.

Through the implementation of the programme, English Australia hopes to raise the professionalism of Australian ELICOS by: the development of teachers actively involved in classroom research (the programme); the development of teacher peer networks; increased teacher engagement with research and academic researchers; and more teachers furthering their formal professional development.

Participants in the EA/Cambridge ESOL Action Research programme 2010 (from left to right): Dimitra Papadimitriou Aidinlis, Kathryn Koromilas, Laura McCrossan, Jock Boyd, Professor Anne Burns, Katherine Brandon and Coral Campbell. Absent: Sylvia Cher.

Embedding teacher research into a national language programme: Lessons from a pilot project

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Introduction

All the papers featured in this issue emerged from the pilot action research (AR) project initiated by English Australia (EA), (see Brandon 2011 in this issue), and funded in 2010 by Cambridge ESOL. The aim of the project is to introduce teachers in the Australian ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students) system to the concepts and processes of teacher research. This article provides an overview of the AR approach adopted, the structure and roles taken in the project, and a brief evaluation of the outcomes of the project.

The notion of teachers undertaking research in their own working environments on areas of immediate relevance to their practice is a trend that has been developing steadily in the English language teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics literature for almost the past two decades. Its genesis was to be found in the moves in the late 1970s and 1980s away from methods-based language teaching and towards the principles advocated for communicative language teaching. In the course of this transition, the teacher came increasingly to be seen as an active agent who mediates the teaching-learning process rather than a passive deliverer of prescribed methods.

Various labels can be applied to the concept of practitioners engaging in research in their own classrooms, including AR, practitioner research, collaborative inquiry, critical enquiry, classroom research and teacher research (for discussions of differentiations among some of these terms, see for example, Bailey 2001 and Borg 2010). My focus in this paper is on AR, as this was the approach to research selected for the EA/Cambridge ESOL pilot programme.

Action research: Underpinnings and practical processes

The roots of AR are located in 20th century progressive education and social psychology movements with their interests in group dynamics, group decision making and commitment to improvement of group social situations (e.g. Lewin 1946). Originating in the US and then spreading to the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia and elsewhere, in the educational context AR adopts the concept that it is practitioners in their immediate social situation who are best placed to understand, examine and innovate in curriculum-related issues and challenges.

Carr and Kemmis (1986:215) contend that neither positivist (or experimental), nor interpretivist (or naturalistic) approaches to research provide adequate accounts of the relationships between educational theory and practice. They argue that positive research assimilates practical problems in favour of theory and interpretivist research assimilates theory in favour of descriptive accounts. Thus, both approaches result in the separation of theory and practice. They assert that to overcome such separation, educational science '. . . must develop theories of educational practice that are rooted in the concrete educational experiences and situations of practitioners and which enables (sic) them to confront the educational problems to which these experiences and situations give rise' (ibid).

Cohen and Manion (1994:186) offer the following definition of AR: 'action research is a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention.' In so doing, they capture some of the essential elements of AR:

- the research is localised and specific
- it takes place in a naturalistic daily environment
- it creates some kind of interruption or change in the usual workings of the environment
- it uses systematic examination of what happens as a result of the intervention.

This approach to research is a way of bringing together *action*, in the form of intervention and experimentation, and *research*, in the form of continuous examination and evaluation of the changes in practices. Thus, it seeks to unite practice with theory. AR is underpinned by the aim of increasing participants' functional, practical and theoretical knowledge of the nature of their daily social context and how they might operate within it.

In order to illustrate the processes of AR, we adopted Kemmis and McTaggart's (1986) four-stage cyclical model in the project described here. The model involves: planning (developing a plan of action or intervention); acting (putting the intervention in place); observing (documenting and recording the effects of the intervention) and reflecting (evaluating the observations and using them as the basis for further action). The cycle is dynamic in that these four stages are interlinked and iterative, so that the research typically results in a spiral of cycles.

AR has been described as a 'family' of research approaches (Dick 1999) as it does not depend on selecting a specific methodological orientation, but is eclectic. It draws on either or both quantitative and qualitative approaches to meet particular challenges. Practitioners use a wide variety of techniques to collect data systematically, including observational tools, such as classroom video-recordings, observation notes or transcripts, and non-observational means such as surveys, test scores, interviews or classroom documents (see Burns 2010). The information obtained from these techniques is a source of reflective praxis (doing and reflecting on action), leading to deepening understanding,

further action, and theory construction, in the sense of developing 'personal practical knowledge' (Golombek 2009) or 'theories for practice' (Burns 1996).

Approach and structure of the project

AR in educational contexts can be undertaken in various modes from a single teacher investigating his or her classroom, to a group of teachers co-operating in their own school, to teachers from a similar educational system working with a researcher or facilitator. In addition, contextually it can be located at the level of a single classroom, a school or organisation or at a larger-scale system level. In this project, the latter approach was taken with my own role being to facilitate a teacher research process – with six participants from around Australia, and with the support of the national English Australia Professional Support and Development Officer, Katherine Brandon – that could have a wider impact nationally within the ELICOS field. The project was structured in order to develop a sustained collaboration among the group for a period of six months. Over this period, three workshops were conducted over three and a half days, with group and individual email contact being maintained regularly in between workshops.

The first workshop, held in May 2010, introduced the teachers to the concepts of AR and the processes and methods used in conducting it. It involved extensive discussion on refining and focusing the initial areas they had already nominated for their research, and developing an intervention action plan to try out in their classrooms. The second workshop, in July 2010, provided an opportunity for the teachers to reflect on and discuss their research progress to date, to reflect on some of their interventions, data collection methods and findings, to raise emerging questions and challenges, and to identify new steps and directions for their research. The third workshop took place the day before the teachers presented their research at the annual English Australia conference in September 2010. On this occasion, the teachers finalised their accounts of their research, and reflected on the knowledge and understanding they had gained about their classroom practices, their students, and themselves as teacher-researchers. They also spent time rehearsing their presentations and getting feedback from the group in preparation for the research colloquium the next day.

The EA/Cambridge ESOL Action Research Colloquium presented at the conference attracted an audience of around 80 people, providing a clear indication of interest in practitioner AR among participants from across the ELICOS sector. Formal and informal feedback also suggested that the project was seen as successfully initiating the concept of teacher research as a relevant means of increasing professionalism in the sector and promoting the idea of a research base for practice in general. Several attendees expressed an interest in being involved in future projects.

As the project proceeded, the dynamics, roles and relationships within the group changed. It began by adopting the 'practical' base described by Carr and Kemmis (1986:203):

'In practical action research, participants monitor their own educational practices with the immediate aim of developing their practical judgement as individuals. Thus, the facilitator's role is Socratic: to provide a sounding-board against which practitioners may try out ideas and learn more about the reasons for their own actions, as well as learning more about the process of self-reflection.'

However, from the first workshop, there was evidence that the group was prepared to develop what Carr and Kemmis (1986:203) describe as an 'emancipatory' approach 'in which participants themselves take responsibility for the Socratic role of assisting the group in its collaborative self-reflection'. The teachers increasingly acted as 'sounding-boards' or 'critical friends' for other group members, by deconstructing each other's action plans, critiquing and (re)constructing focus questions, evaluating plans for interventions, methods and directions and recommending alternative avenues of investigation.

In the articles that follow, six teachers will present their research. Disseminating the outcomes of the research widely, beyond the presentations at the English Australia conference, was considered an essential component of this project. One argument for making teacher research public is put forward by Brumfit and Mitchell (1989:7): 'because it needs to be distinguished from simply improving one's own private understanding: it is not another name for personal study.' This position is supported by Crookes (1993:137) who states that 'research is not research unless communicated', while Freeman (1996:105) fears that if it is not communicated, teacher research will 'dissipate in the recesses of private conversations, staff rooms, or schools'. It is for these reasons that publication outcomes were built into this project from its inception.

Nevertheless, some readers of these accounts may take the view that they do not readily conform to typical standards of empirical research. If so, this is to miss the point of the rationale for dissemination of teacher research. As Borg (2010:394) notes: 'the view that teacher research cannot remain a private activity is not motivated by a desire to see it as an approximation of academic research.' Citing Bartel's (2003) argument that expecting academic norms of dissemination to be applied to teacher research could be seen as 'colonialist', Borg (2010) argues for a broad formative and summative approach, with which I would agree, that allows for a variety of different formats both oral and written. Thus, the accounts in this issue should be seen as written from the perspectives of teachers making public their experiences and research outcomes in personal experimentations with AR. Genres for reporting classroom-based AR are, as Freeman (1998) notes, still in flux and teacher accounts tend to favour narrative forms where stories of experimentation in the classroom can be told. It is hoped that the research stories told by the six teachers featured in this issue inspire other classroom practitioners to consider conducting AR.

Lessons learned

One of the important aspects of this project was that it was initiated and supported at the level of a whole educational

system operating nationally. It was further supported by external sponsorship from a major international and high-profile organisation. Although the areas identified for research were selected at these system levels in response to the educational priorities and needs of ELICOS organisations, these areas were broadly defined and allowed considerable flexibility for teacher choice. Thus, the participating teachers were free to identify their own classroom issues for investigation. The aim was to keep 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' curriculum needs and priorities in balance. Therefore, the projects you will read about in this issue cover a range of topics: using electronic dictionaries to develop content-specific language skills for students enrolled in design courses, introducing beginner students to extensive reading, increasing progress and motivation in high-level learners, using extensive listening to increase listening and speaking skills with intermediate learners, increasing high-level learners' vocabulary development and motivation through extensive reading and exploring learning obligation and motivation of learners in IELTS classes.

Interestingly, a major underlying theme that emerged from all these investigations hinged on the notion of developing learner motivation and increasing skills for autonomous and independent learning. These teachers, all working within the ELICOS sector, were very conscious of the need to assist students whose time in classrooms is short and intensive by providing them with good cognitive and meta-cognitive language learning skills that would motivate them to continue learning.

A further important feature of the project was that participation was voluntary. Participating teachers were keen to understand their classrooms and their personal teaching practices at a deeper level and willingly devoted the extra time required to do research. In addition, the colleges where the teachers worked gave their full support, both materially and professionally, to the additional work the teachers were doing. There was no sense of teachers being forced to undertake research to serve the imperatives of the organisational system. Nevertheless, the system stood to gain from understanding and disseminating what teachers can demonstrate about innovations in practice. The insights about practice from the project could be seen to be contributing to larger-scale curriculum development, as well as to strengthening quality assurance processes and promoting greater professionalism at the system level. The project also sent a strong message within the system that teachers' curriculum enquiry was considered 'to be a genuine part of their work' (Roberts 1998:288).

The collaborative aspects of the project and the different roles taken by participants contributed further to the impact of the project within the group and within the system. Although the teachers came from different parts of Australia that were widely distributed geographically, the various interactions within the group increased the sense of working within a broad educational system. Thus, the collaboration among the teachers came increasingly to be characterised by:

- collectivism (joint activity relating to common concerns)
- reciprocity (equal access to information and mutual sharing of ideas)

- affirmation (evaluation and validation of each other's research and ideas about teaching)
- sustainability (maintenance of the impetus for the research)
- regeneration (creative reconstruction of classroom practices).

Within the system, there was evidence of a growing national interest in AR on the part of teachers and college administrators. This interest was stimulated not only by the formal structures of the project and the colloquium presentations, but also by the impact the teachers had within their various institutions. The 'ripple effect' from their participation in the project included requests from other teachers to be involved in their research or in future extensions of their studies, presentations and updates at staff meetings, and invitations to talk to colleagues at professional development days, both within colleges and at local events. A further 'spin-off' was that, following the conclusion of the project, one of the participating teachers decided to pursue additional formal qualifications, thus meeting one of the goals at the system level to further teacher professionalism.

It would be naive to suggest that the single piloting of an AR initiative was without challenges. Although contact was maintained between workshops, email was not the ideal medium for interactive exchanges. Discussion took place in the group about setting up a blog; however, time constraints, the demands of the research, and technical limitations worked against this idea coming to fruition. The challenge remains of how to initiate a process that allows for distance communication networks to be set up while conducting AR and it is likely that a blog will be trialled in the next project.

Finding time to do the research in addition to teaching and the demands of personal lives was also a continuing problem for some of the teachers, although they all recognised from the beginning that additional time would be involved. Selecting relevant data collection methods, and designing and implementing them were not necessarily straightforward tasks for participants. However, many of these challenges were eventually addressed within the group discussions and through email contact with the facilitators. Finally, another problematic aspect of the research for several of the participants was the current volatility of the ELICOS sector, which has been challenged by political, structural and organisational changes and declining international student numbers. For some participants this resulted in very intensive short-term programming arrangements or major changes in key administrative personnel.

Conclusion

The processes and structures used in this project illustrate how external sponsorship can be combined with institutional and system-level teacher-researcher support (Hustler, Cassidy and Cuff 1986). The AR design adopted meant that teachers became actively engaged in identifying curriculum issues relevant to their own practices and to their institutional and organisational system, trying out innovative

and adaptive teaching interventions, recording and analysing their curriculum decisions, and exploring the values and personal teaching theories that underlie them. Adopting AR rather than different research designs meant that the research facilitators and other personnel within the system were able to access rich information about how ELICOS teachers interact with and negotiate the curriculum plans and frameworks with which they work on a daily basis. AR enabled the teachers to select areas of particular challenge or interest and to explore how they could be mediated in their institutional context. Their findings, while not generalisable, contain messages that may well have resonance for other ELICOS practitioners and more generally for the wider system.

Moreover, having the opportunity to publish accounts in *Research Notes*, means that outcomes from the project are made even more widely available, possibly as templates for other individuals and institutions wishing to initiate similar teacher research processes. Roberts (1998:285) argues that such AR designs are 'notably rich and multilevel in nature'. They highlight the characteristics of curriculum and curriculum development theory, teachers' navigations through the curriculum, the professional impact on teachers of doing research, and the multilayered conditions that are effective in supporting teacher research. Given the teachers' highly positive responses to the process, as illustrated in their accounts, it can be said that this pilot project has achieved the goal of introducing teacher research to this professional field. The follow-up project planned for 2011 aims to take these initiatives further.

Acknowledgement

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Progress, motivation and high-level learners

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Introduction

The purpose of this action research project was to explore the themes of progress and motivation in high-level General English students enrolled in a private language college in Perth, Western Australia. This project aimed to find a solution to the loss of motivation in class due to perceived lack of progress. The teaching intervention associated with the research was to assist students to take more responsibility for their own progress goals, by setting them out in writing and detailing a plan of how to achieve them. The students were interviewed with a view to discovering their opinions on progress and motivation and to identify if there was a link between the two. Their progress was tracked

throughout the process by both the students themselves and me as their teacher.

Context

The students in my upper-intermediate (as determined by our testing procedures) General English class come from a variety of countries, backgrounds and age groups. The students at this level may expect to achieve an IELTS band score of at least 7, roughly equivalent to B2/C1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) scale. At the college where I work, each student is present in the class for a varying length of time: some might study for a matter of weeks, while others will be present for the three-month duration of the class. This depends on the students' personal circumstances and time they have allocated to studying. Each student attends classes for five hours a day, five days a week. The participants involved in my research were enrolled in my morning class which runs for three hours a day.

It became apparent to me through conversations with my students that many of them were of the opinion that they had stopped making progress and had plateaued in their learning of English. I was, however, inclined to disagree with the majority of their views. These students reported feelings of frustration and waning motivation linked to their perceived lack of progress, although they were still mostly diligent and enthusiastic contributors in the classroom. It is the norm in my experience that progress is easier for the learner to see at lower levels, but I was positive that progress was still being made at this higher level. The question was how could I show this progress to my students? This situation led me to consider exploring the relationship between progress and motivation in learners placed at B2/C1 on CEFR levels, if, indeed, there were any relationship at all.

All students in my class who were studying for more than a week were invited to take part in the project. Collecting meaningful data from students studying for less than this period would have been almost impossible. As mentioned, our General English programme is highly flexible and dynamic in terms of length of enrolment. As this was my normal classroom reality, I needed to respond to a situation where students would take part in the project for varying lengths of time. Although there were some overlaps, I completed two research cycles with two different groups. However, until it is appropriate to draw distinctions between these groups I will treat them as one for the purpose of outlining the processes and outcomes of the research.

I received responses of interest in the project from 19 students with varying cultural backgrounds. The ages of the participants ranged evenly from 19 to 40, with a median age of 27. The majority of participants had been in Australia for six months or more. Table 1 shows their nationalities and proportions of male to female students.

Research questions

Deciding upon my research questions was a challenging task. As Dörnyei (2001:2) notes, when studying motivation we are studying human behaviour 'and human nature being as complex as it is, there are simply no cut and dried answers to

Table 1: Participants' nationality and gender

Nationality	Male	Female	Total
Brazilian	3	1	4
Colombian	2	2	4
Indonesian	–	1	1
Italian	–	1	1
Japanese	1	1	2
Korean	1	1	2
Malaysian	–	1	1
Polish	1	1	2
Thai	1	1	2
Total	9	10	19

be offered'. Finding a suitable starting place was imperative. To develop the questions I aimed to follow the advice of Burns (2010:30) that 'the more focused and "answerable" the questions, the more they are likely to bring you good results'. I was also aware that, as Burns (2010) further notes, action research questions could change over the course of my research.

Following a curriculum rigidly can be constraining and in some cases the course material may not be meeting student needs. Although it is common for teachers to follow a curriculum or a recommended course book, it cannot be assumed that these will meet students' needs or provide them with a sense of their own progress. While students also frequently look to teachers as the source for identifying their progress, I wanted to challenge whether this necessarily had to be the case in my classroom. I wanted to explore what would happen if the students took control of this aspect of learning. Hence my first research question was the following:

How does giving higher-level General English students responsibility for their own progress goals affect the progress they make?

As the project developed I realised that the students could never take complete responsibility for their progress. Because of the structured nature of the classroom learning environment I had to play my role and help them to achieve this goal. This reflection led to a small amendment to my initial question:

How does giving higher-level General English students **more** responsibility for their own progress goals affect the progress they make?

I also supplemented my original question with another concerning the role of the teacher:

How important is the teacher's role in the students' attainment of their progress goal?

The main issue that prompted the project was my belief that there was a strong link between progress and motivation. It became the focus of another research question:

What is the relationship between progress and motivation in high-level General English students?

Prior to commencing the data collection process I was concerned that my students would identify rather large progress goals that would be unmanageable for them to

achieve in the time frame of their study. I came to realise that this possibility need not have a negative effect on my data if I incorporated it into my research questions. I accepted that becoming aware of and working with the kind of goals students identified could be an interesting part of the project and could have positive consequences for the participants and myself. Therefore, I constructed my final initial research question:

How realistic are students' ideas of progress, and how does this affect their progress and motivation?

Response

My first research question lent itself naturally to the intervention I was planning. I created a questionnaire consisting of eight questions (see Appendix 1). The last three questions were concerned with the students' progress goals:

6. What is your progress goal?

7. How are you going to achieve this goal?

8. How can I help you achieve this progress goal?

I wanted the students to think more about their progress goal(s) than they might have done in the past; if they wrote their progress goals down and decided on a plan of action I considered that this would be taking more responsibility for their own goals. Prior to the second cycle of action research I altered the questionnaire slightly (see Appendix 2) to distinguish between questions that would assist me with my data collection and those that were related to the main intervention I wanted to take.

In addition to altering the layout of the last three questions in the questionnaire, for the second cycle of research I deleted part of question 5. In the original questionnaire question 5 asked:

5. Do you think that your progress affects your motivation? (For example, making progress, motivation goes up – not making progress, motivation goes down)

It occurred to me that this was a leading question. While trying to help the participants understand the question, I had disclosed my assumptions. The question for the second cycle was as follows:

5. Do you think that your progress affects your motivation? How?

I received responses in the second cycle that were similar to those in the first cycle and was relieved that I had not compromised my data.

In addition to implementing the intervention, I collected data through individual interviews with each of the participants, class discussions, and class observations. The interviews were mainly based on the responses given in the questionnaires, and they provided a means of better understanding the issues and triangulating the data. One concern was that the participants would be guarded in the interviews, either through shyness or a desire to give the answers I wanted to hear. However, this was not the case: the majority of the participants were very open and honest. I interviewed all the participants at least once and recorded

and transcribed each interview. Where possible I tried to give participants two interviews: one soon after they had filled out the questionnaire, another at the end of their time in my class. This was not possible with all participants due to absences, classwork, class changes and the length of their study, but I was conscious of the importance of following up on their goals. As Dörnyei (2001:127) notes, motivation needs to be 'actively nurtured or protected'. If the students were to gain motivation through achieving their progress goals, I had a responsibility to remind them and talk with them about these goals. In this respect the interviews were also part of the intervention.

Case studies

In second language acquisition research much has been written about Gardner and Lambert's (1972) motivational theories (as cited in Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991). Although these theories have been revised over time, they are still relevant to research today. Gardner and Lambert drew a distinction between integrative motivation, that is, learning a language in order to identify with a group that speaks a different first language (L1), and instrumental motivation, for example learning a language to further a career or gain educational qualifications. Gardner and Lambert (1972) realised that both types of motivation could influence language learning, but integratively motivated learners were more likely to master the language (as cited in Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991).

According to Gardner and Lambert's (1972) models, the majority of the participants in my class, based on their questionnaire results and interviews, were instrumentally motivated, while only one student appeared to be fully integratively motivated. Seven students gave responses that suggested they were both instrumentally and integratively motivated. Table 2 provides the response of one participant, Danika, who shows integrative motivation and statements made by other participants that indicate their motivation.

