Language Education in Asia

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Editor's Note

Educating Language Learners in Asia: towards Cultural Learning hybridity

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Among local educationists and Western-born educators teaching in Asia, there is a widely perceived belief in an Asian learning culture as one that emphasises literacy education and the limited practicality of knowledge acquisition. Often this allegedly established Asian learning culture is associated with the unquestioned authority of teachers as the purveyor of knowledge, resulting in the predominant role of rote learning, repetition and teacher-centred learning. The prevalence of this view is most evident among those who are relatively novice to language education industry, as one coming from a Western country teaching in Vietnam, for example, would generally assume more of the implementation of teacher-centred learning. But this view might indicate political naivety to the local educational context. While to some extent the traditional belief in Asian learning culture might hold true, there have been widespread contestations to the belief for its generalisation of cultures (McKay, 2002), failure in recognising differences between language classroom contexts (Kubota, 1999; Savignon & Wang, 2003) and the stereotyping of Asian students as being passive and less outspoken (Kubota, 1999; Zhang, 2012).

In LEiA Editorial Note Volume 8 Issue 1, I offered a further contestation to the view. I showed how Asian countries are currently confronted with the challenge to implement Western-imported approaches and methodologies in conjunction with the local traditions and educational norms. Although conflict with local educational values and traditions have been reported in various contexts such as China (Hu, 2005b) and Japan (Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004), the methodological and pedagogical adaptations occurring within this process is evident. The process is a cultural learning shift in which teaching approaches or methodologies originating from one educational context are modified, reshaped and refined to meet the local needs in another context. Local values, educational norms, religious beliefs and social expectations are the guiding precepts to this cultural learning shift (Zein, 2017). The articles published in the

previous issue demonstrate the occurrence of cultural learning shift in the domains of pedagogy and teacher education. Various educational techniques such as Dictogloss and learning dictation are modified to tailor to the specific needs of the students and to meet the local educational demands. This practice not only reasserts Prabhu's (1990) contention that there is no best method - there is no one method that works with everybody in any teaching situation, in any context - but also brings resounding consequence in the imperative nature of methodological and pedagogical adaptations. Without adaptations, the implementation of a methodology in language education is less likely to be effective.

When taken together as a collective, these adaptations are what Spring (2008) called hybrid educational practices. According to Spring (2008), alternative forms of education have been developed around the world, enabling the local populations to adapt educational practical local needs and culture. These adaptations demonstrate how local actors borrow from multiple models, approaches or methodologies in the global flow of educational ideas. This in turn creates hybrid educational practices that combine the local and the global. But rather than creating a convergence of educational practices, what appears is a hybrid educational practice seen in the adaptation of, Dictogloss, for example, as a Western imported methodology to cater for the local needs.

The five articles published in this second issue of 2017 are also examples of hybrid educational practice – they accentuate the very notion of cultural learning shift. The articles are:

1. Teaching Writing Using Genre-based approach: A Study at a Vietnamese University (written by Thi Thu Nuy and Andrew Ross)
2. Effective Use of Peer-feedback in Developing Academic Writing Skills of Undergraduate Students (written by Yi Yi Mon and Subhan Zein)
3. The Relationship between Leisure Reading Habits, Vocabulary and Writing of English Language Learners (ELLs) (written by Jocelyn)
4. Off-shore and Out of Reach: Student voice in pre-departure EAP pedagogies (written by Jacquie Widin)
5. English As a Key Employability Capacity: Perspectives from Vietnamese Students and Lecturers (written by Thuy Bui)

Each of the articles above provides a sample of hybrid educational practice where the implementation of a Western imported pedagogy goes through a process of local adaptation. First, Thi Thu Nuy and Andrew Ross demonstrate this through their study on teaching academic writing using genre-based approach. Their study found the inseparable relationship between the knowledge of students' first language (L1) and the target genre in the second language (L2). Their study lends further support to the widely embraced language acquisition theory that languages promote each other's development in a reciprocal manner and that an L2 learners must build upon existing skills and knowledge acquired in their L1. Although learners might be familiar with the

conventions and cultural contexts of letter writing, their unfamiliarity with the formal tone, style and language resources to do it properly in L2 suggests they need scaffolded instruction. The teacher will then need to manoeuvre pedagogical techniques that can facilitate this process through genre-based learning that is appropriate to the local context. Second, the use of peer-feedback in academic writing is central in the article written by Yi Yi Mon and Subhan Zein. Peer-feedback, another Western-imported pedagogy that does not originate from the Myanmar educational context where the study was carried out, was proven useful in the authors' study. Nonetheless, awareness of the local educational culture means that one needs to consider the issue of hierarchical linguistic authority. Learners consider themselves to be a group of hierarchy in which there are students that are thought to be more proficient than others, hence being more authoritative, albeit still less authoritative than the teacher. Teachers are expected to be cognizant of this issue, hence developing a pedagogy that spreads out the authoritative mode. This can be done by starting with less authoritative pedagogy such as several cycles of peer feedback to the more authoritative one such as the combination of indirect and full, explicit and written teacher feedback. The third article by Jocelyn is about reading habits. Their study suggests that teachers need to be aware of the changing forms of reading where social media platforms such as Edmodo and Schoology have been used by digital natives to access reading assignments. The traditional conventional reading classrooms in many language classrooms in Asia can be supplemented with virtual reading classrooms that blend face to face discussion with virtual learning through Schoology, for example. The authors argue that it not only works to the convenience of the learners but is also effective to promote lexical acquisition and writing performance. The fourth article, by Jacquie Widin and Malthus, provides another evidence for hybrid educational practice. In an educational setting such as Laos that tends to place high authority to teachers, implementing peer-learning might be seen as challenging the local norm. But this is not the case when it is the previous scholarship holders who played the role of the co-instructors, assisting Lao college staff in advising scholarship recipients attending a pre-departure training programme in their preparation for overseas studies. This provided the scholarship holders with adjusted sociocultural expectations and interactional competence in the new academic and cultural settings that extend beyond the narrowly focused-instrumental skills. Another means of hybrid educational practice is also offered in the fifth article in this issue, written by Thuy Bui. The study suggests the possible benefits that can be derived from collegial performance between university lecturers and successful employers. Lecturers can play a vital role in guiding students to develop research skills to utilise abundant online materials to enhance their English and soft skills, and they could also collaborate with employers to develop courses or workshops that can foster students' knowledge, insights and skills of the 21st century. This is by no means a common practice in the educational context, but it is a necessary educational intervention. The authors believe that such a strategy would help narrow the gap between theory and practice while preparing students with the demands of their occupation and building professional relationships with potential employers.

To sum up, the manifestation of hybrid educational practice is prevalent. Cultural learning shift is currently happening. It occurs in probably every language classroom that sees the adaptation of a Western-imported methodology or pedagogy to the local context in Asia and other contexts around the world. In the long run, this could lead to the development of a completely new cultural learning, a process that I call cultural learning hybridity. Moving beyond a cultural learning shift where approaches or methodologies coming from one educational context are adapted in another context, there are signs that we are witnessing new forms of cultural learning. These forms of cultural learning do not purely characterise the original local educational cultures; neither do they entirely reflect the cultural learning context from where the new methodologies or pedagogies are adapted. Rather, they are new forms of entity that retain the original cultural learning characters of the local context while embellishing themselves with new methodological or pedagogical attributes that they adapt from the other cultural learning context. As in the article by Mon and Zein, the traditional cultural learning that views the authoritative role of the teacher in Myanmar has now seen the emergence of a new pedagogy that embraces a mix of teacher and peer-feedback that evenly distributes linguistic authority hierarchy. Similarly, placing the previous scholarship holders as the facilitators in an EAP pre-departure training, as in Widin's article, would provide alternative to the narrative of the teacher as the only source of knowledge – this would pave the way for a new form of cultural learning. Hayhoe and Pan (2001) stated that "of greatest importance is the readiness to listen to the narrative of the other, and to learn the lessons which can be discovered in distinctive threads of human cultural thought and experience" (p. 20). Many educational contexts in Asia seem to have developed such a readiness to listen to other's narrative. The cultural learning hybridity that that appear to occur in those contexts is the fruit of such a readiness.

About the Author

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Research

English as a Key Employability Capacity: Perspectives from Vietnamese Students and Lecturers

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Building on a research trend that unravels the relationship between English language and employability (e.g., Erling, 2014; Hamid, 2015), this study explored 617 Vietnamese students and six lecturers' perspectives regarding university students' English as an employability skill. A mixed method was employed to collect both survey and interview data in three major universities in North Vietnam. The data investigated students' levels of confidence, in relation to both their English competency and career skills performed in English. The results indicated students' high level of uncertainty in both their English and career skills performed in English, which corresponded to their insufficient English for employability purposes. Specifically, over 80% of the students indicated their uncertainty about seeking employment that required English. The study provides recommendations for improving pedagogies, policies and practices to promote English as an employable skill for the multifaceted demands of the global job market.

Keywords: English, Vietnam, employability capacity, program development

The era of global inter-independence positions English language education (ELE) reforms as a high priority and a key part of social investment, and the human capital priority for the national socio-economic, educational and political developments (Erling, 2014; Erling & Seargeant, 2013). In Asia, the growing economic shifts from agrarian-based to multifunctional economies require young citizens to be equipped with essential skills (Erling, 2014). This includes English as a strategy to address youth unemployment. Driven by the various demands of the globalized market, young people are required to urgently obtain skill sets derived from English to enrich

and sustain their stock of employability skills (Aggarwal, 2010; Coleman, 2011; Erling, 2014). However, central to tremendous ELE policy shifts is how these policies prepare university students for the employability capacities needed after graduation.

Recently, researchers concerned with language policies, equity and employability (Coleman, 2011; Erling & Seargeant, 2013; Phillipson, 2012) and leading organizations such as the British Council have moved beyond exploring the effectiveness of ELE policies to actively uncovering the relationship between English and employability. Studies in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Iran, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka report a positive link between English and economic development, especially employability (Coleman, 2011; Erling & Seargeant, 2013).

While the scholars calling for an urgent need to unravel the relationship between English and employability has actively emerged across Asia (e.g., Coleman, 2011; Ferguson, 2013), such similar research is extremely under-addressed in Vietnam. This is a critical gap because 77.5% of the population is active members of the workforce (15-60 years) (Ministry of Planning and Investment, 2016). Nevertheless, research on the relationship between English and employability in Vietnam is extremely limited, and this situation needs to be considered against a context of the nation's ELE reforms.

Since 2008, the state has placed a heavy emphasis on English as a compulsory subject in various disciplines. According to the government, as many as 20 million students will benefit from this emphasis (Decision 1400/QD-TTg, 2008). Building on recent research, and addressing the scarcity of literature in the context, this study argues for a critical need to explore the degree to which Vietnamese university students are equipped with English language skills for employability. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to investigate perspectives regarding students' English, and their language-based employability capacity from lecturers and university students. The data included student surveys and interviews with students and lecturers. In particular, the study inquires into the following research question:

> How do university students and their lecturers perceive students' English, particularly in relation to their future employability?

The study begins with a literature review on the relationship between English and employability. This is then followed by a description of the methodology while investigating the research topic. Finally, the study discusses the results and conclusions, and offers recommendations to promote English as one of vital employability skills.

English as an Indicator of Employability

What Is Employability?