I was interested in how the students' orientation towards motivation affected their achievement of progress goals, if at all, and to what extent articulating their progress goals would be effective for differently motivated types of learners. In order to illustrate what my research revealed I have

Table 2: Participant motivation types

Integrative motivation (1 participant)	Instrumental motivation (11 participants)	Combination (7 participants)
'Because I like traveling' – Danika, Poland	'To get a good job' – Hiroyuki, Japan	'It's life and job together' – Soo, Korea
	'To improve my qualifications and to find a better job' – Davi, Brazil	'It wasn't just for fun, or just for study, it was life. If your English is better you get more opportunities' – Victor, Poland
	'It's important to get a good job in my country' – Farah, Indonesia	'I meet a lot of foreign friends.' 'To get a good job' – Kyoko, Japan

chosen to compare two participants who showed different types of motivation and approaches to progress goals. The descriptions of these participants aim to show how they responded in regard to the effectiveness of the intervention.

Case study 1: Maria

Maria from Colombia had been studying English for two years. Her main motivation for studying English was expressed in the following way: 'it's important for my career.' Following Gardner and Lambert (1972), therefore, I classified her as an instrumentally motivated learner. Maria's progress goal was unspecific initially, '[to] understand, speak and write very well in English'. She did have a specific plan of how she was going to achieve this goal, however, '[by] studying everyday after school, reading, watching movies, television and practising with people who speak English'. Maria also had a relatively clear idea of the teacher's role in her progress goal, '[by] clarifying my doubts, and doing homework and exercises everyday to develop my English'.

In our first interview I asked Maria if she would consider making her progress goal smaller and more focused, to which she replied, 'yes, it's better cos it's general [at the moment]'. She explained how she would like to focus on tenses, 'start with past continuous, past perfect, the same with present continuous, present perfect'. I gave her homework every day and focused on correcting her tenses.

Prior to the intervention, Maria was frustrated with her lack of progress: 'Now I think my English is at the same level. I don't know why.' However, she participated in the project for four weeks and reported positive feelings about making her progress goals smaller, and the achievement she felt in relation to these more limited goals: 'Now, it's good. Especially in the tenses and present, past and future. You work with us and exercise and games so it's very good for me. And the homeworks and writings was very good for me.' When asked if writing her progress goal down and thinking about a plan to achieve it was helpful she replied: 'Yeah. It's difficult now . . . if next week I have another teacher, the same things . . . I'll be a little bit shy or nervous, but I need to try and practice and talk with my other teacher.'

Case study 2: Kyoko

Kyoko from Japan had been learning English for over 10 years. In her questionnaire, Kyoko cited her reasons for studying English as 'to get a good job, [and because] it's my hobby'. However, in her interview Kyoko talked about having high motivation because, 'I came here by myself and I meet a lot of foreign friends – that's why everyone speaks English'. This later seemed to be an example of integrative motivation, and therefore I classified Kyoko as having a mix of integrative and instrumental motivation.

In contrast to Maria, Kyoko had a very specific initial progress goal, 'to learn over 150 words until I finish'. However, like Maria, she had a specific approach to achieving her goal: 'When new words appear, I'll write them down on my notebook, check their meaning and make some sentences.' In addition she had a clear view of the role of the teacher: 'write down new words and tell us their meanings please.'

However, I was surprised to discover during our interview that prior to filling in the questionnaire, Kyoko had not thought about the need for a progress goal. When I asked her if writing down her progress goal had been useful she replied: 'Yeah, I think so. Because when I came here I just want to study English and speak English. So when I wrote this down I didn't have any progress goal, so I wrote 150 words and since then I've been trying to find new words. It was good . . .' Kyoko concurred with Maria's eventual conclusion that smaller, specific progress goals can be better: 'Small progress goals and small and small and small and finally big – I think it's important.'

These participants had varying types of motivation, different progress goals and different approaches to achieving their progress goals. However, the intervention had a positive outcome for both. At the end of the research cycle, they believed that setting a progress goal was a good learning approach, and both were satisfied with their progress towards their goal.

Outcomes

In order to illustrate the outcomes of my research further, here I will return to each of the questions I posed.

1. How realistic are students' ideas of progress, and how does this affect their progress and motivation?

To respond to this question, I had to reflect on my definition of 'realistic' by considering goals that were achievable within the length of time the student would spend in the class. In addition, I widened the definition to mean the achievement of the specific goals identified by the students. As Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991:157) point out, 'only quite young children seem to be capable of native-like attainment, even after many years of target language exposure'. Therefore, statements such as 'I want to speak fluently', or, 'my goal is to speak like a native speaker' I considered to be unrealistic and unspecific. Table 3 sets out examples of my classifications of the students' goals.

Table 3: Participant goal types

Realistic (specific) progress goals (13 participants)	Unrealistic (unspecific) progress goals (6 participants)
'Use phrasal verbs and idioms' – Soo, Korea	'Understand, speak and write very well in English' – Maria, Colombia
'Improve my writing using gerunds' – Marniyati, Malaysia	'Speak, understand very, very well in English' – Celeste, Colombia
'My goal for the next four weeks is to use prepositions in the right way. To match the correct prepositions with verbs or nouns' – Davi, Brazil	'Speaking, writing, pronunciation, more vocabulary, think in English' – Gerardo, Colombia
'Change my attitude to writing, I usually avoid it' – Victor, Poland	

Achieving a progress goal appeared to be difficult without a clear plan of how to do so. The data from the students' statements seemed to show a relationship between having a realistic goal and a clear plan of how to achieve this goal, as shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Participants with realistic goals

Clear plan of how to achieve goal (10 participants)	Unclear plan of how to achieve goal (3 participants)
'reading books and doing exercises' – Davi, Brazil	'I'm taking a general English course' – Kwan, Korea
'reading books, watching many TV programmes' – Soo, Korea	'with more practice' – Alondra, Colombia
'Watching the news everyday because their speaking is clear' – Prawit, Thailand	'study hard' – Luisa, Brazil

Table 5: Participants with unrealistic goals

Clear plan of how to achieve goal (2 participants)	Unclear plan of how to achieve goal (4 participants)
'Speaking, watching TV, reading, writing in English' – Celeste, Colombia	'No idea' – Hiroyuki, Japan
	'studying' – Gerardo, Colombia
'Studying everyday after school, reading, watching movies, television and practicing with people who speak English' – Maria, Brazil	'I should practice more at home, but I didn't' – Thiago, Brazil
	'I'd be doing more than I'm doing' – Lorenzo, Brazil

Participants with a realistic progress goal were more likely to have a clear plan of how to achieve the goal. Some participants recognised that smaller, more attainable goals were important for learning, e.g. 'Small progress goals . . . and finally big – I think it's important' (Kyoko, Japan); 'After you decide your big goal you have to decide on small ones, and when you complete all of them you complete the big goal' (Davi, Brazil). These two students in particular were successful in attaining their progress goals and both reported good levels of motivation. In the context of my project, attainable progress goals with a clear plan of how to achieve them led to progress and in most cases increased motivation.

2. How important is the teacher's role in the students' attainment of their progress goal?

Initially, I did not have a research question related to the role of the teacher. As the project developed it became obvious to me that my own role in the students' development of progress goals should be addressed. When asked the question, 'Do you think it's important that the teacher knows each student's progress goal?', all participants answered in the affirmative. Here are some of the answers:

> 'For sure, cos if you know where they want to be you can direct your way of teaching to that target, and if you know what they want it's better for you' (Lorenzo, Brazil).

> 'Yeah, that should be a part of the job of a teacher to see what is the progress of their students' (Prawit, Thailand).

> 'Yeah, it's important, because when you ask me I should care more about this. My conscience is switched on' (Luisa, Brazil).

Walker and Symons (1997) (as cited in Dörnyei 2001:18) summarise motivation as being at its peak 'when people:

- are competent
- have sufficient autonomy
- set worthwhile goals
- get feedback
- are affirmed by others.'

The teacher plays an important role in giving feedback and affirming those goals. In addition, as Luisa alludes to, the teacher can play a motivating role or can at least, as mentioned previously, respond to Dörnyei's (2001) notion of nurturing and protecting motivation. It is the teacher who sets the agenda for the class, and without including the students' progress goals, they cannot be expected to be achieved. As Danika from Poland commented, 'Yes [it's important that the teacher knows every student's progress goal], because the teacher can prepare the materials for that kind of group'. Once the students had outlined in their questionnaires how I could help them, I was in a better position to tailor the course to the students' needs. As Maria mentioned in her second interview, this more tailored approach was helpful to her: 'you work with us and exercises and games so it's very good for me especially. The homeworks and writings was very good for me.'

3. What is the relationship between progress and motivation in high-level General English students?

In the first cycle of research where I worked with 12 participants, nine of them answered affirmatively to the question: 'Do you think that your progress affects your motivation? (For example, making progress, motivation goes up – not making progress, motivation goes down).' I was concerned about the leading nature of this question, so in the second cycle of research I took out the example in brackets and asked the participants 'How?'. All of the participants replied that progress affected their motivation:

> 'If I didn't see my progress I feel bad, my energy lowers' (Luisa, Brazil).

> 'I think the achievement of studying English is a motivation. If there is no progress, I won't be interested in studying English' (Kwan, Korea).

> '[it] makes me feel satisfy and so my motivation is increased' (Veronica, Italy).

These responses fit with Strong's theory (1984) (as cited in Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991:175) that, 'motivation does not necessarily promote [language] acquisition, but rather results from it'. There was more evidence of this concept in the interviews:

> 'I think they go together motivation [and progress] – if you can't hit your target your motivation starts to go down, but if you're learning you keep your motivation at a high level' (Lorenzo, Brazil).

> 'If you are getting better you can have more motivation' (Davi, Brazil).

The majority of the participants felt there was a clear link between progress and motivation; they considered that being able to see progress leads to an increase in motivation.

4. How does giving higher-level General English students more responsibility for their own progress goals affect the progress they make?

As seen in the case studies of Maria and Kyoko, for these two participants the intervention helped them achieve their progress goals. This was true for a majority of the students; when asked if taking responsibility for their progress goals helped them, most responded affirmatively:

'Yes, yes' (Davi, Brazil).

'Yes of course' (Prawit, Thailand).

'Yeah, I was thinking about progress goal' (Farah, Indonesia).

However, this was not the case for all the participants. Two students had different perspectives:

'After I wrote this? No, I don't think about it anymore' (Luisa, Brazil).

'No, I think it didn't affect. I was just thinking about what I want to be when I finish' (Lorenzo, Brazil).

However, the participants were unanimous in their belief that it is important for students to have progress goals. This was true even for the students who reported that the intervention had had no effect on their progress:

'When you set a goal, you know the way to get that goal, so it's better to set a goal. See your progress' (Prawit, Thailand).

'Yeah, we need a personal goal. But I think many students don't have a goal, they just want to stay here and extend their visa sometimes' (Soo, Korea).

'If I have control of my progress, yes, it's good' (Gerardo, Colombia).

Since progress goals appeared to be so important to my students and to have a positive effect on their perception of progress, I concluded that there is value in implementing them as a permanent feature of my course. Not only were they found to be important for student learning, they also proved to be an important part of course planning. Without knowing students' individual progress goals I would not have been able to tailor the course to help them achieve their goals.

Reflections

My experience of undertaking this action research process was illuminating. I learned a great deal about my teaching style and how I relate to my students. More importantly, I learned more about my students, the way they learn and what aspects of learning are important to them. I felt that the intervention had shown positive outcomes and I now intend to install it as a permanent feature in my class. I also realised how much can be gained through conducting short interviews with students and I will also use them in the future where time permits. The importance of establishing students' trust through this medium cannot be underestimated and becoming aware of students' individual goals is imperative for both teacher and learner. As one participant stated: 'It's difficult for the teacher, but you need to know everything about your students. It's better for you, its better for us. It's a work together' (Maria, Colombia).

Often it seems to be the case that teachers do not ask their learners about their progress goals until it is too late, when their motivation and attitude to learning may have deteriorated beyond repair. This can be especially true of high-level learners. By continuing to find out what motivates my learners from the outset, I hope to go some way towards eliminating this problem and ensuring that progress, and therefore motivation, continue.

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Appendix 1: Student questionnaire

I'd like you to fill out this questionnaire for me, to help with my research project into student progress and motivation. I'd like you to answer all the questions as honestly as you can and please think carefully about question 6; this should be an area of your English that you really want to improve (it can be as detailed as you like). Thank you very much for filling this out, I really appreciate it, *Laura.*

Name: Age: Date:

1. How long have you been studying English?

2. Why are you studying English?

3. Do you have positive feelings about studying English? If not, why?

4. Is it important to you that you make progress while studying?

5. Do you think that your progress affects your motivation? (For example, making progress, motivation goes up – not making progress, motivation goes down)

6. What is your progress goal?

7. How are you going to achieve this goal?

8. How can I help you achieve this progress goal?

Appendix 2: A revised student questionnaire

I'd like you to fill out this questionnaire for me, to help with my research project into student progress and motivation. I'd like you to answer all the questions as honestly as you can, and please think carefully about your progress goal; this should be an area of your English that you really want to improve (it can be as detailed as you like). Thank you very much for filling this out, I really appreciate it, *Laura*.

Name: Age: Date:

1. How long have you been studying English?

2. Why are you studying English?

3. Do you have positive feelings about studying English? If not, why?

4. Is it important to you that you make progress while studying?

5. Do you think that your progress affects your motivation? How?

6. What is your progress goal?

7. How are you going to achieve this goal?

8. How can I help you achieve this goal?

Obligation and motivation

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Introduction

As a concept, motivation is a bit of a beast (Wlodkowski 1985, in Dörnyei 2001a:12). 'The real problem with motivation . . . is that everyone is looking for a single and simple answer . . . Unfortunately . . . motivating students . . . will never be a singular or simplistic process' (Scheidecker and Freeman, in Dörnyei 2001b:13). Motivation is 'not located solely within the individual but is socially distributed, created within cultural systems of activities and involving the mediation of others' (Ushioda 2006:154).

The purpose of this study is to aim for a better understanding of the complexities of motivation in students and the role of a teacher as a motivator. It is also intended to serve as the beginning of an ongoing project towards designing my own classroom intervention strategy to motivate language learners, which may or may not be applicable to other teachers, but might certainly provide a starting point for them. The goal of this study is to explore the potential of explicit goal-setting behaviour and promissory obligations in motivating students towards achieving their study goals. The effect of these motivational strategies on student motivation levels is not measured at this stage.

Setting

This action research project took place at the Australian Institute of Professional Education (AIPE) in North Sydney, which currently offers two IELTS preparation courses. At the time, I was teaching students who had enrolled in one of the IELTS preparation courses. The students' level of English ranged from approximately IELTS Band 5.5 through to 6.5.

While the course is designed to prepare students for the IELTS examination, not all of my students wished to sit the exam. Some students had clearly defined goals with regard to achieving the IELTS band necessary for immigration or further study purposes, while others did not have clear goals and were attending class to comply with visa regulations while working long hours outside of class time. Some had enrolled because the evening timetable suited them – they worked during the day. Others simply wanted a higher-level English class. Owing to the nature of ELICOS (English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students) programmes in Australia – the weekly intake and departure of students – the social and learning dynamic was constantly in flux. It was difficult to maintain group cohesion as students left and arrived. This situation proved challenging for me and I became increasingly concerned (and often frustrated) with the extreme changes in student levels of motivation in the classroom and outside of the classroom (understood on my part by the amount of homework that was achieved). This situation affected my own motivation and caused confusion regarding what my teaching goals were at any given time.

I had spoken to other teachers about student motivation, but few seemed as deeply concerned about it as I was. One colleague had dismissed the problem by saying: 'I'm a teacher, not a motivator.' Another teacher's response to de-motivated students was they were 'lazy, untalented or just plain dumb'.

Participants

The participants in this study were international students from a variety of countries: Turkey, Brazil, Thailand, Colombia, Uzbekistan, Peru and the Czech Republic. In total, 22 students participated. The age range was between 20 and 47 years, with the average of around 28. The majority were female. The time they had spent in Sydney also varied from only a few weeks to a couple of years. Their professional backgrounds ranged from medicine, nursing and engineering to journalism, business and hospitality.

Focus

Assumptions

My fundamental assumption, following Gardner and Lambert (1959), is that students are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. My students were certainly not lazy or untalented and they were not dumb. More than that, my students were not generally de-motivated. They had done many things propelled by a high level of motivation – whether intrinsic (wanting to learn a language and explore a new country) or extrinsic (wanting to learn the language for vocational purposes or for migration). They had travelled from their homes to a new country. They had enacted massive changes in their lives, left families, left jobs, left the security of home and language. These students lived in non-ideal accommodation, sometimes, in the case of one student, sharing a bedroom with six other men and not having a table of his own on which to do homework. Some students would get out of bed at 5 a.m. to go to work and then come to my class at 3.30 p.m. They stayed until 9 p.m. and then returned home; some even went back to work an evening shift. In class, some students were yawning uncontrollably or nodding off to sleep even as I entered the classroom. Others were late because they had to find a job before their money ran out, as life in Sydney is expensive. Others were late because they were on the phone to their partner in their home country, trying to resolve an argument by long distance.

These students, then, were highly motivated and yet, in class, some of that inherent motivation was lost. I came to sense that motivation was not only a complex concept, but also an elusive one as it fluctuated over time. In my later reading, I noted that Dörnyei (2001:45) reflects on the 'temporal dimension of motivation' and understood that not only does learner motivation vary from student to student, but that student motivation is constantly changing from one day to the next. The above reflections gave rise to my first research question:

> How can I tap into my students' energy and somehow manipulate it and focus it on me and on my class and on the whole lengthy process of English language acquisition?

Teacher as motivator

I had a strong intuition that, as a teacher, I was also a motivator. I also believed that my passion for teaching had a strong effect on my students. On some days, my teaching seemed to transform my students' faces. I would be charged by the teaching process and sometimes my students would tell me, or they would write feedback, that they felt the effect too. However, although I knew that my behaviour in the classroom was surely one of the most important 'motivational tools' (Csizer and Dörnyei 2005), I also realised that I could not always maintain student motivation. This realisation would impact on my own motivation in the classroom, which would also impact on my students.

I reflected that it was my responsibility to motivate my students. However, if I had a responsibility, a moral obligation as I saw it, to motivate my students as well as to teach them then did my students also not have an obligation to become motivated and to motivate other students in the classroom? I believe that responsibility has a philosophical

basis, which is based on ethics and obligation. I realised that I wanted my 'intervention' (Burns 2010) as an action researcher to occur within the educational context and also within a philosophical context. This aspect introduced a kind of moral code into the learning environment. Keeping the promises we make – to ourselves and, especially, to others – is a universally acknowledged moral code. Promissory obligations are voluntary, as we do not have to make them, but when we do make promises we must keep them (Habib 2008). So, my second research question includes the term 'obligation':

> Could I create a sense of promissory obligation that might motivate students to keep their word and achieve their study goals?

I aimed to respond to my question by getting students to put their goals in writing, and to discuss them first with a partner, next with the teacher, and then to have their goals witnessed and signed.
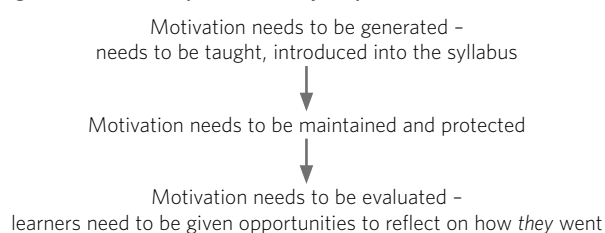
Literature

When I began this action research project I was reluctant to consult the literature and only did so once the project was well under way. The reason was that initially I felt the project was an entirely personal process, between myself and my students and I wanted to follow my own intuitions and those of my students. However, when I finally did approach the literature, I found that many of my intuitions were very much confirmed.

First, the teacher's role in motivation is indeed central (Dörnyei and Csizer 1998), despite what some of my colleagues believed. It was also true that sheer passion and enthusiasm do generally motivate students. Second, Dörnyei and Csizer (1998) confirmed that the teacher had to get to know the students personally, as their research shows that personal connection also adds to motivation.

On the other hand, I had not clearly understood the role of teacher practice in motivation (Oxford and Shearin 1994), as I had assumed that good teaching practice was linked to teaching, not motivating. Furthermore, I was better able to understand that motivation was a socially mediated phenomenon (Ushioda 2006) and this meant that all actors within the classroom were motivating factors and therefore responsible at varying levels for the motivation of others.

Moreover, my students' oscillating levels of motivation over time seemed to fit into Dörnyei's (2001a:19) process model of language learning motivation which he sees as 'a dynamic view of motivation'. The main assumptions of the model are illustrated in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Main assumptions of Dörnyei's process model

Motivation needs to be generated –
needs to be taught, introduced into the syllabus

↓

Motivation needs to be maintained and protected

↓

Motivation needs to be evaluated –
learners need to be given opportunities to reflect on how *they* went

Dörnyei and Otto (1998) helped me to understand 'that motivation is not static but dynamically evolving and changing in time, making it necessary for motivation constructs to contain a featured temporal axis'.

My action research project revolved around the setting of goals, so I also looked to goal-setting theory, which is based on the idea that all individuals are driven to achieve an end goal. Locke's (1996) concepts provided a basis for my analysis of the project. Locke argues that the success of a goal-oriented approach is based on three characteristics: 'proximity', 'difficulty' and 'specificity'. In short, an achievable goal is one which can be completed in a short given time, requires moderate effort to achieve and is clearly defined and understood. Although my study did help students adjust their goals by guiding them to make increasingly more specific goals, it was not within the scope of the study to teach students goal-setting behaviour.