Employability manifests as the multi-faceted traits of a person; and the knowledge and personal attributes that make an individual more likely to secure and thrive in their chosen occupations; bring benefit to themselves, the national workforce, the community and the economy (Yorke, 2006; Yorke & Knight, 2004). Employability comprises two main categories: hard skills or discipline-specific skills, and soft skills or employability skills. Employability skills include communication skills (verbal and such as reading, listening, writing and speaking, and non-

verbal skills, namely body language) in both the vernacular and dominant global languages (Pooja, 2013). This notion further emphasizes the roles of multiple languages, including English, in securing employment. Pooja's (2013) study on employers' perspectives of employability place a great emphasis on literacy and linguistic skills. Generally speaking, the concept of employability suggests the essential role of English in constructing and sustaining the development of both one's expertise and soft skills.

Studies on English as an Employability Skill

Studies on English as an aspect of employability provide evidence of positive correlation between competent English language skills and economic opportunities, especially when the language, in Asian contexts, is embedded in development initiatives (Coleman, 2010; Erling & Seargeant, 2013; Grin, 2001; Ku & Zussman, 2010; Hamid, 2015; Lee, 2012). There is a positive impact of English on national economic development, as knowing English is perceived as offering a competitive edge and is "highly rewarded in the labour market" (Erling, 2014, p.3). Economic development initiatives in Sri Lanka, Nepal, and India reiterate that English language is an essential element, especially in outsourcing occurring within the service industry, information technology (IT), healthcare, and hospitality, which helps alleviate these countries' unemployment and poverty issues (Asian Development Bank, 2013). Similarly, studies in Pakistan and India (Aslam, Kingdon, De & Kumar, 2010) found significant returns to education including English because this and other languages function as a central platform for young people to achieve lucrative occupations and increased earnings (Coleman, 2010; Erling & Seargeant, 2013; Grin, 2001; Ku & Zussman, 2010). Grin (2001) reported a link between English and economic value as salary premiums rise along with English competency in the Swiss linguistic market.

While there is a positive link between English and economic benefits, studies indicate the fragile role of English education in strengthening employability capacities in practice, largely because of employees' limited English competency (Azam, Chin & Prakash, 2011; Ferrari & Dhingra, 2009; Pooja, 2013). Particularly, insufficient English comprehension skills represent a critical hindrance for students to confidently enter the job market. Studies on English for employability with engineering students in India reported that only 27% of the cohort surveyed possessed business English capacities (Seetha, 2012). Moreover, in the context of rising demand for Indian engineers to provide services related to software and IT, students' communication skills are reported to be a significant barrier for students when dealing with clients across the United States and the United Kingdom (Azam et al., 2011; Ferrari & Dhingra, 2009; Pooja, 2013). Similarly, it was rather shocking that 47% of graduates were "not employable in any sectors" due to their insufficient English, especially communication skills in English (Aspiring Minds, 2013, p.7). This result further indicates a convergence between a strong demand for English and students' reduced employability. Another issue that reinforces the gap between ELE policies and employability is that a large number of students have not yet experienced English language education at levels that allow them to benefit economically (Erling, 2014).

In Vietnam, globalization has greatly influenced the country's higher education. With the agenda of socializing education, Vietnam has promoted various educational cooperations,

programs, and models to meet the needs of the modern society (London, 2011). In parallel with the overall changes in education, Vietnam English language policies have undergone significant shifts such as the National Foreign Language Project 2020. This project requires young Vietnamese citizens to be equipped with English language skills in order to improve national and regional employability and development (Decision 1400/QD-TTg, 2008). English is already mandated a compulsory subject for all students nationwide from Grade 3 onwards. University students are required to take 12 credits of English together with their majors in order to fulfill their graduation requirements and to meet the needs for regional and international job markets.

The literature on English and employability capacities suggests a complex and contested issue of whether English can provide critical economic returns. ELE in universities, in fact, plays a very minimal role in strengthening students' employable capacities due to mismatched teaching orientations, ambiguous language education needs, and divergent gaps between students' learning outcomes and employers' needs. The scholarship further illuminates the lack of research on teaching and learning English, and students' ability to get employed. The available research inadequately examines the perspectives of students and lecturers on students' English capability and their employment goals. The current study argues an essential need to gain a rigorous understanding of the extent to which current ELE initiatives can support university students. The study attempts to address the gaps of the current literature and provide suggestions to strengthen ELE toward career-oriented and socio-economic advancement. The following section discusses the methodology used to investigate the research problem.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was utilized as it provides a cross-check to confirm the validity and measure the reliability level; and gets a more nuanced understanding of the research problem (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Both quantitative and qualitative data, collected between March and June, 2016, focused on (i) students' confidence in their English for employability purposes; (ii) employability skills in English learned at universities; (ii), and (iii) recommendations on how to acquire English language in order to increase employability. The validity and credibility of the questionnaire was justified based on the existing literature as well as the rigorous steps of developing, piloting, and conducting the questionnaire. In particular, the English and Vietnamese questionnaires were developed based on the literature in relation to English employability (Seetha, 2012; Pooja, 2013) and were piloted with 50 university students in order to address potentially unclear questions and incomplete aspects of the research topic. Unclear areas of the survey were then be fixed and the survey was piloted the second time and the third time to make sure all aspects were comprehensive to the students. The final version of the survey was then completed by 617 students at three universities in North Vietnam. These universities offer high-quality undergraduate programs (see Table 1). The students completing the surveys were between 20 and 24 years old and at their third or final year (4th) of the undergraduate programs. Besides the English programs, these university students were not provided with further support for their English learning and soft skill development. Nevertheless, the majority of the students (91.5%) had learned English for more than 7 years prior to their university enrolment.

Table 1

Brief description of the researched universities

University	Number of full-time students	Number of students surveyed	Majors of students surveyed
University 1	5,000	202	International Relations, External Information
University 2	11,000	227	Business Administration, Animal Husbandry, Environment, Natural Science, Social Science, Management - Economic Laws, Finance -– Banking
University 3	7,500	188	Nursery Education, Politics, Information Technology, Economics, Biology, Chemistry, Business Administration

In an attempt to obtain further in-depth data and detailed explanations about students' lack of confidence, and its affecting factors of curriculum, teaching methods and assessment, two EFL instructors and two students from each of the three institutions were invited to participate in face-to-face interviews in Vietnamese to make sure of the respondents' accurate understanding. The instructors and students participated in the interviewed were randomly chosen. The instructor participants had at least three years of teaching experience in their content area in English, and had an understanding of the English language programs as well as their students' English abilities. In addition, the students were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews on the basis of their questionnaire responses. The interviews were conducted outside classroom hours and audio-recorded. The interview questions focused on the students' English skills and their career employability in relation to English. The interviews were then transcribed, and the transcripts were sent to the interview participants for a check of accuracy. The transcripts were then translated into English and verified by a certified English lecturer in a teacher education institution in North Vietnam.

For the qualitative data analysis, the study employed an iterative and recursive process; we inductively identified universal patterns during the first coding cycle of the interview data by carefully reading the transcripts to generate themes and categories. The themes that emerged were then deductively interpreted and developed as the final themes to support the findings (Berg, 2001; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 2008). The quantitative data was analyzed for students' levels of confidence in employability-related matters and their English competence using a percentile scoring system.

In the following section, we will discuss major themes that illuminate students' and lecturers' perceptions section regarding students' English skills for employability.

Findings

Students' English Skills for Employability

The survey data indicated that students' perspectives regarding English skills for employability were alarmingly limited. In particular, besides two skills (introducing oneself and reading comprehension in English) which over 50% showed their lack of confidence, the remaining results indicated that students felt overwhelmingly uncertain about the rest of their skills (ranging from 60 to 85%). In particular, the skills in which students were found to show a

strikingly lack of confidence were their ability to listen to different topics (60.29% and 23.18% for not confident and not very confident, respectively), collect information (59.48% and 18.48%), and communicate in English (57.21% and 23.18 %). The survey results further indicated that students' areas of uncertainty about employability skills included answering phone inquiries (56.40% and 24.80%), participating in job interviews (57.86% and 18.96%), reading information on websites (54.62% and 22.04 %), and understanding human resource policies (55.75% and 26.58%). As many as 78.28% of the students reported that they were uncertain of their ability to create documents, letters, reports, and invoices in English.

Similar to the survey results, the interviews with students showed that most of them (5 out of 6) were not confident in their English after graduation, even though all of them had studied English from 9 to 13 years. Regarding the interviews, most students indicated that their English was insufficient for applying for jobs performed in English. A student interviewed indicated that: "my English is not enough to communicate in a workplace that requires English because my listening and speaking skills are very limited." This response echoed the perspectives of the lecturers, who indicated that an emphasis on grammar learning prior to university enrolment and limited access to daily English communication were significant causative factors. When discussing students' ability to read in information on websites and understand human resource policies, a lecturer reflected that:

> My students can quickly find the English news about their favorite pop singer or actor, but they do not really know about changes in policies and other social issues. They just don't care enough or take these skills seriously in their learning.

We further delved into students' career skills performed in English in order to obtain a deeper understanding of students' English employability skill. The following themes highlight their career skills performed in English.

Students' Career Skills Performed in English

Table 2

Students' English skills and English as an employability skill

Content Performed in English	Very confident	Quite confident	Not confident	Not very confident	Don't know
I. English skills					
1. Ability to collect information	0.49	18.31	59.48	18.48	3.24
2. Ability to listen to different topics	0.49	12.97	60.29	23.18	3.08
3. Ability to communicate	0.65	14.42	57.21	23.18	4.54
4. Ability to answer inquiries via phone	0.32	14.42	56.40	24.80	4.05
5. Ability to do presentations	1.46	26.09	49.59	20.75	2.11
6. Ability to introduce yourself	3.73	44.08	38.57	11.83	1.78
7. Ability to answer interview questions	1.46	18.96	57.86	18.96	2.76
8. Ability to comprehend readings	1.94	34.52	48.78	10.53	4.21
9. Ability to understand timetables and job-related agendas	1.13	28.20	52.35	15.88	2.43
10. Ability to read information regarding companies online	0.65	16.53	54.62	22.04	6.16
11. Ability to understand human resource policies	0.32	10.37	55.75	26.58	6.97
12. Ability to create documents, for example, letters, instructions, announcements, forms, and email, etc.	0.65	15.24	52.35	25.93	5.83
II. English as an Employability Skill					
13. Ability to work with colleagues in group	0.81	16.37	58.02	20.58	4.21
14. Problem-solving skills	0.65	12.16	59.97	22.37	4.86
15. Interpersonal skills (e.g., sharing, supporting, cooperating, etc.)	0.65	17.67	57.37	19.61	4.70
16. Ability to use technologies	1.30	19.29	53.16	20.91	5.35
17. Business skills	0.65	9.40	59.16	24.31	6.48
18. Leadership skills	0.49	10.86	54.62	27.55	6.48
19. Debating	0.32	8.104	56.56	29.17	5.83
20. Ability to find a good job thanks to my good English skills	0.65	5.67	55.11	32.41	6.16
21. Ability to work with people around the world thanks to my good English skills	0.65	5.99	51.54	34.85	6.97
22. Ability to find scholarships for my profssional development thanks to my good English ability	0.32	5.35	50.41	37.28	6.65

The survey results further indicated a strong correlation between the students' lack of confidence in their English and career skills performed in English. Overall, as many as 70% to 80% of 617 students were uncertain (both not confident and not very confident) about their career skills in English. The results indicated that students lacked confidence in debating (56.56% and 29.17% for not confident and not very confident, respectively), working with people worldwide (51.59% and 34.85%), and finding scholarships for career development (50.41% and 37.28%). Similarly, as many as 55.11% and 32.41 % of the students were not confident and not very confident, respectively, in their ability to seek a job that requires

English. A student majoring in environmental science reflected similar feelings to others when talking about her English skills:

> I am not confident with my English skills when applying for a job. My other skills such as working in groups, problem solving, debating, presentation, and leadership in English are also very limited.