Response

My response to the focus question was to intervene directly into the classroom environment and into my students' current habits. The intervention first took the form of getting to know my students on a more personal level, that is, by learning about their lives outside of the classroom so that I might understand how motivation played a role in their day-to-day lives and how it might be impacting on their level of commitment to the class and to achieving their goals. To do this, I led group discussions, asked students to complete a questionnaire, and asked students to work with a study partner to set goals and make promises that goals would be achieved.

Intervention

My intervention was based on the desire to understand how group members, both teacher and students, might participate in the act of motivating learning within the classroom. My main teaching tool was, in the first instance, to make learning objectives and the need for motivation explicit. I then encouraged students to work in pairs and with me to motivate each other by signing a contract and getting other students to witness the goals they set. This meant they were committing to creating a promissory obligation to keep their word and achieve their set goals.

Methodology

The main methods of collecting data used in this research were the compulsory AIPE student progress reports, group discussions, a detailed questionnaire, student blogs, participant–participant discussions, researcher–participant discussions, observational data and my researcher's journal.

AIPE student progress reports

Student progress reports (see Figure 2) are completed by every teacher at AIPE during the student's second, fifth and tenth week on the course. Class time is dedicated to this reporting and teacher and student complete the form together.

Group discussions

At the beginning of the course, the data collected during initial brainstorming sessions served two purposes: it directed student attention to their participation in a research project on motivation that for me was still a rather vague topic at the time. This would require thinking in a new way about their studies, their role in a classroom, the role of their teacher, and their own interaction with other students and their teacher. In other words, students would have to begin to see themselves, their peers, and the teacher as resources for their own language learning.

One of the very first questions was, simply, 'What is motivation?' The first group discussion and brainstorming session aimed at getting students to articulate what motivation meant. By the end of the second session, the students had come up with the following definitions: 'reason to do something', 'a push to do something', the 'desire to do something', 'the feeling that encourages you to do something' and 'the inspiration to achieve a goal'.

The final definition was the one I worked with, as goal-setting behaviour was central to this action research project. Motivation is often defined as the 'psychological quality that leads people to achieve a goal' (Wikipedia 2010).

I ended the second brainstorming session by posing the question: 'Could anyone or anything make you become more motivated? Say, for example, you told your mother than you wanted to achieve an IELTS Band 6; would simply saying it to her make you feel that you had to achieve it?'

Most students replied that they were studying for their own benefit and for personal reasons, so it would not matter to them, they would not feel that they were expected to achieve their goal. However, as the discussion progressed, some students admitted to feeling a kind of 'social pressure' to achieve goals. For example, Student L mentioned that his sister had paid a significant amount of money for him to study in Sydney. 'Do you feel you have to study hard and achieve your goals because she is, kind of, waiting for you to do that?', I asked. He replied, 'Yes, it's like a moral obligation'. Another, Student T, said her husband had expectations of her and she also felt a kind of vague pressure to achieve her goal.

Most students, however, did not express any real sense of feeling obligated to study, and this was later confirmed following analysis of the questionnaire (discussed below).

Questionnaire and student–student pair discussions

My questionnaire (see Appendix) was divided into three parts. It was developed from the course book I had chosen for the new Advanced IELTS course and which included an interesting instrument – it asked students to rate (on a scale of 1–5) their ideal study preferences and what happens in reality. Students were also asked to calculate the difference between their ideal preference and reality. I used this instrument in the first part of the questionnaire and also used some of the questions and asked a number of my own. I imagined that the difference between the ideal situation and the reality could be bridged by motivated students to turn their reality into their ideal situation.

In my questionnaire (see Appendix) students were asked to rate on a scale of 1–5 both their ideal study preferences

Figure 2: An example of a student's progress report

A. STUDENT FEEDBACK (PLEASE ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF)

Do you enjoy coming to class? Why?
Yes I enjoy coming to class. Because I like my teacher.

Do you have enough homework?
Abundantly.

Do you think your English has improved? Which skills?
I'm not sure.

Do you always participate in the lesson?
% 100

Which skills do you want to improve?
All of them.

How can you improve these skills (outside class)?
Study and speak.

What are your future goals?
I don't know :)

B. TEACHER TO DISCUSS WITH THE STUDENT

Explain how you can improve each skill and how much time you should spend each day.

SKILL	HOW I CAN IMPROVE THIS SKILL	
SPEAKING	Study	I'm working in a shop. If I speak everyday one hour with our customer. I can improve
LISTENING	//	If I listen radio or watch TV everyday 2 or 3 hours.
READING	//	When I come to school and go back to my house in the train I can read book and newspaper
WRITING	//	Really I don't know so I can't improve my writing
GRAMMAR	//	Just study. Maybe everyday 1 or 2 hours.

SMART GOALS – (SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE, ACHIEVABLE, REALISTIC, TIMELY)

and what happens in reality and then to calculate the difference between the two sets of responses. I used this instrument in the first part of the questionnaire. In the second part of the questionnaire, I asked students to write a longer comment in response to questions about motivation related to study habits, other students, the teacher, and the classroom environment. They were also asked to note their attitudes towards making their goals known to others and whether this would make them feel obliged to achieve their goals. In the third part of the questionnaire, I asked students to list long-term goals and to break them down into short-term specific steps. Students were then asked to discuss their goals in pairs and, finally, to act as witnesses to the goal-setting promises of their partner before asking me also to sign as a witness. For the first group of students I added an extra section whereby they were asked to make two explicit 'want' statements:

1. I want my witness to . . .
2. I want my teacher to . . .

The questionnaire was administered to two separate groups and took approximately 1 hour of class time to complete.

Student blogs

Besides responding to questionnaires, students were also asked to write a blog in response to the following question: 'When it comes to effective study habits most people say that studying with a friend increases motivation. Others, however, say that studying alone is best. What do you say?'

Students were already familiar with blogs as they had been working on online journals using WordPress.

Researcher–participant discussions

I completed a number of unstructured interviews with participants in which I focused on understanding the following points:

1. Why the participant chose to study English.

2. Why the participant chose to study English within a classroom situation at AIPE.

3. How much time – realistically – they had outside of class to dedicate to further study.

4. Whether they checked with their witness on their progress.

5. Whether they felt they had to achieve their goals because of the contract signed with witness.

If I had known the student for a longer period of time, for example, 10 to 20 weeks, I also gave them feedback on how I saw their motivation levels change over time and asked them why this might be so.

Collection of observational data

I observed changes in motivational level and recorded them in my journal. I also noted comments I heard in the classroom during other activities which could be linked back to the action research project. For example, during some activities given immediately after the initial contract signing phase, Student C said to her partner: 'Come on my witness, you need to help me with this activity.'

Researcher journal

I began keeping a journal in which I recorded observational data and thoughts during the process of the action research project. I also noted discussions I had with the Student Welfare Counsellor to whom I had referred students who seemed to have external problems which were impacting on classroom concentration levels and motivation to complete homework tasks or participate in class.

Outcomes

The questionnaire produced three types of data. I will firstly discuss questionnaire data which offers an insight into students' ideal study habit preferences compared to how they are able to study in reality. Next, I will discuss 'discussion data' analysing attitudes towards study habits, classroom, students, teacher and obligation. Finally, I look at students' goal-setting behaviour.

Comparing ideal study habits and preferences with what happens in reality

The first set of data collected was the scores indicating the differences between students' ideal study habits and preferences and what was happening in reality. The analysis of the data shows that the largest differences of 1.5 to 1.7 were seen in response to the statements 'I like to be motivated to study' and 'I like to complete my homework', respectively. That is to say, students would ideally like to

be motivated and ideally like to complete homework, but in reality they cannot due to factors other than personal choice and preference. When these results are further analysed with reference to the discussion data (collected from the third part of the questionnaire 2), which will be discussed in more detail further below, it can be seen that the major obstacle is employment, lack of time and exhaustion. A detailed analysis of the data shows that if the obligatory contract is to be effective, it will have to be confined to what can be done within the classroom. For many students there is not enough time to commit to outside-of-class study, or when there is, students are generally too tired to do homework.

Discussion data analysing attitudes towards study habits, classroom, students, teacher and obligation

The second set of data was categorised according to attitude statements, listed below, and collected mainly from the discussion section of the questionnaire, but also student blogs and progress reports. The main categories were:

• Attitudes to study

Almost the entire group held a positive attitude towards having study habits. A negative attitude of Student T was expressed in the following way: 'I don't like study habits, because they [give] me a headache.'

• Attitudes to other students as motivating factors

The vast majority of students held positive views towards fellow students in the classroom and saw them as people who could motivate them with their own studies. Student T, for example, said that 'the role of students [is] . . . significant [;] studying with a friend in the classroom [increases] motivation [more] than studying alone.' Similarly, Student J said: 'Study habits with a friend can increase motivation [in] both individuals. That is true because [as] human beings we always need someone who can help us to achieve our goals.' Student E reported the following: 'I generally feel motivated when a friend is studying with me, because I can learn from my friend and I focus better than when I am alone.' Student L said: 'You share the same goal and feel that we inspire each other to keep learning.'

The neutral to negative responses were 'I don't care', [Student D] and 'I don't care, because in this aspect I am a little selfish. I am the only important and I don't care about anybody else' [Student L].

• Attitudes to teacher as expert motivator

As far as the motivating factor being the teacher, again almost all students held positive attitudes. Student M revealed: 'I generally feel motivated if a teacher checks on my progress because it makes me study harder and achieve better grades', while Student D stated the following: 'I feel motivated when a teacher checks on me, because I want to know where my mistakes are and what I can do better.' Most students felt that some level of expectation and advice increased their level of motivation, but two students held neutral attitudes to the influence of teacher motivation.

• Attitudes to classroom environment as motivating factor

Again almost all students held positive attitudes towards the classroom environment as a motivating factor for reasons that included the energy level, character and quality of the teacher, the content studied and the social environment.

Table 1: Data comparing ideal study habits and what happens in reality

My study preferences, goals and motivation	Difference between reality and ideal
I like to complete all my homework	1.7
I like to be given set goals to achieve	1.5
I like to be motivated to study	1.5
I like to study English outside of class	1.4
I like studying during my free time	1.4
I like to be given homework	1.3
I am more motivated to learn English if I have a teacher who will check on my progress	1.2
I achieve more when I work with a study partner	1.0
I achieve more when I share my study goals with friends	1.0
I prefer to study in a quiet place like a library	1.0
I achieve more if I am motivated	1.0
I prefer to study outdoors	1.0
I prefer to study in a class with other students	0.9
I am more motivated to study if I know people who expect me to learn English	0.9
I prefer to study on my own with no interruptions	0.9
If my teacher gives me homework I feel I have to complete it	0.8
I am more motivated to study during the day	0.8
I like to compete with other students	0.7
I prefer to study in an unusual place like a cafe	0.7
I prefer to study at my own pace	0.7
I achieve more when I study alone	0.7
I depend on my teacher to motivate me otherwise I cannot study	0.7
When I see my friends studying I am more motivated to study	0.7
I am more motivated to study if my friend will help me with my study goals	0.6
I am more motivated to study in a class if other students motivate me	0.6
I am more motivated to study at night	0.6
I like to participate in class	0.6
I like my teacher to encourage me to study	0.6
I like to set my own goals	0.4
I like to set goals and achieve them	0.3
I like to study without setting specific goals	0.2

- Attitudes reflecting non-academic factors impacting on motivation

Influencing personal preferences regarding study habits were external non-academic factors, such as work and loneliness. Student G said what a number of other students also said: 'I am working too much and I do not have enough free time to study more.'

- Attitudes towards being obligated to study

Only a minority of students expressed a positive attitude towards the feeling of being obligated to study by setting explicit goals and sharing them with a witness. Student M, for example, said: 'Yes, I feel that I will have to study harder when telling my friends about my study goals in order not to disappoint them', and Student L stated that: 'You are going to feel a social pressure and that would push you to achieve your goals. It's a kind of moral obligation.' However, the majority felt that this pressure of obligation was negative. For

example, Student A said: 'If it is my goal, I have to prove that for myself', and Student R said: 'I have never had the need of others approval.'

These attitude statements revealed two important things. Firstly, almost all students held positive attitudes towards the classroom environment, the active presence of other students as motivating influences and the teacher as an expert motivator, checking on progress and pointing out weakness or correcting students. Secondly, the vast majority of students held negative attitudes towards the idea of being obliged to achieve a goal because they had told another person about it. However, my own observations and verbal student feedback revealed that the task of discussing goals and getting a partner and the teacher to witness and sign the 'contract' was an enjoyable task and students liked the idea of having a 'witness'. It may have been that the use of the term 'have to' in the questionnaire seemed an unfavourable way of stating the process the students carried out. In this respect, my study confirmed the complex nature of motivation.

Goal-setting behaviour

The third set of data collected and analysed was students' statements of their goals.

The data revealed that students do not really know how to set achievable goals or how to break down long-term goals into short-term steps. Goals set by students were vague and required further discussion to make them clear and achievable. For example, prior to teacher intervention, one student wrote: 'I wanna learn English to improve my career.' Following teacher intervention, this goal changed to: 'Listen to the radio every day for half an hour. Speak with husband at dinner time for half an hour a day.' This strongly suggests that work on motivation as the 'psychological quality that leads people to achieve a goal' (Wikipedia 2010) must begin with teaching students how to break down long-term goals into short, clear and achievable daily and weekly goals.

Reflections

The goal of this study was to explore the potential for explicit goal-setting behaviour and promissory obligations to motivate students towards achieving their study goals. What I found was that making goal-setting behaviour explicit may well draw student attention to the importance of setting goals and being motivated in order to achieve results, but external factors already impeding motivation (such as overwork and the ensuing exhaustion in class) would remain an impediment. Since some external factors cannot be changed (for example, hours a student must work), the added psychological pressure of promissory obligation was not an attractive option for the majority of students.

In any case, the results of this study helped me to understand two vital things. Firstly, they confirmed that external factors such as work commitments and practical ability to commit more time to study or even level of concentration in the classroom impacted on motivation levels. Moreover, results confirmed that students depended on their teacher to act as the expert and the data showed me

that here I was the central player. Secondly, the study helped me to understand a number of my own shortcomings. I refer to a journal entry written following a post-questionnaire discussion with the eldest of my students, Student N, a leading and respected member of the group, who had begun to show signs of de-motivation and frustration in the classroom. Student N, when asked about his response to some of the discussion questions said that the other students de-motivated him, because they did not seem to want to learn. He then told me the following, which I have recorded in my journal, and will probably never forget: 'Kathryn,' he said, 'a good teacher leads the students, does not follow them. If a student wants to pay money to sleep in class, then let him sleep. I want to learn.' I reflected on this for days on end, until I finally realised what Student N meant. In my attempt to be the master motivator I had allowed myself to be led by the least motivated student in the class, Student P. Student P works early mornings and slept in class. When I saw him nod off, I would gently call his name and bring him back to class, explaining again where we were up to and what we were doing. I was not leading. I was following. And worse, I was following the least motivated and, inevitably, slowing the entire class down. I somehow felt that my responsibility to motivate was strongest towards the least motivated, instead of the most motivated, and I know that this must have been something I learnt during my education degree: a kind of inclusive philosophy of education.

The classroom is a personal space and 'language learning is a deeply social event', writes Dörnyei (2001a:15). I have come to the realisation more and more that learning is rarely simply about learning content or skill. Learning is a social phenomenon and the classroom environment is a social space. It must be treated as such, as I aimed to do in this project. If I am to motivate students, as a teacher I must really get to know them, understand what their goals are and what expectations they have of the classroom environment, what their ideal study habits are, and what, ultimately will motivate them.

This project has helped me understand that I need to integrate teaching of motivation and goal-setting behaviour into my lesson plans and the curriculum. I need to be more explicit about weekly course objectives and give students confidence to work towards achievable goals. I will continue to encourage students to work in pairs as motivating partners, but I know that I must be the one to maintain motivation and lead the class to achieve goals, though not necessarily by creating promissory obligations.

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Appendix: A questionnaire on study habits and study preferences

Study habits and study preferences

Your name: _____   Your class: _____   Weeks studying English: _____

Part 1: Questionnaire

My study preferences, goals and motivation	Score	Difference	Action plan	Date
	1. Circle the score that reflects your preference. 2. With a different colour circle the score that reflects the reality – what happens now.	Record the difference between your preference and the reality.	Make a comment about how to turn your ideal preference into a reality.	
I prefer to study on my own with no interruptions	1 2 3 4 5			
I prefer to study in a quiet place like a library	1 2 3 4 5			
I prefer to study in an unusual place like a cafe	1 2 3 4 5			
I prefer to study outdoors	1 2 3 4 5			
I prefer to study in a class with other students	1 2 3 4 5			
I prefer to study at my own pace	1 2 3 4 5			
I like to set goals and achieve them	1 2 3 4 5			
I like to compete with other students	1 2 3 4 5			
I like to be given homework	1 2 3 4 5			
I like to be given set goals to achieve	1 2 3 4 5			
I like my teacher to encourage me to study	1 2 3 4 5			
I like to set my own goals	1 2 3 4 5			
I like to study without setting specific goals	1 2 3 4 5			
I like to complete all my homework	1 2 3 4 5			
I like to participate in class	1 2 3 4 5			
I like to study English outside of class	1 2 3 4 5			
I like to be motivated to study	1 2 3 4 5			
I like studying during my free time	1 2 3 4 5			
I achieve more when I study alone	1 2 3 4 5			
I achieve more when I work with a study partner	1 2 3 4 5			
I achieve more when I share my study goals with friends	1 2 3 4 5			
I achieve more if I am motivated	1 2 3 4 5			
I am more motivated to study during the day	1 2 3 4 5			
I am more motivated to study at night	1 2 3 4 5			
I am more motivated to learn English if I have a teacher who will check on my progress	1 2 3 4 5			
I am more motivated to study if I know people who expect me to learn English	1 2 3 4 5			
I am more motivated to study if my friend will help me with my study goals	1 2 3 4 5			
I am more motivated to study in a class if other students motivate me	1 2 3 4 5			
I depend on my teacher to motivate me otherwise I cannot study	1 2 3 4 5			
If my teacher gives me homework I feel I have to complete it	1 2 3 4 5			
When I see my friends studying I am more motivated to study	1 2 3 4 5			
If my friends don't complete their homework, neither do I	1 2 3 4 5			
If I set my own goals I feel I have to achieve them	1 2 3 4 5			
If I share my goals with others I feel I have to achieve them	1 2 3 4 5			

Part 2: Discussion

Spend some time alone thinking about these questions and write an answer for each:

1. Do your current study habits match your study preferences/likes? If not, why not?

2. Is there something happening in your life – outside of class – that is distracting you from study?

3. How could you plan your study to improve how effectively you use your time?

4. Do you generally feel motivated in class? If yes, why? If no, why not?

5. Do you generally feel motivated outside of class? If yes, why? If no, why not?

6. Do you generally feel motivated when a friend is also studying with you? If yes, why? If no, why not?

7. Do you generally feel motivated if a teacher checks on your progress? If yes, why? If no, why not?

8. Do you feel that you **have to** study if you tell your friends about your study goals? If yes, why? If no, why not?

9. Do you feel that you **have to** achieve your goals if you tell your teacher and friends about them? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Now, with a partner, discuss your answers to the questions.

Make notes about the results of your discussion:

_____

_____

_____

Part 3: Action plan

What is my long-term goal?

Long-term goal:	When I want to achieve it:	What steps I need to take to achieve this goal:
		1
		2
		3
		4

How do I achieve my long-term goal?

The steps you need to take in order to achieve your goal are otherwise called 'short-term goals'.

Try to write them below in a way that is clear and achievable. First, set five short-term goals.

Short-term goals	Description of goal	Deadline
Short-term goal 1		
Short-term goal 2		
Short-term goal 3		
Short-term goal 4		
Short-term goal 5		

Discuss these goals with your partner and your teacher.

Finally, add your signature below and ask your partner and your teacher to witness.

Your signature: _____ Date: _____

Witness signature: _____ Date: _____

Teacher signature: _____ Date: _____

Exploring active participation in listening and speaking within an academic environment

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Introduction

My interest lies in exploring fresh methods of teaching speaking and listening to second language (L2) students in intensive (20 hours per week) General Academic English (GAE) programmes. My aim is to help students become active and effective participants in tutorials and lectures and thus prepare them for study in an academic context. This paper reports on the teaching method I developed and implemented and on its results. As part of this teaching method, students are required to listen to authentic listening passages via audio and video podcasts and formulate questions on the content/theme of the podcasts. This work done outside the classroom is then used as a starting point for discussion and debate in the classroom setting. I found that students' confidence in using the interrogative (focusing on 'open' questions) grew and that their critical thinking skills were sharpened. The findings of this study suggest that this classroom-based investigation is a worthwhile exercise in furthering students' listening and speaking skills.

Research context

The college in which this research was conducted (Bradford College, Adelaide) offers degree transfer and foundation study programmes for international students en route to universities in Australia. Students begin their courses with a GAE programme within their first week of arrival into the country. For most students it is their first exposure to a foreign culture and their first experience of having to function in their second language. Depending on their IELTS scores or assessment testing, they are put into GAE courses of between five and 40 weeks of 20 hours per week. This course precedes a year-long English for Academic Purposes programme (EAP) which is part of the foundation studies programme.