In contrast, two other two students showed their confidence in English for employability as they understood the importance of English or had participated in skill courses for career development in English. As a student said:

> I am quite confident in my English when I apply for a job because I understand the importance of learning English in the era of global integration. Thus, I invest time and money in learning skill-based courses.

These two students believed that if they actively participated in learning communicative English and studied to obtain certified English programs (e.g. TOEIC) for their future jobs, they could afford to feel quite secure about their language skills for job-seeking purposes. However, although these students had positive feelings about their English, they largely acknowledged that their essential job skills such as collaboration, problem solving, debating, presentation, and leadership were somewhat insufficient. As one student commented:

> Although I feel confident about my English, if I have to perform skills such as group work or problem solving in English, I am still not as capable. I lack skills and experience in solving problems. Moreover, I do not think that I can debate or perform as a leader of some kind because I lack comprehensive training in English.

The interview results with lecturers showed their reluctance to comment on the students' English skills. While two lecturers indicated confidence in their students' English, as students had to obtain a required English score (450 TOEIC) before graduation, the remaining four thought that only a small number of their students could function well in terms of English for job-seeking. The principal issues preventing students from obtaining good English skills, as the lecturers indicated, were the lack of an environment to practice English, students' selective English skills, students' limited socio-economic understanding, and disciplinary knowledge. As one lecturer said:

> Some students have a clear career goal, such as they will work for foreign companies so they invest in learning English. However, for most of the students, I feel that their knowledge about the economy, education, and society and their majors is increasingly limited. Thus, all this significantly affects their learning English and using English as a good career capacity.

The survey results significantly corresponded to the lecturers' comments, reinforcing uncertainty about the students' skills. Although the lecturers actively integrated these skills in

their programs, they agreed that the students' English skills mostly ranged from average to below average. As another lecturer remarked:

> The students' group work and problem solving skills are significantly enhanced because they participate quite well and learn from each other when working in groups to solve a problem. However, students lack debating skills because they have not yet developed their own opinions when they do not agree with their peers' ideas. On the other hand, some students' debating skills are quite advanced, and they seem to dominate others in the debate. Moreover, although students have good knowledge about technology, they seem to be nervous when doing a presentation. Only a small number of students possess good leadership skills.

Commenting on their ability to communicate with people in the workplace and worldwide in English, 5 out of 6 students asked indicated that they were not confident with this skill as their English and communicative skills were inadequate. The interview results further showed the similar trend in terms of the students' communicative skills in the workplace. Similar to the students, almost all of the lecturers were ambivalent about the students' ability to communicate with others in English in their workplace. A lecturer in business management reflected:

> I think students can only manage function some simple conversations in English. Only a small number of students are capable of working effectively with people in the region and worldwide in English. Although we have tried hard to create favorable conditions for students to practice English, they still lack a real English-speaking environment. Thus, they are unable to react naturally in English and seem to be unconfident in communication.

Another lecturer shared a similar thought: "The students are not yet able to communicate confidently in the workplace because they only learn speaking via CDs and TV channels. Their English vocabulary is also very limited." These reflections support Vietnamese scholars' growing concerns about Vietnamese students' poor command of both oral and written English competence after graduating from tertiary education (Hoang, 2013; Nguyen, 2010).

Discussion

This study explored students' English as an employability skill from students' and lecturers' perspectives. The results support studies by Azam et al. (2011); Ferrari and Dhingra (2009); and Pooja (2013) which largely suggest that across various contexts students' English as an employability skill is largely insufficient. This study further supports Clement and Murugavel (2015) and Seetha (2012), who also indicated that students' remarkably limited abilities in English were due to various factors, including their lack of English knowledge, communicative English, and skills, as well as skill-based courses in English. While we strongly agree that English and skills performed in English alone do not secure successful employment, we can nevertheless conclude that students' limited English as an employability skill could tremendously diminish their stock of knowledge for employment (Author1, forthcoming a&b). When most of students are unable to utilize their English as a transferable job capacity, their

future social mobility and socio-economic opportunities are significantly threatened (Aspriring Minds, 2013). Considering this in a broader perspective, students' extreme uncertainty about their English and related employability could affect the nation's potential to provide a sustainable and skilled workforce to meet the wide-ranging demands of the job market in the region and the world.

The purpose of this study was not limited to investigating students' English as an employment capacity. It also attempted to offer some practical recommendations for policy makers, lecturers, and associated stakeholders to work towards promoting programs to enhance students' English and capacities to be employed. Thus, a systematic English education from the primary level onwards is strongly recommended. Students' limited English skills suggest that although most of them could benefit from appropriate teaching methods at the tertiary level, this still cannot compensate for their lack of pre-existing solid English knowledge. This deficiency results from unsystematic and problematic teaching quality offered at the lower levels as many lecturers and students indicated (Author1, 2016b). Thus, in the tertiary context, students seem to struggle to either acquire or revise their English with many other courses' requirements. This evidenced by our results show that more than 80% of the students were not confident performing a job in English. We have identified the need to persistently promote the importance of English among students as well as a mindset of lifelong language learning. We suggest that lecturers to guide students to become researchers of their own learning to mobilize abundant online materials including websites, videos, magazines, and films as resourceful tools to enhance their English and soft skills (Luke, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Moreover, one serious matter arising from the data is students' tremendously insufficient socio-economic and educational background knowledge, which further reveals their fragile potential to compete in the demanding job market (Erling, 2014; Hamid, 2015). We urge educators and the stakeholders to re-conceptualize what it means to provide English as well as general education for youth. Therefore, we argue that lifelong learning further reflects the state and educators' abilities to rethink and reposition the goal of education. This creates more complete individuals who possess not only knowledge and skills in English but also sound socio-political, educational, and economic foundations to make contributions on individual, national and international scales.

Third, since the final purpose of the students is to be able to be employed in their desired careers, universities should foster a collaborative, sustainable, and supportive relationship with employers in fields related to their majors. Knowledge, insights, skills, and demands derived from employers should function as a plausible ground to structure, sustain, and develop diverse skill-based courses to prepare students for job markets (Ku & Zussman, 2010; Lee, 2012). Career workshops, inviting successful employers to be guest speakers, and short and long term internship programs should be integrated to narrow the gap between theory and practice, while offering more opportunities for students to build relationships with companies and employers (Pooja, 2013). Generally speaking, besides the quality of students' knowledge and programs, we believe that English as employability skill has to be developed using a systematic, collaborative, diverse, and conscientious approach. This requires tremendous effort from the students themselves, their universities, and associated stakeholders to actively work towards

offering intellectual products with strong English as highly employable skills that meet ever-demanding requirements of domestic and international employers.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study is to explore students' English as an employability skill. The results of the study show students lack of English when it is regarded as an employability capacity. Students' lack of English proficiency, skills, as well as skill-based programs in English were reported as principal hindrances to look for jobs that require English.

The study only aims to investigate perspectives regarding English as an employability skill from students and lecturers. Future studies, thus, are recommended to examine other stakeholders such as employers' perspectives and experiences on hiring students to perform tasks in English. More follow-up studies are also suggested to examine how students perform their tasks later as well as generate perspectives from their employers regarding skills needed in the workplace. Such research directions will further contribute to structuring English programs around the job markets' desires and supporting students to become versatile, confident, and efficient English language users, especially to function in jobs that require English.

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The Relationship Between Leisure Reading Habits, Vocabulary and Writing of English Language Learners (ELLs)

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Numerous studies have highlighted the influence of leisure reading habits on second language proficiency. The present study investigates the relationship between students' reading habits, vocabulary and writing performance. A reading survey, productive vocabulary test and writing test were administered to 33 university English language learners (ELLs) students in Malaysia. The results indicate that participants had not received a lot of support for reading from their English teachers at elementary schools or at secondary level and had limited access to reading resources. The university students in the study were aware of the value of reading in English, albeit spending a considerable amount of time on the Internet compared to reading off-line. More than half of the participants agreed that they would read something if it was recommended by their lecturers. In addition, the present study also found that participants had not acquired the adequate vocabulary size required for tertiary studies. The findings have important implications for English language practitioners both at school and tertiary levels.
Keywords: leisure reading habits, vocabulary size, second language writing, vocabulary development, second language reading

For decades, the reading habits of students are said to have had a strong influence on their language learning. A sizeable number of studies have attested that reading plays a significant role in second language acquisition (Elgort & Warren, 2014; Elley & Mangubhai, 1983; Grabe, 2008; Ito, 2011). Research in reading habits and writing in the first language (L1) has mostly treated as two separate, independent fields of study (Clark & Foster, 2005; Hopper, 2005; Parodi, 2007; Shanahan, 2006). Most studies find that reading and writing are related (e.g., Jenkins, Johnson & Hileman, 2004; Berninger, Abbott, Abbott, Graham, & Richards, 2002; Loban, 1963; Maula, 2015). Like in the L1 setting, studies in reading habits and writing in the second language (L2) settings were mostly conducted separately (e.g. Erdem, 2015; Florence, Adesola, Alaba, & Adewumi 2017; Iftanti, 2012). Little data exists on the links between the reading habits of university students and their writing and most of the studies concentrate

almost entirely on primary and secondary students (Douglas & Miller, 2016). We were disappointed by the scarcity of published research studies that address the impact of reading habits on the writing performance of university students.

The study reported in this paper was conducted in the English language learners (ELLs) context in Malaysia. It aimed at investigating whether university students' reading habits are related to their vocabulary and writing production at the start of their university studies. This paper begins with a definition of *leisure reading*, followed by an overview of reading habits in Malaysia. Reading and writing relationships are also discussed. It continues to describe the methodological tenets used in collecting data. The paper then presents the findings and discusses the implications in ELL language education.

Literature Review

Leisure Reading as a Habit

When reading act is done repeatedly, it becomes a habit. This habit is measured by the amount of materials being read, the frequency of reading and the amount of time spent on reading (Wagner, 2002). The International Reading Association or IRA, defines leisure reading as "independent, self-selected reading of a continuous text for a wide range of personal and social purposes." It is the reading students choose to do on their own. Leisure reading is often referred to as recreational reading, pleasure reading, free voluntary reading, spare time reading and independent reading. It takes place anytime in and outside of school.

Readers may read a wide range of texts including fiction, nonfiction, magazines and newspapers. Leisure reading is generally intrinsically or socially motivated and a pleasurable activity for the reader (Leisure Reading, 2014).

Reading Habits in Malaysia

Students' reading habits are by and large shaped by their home and school environments (Chin, Lee, & Thayalan, 2007; Dijk, 2015; Kennedy & Trong, 2010), and their writing production is determined by their vocabulary size. We draw on the sociocultural perspectives on literacy. Sociocultural theories related to literacy focus on ways people practice literacy in which they exist (Perry, 2012). Viewing literacy as a diverse set of contextualized practices helps researchers and practitioners understand the types of knowledge the learners use literacy which extend beyond their classroom learning.

Many of the studies conducted in Malaysia have reported that matriculation and university students spend very little time on leisure reading in the traditional sense. These students, who have undergone Malay medium instruction and have learned English as a single subject in schools preferred reading in Malay rather than in English (see Pandian & Ibrahim, 1997; Shameen, 2016; Subashini & Balakrishnan, 2013). Similarly, Malaysian Chinese students who learned English as a subject and graduated from Chinese secondary schools, tended to read Chinese materials rather than materials in English or Malay (Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi & Ooi, 2011). Most of these students, labelled as reluctant readers (Pandian, 2000), have low interest in reading. A study by Chin, Lee, Thayalan (2007) found that students may be interested in

reading, but they have not acquired reading as a habit, and this is consistent with Mohd Ariffin's (2010) findings.