Participants

This research involved one class of 18 students: 12 were from China, four from Saudi Arabia and two from Colombia. The action research took place over 10 weeks. Most of these students were aged between 18 and 20 and two were in their thirties. Most of the students (16) were heading into foundation programmes and two were post-graduate students preparing for a Master's programme at the time of the study. Several students were in this programme for 40 weeks (20 hours per week), while others were enrolled for only 25 weeks. For all of these students, it was important to develop language skills that would enable active participation in academic contexts (e.g. listening to lectures, participating in seminars).

Main issues giving rise to research

One of the issues which gave rise to my research was the fact that L2 students spend an insufficient amount of time speaking and listening in English. The results of a case study I did the previous year with a class of 18 Chinese students showed that, outside the classroom, students spent an average of 4 minutes per day speaking (this applied to students who lived independently, rather than with local host families) and an average of 44 minutes per day listening (to movies, music, radio/TV). Clearly, living in an English-speaking country does not necessarily ensure an active engagement with the language and its people. A 4-minute-a-day speaking average is unlikely to ensure success in their stated goal of being able to 'speak' English above everything else. Besides, the results of questionnaires administered over several courses showed the following: the average time students spent practising speaking in L2 classrooms in their home countries was only approximately 30 minutes per week, while around an hour per week was devoted to listening. The focus in their previous education was mostly on writing, reading and grammar.

Other findings derived from my questionnaire data showed that L2 students are not confident in interactive, two-way, listening (listening and speaking during a conversation) and consequently avoid it. In the present research, I focus on the seminar-style interactive listening/speaking that arises out of transactional academic listening, which is a non-collaborative kind of listening, where students listen for information and potentially take notes. I took this approach in order to find a way of encouraging students to share collaboratively the meanings they constructed from the non-collaborative podcast listening task.

Since my goal in the present study was to assist students in moving from transactional to interactional listening, the interrogative, both its form and function, became an important part of my focus. Thus, having students create questions was key in this research. Nunan (1991:192) discusses the use of classroom questions of both the referential and display type and the research relating to their effectiveness. Display questions (the answer is known to the asker) are of the usual kind encountered in classrooms, but seldom used outside the classroom. Referential questions (information seeking questions to which the questioner does not have the answers), however, are less often used in the classroom even though research by many linguists has shown that these questions lead to the student using much more complex and natural language (Nunan 1987, cited in Nunan 1991:194). I wanted students to feel confident asking both open-ended (including referential) and closed questions, but encouraged them to use open questions as they are essential in both social and academic situations.

Another issue to inspire the present research was the inadequacy of the listening resources used in the course. Many of these were examination-style scripts with the following problems: de-contextualised and often meaningless content, affected and exaggerated accents (bad acting/reading) and culturally limited topics lacking relevance to learners' interests and needs. I was interested in introducing

my students to resources that were more authentic, as I believed they would be the most appropriate for their academic learning. I refer to Lynch and Mendelsohn's (2002:205) definition of authenticity which defines authentic material as 'not designed or recorded for non-native speakers, or for language purposes'.

Therefore, the initial questions which I explored (and will continue to explore) for my research were the following:

- What resources and methods can I use that would provide content-rich and language-useful listening?

- As a teacher, what involvement can I have in my students' learning outside the classroom? In other words, how can I motivate my students to practise their listening and speaking in their free time?

- In what ways can authentic speaking and listening practice be introduced to students?

Theoretical perspectives

There were a number of perspectives from literature that supported the present research study and influenced the teaching ideas I put in place.

Lynch and Mendelsohn (2002:194) emphasise that listening is not simply an auditory version of reading and neither is speech a spoken rendition of writing. It is important for L2 students to be adept at both one-way and two-way listening or, in Brown and Yule's (1983) terminology, transactional and interactional listening. Lectures generally require non-collaborative transactional listening where the student listens for information and usually takes notes. It is in seminars, social life on campus and within the community that the less familiar interactive two-way aural/oral skill is required and where, needless to say, L2 students struggle most. Two-way listening, while linguistically easier (due to lower lexical density, repetition, body language cues, etc.) may be harder for students because of the need to process information on the spot where face-saving can become an issue.

The question of authentic materials was central to the intervention reported in this paper. Burns discusses the limitations of 'idealized' (Carter 1997, cited in Burns and Coffin 2001) spoken texts typically used in language learning materials in comparison with those used in authentic social situations. In an earlier publication, Burns, Joyce and Gollin (1996:43) argues against an over-reliance on scripted listening texts as 'they often represent spoken exchanges as neat, fully formed, predictable and unproblematic. However . . . interactions outside the classroom may be anything but predictable . . . students are often faced with linguistic and strategic difficulties which are not anticipated in the spoken texts presented in the classroom.' In this GAE course, I attempted to find a balance of scripted dialogues and authentic texts so that students could move from more to less familiar kinds of materials. There has been much research supporting the use of authentic texts, as they increase learners' awareness of lexical form, function and meaning. One of the sources of inspiring authentic materials is the Internet which can motivate students to listen and gain more than just 'English'.

Drawing all the threads from my readings together, I set out to provide students with meaningful, challenging and authentic texts that would help them develop confidence in lecture-styled listening and seminar-styled speaking. The methods I used to help develop these skills are described below.

Methodology: The teaching method and data collection

Action research involves a process of putting new teaching strategies into place and systematically observing the impact of those strategies.

The teaching method I developed to help students move from transactional to interactional listening was implemented over 10 weeks. It consisted of the following: I would select a range of authentic listening passages in the form of audio and video podcasts and email them as links to my students. I would also pre-teach recurring vocabulary in the listening texts, but only minimally, just providing key vocabulary. Students were asked to listen to the podcasts at home and formulate a minimum of five full-sentence questions (both open and closed) on the content and/or themes of the podcasts. They were also asked to read the transcripts of the listening passages where these were available, but only after listening to the podcast first. Following that, they would email the questions to me so that I could give them immediate feedback on the form of questions (correcting lexical and mostly grammatical errors). In this way I ensured that all students participated and I was also able to maintain personal contact with all of them throughout the project. Several examples of the tasks are provided in the Appendix.

The work done outside the classroom was then brought into the classroom and used as a starting point for discussion and debate: this is where the focus shifts to interactional listening. I would print off the students' questions and distribute them so that they served as a basis for pair and group discussions, quizzes or debates. The idea was to have the students test each other's listening comprehension and also to evaluate and express opinions on what they had listened to. Students had complete control of the texts without my interference, which meant they could negotiate and construct meaning amongst themselves. Sometimes, I would follow up in class with a more detailed instruction on the form of questions and syntax, but this depended on my diagnosis of students' needs to know more about question formation. The primary focus was listening and speaking throughout. By having the students respond to web-based resources in their own way and by designing their own questions, I put listening practice into the hands of the students in their own space and time outside the classroom.

When a speaking session was clearly not going as well as the others (as for example in the case of the J K Rowling Harvard address), the students were asked to rate the difficulty of the podcast on a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being extremely difficult) and asked to say if they benefited from the listening exercise or not. Obtaining regular feedback such as this from the students was important so that I could

continually judge the appropriate level of the task and avoid overwhelming input which would de-motivate the students. In the tasks I set, which were focused on global and not detailed listening, the students could focus their attention on what they chose. They did not have to understand the whole text. In this case the language of the text could connect with Krashen's notion of comprehensible input but be more than just a little beyond their current level of competence (Krashen 1982).

The podcasts consisted of news and interviews and covered a range of current themes and issues. I worked with the awareness that an 'authentic' text does not guarantee that it would be relevant or challenging, so I strived to make an appropriate selection of authentic texts. These pod/vodcasts included interviews with John Francis on environmental issues; Jessica Watson (the first female 16-year-old to circumnavigate the world); Andrew Denton interview with Mohammed Yunus (Nobel Prize winner for his work in micro-lending start-ups in Bangladesh), etc. There were also news reports on, for example, the British Petroleum oil spill, controversial issues such as cosmetic surgery and the beauty industry as well as speeches by famous people e.g. J K Rowling's Harvard address.

To observe the impact of the teaching and learning strategies on the listening development of the students, I collected data throughout the duration of the project. The data was derived from the following:

- emailed student questions
- a video (only done once but for the full duration of the discussion which lasted approximately 25 minutes)
- voice recordings in class
- observation of classroom pair work and group work
- notes from informal verbal feedback sessions (students were asked to rate difficulty level of listening and enjoyment level).

I also carried out retrospective recorded interviews after the students had commenced their studies in their new courses. The students were asked to evaluate the perceived benefits (if any) of podcast listening and question-styled discussion sessions now that they were in lecture-styled courses (to be described in full later). Seven out of 18 students participated. Five of these students had entered lecture-style foundation study programmes and two had been enrolled in a Master's programme for five weeks when I conducted the interviews. Three students were interviewed in a group (because of their time constraints), while the others were interviewed individually.

Discussion of data

My objective in this project was to help develop students' listening and speaking abilities within academic contexts where they would be required to actively participate in lectures (note-taking, transactional listening, critical thinking) and seminars/tutorials (collaborative listening and speaking, critical reflection and question posing and responding). In this section I will outline how the students responded to the tasks and strategies I introduced.

Every student participated in listening to the podcasts and took this activity seriously. There was only one occasion where two students did not listen to the podcasts or email me their questions. I dealt with this problem when it came to discussion time, by asking them to work on their own in another classroom as they would have nothing to contribute. Thereafter, they made sure they completed their homework. I found that students appreciated the time taken to email them extra work. This procedure established a personal line of communication between myself and themselves through email, so it did not take too much effort to persuade them that the additional work was beneficial for them. They understood that listening exercises were not optional but essential for success in future lectures.

Questions formulated by students after listening to podcasts

As stated in Methodology, students were required to formulate both open and closed questions on the content and themes of the authentic texts they were asked to listen to. It was interesting to observe how the sophistication and complexity of the questions changed over time as students got used to listening to authentic texts. Presented below to illustrate these changes are sets of examples (from a total of nine sets). Initially, I started students on lower-order questions, i.e. questions which focused on memory recall involving factual information contained in the text. The first exercise in March 2010 provides a sample of the students' struggle with the question forms. It is based on a quiz prepared by the students about the animals portrayed on the Monarto Zoo website:

Dromedary camels
- Can change the size of the hump, yes or no, and why?
- When the hum's camels appear over them?
- Which is the percentage minimal of dehydration can the camels resist?

Cheetahs
- How many km/hr can Cheetashs get?
- How far can Cheetashs see?
- What kind of animal Cheetahs use to hunt?

African lions
- How is the DIET?
- How many Kilograms of meat need African lion per day?
- How far can Lions hear?
- How long is the average can lions live?

The above examples show the difficulty students were experiencing at the time with subject–object oriented questions, which I subsequently followed up in class.

The next set of questions was written by students in interview style and is based on an interview with Jessica Watson, a solo adventurer. They date from 18 May 2010 and are listed below:

- Were you afraid of the dark?
- How many storm did you trough out?
- How did you spend your time?
- Did you ever think that your boat was very small to live in?

- How many times did you talk to your family?
- What was the best of the trip?
- Did you know what is ocean?
- What feeling about travel around the world?
- Did you want to give up in that time?
- Who make you to practice you dream?
- What is you next plan?

The questions on the theme of cosmetic surgery and teenagers, dating from 23 May 2010, were the following:

- Why did many teenagers want to have plastic surgery?
- Are many people not satisfied with their own appearance?
- Do you think that the permission of the parents is necessary?
- What the girl who did plastic surgery feel after that?
- Does the plastic surgeon should advise their patient before they have the plastic surgery?
- Why did the issue of giving plastic surgery as a high school gift?

By June, the questions were more fluent. Encouraging the students to think in terms of open and closed questions as I got further into the research was valid as they moved from lower-order to higher-order questions quite successfully. The questions below created on 8 June 2010, based on a speech by J K Rowling, are mostly open:

- How do you think of the importance of imagination?
- What is the advantages of failure?
- Do you think life is under control by ourselves?
- Do you think imagination is necessary?
- Why we do not want to imagine to transform our life?
- What is the wisdom that is taken from her success life?
- How we can learn when we have a failure?
- What can the empathise lead to?
- What do you need when you failure?

The nature of open questions also suggests that the students have understood and assimilated the information and started to evaluate it. This is a considerable development, compared to the earlier stages.

Observations of students' discussions

I observed my students over a nine-week period practising speaking and listening based on the podcasts. It was not always easy to give my full attention to what was happening in all the groups, but as I moved around the class listening in on discussions, I could see that all students got an opportunity to express themselves. Using the questions already formulated at home meant that the students had an equal chance to contribute. English was used throughout with only the occasional explanation in L1. This is, in part, due to the multicultural nature of the class. However, in free-speaking sessions I heard a lot more cross-over to L1 than I did in these more structured sessions. A rare use of L1 during podcast-based discussions was possibly due to the somewhat more formal style of these speaking sessions, which were intended to simulate the seminar/tutorial classroom.

My initial concerns about conducting classroom speaking activities based on the questions from the podcasts was that they may be stilted and contrived because of the scripted nature of the questions. However, students took ownership of the questions they created, which became very evident during classroom discussions. They formulated the questions, and thought about and explored the topics of the listening passages in their non-classroom contexts. Using those questions for discussion encouraged them to think critically about what they were hearing. This, in turn, deepened the discussion and enabled students to engage in truly two-way or transactional listening during classroom discussions.

The discussions within the different groups were fascinating as students from different cultures expressed their views on, for example, hardship and suffering, which were some of the themes in the listening exercises. In addition, during the discussion based on the Rowling interview, many students admitted to not understanding all the many allusions that J K Rowling made to her books (although all were familiar with them), nor could they understand the humour, but they all understood her very personal account of her 'failures' and successes. The above showed that the questions students formulated after listening to podcasts were starting points that took them beyond a simple recount of Rowling's or other stories towards more evaluative and speculative discussions of the passages heard. They also became more keenly aware of what it was exactly that they did not or did understand in the listening passages.

Form following function

Engaging in meaning, or using a variety of language functions, was my primary objective in this research. From what I observed of the students in their discussions, I was satisfied that they were 'making meaning' in their L2 in a fluent and confident manner. However, I still took time to focus on the form of the question by a) correcting their emailed questions and b) conducting separate grammar lessons. It requires a lot of confidence for an L2 speaker to ask questions in seminars or in social situations. If they cannot make themselves understood the first time, they struggle to risk repeating the question in L2 contexts, an embarrassing situation for many. A focus on form to complement a focus on function is beneficial and necessary.

Retrospective interviews

To establish whether extensive listening to podcasts had helped them in their foundation course, which is conducted lecture-style, I emailed students several weeks after the GAE course and asked for volunteers to provide feedback on the listening activities in an interview session with me. The first question the students were asked was the following: 'What was the benefit, if any, of the podcast listening tasks for you? Now that you are in foundation studies do you feel you benefited from them?' Their responses are provided below:

- I think is getting the rule very quickly because I have been finished to understand what they say and when I hear what the teacher

say I feel very normal and very natural. I don't need . . . umm . . . get some time to understand what they say. It's very easy to go into class and getting the rule . . .

- It is very useful for me. Is a fine way for me. The first time I opened the website, the listening website, I feel it's very fast but many times I tried it I feel it's easy and I feel I'm becoming very enjoy it um yes. Of course every listening is very, very long and maybe sometimes I think it is boring but I have to try listen it, listen to it, and when I finish it I feel I know something about this country, about this Western world. I think very comfortable.

- The first time is difficult first – too long to listening but after a week, few weeks later, you can enjoy it and you can learn something from that.

- I have tried to listen it many times not just once – the second time then easier then easier I listen it many times. That helped me improve the listening. I listened it many times.

- I think for example when I hear it I try to . . . um . . . I repeat it because sometimes some words I couldn't understand and it is useful because I can come back and hear again because some words is difficult for my hear exactly what he say. This is very useful.

Two students from a Master's programme responded in the following way:

- Yes, is a good way. I feel more confident in my listening because is completely different now the lecturer speak very fast.

- The tasks were good because at the moment when you have busy time to know is it good task in the past is good for now because uni is real, is very busy, is high level.

The students were then asked the following question: 'How useful was the task of writing questions?' The transcribed responses are listed below:

- That help us because eh if you write the question that mean you understand that video. If you didn't write anything that mean you didn't understand anything.

- We use that to discuss the topic. It was good.

- You must write something and you can see it.

- It is useful because when you write the question you will find the correct way to write this question. You will focus on this topic – how can I connect to each other? For the discussions it is useful because when there is some information your friend maybe sometimes didn't know it and when you compare it with the group you will find it also. It's very very useful.

- I think is good idea because we can focus more in what is the conversation. You focus on what is the topic.

- What I think is help us to understand what the radio [podcast] say. Just sometimes if you don't need write the question you just listening it but if you want to ask some question about that radio you must understand it not just listen it.

I then asked them: 'What would you rate the listening tasks overall out of 10 – 10 being extremely difficult?' Students rated the level of difficulty an overall average of 7.5 out of 10. They all agreed that listening to podcasts was difficult but that over time it became easier. Because there was no pressure on the students to prepare for comprehension-style tests of listening and they were able to select their own focus, they gained knowledge and listening practice from the tasks in spite of the difficulty level.

What I set out to achieve is not easily analysed in terms of immediate outcomes and easily measurable results. The purpose of this AR was to develop student confidence in lecture-style listening and seminar-style speaking, using authentic and challenging texts which would encourage critical thinking. From my data of observations I am persuaded that this is a very worthwhile approach to teaching listening and speaking amongst the many others that are practised.

Reflections

What I found significant about embarking on this action research was that it put my teaching assumptions under the spotlight again. I went back to reading the literature on teaching and learning theory and emerged reminded that no method or theory holds the whole truth. It also made me look at my favoured teaching approach and question the labels that could be applied to it. I realised that to label my approach communicative is only partly accurate as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) could be understood in many different ways. My research revealed to me that, even though the main focus of my course was general academic language, I could involve my students in emotional and intellectual engagement with relevant and meaningful topics in authentic contexts outside the classroom. In this way, I could balance scripted speaking exercises which included dialogue-style questions, role plays, information gap exercises and all the many task-based style activities conducted in class. By using web-based resources I put the listening into the hands of the students in their own space and own time. They listened to these and asked their own questions and the discussions that followed were about meaning-making as much as communicating. I cannot make any grand claims about my action research. However, I do know that I ventured onto a fresh path with my students and the journey was worth it. Affixing theoretical labels to my teaching practice is not very meaningful. The important aspect for me was to extract the best I could from all the practices, methodologies and pedagogies I was familiar with, but more importantly, to take my own students and teaching issues as the starting point.

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Appendix: Examples of tasks emailed to students

Example 1: Listening to a solo adventurer – Jessica Watson

Hello GAE 2,

Listen to the 2 podcasts on Jessica Watson – links below:

http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/1257812/latest-from-wire/

http://ten.com.au/watch-tv-episodes-online.htm?channel=Jessica+Watson&clipid=1427_glb-jess-160510-sg1&bitrate=300&format=flash

(just part 4 – where she's being interviewed)

Imagine you are a news reporter and you are interviewing Jessica Watson. Create 6 questions which you would ask her. Some should be content questions. These should be written out in full sentences and emailed to me by Weds as we'll be using them in class for Speaking.

Jessica says to the Prime Minister: 'I'm actually going to disagree with . . .' First tell me what she's disagreeing to and secondly, transcribe the rest of her statement – that is, write down word for word what she says. This should also be emailed to me.

Example 2: Cosmetic surgery and body image

Hello GAE2,

Some of you are enjoying your first winter rains – hope you're enjoying this?! I am.

Please find your homework below. There are 2 YouTube videos from an interesting campaign called the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty. These question the beauty industry and our perceptions of beauty. ***Answer the questions that follow and email me by Thurs night*** as I want to use this in class on Friday. Those of you who do not have internet access, remember you can use the computer room on level 2. Just bring your earphones (you usually have them with you anyway) and your student access number and password. You can just answer on this same email when you click 'reply'.

See you tomorrow.
Coral

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iYhCn0jf46U

a) What is the slogan at the end of this ad for Dove Campaign for Real Beauty?

b) Write it out in full and **then rephrase** (rephrase, reword, provide synonyms) the statement.

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2qenh_dove-campaign-for-real-beauty-ads

a) In this video girls express dissatisfaction with their looks/bodies. Write out in full sentences what they are as they appear on the video (e.g. She hates her freckles.)

b) Do you think males have the same problems with body image, or how they see themselves? Explain your answer briefly.

http://www.plasticsurgery.org/Patients_and_Consumers/Today_in_Plastic_Surgery_Podcast/Teenage_Plastic_Surgery.html

Now listen to this 12 min podcast on teenagers and cosmetic surgery.

a) Listen to it *first without the tapescript*

b) and then again *with the tapescript*.

c) Create *5 questions* based on what you have heard here.

Example 3

J K Rowling is the author of all the Harry Potter books. This is her speech to Harvard University students: http://video.the-leaky-cauldron.org/video/1027

Her speech can be titled 'The Benefits of Failure and the Importance of Imagination.' There will be a lot of vocabulary that you may be unfamiliar with but try and get the overall ideas without worrying about every word.

Create 5 questions based on this and email these to me. (I will return email to you with the corrections if there are any ☺) These will be used in class on Friday for speaking.

Some words that are repeated:

Impoverished (adj) – My impoverished parents. = My poor parents . . .

poverty (noun) – We lived in poverty. = We were poor.