Like many countries, access to new forms of media is becoming widespread in Malaysia. In a recent study, it is reported that Malaysian undergraduates spend more than 6 hours online using social media technologies (Lim, Agostinho, Harper, & Chicharo, 2014). In a report from the Pew Research Centre, 70 per cent of users logged into Facebook at least once a day, and about 45 per cent logged into the site several times a day (Duggan, Ellison, Lampe, Lehnhart, & Madden, 2015). In the present study, we identified some popular social network platforms on mobile and web applications namely Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Whatsapp, Instagram, WeChat, and Google Plus.

The impact of digital media on students' learning engagement has been the subject of study by researchers from different disciplines such as psychology, computer science, education, literacy studies, and library and information science. With the accessibility of digital information and the increasing amount of time people spend reading electronic media, the digital environment has begun to affect people's reading habits (see Chen & Yan, 2016; Chou, 2001; Junco, 2011; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Rosen, Carrier, & Cheever, 2013). Electronic media use among university students has a profound impact on students' reading. Today's young adults are more digital active than any previous generation as reported by Pew Research Centre (Zickuhr & Smoth, 2012). Reading on digital devices or online reading can be considered as a form of reading. The underlying question is whether students engage deeply with a digital text in the same way they do when reading a printed text. Other studies such as Liu (2005) and Picton (2014) found that the habits in reading on screen or screen-based reading has been the most common habit for young people. Students who prefer screen-based reading often spend more time browsing and scanning, keyword searching, reading selectively and spend little time on in-depth reading. Attention span while reading is also shorter. Although annotating and highlighting is common in print reading, it has not yet "migrated" to the digital environment when people read electronic texts (Liu 2005, p. 707).

A study on scholars as the student subjects by Nicholas, Huntington, Jamali, Rowlands, Dobrowski, and Tenopir (2008) found that there is a large proportion of full-text reading on screen. This shows an increasing screen-based reading habits of late due to the relatively more time spent reading electronic documents (Liu, 2005). Some studies report that students rather view than read and do not possess the critical and analytical skills to retrieve the information found on the Internet (see e.g., Rowlands et al. 2008). In the present study, we did not explore the state of e-book reading i.e., long-form writing in digital format when participants were in primary and secondary schools. This is because most of these students were from suburban and rural regions where there is limited or no access to the Internet. Computers at schools are also not readily available as school computer laboratories are restricted to teaching technology rather than for accessing internet resources (Abidin, Pourmohammadi, Varasingam & Ooi, 2014). Also, mobile phones and ipads are prohibited at schools. Although in the present study students' exposure to social media was not the main focus, their reading habits were shaped by the social and cultural contexts where they were situated.

Reading and Writing Relationships

Research traditionally approached writing and reading as distinct areas of exploration (Langer & Flihan, 2000). Only in the 1960s, spearheaded by the Center for Cognitive Studies at Harvard, were writing and reading regarded as related language processes. In his seminal paper, Loban (1963) reported strong relationships between reading and writing i.e., students who wrote well also read well, and that the converse was true. Since then, such relationships have become more widely recognized (Harl, 2013). Stotsky (1983) investigated reading and writing relationships through her much cited synthesis which spans approximately fifty years from the beginning of the 1930s to 1981. She claimed that "better writers tend to be better readers", "better writers tend to read more than poorer writers", and that better readers tend to produce more syntactically mature writing than poorer readers" (p. 636). In other words, reading experience appears to be a consistent correlate of, or influence on, students' writing ability. In a similar vein, Pearson (2002) refers to the relationship between reading and writing as synergistic. Parodi's empirical study (2007) further showed significant coefficients between reading and writing of argumentative texts. However, these studies on reading and writing relationships were all conducted in the L1 contexts.

In second language (L2) learning, prominent scholars in vocabulary studies (Goulden, Nation & Read, 1990; Laufer & Goldstein, 2004) claim that one of the key predictors is lexical competence. Studies on the relationship between vocabulary size and the skills of reading, writing and listening have suggested that vocabulary knowledge is a strong predictor of general proficiency in a foreign language. This is especially evident as far as L2 writing is concerned. Studies on relationships between vocabulary and L2 writing have found that as L2 vocabulary size increases, so does the ability to write more effective texts (Cumming, 1989). In fact, numerous studies have highlighted the role of L2 proficiency in L2 writing ability and L2 writing fluency (Sasaki, 2000; Yun, 2005, Tseng & Schmitt, 2008; Wong, 2012). The general consensus is that the restricted vocabulary of L2 learners limits their writing quality and fluency. This realization has further strengthened the theory that vocabulary knowledge is central to the development of L2 writing (Ashrafzadeh & Nimehchisalem, 2015; Lee, 2014; Wong, 2012). As emphasized by Milton (2010, p.58), "current thinking advocates that vocabulary may be crucial to the development of language performance overall". Hence, the current enquiry on the role of vocabulary size in writing is deemed fitting in the current Malaysian academic setting.

Despite increased attention in the L2 or ELL context, the empirical evidence for the relationship of reading habits and writing in a second language is largely unexplored. A majority of studies have been either on the reading habits (see Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi, & Ooi, 2011; Pandian & Ibrahim, 1997; Shameen, 2016; Subashini & Balakrishnan, 2013) or the writing performance of ELLs (Chow, 2007; Maarof, Yamat, & Li, 2011; Wong 2005). It is not altogether clear whether ELLs' reading habits are integral to their writing performance. To address these gaps in the previous research, we designed our studies to involve first year university students in a reading survey, a productive vocabulary test and a writing task with no direct instruction from the lecturers. Thus the current investigation took the form of a correlation study to determine whether students' reading habits prior to and at university entrance correlate with their vocabulary size and writing.