To fail (v), failure (noun)

To imagine (v) = to picture, to see, to envision, to visualise

Imaginative (adj) He is an imaginative person = creative, inventive, inspired

Empathy (noun) = sympathy, compassion, understanding

To empathise (verb)

I look forward to your questions.

Regards
Coral

The role of digital devices in vocabulary acquisition

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Introduction

With the advent of social networks, cloud computing and digital devices, the landscape of learning is changing rapidly. Students are using digital devices, in the form of smart phones and iPads in the classroom but, from my observations, they have been using them as mere reference materials, looking up words and translating them into their own languages. These powerful devices are capable of much more; they can be used as learning tools if they are incorporated into classroom teaching practice. The present action research investigates how students normally use their digital devices for vocabulary acquisition and shows how digital devices could be used more fully and creatively to enhance learning of second language (L2) vocabulary, both general and specialised (discipline-specific).

The problem

Vocabulary is essential to L2 acquisition and academic performance since '. . . without words to express a wider range of meanings, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way . . .' (McCarthy 1990:140).

A dictionary is one of the most extensively utilised tools by L2 learners; it is through this device that many of them first learn to decipher English. Many students depend heavily on their dictionaries for learning; they use dictionaries as a primary source to find the meaning of words (Fan 2003). The learners' dictionary market is dominated by four brands: *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, the *Longman Dictionary*, the *Collins English Dictionary* and the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*. However, many lecturers argue that the use of dictionaries can hamper learning and therefore believe that L2 learners should use dictionaries sparingly (Fraser 1999). They emphasise macro understanding of communications and encourage students to deduce word meaning from context. They believe that acquisition of lexis should occur in a naturalistic setting while reading or listening, not by studying short definitions or translations from a dictionary (Schmitt 2000). Despite these concerns, new research shows that consulting a dictionary is not harmful for L2 acquisition. There is evidence that dictionaries smooth the progress of vocabulary acquisition and the comprehension of texts (Watanabe 1997). In addition, researchers have found that contextual guessing does not work well in some contexts and with some words, especially specialised vocabulary, and that dictionaries are necessary for acquiring new vocabulary (Nation 2001).

Since recently, L2 learners have been using a range of digital reference materials as the source of words, phrases and other lexical items that are linked through a reference system which includes the word form, meaning, origin, pronunciation and history. These materials, which include digital devices (DDs), electronic dictionaries (ED), and concordances, have the potential to improve L2 vocabulary acquisition significantly (Nesi 1999). Although more learners are using these DDs and EDs, there is little research on how they use them and how they are related to vocabulary learning in general.

At the college where I work, DDs are very popular among Asian students, especially Chinese learners. However, many educators and researchers are concerned about their potentially negative effects on L2 acquisition. They dislike DDs because of their poor quality and the possibility of encouraging translation rather than learning English. Some educators even want them banned in their classes (Tang 1997). Whether negative or positive, the new digital technologies have impacted on my teaching of vocabulary in the classroom. Since DDs are so popular amongst Asian students and the pace of change in digital technology is so fast, I felt that more research was needed to discover how DDs can be used in the classroom to enhance L2 learning.

Currently, there is a wide variety of print and electronic dictionaries and reference materials available. However, none of the students in this study used these traditional dictionaries. They all used smart phones instead, such as the Apple iPhone®, the Google Android® and the Apple iPad®. These digital devices allow the student to look up words online, create their own wordlists and develop their own dictionaries with their own meanings. These facilities have created a situation where learners need to understand how to use their digital devices as learning tools and not just reference materials. This requires them to have the skills to choose what they require to enhance their learning.

Literature review

The use of DDs in the classroom has been ignored by most researchers. Besides, many teachers do not allow students to use DDs in the classroom because they think that students waste too much time looking up individual words at the cost of comprehension and that it slows down reading. This practice is supported by some researchers who attach a great importance to implicit, naturalistic methods of vocabulary acquisition (see Wakely 2010 for example). Guessing word meaning from context while reading is, Wakely (2010) believes, the best way of learning new vocabulary. Consulting dictionaries merely interferes with the comprehension process. However, she also argues that learners use dictionaries no matter what advice is given to them by their teachers.

Some researchers suggest that implicit vocabulary acquisition is not the only method that should be used (e.g. Knight 1994). Vocabulary is best learned by a combination of methods involving implicit learning combined with explicit learning. Knight (1994) found that dictionaries enhance not only vocabulary but also comprehension. Cobb (2004) believes that students should consult dictionaries selectively while using them with other lexical strategies such as deducing word meaning from context and disregarding words.

Second language vocabulary acquisition and instruction can be viewed, therefore, from two perspectives: naturalistic and explicit (Lieb 2006). Nation (2001) believes that the learning of vocabulary happens when a learner is reading and absorbing the message of a text. The reader can guess the meanings of words from the context of the text. However, Lieb (2006) also advocates the conscious study of new vocabulary. This argument comes from the fact that there are tens of thousands of words to know. Native speakers already have a large repertoire of words, including idioms and phrases. In addition, word knowledge has multiple dimensions and involves knowledge of the spoken form, written form, grammar, collocations, register, meaning and associations with other words (Nation 2001). Nation (2001) argues that as there is so much to understand about a word beyond its dictionary meaning; contact with a word from multiple aspects is essential for a complete understanding. In view of the above complexities underlying L2 acquisition of vocabulary, L2 learners may have insufficient linguistic knowledge to mostly rely on comprehending the meaning of a word just from its context. Therefore, I side with the researchers who believe that conscious vocabulary learning should be taught and that room should be created for implicit learning to help vocabulary acquisition. The use of digital devices to learn new vocabulary is one of the techniques that learners can use to increase their vocabulary, balanced with learning from context through extensive reading.

As far as L2 acquisition of specialised words is concerned, Parry (1991) carried out a series of studies into how L2 students acquired specialised and non-specialised words for their undergraduate courses. Parry's research included two students, a Cypriot and a Korean, who had different approaches to learning. The Cypriot student read the text right through and then went back to the unfamiliar words and tried to guess their meaning. The Korean student on the other hand would read the text once very slowly stopping at each word and looking up the meaning. The Cypriot student did not remember many new words and did not understand the text, but read it in its entirety. The Korean student remembered and understood the small number of words that she looked up in her dictionary but did not have enough time to finish the text. Parry concludes that students should balance the two styles of learning to acquire new words and comprehend their meaning.

Peterson (1997) believes that the computerised world of teaching should provide help to the teacher only when it is essential and suitable and it should not interfere with the students' pace of work. Peterson argues that the empowerment of the student in their learning creates an independent learner who will use the resources at hand to enhance learning. Levine, Ferenz and Reves (2000) go on to say that the computer-networked environment has changed the teacher–student relationship for the better as DDs combine the security of the classroom with a greater exposure to authentic materials and new learning opportunities.

In sum, previous research indicates the importance of both conscious vocabulary learning, through explicit teaching and the use of dictionaries, as well as implicit vocabulary acquisition. The present study investigates how conscious learning can be improved through the use of modern technology as embodied in digital devices such as smart phones.

Purpose and significance of the study

The aims of the present action research study are two-fold. As part of pre-classroom intervention research, the study explores the use of DDs in the classroom and at home by students of L2 English when they encounter new vocabulary. It also discusses a way of exploiting DDs more fully as vocabulary learning tools, which was a part of the classroom intervention I conducted. The research participants studied English at Think: CLASS English classes and were going on to study at the Billy Blue College of Design Bachelor Degree Programme.

The study addressed the following research questions:

1. Why do non-English speaking design students use DDs?

2. What are the differences between users of DDs in terms of Lexical Processing Strategies (LPSs) such as inferring (deducing meaning of unknown words from text using linguistic cues and background knowledge), ignoring (disregarding unknown words), and consulting (asking others or looking words up in a dictionary available on a smart phone or iPad®).

3. How should the students organise their DDs?

4. What strategies can be formulated to enhance learning through DDs?

The first two questions formed part of a pre-intervention investigation and informed the intervention I subsequently carried out. The last two research questions were a part of the classroom intervention strategy I developed. The main aim was to investigate how digital devices can be used to allow a learner to take responsibility for their own learning through embedding new vocabulary in the context that is meaningful to them. Students were encouraged to acquire vocabulary through their own definition of a word attained through a personal 'narrative'. More specifically, students would save information about a word to their DDs which could be in the guise of a photograph, a video, a podcast, a web-link or even a personal story or anecdote. This personalisation of the word, thus, became the context in which the students learned the word(s).

DD skills are not taught in many classrooms and many teachers are not adept at the use of technology, leaving strategies for their use up to the student. The findings from this study aimed to bring up to date my own and other teachers' understanding of how students use and learn with DDs and to improve the ways that we can train students to learn new vocabulary.

Methodology and participants

From the previous literature and my teaching experience, I brought a number of assumptions to my research:

1. All L2 learners depend on a dictionary to understand new words.

2. Students can understand and report on their use of DDs through a written questionnaire and interviews.

3. Teacher observations of how students use DDs do not alter students' use of DDs.

4. Students use DDs during class as they usually do.

The participants in the study were 12 Direct Entry Design Students for the Billy Blue College of Design (BBCD) who were taking English lessons at Think: CLASS English classes where I teach. There were six male Chinese students and six female Chinese students. They had been studying English for four to five years and were measured to be at an intermediate level of proficiency (IELTS Band 4.5–5.0).

The methodology adopted in the investigation which preceded classroom intervention is discussed first. It is followed by a description of classroom intervention strategy.

Stage 1: Pre-classroom intervention research

This study investigated students' use of DDs in L2 vocabulary learning both quantitatively (through a questionnaire) and qualitatively: through a semi-structured interview and my observations of student use of DDs. The questionnaire was administered at the beginning of the course with the aim to find out how students used DDs for vocabulary learning at that point in time. The qualitative procedure was used to gain a greater understanding of the quantitative data since written questionnaires can result in students giving brief or simplistic answers (Frary 2003). Interviews were conducted during each reading session and teacher classroom observation as well as after each vocabulary test. The vocabulary tests I administered consisted of matching exercises and games with words and definitions. Each test was a puzzle to be played with, rather than a test of the student's ability. Therefore, the test scores were not the main aim of the activity, but rather what students do when they encounter an unfamiliar word, i.e. how they use DDs for vocabulary learning.

Stage 2: Intervention strategies

I devised a series of vocabulary activities that allowed students to engage with their DDs. These activities were based on the approach of Morgan and Rinvolucri (2004) and include text, writing on the part of the students, and communicative activities. The vocabulary activities also relied on the use of corpora and concordances, multisensory procedures (procedures involving the use of different senses, e.g. sight, hearing) and included the most important activity: word personalisation tasks. I adopted a strategy of encouraging the students to personalise their learning through personalised narration, previously used by Fazioli (2009). Personalised narration involves presenting (instructional) content in conversational language and in a more personal context. The word personalisation tasks are driven by the narrative potential of stories to increase the interaction of the learner with the vocabulary to be learned. The students were asked to focus on the reception and production of the new vocabulary and getting the meaning of the word across and into their memory. The stories that they were asked to create behind each new word were like communicative vehicles, transmitting the meaning of the word via a personal tale. This is exactly where DDs came

into play: I conceived of a personalised online database that could be created so that DDs can become a repository of various kinds of information on the new specialised vocabulary required for the Billy Blue College of Design.

I first carried out extensive research on the best tools available to organise the vocabulary into a useable personalised dictionary. From a range of applications that could be used as a learning environment for students (Simple note®, Microsoft OneNote®, Evernote®, Droplr® and Zotero®), Evernote was chosen as the database to use with the DDs because of its ability to include images, video, audio and web links and also because of the personalisation of its operation. Evernote is an online service that allows the user to operate their software to collect, sort, collate, tag and annotate notes. The learner is able to enter information onto a card system that can then be accessed whenever and wherever the learner wishes. These notes can also be accompanied by images and their annotations, videos, audios and web clippings. This free online service can also be shared for viewing and editing by other users. It can also be downloaded for the desktop and, most importantly for this study, downloaded as an application for the iPhone, the iPad and other smart phones. These synchronised notes can be accessed and edited when internet access is available, but can also be used when the internet is not available. Using Evernote, a class dictionary was created and students could add, edit and comment on other people's vocabulary, thus taking more advantage of DDs as vocabulary learning tools and using them more creatively than previously.

It is this integration of the digital world and the real world that allows the students to create a personal learning environment, enabling them to capture what they saw, heard or read about a new (specialised) word, phrase or technique in the database and to access this database from home on their desktop computers, at school on the library's computers and everywhere else on their DDs.

Results and discussion

This section starts out by discussing students' use of digital devices in learning new vocabulary. As stated earlier, the data was obtained through three investigative techniques: questionnaires, interviews as well as observations and reflections of the teacher researcher. The findings based on this data inform the classroom intervention strategy presented in the previous section. The remaining part of this section will, therefore, discuss the effect of the intervention strategy on the students' approach to vocabulary learning.

Questionnaire results

The aim of the questionnaire was to find out what the perceived advantages and disadvantages of DDs are and how the students use their DDs in language learning.

Firstly, all students reported owning a smart phone (e.g. Android® and iPhone®) or an iPad®. These DDs are all quite expensive, but the students felt that combining the phone and internet capabilities meant that the expense was worthwhile. The majority of DD owners were either happy or fairly happy with their DDs. They found that the

best aspects of DDs are their convenience (91%), the ease of use and speed (86%), the ability to look up words they could not spell (71%), the ability to record and listen to pronunciation of difficult words (66%) and the ability to add video and audio content (100%). The disadvantages outlined by the students included not having enough detailed grammatical information (45%), a deficiency of 'how to use' information (28%) and their breakability (15%). Apart from the iPad users, students reported that the small screens did hamper their ability to view the whole of the information available and many students had the impression that the information did not exist until they scrolled further down the page.

Overall 80% of students used a dictionary in their DD to search for 90% of the unknown words when they were reading a text. Importantly, the students felt they were more likely to consult a DD than any other type of dictionary: paper, online or CD-ROM. About 90% of students use a dictionary in their DD at home, 85% in class, and 30% in the library. Less than half of the students had received training in how to use their DDs at school, but 65% of them felt confident in the use of DDs. This suggests that these students are very literate in the digital world. The results of the analysis also showed that most students used their DDs in and out of the classroom for reading and writing and the least for speaking and listening (see Table 1).

Table 1: Breakdown of usage of digital devices across language skills

Skills	Digital device use (%)
Reading	91%
Writing	86%
Listening	17%
Speaking	12%

All students reported using their DDs to quickly look up words and to find out detailed information about a word and grammatical information.

In sum, the findings above showed that DDs are very popular amongst Asian students at Billy Blue College of Design. All students in the class owned a digital device and used it on a regular basis, to quickly search for unfamiliar words and grammatical information. Most students were very satisfied with their DDs because they provided access to a great amount of information, were portable and fun to use.

The interviews

After each classroom activity (reading sessions and vocabulary tests), interviews were carried out to get more information on when, how and why students consult their DDs. The students were asked a series of open questions from which it was found that the students: a) used their DDs for unknown words 70% of the time, b) inferred the meaning of words 20% of the time, and c) ignored the word while reading 10% of the time. For example, a student who used a DD for unknown words explained how in the following way:

Teacher: When you first saw the word *dither*, what did you do?

Student: I didn't know the word, very difficult word.

Teacher: What did you do then?

Student: I tried to look it up but couldn't find it until I searched the internet. I wouldn't have worked out its meaning.

Another explained how he read to infer words:

Teacher: When you first saw the word *pixel*, what did you do?

Student: I knew the word.

Teacher: What did you do?

Student: I kept reading and remembered it.

A third student stated that he did not look up unknown words during reading:

Teacher: Do you always read the text first and then look up the word?

Student: Yes because I need to read faster.

Teacher: Does the dictionary slow you down?

Student: Sometimes, but easy words I should know.

Based on the interview data, it was possible to identify that the use of DDs was dependent on many factors such as:

• Text features (length, readability): the students used their DDs less with longer and more complex texts.

• The learner (ability, knowledge, experience): the students who had wider vocabularies used DDs more rarely.

• The word (word class): the DDs allowed the student to link words with other words and this allowed them to work out the meaning of a word from the context.

• The type of genre and register being used: when the students were reading an academic article, they would sometimes be confused by a word, which they could otherwise understand when they encounter it in a different genre such as a magazine article.

In addition, the students found that the meaning of the specialist vocabulary they required for the design course was very difficult to work out by relying on lexical strategies such as guessing and inference. Many words are so specialised that they have no equivalent meaning to any other word. Most students complained that the words were just too hard to understand and that nobody could explain them and even most of their dictionaries did not have the specialised words they needed. This resulted in the students spending a lot of time looking up words on the internet and translating them into their own language. Unfortunately, these translations were never written down or kept for future reference. The students seemed to expect to remember the words or to look them up again the next time they encountered the word.

What the questionnaire and interview findings show is that the students were using the DDs as a referencing and translation devices, looking up new words every time they encounter them and (probably) never learning them. They had this powerful tool, but did not know how to use it fully and creatively. It was evident that the students needed to organise their vocabulary learning and take ownership of the learning process.

Reflections on classroom intervention strategy and its effects on L2 vocabulary learning

The solution to the problems outlined in the previous sub-section, as I saw it, lay in the creation of a personalised online database so that DDs can become a repository of a variety of multi-modal (text, audio, video, picture) information that students would add to new specialised vocabulary they would encounter. Embedding new words into a personalised and/or personal context would encourage taking ownership of vocabulary learning. Doing it through the use of DDs makes the task easier and more in line with current real life developments: modern technological devices used in this study allow one to access a variety of information, organise it the way they want to, and access it from wherever they want to.

The new vocabulary learning strategies involving the use of DDs in the way outlined above were developed with the students. The observations that I carried out along with brainstorming sessions with the students resulted in a rounder, more student-led intervention than has usually occurred with my teaching. It is also important to bear in mind that, in this approach, there should be very little teacher involvement, so that the student can 'own' the vocabulary and the learning process.

The new learning strategies created with the technology and normal teaching methods brought about a change in the way students approached vocabulary learning, leading them to focus on three key issues: word meaning, how a word fits into a story and the purpose of a text. This discovery of meaning from diverse contexts and remembering it through diverse memory strategies allows students to choose their most effective way of recalling vocabulary. For example, one of the students was very proud that he knew the meaning of 'dither' (to add pixels to a digital image) and that it did not mean 'to be indecisive'. The way this student learned the word was that he heard a lecturer on a YouTube video using the word; he looked it up in his dictionary and was 'flabbergasted' at the meaning. Further research on the internet led him to understand what the word meant in a design context. This student then saved the video link, wrote a definition in his own words and saved an image of dithering in Evernote. The result of the student taking ownership of his learning was that a very difficult word was understood and could then be easily retrieved and used in the future.

The organisation of the vocabulary through the use of digital devices and the strategy of personalisation of the word stories increased the students' autonomy, seemed to increase their motivation and required the students to access the vocabulary through different access points. A good example is that one of the fashion students was very proud of the lexical database she had created on Evernote. She downloaded catwalk shows from YouTube, and images of patterns from web pages. She included her own photographs of clothes she liked and even scrapbooked images from magazines onto her smart phone. Many of these forms of visual communication had personal stories attached, stories that required her to use the new vocabulary she had learned to express her meaning or her understanding of the fashion that she was passionate about.

In contrast to the assertions in much of the literature, I found that DDs are an important resource if used appropriately. The students appreciated the use of DDs because they supported their learning. Many felt that too much guessing led to their becoming frustrated with the vocabulary and they liked the idea that they could understand the word accurately. The DDs provided this accuracy support.

Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

This research was designed to examine vocabulary learning strategies in the classroom and how DDs can effect and enhance that learning. It was not meant to test the students' ability to learn new vocabulary but was more of an exploration of student learning with DDs. The students were not randomly selected and therefore I cannot generalise across all students who attend the college. All I can say is that the students who participated in my research responded to DDs in a particular way. They may not even be typical international students.

Through my classroom observation, I realised that a vocabulary acquisition is quite often an unconscious process. A number of times the students were surprised that they could remember a new word, but they could not recall ever having actively spent time learning the word. They learn through the task, not from the results of the task. This study could not examine learning strategies used unconsciously because data was collected through a written questionnaire and interviews.

Discussion and conclusion

As mentioned, an action research approach cannot claim to generalise findings. This research was an exploration of a teaching situation that I encountered in the classroom. The major suggestion relates to the need for more classroom-based research to question the commonly held assumptions about digital devices in the classroom.

This action research also highlighted certain strategies for vocabulary acquisition. Extensive reading and listening are very important for learning vocabulary (Nation 2001) and the language strategies of inferring and guessing unknown words from context are essential. Helping students to organise vocabulary and personalise their learning of required words also proved effective.

The students in this action research had the opportunity to access vocabulary through various activities and strategies rather than just using the more traditional paper-based activities. The use of DDs allowed the students to individualise their language learning and permitted them to create their own vocabulary acquisition methods.

The project endeavoured to show that digital devices need not be discouraged in the classroom; in fact they should be absorbed into classroom learning strategies. DDs not only help vocabulary acquisition but they seem to enhance a student's autonomy and motivation in classroom learning. This action research also supports the idea of student-centred learning, where different strategies of learning contribute differently to a student's success. In this way students can choose which learning tactic best suits them rather than experiencing teacher-led learning that limits opportunities to the approach the teacher believes works for all the students.

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Appendix 1: The questionnaire about digital devices

This questionnaire is designed to gather information about how you use digital devices (DD). It also includes questions about other ways you deal with unknown vocabulary. It takes about 20–30 minutes to complete this questionnaire.

This is not a test; there are no right or wrong answers. It is important to answer each question as honestly as possible. Please think about what you typically do. Thank you very much for your co-operation!

Name: _____

Class: _____

Email: _____

Part I: Digital devices (DD)

1. Do you own a DD? a. Yes b. No

2. If you don't own a DD, why not?

   _____

3. If you use both a printed dictionary and a DD, which do you use more often?

   a. I primarily use a DD.
   b. I use a DD more often than a printed dictionary.
   c. I use a DD and a printed dictionary with about the same frequency.
   d. I use a printed dictionary more often than a DD.
   e. I primarily use a printed dictionary.

If you don't own a DD, skip the following.

4. Which type of DD do you own?

   Brand: _____

   Model: _____

   Cost: _____

5. Does your DD have an English–your language dictionary/a your language–English dictionary/an English–English dictionary?

   a. English–your language dictionary
   b. Your language–English dictionary
   c. English–English dictionary
   d. Thesaurus
   e. Other ( )

6. If you use both a printed dictionary and a DD, do you use them for different reasons? a. Yes b. No

   If your answer is *yes*, what do you use each type of dictionary for?

   Please mark all the items that are true of you.

   a. I use a DD when I want to know the meaning of the word, to find examples or to know more about the usage of the word.
   b. I use a DD when I want to know the meaning of the word, while I use a printed dictionary when I want to know detailed grammatical information.
   c. I use a DD for speaking and listening and use a printed dictionary for reading and writing.
   d. I use a DD at school or in the library and use a printed dictionary at home.

7. Are you satisfied with your DD?

   a. Satisfied
   b. Somewhat satisfied
   c. Dissatisfied

8. What are the good points and bad points of your DD? Please mark all the items that are true of your DD.

   Good
   a. It is easy to look up a word.
   b. It is easy to carry around.
   c. It is easy to change from one dictionary to another.
   d. You can hear the word spoken.
   e. It is easy to check spelling.
   f. It can be connected to another application.
   g. Other ( )

   Bad
   a. It does not provide detailed information about how to use the word.
   b. It does not contain enough examples.

c. It does not provide enough grammatical information.
d. The screen is small and hard to use.
e. It is fragile and easily broken.
f. Other ( )

Part II: How do you deal with unknown words?

1. How often do you use your DD?
    a. Daily
    b. 4 or 5 times per week
    c. Several times per week
    d. Once per week
    e. Less often

2. What percentage of unknown words do you look up when reading?
    a. More than 90%
    b. 70–90%
    c. 50–70%
    d. Less than 50%

3. Do you use online dictionaries?
    a. I use it daily.
    b. I use it 4 or 5 times per week.
    c. I use it several times a week.
    d. I use it once per week.
    e. I use it less often.
    f. I never use it.

4. Where do you use your DD?
    a. At home
    b. In class
    c. At the library
    d. Other ( )

5. Please answer the following questions using a five-point scale:
    • Never or almost never true of me
    • Generally not true of me
    • Somewhat true of me
    • Generally true of me
    • Always or almost always true of me

    a. I use an English–English dictionary.   1 2 3 4 5
    b. I use an English–my language dictionary.   1 2 3 4 5
    c. I use a my language–English dictionary.   1 2 3 4 5
    d. I use a DD for speaking (e.g. face-to-face conversation).   1 2 3 4 5
    e. I use a DD for listening (e.g. listening to lectures).   1 2 3 4 5
    f. I use a DD for writing (e.g. writing academic papers).   1 2 3 4 5
    g. I use a DD for reading (e.g. reading magazines).   1 2 3 4 5
    h. I use a DD to find out the meaning of a word.   1 2 3 4 5
    i. I use a DD to find out the pronunciation of a word.   1 2 3 4 5
    j. I use a DD to find out the spelling of a word.   1 2 3 4 5
    k. I use a DD to find out all the meanings of a word.   1 2 3 4 5
    l. I use a DD to find out how to use a word.   1 2 3 4 5
    m. I use a DD to find out the part of speech (e.g., noun, verb) of a word.   1 2 3 4 5
    n. I use a DD to find out the sentence patterns in which a word can be used (e.g. interested in, like to go, etc.).   1 2 3 4 5
    o. I use a DD to find out whether a word is countable or uncountable (i.e. whether a word can be pluralised).   1 2 3 4 5
    p. I use a DD to find out the synonyms and antonyms of a word.   1 2 3 4 5
    q. I use a DD to find out the patterns of a word (i.e. with which words the word is frequently used).   1 2 3 4 5
    r. I pay attention to the examples of use when I look up a word in a DD.   1 2 3 4 5
    s. When I want to know more about a word that I already have some knowledge of, I look it up.   1 2 3 4 5
    t. When I get interested in another new word in the definitions of the word I look up, I look up this word as well.   1 2 3 4 5
    u. I increase my vocabulary by studying my DD. 1 2 3 4 5
    v. I look up in my DD English words that I have seen/ heard outside class time. 1 2 3 4 5
    w. I ask a teacher for the meaning of a new word. 1 2 3 4 5
    x. I ask a friend or a classmate for the meaning of a new word. 1 2 3 4 5
    y. I scan nearby entries to find out related words. 1 2 3 4 5

Part III: Background information

1. Education:
   _____

2. Sex: a. Male b. Female

3. Field of study:
   _____

4. How much time each week do you usually spend studying English outside of class?
    a. Less than 30 minutes
    b. 30 minutes–1 hour
    c. 1–2 hours
    d. 2–3 hours
    e. 3–4 hours
    f. 4–5 hours
    g. 5–6 hours
    h. 6–7 hour
    i. 7–8 hours
    j. 8–9 hours
    k. 9–10 hours
    l. More than 10 hours

5. How much time do you spend each week on activities related to vocabulary learning outside of class?
    a. Less than 30 minutes
    b. 30 minutes–1 hour
    c. 1–2 hours
    d. 2–3 hours
    e. 3–4 hours
    f. 4–5 hours
    g. 5–6 hours
    h. 6–7 hours
    i. 7–8 hours
    j. 8–9 hours
    k. 9–10 hours
    l. More than 10 hours

6. Where do you get most of the opportunities to learn/ practise English vocabulary?
    a. In class and homework assignments
    b. Self-initiated learning activities outside my classes
    c. Both

7. Have you received any formal training in your DD? a. Yes b. No

8. Are you confident about your ability to use your DD?
    a. Confident
    b. Neither confident nor not confident
    c. Not confident

Appendix 2: Prompts for the interviews

These questions were asked based on the observation.

1. Do you use a digital device to look up new words?

2. Do you usually write down the unknown words?

3. Did you read the text several times?

4. When did you use your DD, right after reading a new word, after reading the sentence, or after reading the paragraph, or after reading the whole text?

For each word

5. What did you think when you first saw the word?

6. Then, what did you do?

7. Why did you use/not use your DD?

When the student consulted a dictionary

8. What is the meaning? What did you find out?

9. Did you find it easily? Why/why not?

10. Are you satisfied with the meaning?

11. Did you find out any other information?

For a few words, the student was asked to demonstrate how they looked up the word.

Beginner students and extensive reading

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Introduction

My action research project, which was carried out at Deakin University English Language Institute (DUELI) in Melbourne, involved two beginner classes. My research focused on extensive reading for beginner students: I wanted to evaluate the types of reading tasks that engage the beginner students' interest in reading. Another issue I wanted to explore was if and how it was possible to assess engagement in reading.

Background and focus of research

For my Master's thesis, I investigated the reasons why international and local students tend to plagiarise in academic writing. My research led me to believe that international students often plagiarise inadvertently because they do not understand academic conventions and have had very little experience of learning them. It seemed to me that the essential skill that students needed to know was how to paraphrase. If students can paraphrase, it means they are able to understand what they have read and put the meanings into their own words. I found that international students, in particular, did not possess the skills to paraphrase satisfactorily, because they often did not understand what they were reading. As a result, I felt that international students needed to improve their reading skills and that their reading skills even at the highest level in an English for Academic Purposes class were often inadequate for postgraduate study, which was also noticed in the previous literature (Day and Bamford 1998:25).

These insights from my Master's were what prompted me to start an extensive reading programme at DUELI in the General English programme and led me to the focus of the current project. In the reading programme, students borrowed books from the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) and read daily in class for 15 minutes. They recorded the names of the books they read and filled in a brief review after they finished each book. DUELI purchased a large quantity of graded readers on a variety of topics, fiction and non-fiction. The programme has been progressing well. Teachers' feedback from the higher levels (GE4, IELTS Band 4.0–GE6, IELTS Band 5.0) was positive and it was clear that

students were enjoying the reading. However, this was not the case in the beginner levels (GE1, IELTS Band 2.5–GE3, IELTS Band 3.5). When I initially started the extensive reading programme, the beginner students did not seem to be as motivated to read as in the higher levels, despite the fact that they were reading a great deal more than before the programme started. My dilemma was how to get these students more interested in reading.

There were several explanations that I considered may contribute to the students' lack of interest. Firstly, students at higher levels can easily find stories that are interesting to read, but at lower levels the reading material is less interesting and not necessarily in a 'story' format, due to the fact that there can only be very limited vocabulary and sentence structures. Were the simple stories they were going to read enough to motivate them to read further? Another reason could be that young adults today do not read books because their time is taken up consuming other media. The majority of the students in my classes, who were aged between 18 and 25, may not have had a reading habit in their own language. This could be because they have little experience of a reading culture, and therefore were not exposed to extensive reading of books.

I decided to focus my research on the types of reading tasks that would engage the beginner students' interest in extensive reading. Another issue I wanted to explore was whether and how it was possible to assess 'engagement' in reading. It is very difficult to determine whether students are 'engaged', so I decided to look at the number of books they read, whether they enjoyed reading and whether they read at home as indicators of their engagement and motivation to read.

Background literature used

My extensive reading programme was planned around the 10 key principles that Bamford and Day (2004:2) created to characterise extensive reading:

1. The reading material is easy.

2. A variety of reading material on a wide range of topics is available.

3. Learners choose what they want to read.

4. Learners read as much as possible.

5. Reading speed is usually faster rather than slower.

6. The purpose of reading is usually related to pleasure, information and general understanding.

7. Reading is individual and silent.

8. Reading is its own reward.

9. The text orients and guides the students.

10. The teacher is a role model of a reader.

Day and Bamford (1998) point out the importance of motivational factors in reading, which has also been recognised by many other authors (e.g. van Elsacker 2002). Attitudes to first language reading and previous experiences towards the second language as well as the second language classroom environment can influence students greatly. However, extensive reading cannot change attitudes to past experiences that were negative (Day and Bamford 1998:26), but it can positively influence students in the classroom. Students have the opportunity to discover the 'pleasure' of reading that will very likely lead them into a lifelong habit. If students have a positive attitude to second language reading, they may become interested and confident readers (Day and Bamford 1998, Renandya 2007). The importance of extensive reading in classroom teaching was also emphasised by Renandya (2007:134) who demonstrated so many benefits from extensive reading 'that it will be inconceivable for teachers not to make it an important feature of their teaching'.

I also found the following references extremely useful for my action research projects. Grabe and Stoller (2002) provide a good overview of the process of reading as well as many examples of model research projects that motivated my research. Bamford and Day (2004) gave me numerous practical ideas for pre- and post-reading activities that students would enjoy. When I was searching for testing material, I came across ideas from Rasinski and Padak's (2005) book, which I adapted for an initial reading assessment test. Finally, Burns and de Silva (2000) was an invaluable aid in providing me with various accounts of how action research projects have been conducted in an Australian context by ESL teachers.

Class profile

The students were in beginner classes called General English (GE) 1/2 and General English (GE) 3. There were 16 students from GE1/2 and 22 GE3 students. The GE1/2 is a combined GE1 (IELTS Band 2.5) and GE2 (IELTS Band 3.0) class. Students attend classes for 5 hours a day, Monday to Friday and each course runs for five weeks. Usually there are two teachers for each course, with the main teacher teaching three days a week, and the co-teacher two days a week.

The curriculum is organised in weekly themes based on material from course books and supplemented by other resources. Assessment consists of end-of-course tests in grammar, reading, writing, speaking and listening. The students in GE1/2 have weekly grammar tests.

The participants in my research were male and female international students, aged between 18 and 30 who were from Vietnam, Thailand, Japan, Korea, China, Saudi Arabia, Libya and Turkey. At the start of this project, the students had either just arrived in Australia, or had been here for five or 10 weeks. All the students had completed 12 years of formal education and one student had just finished high school. All the other students had studied at tertiary level or had completed undergraduate degrees.

Some of the students were going to continue on academic pathways after completing four or five levels of General English. These students had conditional offers to Bachelor courses at Deakin University. Some students were participating in study tours, where they had chosen an elective to learn English in Australia for 20 weeks. Several students had been sponsored by their governments to learn English and then obtain Australian postgraduate qualifications. Some students were learning English to improve their career prospects in their countries. Since all these students were only at a beginner stage, they would have to do about 45 weeks of English to prepare them for their academic pathways.

I completed three cycles of research, which ran over three intakes of five weeks each. At the end of each intake, some students involved in my research left DUELI and new students arrived.

The research process

Phase 1: First cycle

I decided to determine whether students were engaged by looking at the number of books they read, whether they said they enjoyed reading and whether they read at home.

In order to begin the research, I first requested consent from my students. All the consent forms were translated into the students' languages. In addition, I asked students from higher levels if they could translate any questions the students may have had about the research, because I had to be certain that the students clearly understood what the project was about. Some students then decided that they did not want to be involved in this project, and data from these students was not included.

Tools used to collect data

I kept a journal to record my observations and reflections on the progress of the reading programme. I involved my co-teacher in GE1/2 and my co-teacher in GE3 and we often discussed the progress of the programme. They often noted something that a student said or gave me valuable input about the programme. At the end of each course, these teachers filled out feedback forms.

At the beginning of each course, students were given a questionnaire about their reading habits and previous reading experiences in their own language (see Appendix 1). In addition to the questionnaire, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the students about the reading programme and recorded their responses. It was important to use both the questionnaire and the interview as the Arabic-speaking students' speaking skills were stronger than their writing skills and the Asian students' writing skills were stronger than their speaking skills.

I gave the classes several activities to introduce the

concept of extensive reading. I attempted a discussion about reading habits with the GE1/2 class, but this did not succeed, as the students could not express themselves adequately or give reasons for their opinions. I restructured the discussion into a class activity where students had to ask their partners a series of closed questions related to reading activities. At the end of the activity, the students had to work out how many questions they both answered in the same way. Another activity was to introduce and familiarise the students with book genres.

I introduced the students to the graded readers in the Independent Learning Centre (ILC). In the first few days of the course, I took the GE1/2 graded readers into class to explain how the students should choose readers. I explained to them that the books should be interesting, easy to read and have fewer than four unknown words on a page, as according to Bamford and Day's (2004) 10 principles. When there were new students in the class, I explained to them how the extensive reading programme worked.

Both GE1/2 and GE3 had 15-minute reading sessions daily. I tried to follow Bamford and Day's (2004) principles of extensive reading, that is, the students read silently, without dictionaries for 15 minutes, and the teacher acts as a role model by also reading, and not monitoring students or doing corrections. I decided that 15 minutes was sufficient time for reading. If the reading time had been any longer, I believe that the weaker students would have lost interest.

At the start of each intake of the five-week course, students were given a reading record sheet and a reading recommendation sheet. Each student wrote the name of the book and the date they started reading and the date they finished reading. After the students finished reading a book, they filled out a reading recommendation sheet. This consisted of answering a few questions about the book. Students were then asked to rate the book. These reading recommendation sheets were kept in a class folder so that students could see which books other students had read and what they thought of them. The reading recommendation sheets formed the basis of other class activities. For example, students would take their own recommendation sheet and explain the book to a partner. Students would have to ask each other three questions about the book they recommended. For the GE1/2 class, students also filled in a 'smiley face' on a wall chart recommending books they had read.

Every week of the course, I gave each class different types of post-reading activities. Students were informed that these activities were not assessed. These activities involved students in questioning each other about the books they had read, but in a relaxed way. It was a way for me to observe the students' reactions to their reading and whether they had enjoyed and understood what they had read. At the end of the five-week course, students were given a questionnaire (see Appendix 2) and interviewed about the programme.

In sum, after getting consent forms signed by the students, the reading programme (15 minutes each day) commenced with a short questionnaire about students' reading habits. I explained the extensive reading programme and the main principles of extensive reading, gave students some activities to familiarise them with book genres and they chose books to read. I would also like to add here that initially, I gave students a reading test to determine their reading level.

I then realised that this was not necessary, as I was not focusing on the students' fluency and comprehension, but rather their engagement in the reading tasks. If I were to explore fluency and comprehension I would have needed a lot more time to determine whether extensive reading had an influence using this measure. I realised I had to narrow down my topic to one area that I could concentrate on within the relevant timeframe of this study.

Phase 2: Second cycle

When I discussed the reading with the GE4–GE6 teachers, they said that their students were mostly enthusiastic about the reading programme. The responses from the GE3 students also indicated that the majority of them were keen. Figure 1 shows that 64% (14 students out of a total of 22) of GE3 students, over all three cycles, indicated that they enjoyed reading. When the GE3 students were interviewed at the start of the project, they said that they did not read English books at home. However at the end of each cycle, 55% (12 students out of a total of 22) of the GE3 students were reading at home (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Percentage of GE3 students indicating they found reading enjoyable in class (all cycles)
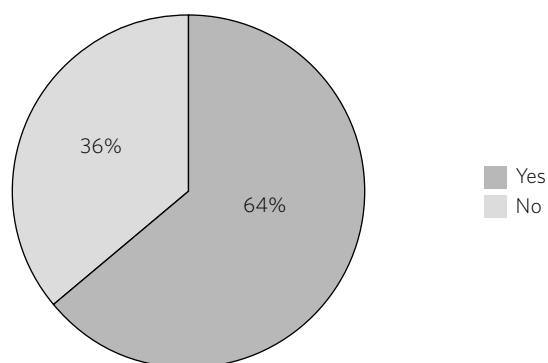

During the course I had observed that the GE1/2 students did not really settle into the reading as well as the other classes. Consequently, I had to change my approach for the second cycle. I decided to let students choose from the range of readers with CDs for the rest of the course. This was more successful and the students enjoyed the reading; however, there were no CD players in the classroom so students had to go to the 'conversation room' to listen to the CDs and there were only seven portable CD players and two MP3 players to use.

Figure 2: Percentage of GE3 students who read English books at home (all cycles)
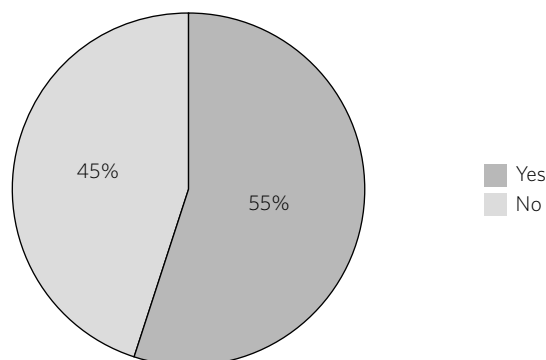
This situation caused a problem because there was a great deal of time wasted in settling in. Additionally, other students in the room were noisy, and as it was a conversation room it was not possible to tell students from other classes to be quiet. My students were often distracted by the other students so it was far from an ideal reading environment. Nevertheless, the students' responses to the questionnaires were more positive at the end of this cycle. This time the questionnaire included a question asking students which reading activity they preferred, whether it is (a) reading books per se, (b) books combined with CD, (c) listening to teacher reading aloud, or (d) class reader. Five out of six students (83%) chose option (b), i.e. the reader with the CD option while only one student chose option (a) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage of students who preferred books combined with CD versus books alone
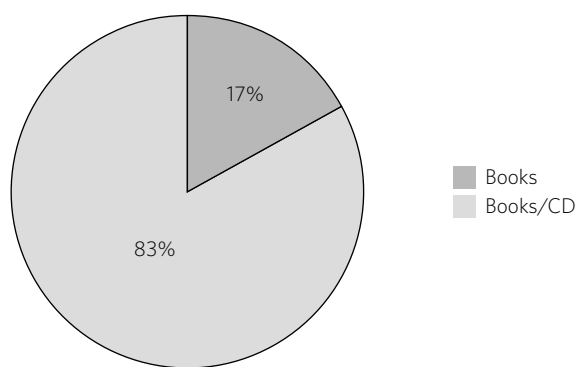
In brief, Phase 2 was successful with the GE3 students who were reading at home as well by the end of this cycle. The second phase for the GE1/2 class did not start smoothly, until the students started reading and listening to CDs and books. Their responses to a questionnaire were more positive about reading.

Phase 3: Third cycle

During this cycle, I also started reading aloud to the GE1/2 class once or twice a week. The students were able to follow the story as I read, as there were enough copies of the readers for students to share. However, there were only a few class sets of readers. It was noted that GE1/2 students started to read at home more regularly.

Another reading task that came about spontaneously and worked really well with the GE3 class was reading magazines in the ILC. This activity happened completely by chance. On several occasions there were not enough CD players available to use in the conversation room, so I told the students to sit on the couches in the ILC, choose from a wide range of magazines and try and read the captions under the pictures or a little of the story. This was a great reading environment for the students because it was quiet, the students were very comfortable and relaxed, and there was a wide choice of magazines. I observed that the students were engrossed in their reading after 5 minutes. Obviously they were not reading entire stories, but they were able to pick out some words and make sense of some sentences. Later in class they were able to relate to the class something that they had read.

Researcher findings

I set out to evaluate which reading tasks engage beginner students' interest in reading and explore ways of assessing students' engagement in reading.

I found that the reading task that all the students enjoyed the most was reading and listening to a book with a CD. The students stated that this approach provided them with a model of the correct pronunciation and intonation. They also saw this activity as a way of understanding new vocabulary by hearing it pronounced correctly the first time they encountered it. The number of books students read was how I decided to measure engagement with reading. I believe that at the end of my research project it was a reasonable indicator of whether students enjoy reading. The students who were most enthusiastic about reading did, in fact, read the most books, while the students who were the least engaged and commented that reading was boring read the least number of books and did not read at home. Teacher feedback (Figure 3) indicated that the GE3 students preferred reading and listening to a book with a CD.

There is certainly no doubt that all the students read more after the extensive reading programme started than before. Figure 4 illustrates the number of books read by GE1/2 students. Prior to this project the students had not read any English books. The mean number of books was nine books per student within a five-week period over the three cycles. 64% of GE3 students found reading enjoyable through all the cycles and read at home. This indicated that they were engaged in reading, therefore this strongly supports my contention that extensive reading can engage students in reading.

The reading record sheets and the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) record sheets confirm that this increase was the case. In fact, almost all students in their initial interviews and questionnaires said that in this class it was the first time that they had read a book in English. All the students felt that reading was an important skill. Most students responded that they read regularly in their language.

I felt that for some students, particularly the weaker students, the task of reading was just too overwhelming for them. As van Elsacker (2002:1) stated, 'if students have to struggle too much to read and write or the reading and writing have no personal significance for them, they may simply disengage'.

My observation of the students in GE1/2 and GE3, as well as comments from the teacher feedback was that over the course of the three cycles, there seemed to be less reliance

Figure 4: Number of books read by all GE1/2 students
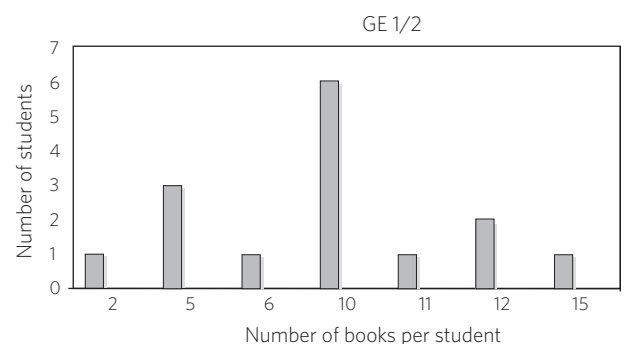
on dictionaries during reading time; students enjoyed the reading sessions in class and were generally enthusiastic about borrowing books.

I also found out that the engagement of my co-teachers made a large contribution to the project. At the end of each course, my co-teachers in GE1/2 and GE3 completed a feedback form. This feedback was most valuable in planning for the next cycle. For example, one GE1/2 teacher, at the end of the first cycle, commented that students at this level are concerned with reading words but do not comprehend even short stories. On the basis of these comments, I had to re-think the type of reading tasks that would be appropriate for these students. Another example is that several teachers commented that they did not think students really understood the purpose of the reading programme. For the coming cycle, I prepared more pre-reading activities that would clarify the aims of the programme.

Feedback about the weaker students was very useful and confirmed what I had initially assumed, that the weaker students did not make an effort with reading and did not focus even for 15 minutes. Teachers' comments about the GE3 levels were that they all enjoyed the reading time in class. This confirmed my expectations that these students would have a positive experience. Several teachers observed that the students were very relaxed and engaged in their reading especially if they had already completed the reading programme in their previous class. Another benefit of the reading programme that teachers observed was that the students enjoyed the 'no pressure' reading of an extensive reading approach which had no assessment tasks associated with it. The teachers also said that the extensive reading helped students 'to learn to like reading'.

I came to the conclusion that it is possible to assess engagement in reading based on the results of the feedback from the students, observation of students during reading time and the number of books the students borrowed.

Reflections

In general I was pleased with the results of the project. I had the benefit of thoroughly exploring the extensive reading programme for beginners in a way that regular class teachers cannot do. This research has informed my teaching practice in many ways and I have learned a great deal about myself as a teacher. I have gained new understanding of why Goodnough (2010:167) says: 'Self-understanding about being a teacher is critical to learning how to teach and can be shaped in many ways.' I can now appreciate much more the difficulties and frustrations beginner students undergo. I have realised how important it is to take into account the students' opinions and thoughts about reading.

In an ideal setting, the type of extensive reading programme I implemented would work better over a longer period of time. It would have been useful to compare different groups of students to see how using different reading tasks works. However, given the nature of enrolment in the language centre, where new students overlap with old students, it was not possible to compare across different cycles.

At the beginning of each course/cycle, I created a

questionnaire about the students' reading habits and reading experiences in their own language. This was not a straightforward task, as I had to make the questions appropriate for these students to understand. Because of their beginner proficiency in English, I was limited in the amount of feedback I could expect from them and I had to structure the questions as simply and directly as possible. As the class teacher doing the research, I also believe that some students gave me answers that they thought I wanted to hear. However, most students were very honest, even with their limited English.

With the experience that I have gained doing action research, I would improve the programme in the following ways:

- a more detailed assessment of enjoyment of reading by using a numerical scale would be valuable

- a requirement of the reading programme should be to read at home for 15 minutes or more

- a weekly reading target or some sort of incentive may motivate some students

- as the students were so interested and absorbed in reading magazines, I should take full advantage of this situation and devise activities related to the magazines.

A further reflection concerns the use of dictionaries. Some students, especially the weaker students, were very frustrated at not being allowed to use a dictionary. I was reluctant to let them use dictionaries as it breached one of the 10 extensive reading principles. Many students did in fact use their dictionaries. I found it very difficult deciding whether to modify the extensive reading programme but I found that students at these levels could not use strategies to work out the word from the context (Day and Bamford 1998:18). The most important issue to arise from my point of view from this research is that Bamford and Day's (2004) principles of extensive reading cannot always be applied unmodified. Adapting extensive reading to fit the particular needs of these levels of students was a very valuable way of increasing their amount of reading and an alternative approach to motivating them. For example, I limited the range of books that students could choose from, because I wanted the students to choose only from GE1 or 2 level books. I also suggested certain books to students instead of letting them choose for themselves. Further work needs to be done to target the programme more specifically for weaker students.

In conclusion, although extensive reading is not a perfect solution for all students, as a result of my research I believe it can certainly guide students towards improving their English skills.

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Appendix 1: Questionnaire 1

1. Do you like reading?

   _____

2. Do you read in your language?

   _____

3. What do you like reading in your language?
   Newspaper
   Book
   Magazine

4. What do you dislike about reading?

   _____

5. How long do you read for every day?
   15 minutes
   30 minutes
   1 hour or more

Appendix 2: Reading questionnaire

Reading questionnaire

Now that you have finished 5 weeks of reading in class:

1. Did you enjoy reading in class? Answer YES or NO and say why you liked reading or why you didn't like reading.

   _____
   _____

2. Did you read English books at home? Answer YES or NO

   _____

3. How long did you read for **at home**? Choose ONE answer.
   10 minutes _____
   20 minutes _____
   30 minutes _____
   More than 30 minutes
   _____

4. How many books did you read **in class**?

   _____

5. Did you **understand** all the books you read? Answer YES or NO

   _____

6. **In class** during reading time, what did you do if you read a word you didn't understand?

   _____
   _____

7. Did you choose books that were easy for you to read? Answer YES or NO

   _____

8. **At home** did you use a dictionary when you read a new word? Answer YES or NO

   _____

Thank you for answering these questions and . . . KEEP READING!

The impact of an extensive reading programme on vocabulary development and motivation

DIMITRA PAPADIMITRIOU AIDINLIS PROGRAMME MANAGER (DIRECT ENTRY PROGRAMMES) THINK: CLASS (CENTRE FOR LEARNING AND ACADEMIC SKILLS SUPPORT), SYDNEY

Introduction

As a language teacher I have always tried to provide the best opportunities for my students to participate fully in the learning experience. However, at times this goal was quite challenging as some of my students developed a passive and detached attitude to language learning when they attended our Direct Entry Programme. They were reluctant to take an active part in the learning process which inhibited their progress and created a negative atmosphere in the classroom. This attitude towards English language learning was partly due to the fact that their interest was to join their primary course of study, Hospitality Management, and partly due to having studied English for many years in other classes or colleges without much noticeable progression.

This study focused on the learners attending the Hospitality Management Direct Entry Programme, which equips the students with the language skills they will need to study in the course and work in the hospitality industry. The aims of my study were to investigate ways of increasing my learners' motivation and establish the relationship between higher motivation and language learning.

One of the approaches to assist a student in becoming more actively involved in their own learning is extensive reading, which entails reading a wide range of contexts, lexis and grammatical constructions as well as social and academic behavioural requirements. This can result in not only successful language acquisition (Renandya 2007:134), but also the students' familiarisation with the new social and academic community. Relevant, thought-provoking

and interesting texts and activities in a relaxing setting can encourage and motivate students who aim to study further in Australia. Participating in meaningful communication in class can inspire them to make a more concerted effort to learn the target language and equip them with social and study skills that can empower them as they become more independent learners and more familiar with the norms of the new academic discipline.

Context

The class I was teaching during the research, the Hospitality Management Direct Entry Programme at Think: CLASS, is a content-specific 25-hour-a-week intensive English for academic purposes course aimed at students who wish to use English in a vocational tertiary course at William Blue College of Hospitality. The aims of the course are to develop learners' listening, reading, writing and speaking skills, expand their communication strategies, and develop not only their academic skills but also their content-specific lexical knowledge. The course also addresses the necessary survival skills relevant to students. Although the syllabus is organised in themes based on pre-packaged course materials, the teachers are encouraged to search for more 'appropriate materials', often authentic or related somehow to the learners' area of interest.

The intensive nature of the programme along with the fact that the class consists mainly of Asian students, who are not typically used to active participation and offering their opinions, can often act together as a significant impediment to students' progress. Thus, the teachers must manage the classroom to address these challenges by adjusting their style of delivery and providing sufficient activities to engage all learners. In addition, the proficiency level of the students tends to be comparatively low for the requirements of a syllabus that focuses on complex academic reading and listening texts. This also affected learners' performance in class and their motivation.

Literature review

Research into the impact that extensive reading can exert on second language learners' linguistic ability has been underpinned by Krashen's Input Hypothesis whereby subconscious language acquisition occurs when learners are 'exposed to an adequate amount of comprehensible input that is meaningful, interesting or relevant and which is provided in a tension free learning environment' (Cileli and Ozen 2003:91). The effectiveness of meaningful input in the subconscious acquisition of linguistic knowledge such as text structure, grammar and more particularly lexis (which is the focus of this study) has been explored and established by a number of studies on extensive reading programmes (Carrell and Carson 1997, Elley 2001, Renandya 2007, Tudor and Hafiz 1989). These studies also ascertain that the greater the mental effort in processing an unknown word the more likely it is to be retained. Therefore, as subconscious learning together with cognitive involvement in information processing can result in vocabulary learning, my study focused on the impact of not only subconscious learning through extensive reading on the learners' vocabulary development, but also on

the effect of the students' active involvement in the learning process on their motivation. For instance, the learners had to present to the class a summary of their books, create and participate in book discussions and design follow-up activities to engage their audience. This provided the learners with the opportunity to use familiar and unfamiliar vocabulary in new contexts and for new purposes, which led to meaningful communication. Research also shows that supplementing an extensive reading programme with post-reading activities can facilitate the advancement of writing and speaking skills as learners are provided with ample opportunities to produce meaningful output (Carrel and Carson 1997, Horst 2005). Based on the results of a case study, Leung (2002:79) argues that extensive reading can give 'learners more control over and confidence in their own learning', which can facilitate their future studies as they learn to become more independent learners and become actively involved in the learning process. Thus, post-reading activities became an integral part of the extensive reading programme and were designed in collaboration with the students as 'real language learning is most likely to occur when the learners . . . are trying their new language to fulfil genuine communication purposes' (Carrel and Carson 1997:53).

The use of extensive reading in my English language programme was based on the following key principles, which were adopted from Bamford and Day (2004:2):

1. The reading material should be easy to encourage the students to keep reading.

2. A wide range of reading material should be available so that learners can select topics that they are interested in.

3. Learners should be given the opportunity to choose what they want to read. This empowers them as they make decisions for their own learning instead of relying solely on the teacher.

4. Learners benefit from the quantity of reading and reading speed. It is, therefore, suggested by Bamford and Day (2004:2) that students should read a book a week and infer the meaning of unknown words instead of using a dictionary.

5. Reading should be pleasurable, and for general understanding and information in order to achieve its purpose which is to motivate students to read.

6. Learners should read in their own time and at their own pace. This can motivate weaker students to read as they can organise their reading time and are not under pressure to complete a text at a specified time.

7. Extensive reading is a pleasurable activity and should not be followed by comprehension questions but it can be supplemented by follow-up activities so that the teacher can monitor the students' progress. This can also encourage students to persevere with their reading.

8. The role of the teacher in an extensive reading programme is to explain the aim of the programme and to maintain a record of the students' reading progress and their reflections on the reading material so as to help them enjoy and benefit from their reading experience. The teacher should also act as a role model for the learners by reading, discussing and recommending interesting reading material.

Research method

After reviewing the literature, I decided to run an extensive reading programme with the students who study on the Hospitality Management Direct Entry Course to build their motivation and confidence in learning and using English as well as build their vocabulary knowledge. The implementation of programme was divided into three stages:

Stage 1 (weeks 1–5)

- A needs assessment questionnaire divided into two parts was given to the students to gather information about their background, their interests and reading habits (see Appendix 2).

- A writing pretest was administered to establish their level of English. Particular emphasis was given to their use of vocabulary as this information was useful for the design of the extensive reading programme.

- The students were initiated into the notion of extensive reading by listening to the teacher presenting her favourite book in class. Then, the teacher elicited from the learners the meaning of 'extensive reading' and asked the learners to brainstorm its benefits for them.

- A tour of the college's library was organised to familiarise the students with the books and all the other available reading material. The learners were encouraged to select any reading material that they deemed interesting and pertinent to their needs and read it in their spare time. They were advised to start reading low-level readers first so as to increase their confidence of reading a book a week.

- A lesson on speed reading was followed to show the students ways of reading for the gist without the use of a dictionary.

- The students together with the teacher created a class blog so that they could post their comments on their books or raise interesting topics for discussion, exchange ideas and communicate with one another. This resulted in a positive atmosphere of co-operation and solidarity in class as the creation of the blog became a joint effort, which motivated even the most reticent and weak students to participate.

- The class created an extensive 'reading corner' in the classroom where they kept the new vocabulary in a box for activities and revision and hung a poster on the wall with their names, number of books they read each week and books they recommended.

- In week 5, a counselling session with the students was organised to gather information about their progress, needs and attitude towards reading and the programme.

Stage 2 (weeks 6–10)

- After the first five weeks, a writing test similar to the pretest was given to the students to determine the effectiveness of the programme and its impact on their lexical development.

- The learners were then encouraged to start reading higher-level readers.

- Every week a different reading strategy was taught and one of the students was presenting his/her book and together with the teacher-organised vocabulary activities for the rest of the class. This and their weekly contributions to the blogs gave the learners the opportunity to use the language in their own context, and discover the different uses of lexical items.

- In week 10, a counselling session was held to establish the impact of the programme on the students' motivation.

Stage 3 (weeks 11–15)

- Another writing test was administered to ascertain the level of the students and more precisely their use of lexis.

- A second needs assessment questionnaire was also administered to determine the effect of the programme on their reading habits and their motivation.

- The teacher brought some authentic reading material pertinent to the interests of the students in class. The students divided into groups and chose an article that they wanted to read, and presented its main points to their group.

- The students had to read authentic reading material. They could choose any article they were interested in but they were advised to select journals from the Hospitality field to become more familiar with the specialised vocabulary of the subjects they were going to study.

- In week 13, the teacher interviewed the students to find out whether or not they could manage with the authentic texts.

- A final writing test was used to establish the impact of the extensive reading programme on their lexical development.

Participants

My class consisted of the first group of students from the Hospitality Management Direct Entry Programme who were interested in joining the Hospitality Management course at William Blue. These 10 students, aged between 20 and 25 years, were mostly from Asian countries and had been in Australia from between eight weeks to four years (see Table 1). The students' level of English, which varied from low intermediate to intermediate (on average equivalent to IELTS Band 5), was measured with a placement test prior to the commencement of the course to assess their writing skills and minimise extra variables regarding proficiency and L2 communication competence. Although most of them had been studying in Australia for more than a month, their lexical development had not progressed consistently as they tended to overuse lower-level vocabulary and demonstrate a significant difficulty in acquiring advanced lexical items and usage. This partly stemmed from their reluctance to use the target language outside the classroom and to read extensively. The majority of the students in this programme had not attained tertiary-level studies either in their home country or in Australia, as indicated in Figure 1. However, it was essential for the students to become conversant with the academic conventions of tertiary education, and more precisely, their area of interest.

Table 1: Students' background

Nationality	Number of students	Time in Australia
Korean	5	6 months–3 years
Chinese	2	1–2 months
Indonesian	1	8 weeks
Vietnamese	1	10 months
Russian	1	1 year
Total/Average	10	16 months

Figure 1: Level of education
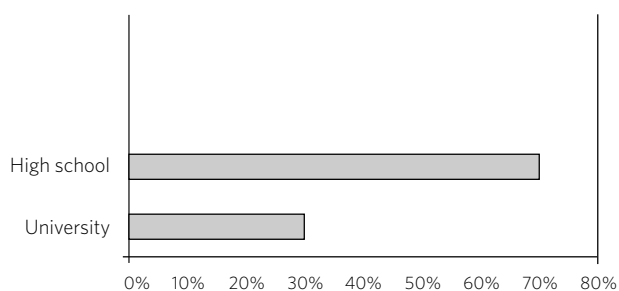
Quantitative instruments

For the quantitative aspects of my research I used a writing pretest administered in week 1 of the programme combined with monthly writing tests and a writing post-test which was conducted in week 15 to measure vocabulary development. The assessment criteria used in the writing tests were the following: task response, cohesion/coherence, vocabulary range, vocabulary use and grammatical accuracy. Each criterion carries a maximum of 5 marks, the total available mark being 25.

Vocabulary development and use in writing were measured by comparing the learners' pretest and post-test scores and analysing the lexical density and the lexical variation of their writing. Read (2000:203) defines lexical density as 'the proportion of lexical (or content) words – nouns, full verbs, adjectives and adverbs derived from adjectives – in the text'. Lexical density of my students' texts was calculated as follows:

$$LD = \frac{\text{Total number of lexical words} \times 100\%}{\text{Total number of words in the composition}}$$

To measure lexical variation, which is the number of word forms in the text, the following calculation was used:

$$LV = \frac{\text{The number of different lexemes in the text} \times 100\%}{\text{The total number of lexemes in the text}}$$

This calculation is based on Laufer's (1991, cited in Read 2000) study which used the lexeme as the main unit of analysis of all lexical items in a text (a lexeme corresponds to a set of forms taken by a single word, e.g. the forms of the lexeme *sing* are *singing*, *sang*, *sings*, etc.).

Qualitative instruments

Nation's (2001) framework (see Appendix 1) was used in this study as a reference point to build up the students' vocabulary and to focus my investigation of vocabulary

development. In particular, I focused on word use and constraints of word use (see Appendix 1). To assess these two variables I organised reading class sessions which ran once a week for an hour where the learners participated in many vocabulary activities taken from Bamford and Day (2004), such as collecting collocations, 'back to the board', etc. In 'back to the board', for example, the teacher brings a student from one team up to the board and places them with their back facing the whiteboard. The student has to guess the word written on the board by utilising clues such as synonyms, antonyms and examples given to them by the members of their team. I also organised vocabulary discussion groups where the students had the opportunity to introduce the meaning and different uses of new words that they had encountered while reading. I endeavoured to involve the learners in the design of these sessions so that they could understand the various uses of a word and take charge of their own learning. In these sessions, I applied Nation's framework (2001) by designing activities and asking questions in order to establish whether the students could understand new words and different uses of a word depending on the context, without using a dictionary. In addition to that, I gauged their use of new words by evaluating the learners' presentations of book summaries and reports and other class activities, by collecting and analysing data from their blogs and the monthly writing tests.

More precisely, the qualitative data was collected through:

- A needs assessment questionnaire. It was divided into two main sections and was administered on the first day of the programme. The aim of the first section was to establish the participants' cultural and educational background and the purpose of the second section was to ascertain their reading habits as well as their preconceptions regarding reading for pleasure. This information helped me organise activities relevant to the needs of the students. A second needs assessment questionnaire was given to the students 10 weeks after the commencement of the extensive reading programme to establish the impact of the programme on their motivation.

- Initial and monthly individual interviews with students to gather information about the learners' attitude towards the programme, issues with speed reading and other reading strategies, understanding unknown words from the context and their participation in class vocabulary activities and discussions.

- Weekly entries on online blogs by the learners to provide information about the impact of the programme on their outlook towards reading.

Since extensive reading entails pleasurable and interesting activities and readings, the learners had the opportunity to select readings that they found interesting and pertinent to their needs. Since 'after the 2000 word level, learners need to start specialising in their vocabulary learning to suit their language use goals' (Nation and Wang Ming-tzu 1999:371), the participants were asked to select a number of authentic reading materials relevant to their interests and future study.

Outcomes

The first needs assessment questionnaire, which was administered in week 1 of the extensive reading programme, investigated the learners' preconceptions about reading in their own language and in English, frequency of reading, attitude to hard copies as opposed to electronic copies, purpose of reading and their opinion on the relationship between reading and vocabulary development. The second questionnaire administered in week 10 was slightly modified by removing questions 1 and 2, which were irrelevant at this stage, and adding a question about the use of a dictionary when they read a new word to determine the effect of the programme on the learners' attitude to reading and its association with lexical advancement.

The results of the first questionnaire (see Table 2) reveal that eight out of 10 participants disliked reading books in English and were not avid readers even in their own language. One of them stated that although she likes reading, it is difficult for her to read in English. I decided to follow that point up in my interview with them and I discovered that this was the main reason behind most learners' reluctance to pursue reading in the second language. The vast majority (nine out of 10) of the learners felt so inundated and intimidated by the vast amount of unfamiliar lexis in second language texts that they lost their interest in reading. Following the implementation of the extensive reading programme, their attitude towards reading appeared to differ significantly as nine out of 10 respondents indicated that they started to enjoy reading in English as the results of the second questionnaire demonstrate (see Table 3). In addition, most of the respondents mentioned in the second questionnaire that they now read at least

once a week, with three of them even reading every day. These responses were in marked contrast to the ones from the first questionnaire further providing support for the positive influence of the extensive reading programme on the learners' approach to reading and their immersion in the target language.

The learners' outlook on what makes reading an enjoyable experience and whether it can improve their vocabulary is also worth mentioning. The results of both questionnaires show that the learners considered that reading for fun is important, but in the second questionnaire some students' comments on the value of enjoyable reading material strongly indicated the central role that the extensive reading sessions played in shaping their attitude to reading. Here are several students' comments: 'I now love reading because I have fun when I read'; 'I now know that easy and interesting books can teach me a lot of words'; 'only if you are interested in reading, you will not do it as a job, and you will like doing it every day'; 'I can better understand what I've read about'. Furthermore, the majority of respondents stated that interesting and Hospitality Management related reading material would make the reading experience more enjoyable (see Table 3). This suggests that not only reading for pleasure but also for information can motivate learners to actively engage in reading, which further means that reading material should be relevant to students' needs. In other words, the teacher should become familiar with the interests and the needs of the students at the beginning of the programme. The learners' remarks about the relationship between reading and lexical advancement seem to indicate their increased confidence in their ability to read and guess unfamiliar vocabulary which they can utilise in their blogs.

Table 2: Results from needs assessment questionnaire 1

Did you enjoy reading at school?	How often did you borrow books from your school or local library?	Do you like reading books in English?	How many times do you read a week?	How many books have you read in the last six months?	Do you prefer reading online content or hard copies?	Do you read in order to learn new things?	Do you think that reading for fun is important?	What would make reading more enjoyable?	Do you think your vocabulary improves as you read?
Yes (2)	Sometimes (1)	Yes (2)	Once a week (4)	1 (6)	Online (6)	Yes (8)	Yes (9)	Pictures (2)	Yes (9)
No (8)	Once a month (3)	No (8)	Sometimes (2)	2 (2)	Hard copy (4)	No (0)	No (0)	Interesting content (6)	No (1)
	Never (3)		Rarely (2)	3–4 (2)		Sometimes (2)	Sometimes (1)	Funny story (2)	
			Never (2)						

Table 3: Results from needs assessment questionnaire 2

Do you like reading books in English?	How many times do you read a week?	How many books have you read in the last three months?	Do you prefer reading online content or hard copies?	Do you read in order to learn new things?	Do you think that reading for fun is important?	What would make reading more enjoyable?	Do you think your vocabulary improves as you read?	Did you use a dictionary when you read a new word?
Yes (9)	Once a week (7)	15 (6)	Online content (4)	Yes (9)	Yes (9)	Pictures (2)	Yes (9)	Yes (2)
No (0)	Sometimes (0)	20 (2)	Hard copies (6)	No (0)	No (0)	Interesting content (2)	No (0)	No (4)
Sometimes (1)	Every day (3)	30 (2)		Sometimes (1)	Sometimes (1)	Hospitality related content (6)	Sometimes (1)	Sometimes (4)
	Never (0)							

The results from the four writing tests, as indicated in Table 4, show that there is a noteworthy improvement in the learners' productive skills, which might be a result of the extensive reading programme. However, in order to verify the direct correlation between the advancement of their writing skills and the extensive reading programme further analysis of the learners' writing is required which is going to occur at a later stage. The data from the two questionnaires and the counselling sessions denotes the beneficial impact of the programme on the students' attitude to reading and participation in class. Their postings on the blogs, their book presentations and discussions in class along with their cognitive engagement in vocabulary activities increased their motivation and improved their communication skills. My co-teacher also pointed out that even the most reticent and weakest students were more willing to participate in class, read and write extensively, and thus, their immersion in the target language had a positive impact on their written and oral communication skills.

Here I focus on only two case studies as these two students faced not only tremendous difficulties in developing their lexical repertoire, but were also remarkably de-motivated before the commencement of the extensive reading programme. Both students had lost confidence in themselves which resulted from studying the target language for a long period of time without making perceptible progress.

Case study 1

Catherine was a timid student who had been in Australia for about 10 months and lived with her relatives in a south-western suburb of Sydney. Catherine had studied General English for about nine months in Australia prior to the Direct Entry Programme. In the interview, Catherine stated that she was more concerned about her family and some personal problems than her level of English, and therefore, had neglected her studies. She hardly used English at home or at work and she had difficulty communicating with native speakers as her vocabulary was fairly limited. From the beginning of the extensive reading programme, Catherine made a concerted effort to participate fully in all class activities. It was exceedingly motivating for her to realise that she could contribute constructively to the reading and speaking tasks as she mentioned in one of her postings. Catherine stated that 'I can understand, remember

the story and discuss with the teacher when she asked about the story'. After a class session on speed reading, Catherine claimed the following: 'this skill can help me to read more books and newspapers later. When I read a book before, I usually worried a lot about new vocabulary I didn't know. But now, I can concentrate on the main words in the story and remember. I think this skill makes me more confident.'

Catherine and most of the other students on the course hardly read any texts in English due to the overwhelming amount of unknown lexis. However, skills such as skimming, scanning and guessing unknown words from the context increased their confidence and their willingness to read English texts. With regard to skimming, she maintained that 'this skill can improve my reading as well. I can read more quickly and catch the main ideas . . .' Over the course, Catherine's written texts also began to show an increase in lexical density and variation (see Tables 5 and 6) which suggested that the extensive reading programme was having an impact on her progress. Catherine stated on her blog that she now reads newspapers, magazines or articles on the internet and she had the confidence to recommend interesting articles and books to her friends. These results indicate that for Catherine there was a positive relationship between her active involvement in the learning process and her confidence to immerse herself in the target language. My co-teacher on the course also commented on Catherine's progress and was convinced that the extensive reading programme had had a strong effect on her motivation. After 15 weeks, Catherine finally reached the required level for entry into the Hospitality Management course as her writing skills increased significantly (see Table 4).

Case study 2

Danny had also studied General English for more than four months without making any noteworthy progress before he joined the Direct Entry Programme. He was under pressure from his parents to finish his English studies and commence his primary course. Danny considered the Direct Entry Programme as just another English course, which was going to waste his time, and was very reluctant to participate in any class tasks and activities. After the first week of the Programme and the interview regarding the extensive reading course, Danny's attitude seemed to change as he realised that he had the opportunity to improve his level

Table 4: Results from writing tests

Students*	Writing pretest wk 1	Writing test wk 5	Writing test wk 10	Final writing test wk 15
Michael	10/25	12/25	14/25	16/25
Sarah	12/25	13/25	15/25	16/25
Catherine	10/25	12/25	15/25	17/25
Danny	8/25	9/25	13/25	15/25
Daniel	8/25	9/25	12/25	14/25
Anne	13/25	14/25	16/25	17/25
Vivian	14/25	15/25	16/25	18/25
Ken	12/25	13/25	15/25	16/25
David	15/25	16/25	17/25	18/25
Brandon	16/25	17/25	19/25	21/25
*pseudonyms				

of English and gain knowledge of discipline-specific terms. Danny stated that he never read English books or articles in the past as he consumed an inordinate amount of time searching for unfamiliar lexis.

In the first two weeks of the extensive reading programme, Danny was reluctant to participate in the reading activities and was lagging behind the other students. However, the regular interviews with the teacher, the selection of readers at pre-intermediate level and of interest to him, and the vocabulary and writing tasks brought about a significant change in Danny's attitude. As he mentioned in his blog, he now spent two to three days reading a book in English instead of weeks. He also created a vocabulary notebook which he organised under headings and handed in every week for correction and feedback. These activities empowered Danny as indicated by his postings on his blog, where he states: 'I learned that I don't need to use dictionary when I read a book. I can understand while I am reading the book without dictionary. If I don't use a dictionary while I am studying English, I can understand all about the word from a sentence and explain it without dictionary.' It is encouraging to notice Danny's progress and the impact that the sessions had on his motivation to learn. As he asserts in another posting: 'I felt more confident than before about my English skills but I'm not still that good enough. If I keep reading a book like this, I can read a newspaper without any grammar and vocabulary problems.' Although he realises his limitations, Danny appears more confident to immerse in the target language.

The analysis of Danny's written texts indicates that despite the fact that he was weaker than the other students, his dedication and determination to succeed played a pivotal role in his progress. Danny managed to advance his vocabulary, which is indicated in particular by the lexical variation of his texts (see Table 6). It is interesting to notice his use of collocations both in his texts on the blog and the essays he wrote. Most of these collocations were very common and were taught during the General English course that he had attended, which indicates that Danny's new reading habits may have enhanced his passive lexical knowledge that enriched his active use through the medium of written language. The use of blogs which 'resemble a personal home', as Ducate and Lomicka (2005:411) point out, can provide learners with a tension-free environment where they can voice their opinions and communicate with the teacher or other learners without any restrictions. Danny utilised this facility to post his book reports, his insights into his own learning and recommend books and articles to his classmates and friends, which also facilitated his lexical advancement as he practised using new lexis in new contexts.

The two case studies signify the importance of supplementing extensive reading with follow-up activities that will address the needs of the students and enhance their reading skills. In the first case, Catherine was reluctant to read extensively as she was inundated by the great number of unknown words in a text. After the lesson on guessing unknown words from the context, her confidence increased and she started to enjoy reading. This had a considerable impact on her progress and motivation. Danny also

benefitted from the reading skills he learned and practised in the extensive reading classes as he mentions on his blog. Not only did their participation in the extensive reading programme enhance their reading skills as they learned to read without being dependent on a dictionary, but also the weekly book presentations and discussions, their postings on the blogs as well as the monthly tests furthered their oral and written communication skills.

Table 5: Lexical density

	Catherine	Danny
Entrance test	52.41	43.08
Task 1	52.68	44.44
Monthly test wk 5	53.73	45.38
Task 2	54.92	52.68
Task 3	60.53	54.63
Monthly test wk 10	60.63	54.75
Task 4	60.91	56.86
Task 5	62.28	61.8
Final test wk 15	62.55	62.12

Table 6: Lexical variation

	Catherine	Danny
Entrance test	51.42	43.16
Task 1	51.5	43.18
Monthly test wk 5	52.5	44.7
Task 2	53.61	52.33
Task 3	59.53	53.12
Monthly test wk 10	59.64	54.15
Task 4	59.74	55.24
Task 5	61.12	60.56
Final test wk 15	61.24	60.75

Reflections

Burns (2010:2) states that action research 'involves taking a self-reflective, critical, and systematic approach to exploring your own teaching contexts', in order to identify possible problem areas and introduce changes that will enhance the teachers' skills and their relationship with the students. My involvement in action research gave me a better understanding of my teaching context and my students. I also gained the relevant knowledge and skills needed to investigate ways to intervene successfully in this challenging situation. My investigation into the problem that I faced with my students revealed that many other teachers encountered the same situation.

Action research increased my understanding of the students and the difficulties they faced with reading as well as the way that they processed information. It also provided me with significant insights into the nature of reading and studying which can facilitate the implementation of an extensive reading programme. Books and reading material, in general, were made readily available to all students in every programme. Library and research skills became an integral part of the course which augmented the learners' scope of

investigation and familiarisation with more reliable sources of information than the internet and Wikipedia. The library tour in week 1 was also illuminating for most students in the Hospitality Management Direct Entry course as they came across reading material that they would use in their future study. They realised that in the extensive reading programme, they had the opportunity to choose their reading material, which increased their motivation to participate.

Allowing students to read material relevant to their field of interest maintained the forward momentum of their reading pattern. Encouraging participation in class discussions about each other's reading topics enhanced their lexical development as conversation assisted students in consolidating the acquisition of new lexis. That way, learners realised that the context determines the meaning of words and that reliance on dictionaries which present words in a de-contextualised manner is not always appropriate. Allowing the students to select their reading material was pivotal for establishing personal relevance of the content which led to the students' engagement with learning.

Action research heightened my awareness of the importance of engaging students in the learning process and incorporating meaningful activities that address their needs. Monthly counselling sessions where learners discussed their learning experience provided invaluable information on their needs and feedback on the course. In these meetings, students had the opportunity to discuss their progress or lack of it with their teacher, evaluate the course by pointing out areas that could be improved, suggest activities or reading material that could support the extensive reading sessions and even relate their personal emotional upheavals with regard to learning. This opportunity fostered active student participation in learning which led to their empowerment. It also provided a greater insight into the composition of the class so that the teacher reviewed the course in order to accommodate the needs of each student. The personal interest that I aimed to show during these sessions encouraged this group of students to express themselves freely and become more actively involved in class activities.

The use of blogs also provided significant information about the students and their motivation to read and improve their vocabulary. Although I was initially reluctant to use blogs and web logs in class, I discovered that they empowered the students and encouraged them to express their thoughts about their progress and performance without any restrictions in a relaxed personal setting. Inviting their classmates to view their postings and make comments contributed substantially to the creation of a positive classroom atmosphere. The blogs also facilitated the learners' lexical development as they could utilise new words in a variety of new contexts. As Nation (1990) indicates, the use of vocabulary in different contexts to convey new ideas can result in lexical development. All in all, the blogs revealed the writers' personality and approach to learning and consolidated the new lexis.

The findings from my first cycle of action research suggest that encouraging students to read extensively, designing meaningful class activities that address the needs of the students and engaging ESL adult learners in the learning process can have a tremendous impact on their motivation to learn and immerse in the target language. These results will be presented to the other teachers in the College so that they can also participate in the next cycle of the project that I intend to carry out. The next stage will attempt to investigate the impact of extensive reading activities on the lexical development and motivation of other groups of students in different discipline-specific courses.

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Appendix 1: Nation's framework

What is involved in knowing a word (source Nation 2001:27)

Form	Spoken	R	What does the word sound like?
		P	How is the word pronounced?
	Written	R	What does the word look like?
		P	How is the word written and spelled?

	Word parts	R	What parts are recognisable in this word?
		P	What word parts are needed to express the meaning?
Meaning	Form and meaning	R	What meaning does this word form signal?
		P	What word form can be used to express this meaning?
	Concept and references	R	What is included in the concept?
		P	What items can the concept refer to?
	Associations	R	What other words does this make us think of?
		P	What other words could we use instead of this one?
Use	Grammatical functions	R	In what patterns does this word occur?
		P	In what patterns must we use this word?
	Collocations	R	What words or types of words occur with this one?
		P	What words or types of words must we use with this one?
	Constraints on use	R	Where, when and how often would we expect to meet this word?
		P	Where, when, and how often can we use this word?

R – RECEPTIVE, P – PRODUCTIVE

Appendix 2: Example of a needs assessment questionnaire

Name:
Date of birth:
Place of birth:
Nationality:
Occupation:
How long have you been in Australia?
How long have you studied English?

Educational background

Age left school:
Year/Grade reached:
Was education/schooling interrupted?
Subjects you enjoyed at school:
Check the highest level of education attained:
Secondary
Vocational
Enrolled in undergraduate

Completed undergraduate
Enrolled in postgraduate
Completed postgraduate
Other: _____

Reading habits

Did you enjoy reading at school?
How often did you borrow books from your school or local library?
Do you like reading books in English?
How many times do you read a week?
How many books have you read in the last six months?
Do you prefer reading online content or hard copies?
Do you read in order to learn new things?
Do you think that reading for fun is important?
What would make reading more enjoyable?
Do you think your vocabulary improves as you read?

Forthcoming ALTE events

Registration is now open for the ALTE 4th International Conference which will take place in Kraków, Poland from 7–9 July. The theme of the conference is 'The Impact of Language Frameworks on Assessment, Learning and Teaching viewed from the perspectives of policies, procedures and challenges' and the plenary speakers are Professor Lyle Bachman, Professor Giuliana Grego Bolli, Dr Neil Jones, Dr Waldemar Martyniuk, Dr Michaela Perlmann-Balme and Professor Elana Shohamy. In addition to the plenary speakers, presenters from around the world will attend, providing an opportunity for delegates to engage with language teaching and testing

professionals from a variety of backgrounds. To register for the conference, please visit: www.alte.org/2011/registration.htm

Following the successful launch of the ALTE Tier 3 Testing Courses in Prague last November, Dr Ardeshir Geranpayeh will again run an Extended Learning Course on 'The Application of Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) in Language Testing Research'. This three-day course will take place in Kraków from 4–6 July, prior to the ALTE 4th International Conference, and will address issues such as exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, latent variable

investigation, multiple regression and building structural models.

In September, ALTE will run its annual summer testing courses in Copenhagen. The week-long courses will take place between 12–16 and 19–23 September. The first course will be an 'Introductory Course in Language Testing' run by Professor Cyril Weir and Dr Lynda Taylor, and will focus on the practical application of testing and assessment theory. The second course will be an 'Introductory Course in Research Methodology' and will be run by Professor Micheline Chalhoub-Deville and Dr Hanan Khalifa. It will look at research design, research methods, mixed methods, and researching listening and reading.

Later in the year, ALTE's 40th meeting and conference will take place in Bochum, Germany from 16–18 November, and will be hosted by one of ALTE's German members, TestDaF.

As at previous meetings, the first two days will include a number of Special Interest Group meetings, and workshops for ALTE members and affiliates, and the third day will be an open conference day for anyone with an interest in language testing. The theme of the conference is 'Achieving Context Validity' and the speakers at the conference will include Professor Gillian Wigglesworth and Professor Cyril Weir.

For further information about these events and other ALTE activities, please visit the ALTE website – www.alte.org. To become an Individual Affiliate of ALTE, please download an application form from the ALTE website or contact the Secretariat – info@alte.org. This is free of charge and means you will receive advance information on ALTE events and activities and an invitation to join the ALTE electronic discussion fora.

Winner of the Caroline Clapham IELTS Master's Award 2010

Since 2000, the IELTS partners have presented an award for the Master's-level dissertation or thesis in English which makes the most significant contribution to the field of language testing. In 2010, the award was renamed after Caroline Clapham in recognition of her contributions to IELTS in particular and language testing in general.

After careful consideration, the IELTS Research Committee has chosen as the first recipient of the renamed award Thom Kiddle, for his dissertation entitled 'The effect of mode of response on a semi-direct test of oral proficiency'. The dissertation was submitted to Lancaster University and was supervised by Dr Judit Kormos. The Committee made note of how well the literature was reviewed, how the research grew organically out of the literature, how appropriate the design and methodology of the study was, and how within its limited scope the study contributes to the ongoing discussion

about approaches to speaking assessment. Thom Kiddle's abstract appears below. In addition, the Committee was also impressed by the submission from Gerard Seinhorst, also from Lancaster University, and decided to award him a 'Commended' certificate. His dissertation considered the relative merits of three- and four-option multiple-choice reading test items.

Thom Kiddle will be presented with his award – a certificate and a cheque for £1,000 – at the annual Language Testing Research Colloquium (LTRC) to be held in Ann Arbor, Michigan in June. For more information about LTRC, please visit www.lsa.umich.edu/eli/LTRC2011 Qualified individuals who would like to join the 2011 competition are invited to visit http://ielts.org/researchers/grants_and_awards/ielts_masters_award.aspx for details of the competition and submission guidelines.

Thom Kiddle's abstract

The all-pervasive nature of the computer and internet in the modern world offers many possibilities for delivery of speaking tests. The language testing community has approached this in a number of different ways. This paper reports on a study conducted with 42 participants from a Chilean university. It aims to determine the effect of mode of response on test performance and test-taker perception of test features, by comparing a semi-direct online version and a direct face-to-face version of a speaking test. Candidate performances on both test versions were double-marked and analysed for significant differences. Candidates also completed questionnaires after sitting each version, and a randomly selected group were interviewed after the second administration in order to directly contrast the versions. The questionnaire and interview data were analysed to determine candidate attitudes to the two test versions and to compare these attitudes to performance on each version. It was found that there was no significant difference in performance between the two versions. Despite a positive response to the online version, there was a significant preference among candidates for the face-to-face version across a number of different features of the test. However, there was no significant relationship between attitudes towards a particular version and performance on that version.