Method

Design

The study was primarily quantitative in nature as it attempted to explore the reading habits of ELL university students and the relationship between the variables in the study. The independent variable was participants' reading habits and the dependent variables were their vocabulary size and writing performance. Two sessions were set aside for data collection: the vocabulary test was the first to be administered, while the reading survey and the writing task were conducted on the same day.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:
1. What are the English reading habits of ELL first year university students in Malaysia?
2. What is the English vocabulary knowledge of ELL first year university students in Malaysia?
3. What is the relationship between ELL first year university students' English reading habits and their writing performance?
4. What is the relationship between ELL university students' English vocabulary knowledge and their English writing performance?
5. What is the relationship between ELL students' English reading habits and their English vocabulary knowledge?

Participants

The present work used a convenience sample of 33 ELL university students majoring in different fields of study. Participants were in their first-year university programme and were taught by one of the researchers in this study. Although initially 47 students took part in the data collection, 14 were absent during the second session and had to be excluded from the study. The participants were all indigenous students whose age ranged from 19 to 22. English was not their first language but all of them had learnt the target language for more than 12 years before enrolling in the university. The participants' level of English ranged from low to intermediate and they were all taking English as a prerequisite subject in their course programme. The low level is equivalent to A2 Level which is a Basic User in Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the intermediate level is equivalent to B2 Level which is an Independent User in CEFR. Most participants were staying in student dormitory where a television room was not provided. Although there was wi-fi on campus, the connection was often disrupted unless they were in hotspots. Most students had their own Internet connection, but they rarely watched movies or Youtube online unless they had free access to the Internet. The university library was at a distance from their hostels.

Data Collection and Instrument

ELL learners' vocabulary size, written skills and reading habits were assessed by administering a productive vocabulary level test (PVLT), a writing test and a reading habit questionnaire.

Productive Vocabulary Level Test (PVLT). Although there are three main productive vocabulary tests in the literature: Lexical Frequency Profile (LFP; Laufer & Nation, 1995), PVLT; Laufer & Nation, 1999) and the Lex30 (Meara & Fitzpatrick, 2000), the PVLT (Laufer & Nation, 1999)

was chosen as it is a reliable, valid and practical measure of vocabulary growth. The PVLT is intended to assess controlled productive vocabulary, in contrast to receptive vocabulary as measured by the VLT. The PVLT measures students' productive knowledge in a limited context i.e., fill-in task where a sentence context was provided and students had to provide the missing word. The test comprised five sections; 2000 level, 3000 level, 5000 level, academic word level and 10000 level. The maximum possible score for each section was 18 and participants were given 45 minutes to complete the test.

Reading Behaviour Questionnaire. A reading behaviour questionnaire was used to elicit information on participants' reading habits. The questionnaire consisted of four sections; Sections A, B C and D. Section A (Home Variables) consisted of 9 items which elicited information regarding participants reading habits at home. This includes the frequency of reading English materials at home and possession of English reading materials at home. Section B (School Variable) consisted of 9 items which elicited information regarding reading habits at school. This includes involvement in reading activity in English, teachers' encouragement to read English materials in school and library assignments in English. Section C (Behaviour, Attitudes, Opinion towards Reading) consisted of 13 items which elicited information regarding participants' overall perception and attitude on reading. Section D (Demographic) consisted of 4 items which elicited information regarding participants' background. All items were presented in English and Malay. Participants were given 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Writing Task. A writing task consisting of writing an expository essay on the topic "Mobile devices can be effective learning tools for university students. Do you agree with this statement?" was administered in the study. This topic was deemed appropriate as it was something that university students could relate to. Participants were given 40 minutes to complete the task which required them to provide points relevant to the topic. The reading behaviour and the writing task were conducted on the same day.

Evaluation of Students' Writing

Students' writing was evaluated based on the Essay Writing Score Guide which was adapted from ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughey, 1981, p.30). This analytic rating scale was chosen as it is one of the most widely used and recognizable rubrics in second language writing (Brooks, 2013). Additionally, the ESL Composition Profile has been recognized to have a high degree of both internal and external validity (Bacha, 2001). For this reason, many researchers have utilised the profile to measure second language writing performance (Ito, 2011; Mukundan, Mahvelati, Mohd Amin Din & Nimehchisalem, 2013; Reimer, 2013; Zare-ee, Hematiyan & Matin, 2012). The original Profile consists of five main component scales – Content, Organisation, Vocabulary, Language Use and Mechanics. For the purpose of this study, only three of these components were measured: Content, Vocabulary and Language Use.

Data Analysis Method. Two main statistical analyses were employed in the present study. First, descriptive statistics were calculated on the responses to the scaled questions in the questionnaire. Frequency distribution was carried out to describe participants' reading habits,

level of vocabulary and writing performance. Following this, inferential statistics were carried out using a correlation analysis. The Pearson Product-Moments correlation test, which is a parametric test, was used in the present study to examine the relationships between the PVLT, reading habits and writing performance. Meanwhile, the responses to the open-ended questions were coded and then categorized according to themes developed through the analysis.

Results

In Section A of the questionnaire, students were asked to indicate the types of reading materials they have at home and their exposure to reading English materials. Findings showed that 80% (N= 26) of participants said that they did not have any English reading materials at home. However, over 50% (N=18) said they had English comics, while about 70% (N=22) said they had English newspapers at home. With regard to exposure to reading English materials at home, it was discovered that 58% of the participants reported having had their parents read to them in English. However, the findings do not show the age at which parents stopped reading to them. Only 38% of students received books as presents and a lower number of students (18%) had parents/siblings reading English materials.

In terms of access to English reading material available at home, it was found that over half of the participants in this study possessed not more than ten English reading materials at home. For this question, students were asked to indicate the number of English reading materials at home specifically English books, English magazines and English comics as opposed to the first question which only indicated English reading materials in general. Findings also indicate that a majority of students (58%) reported not having any English newspapers at home, 24% reported having only one to two newspapers per week and only 9% reported having seven or more newspapers in a week. Additionally, most students (91%) reported that they have never purchased any e-books.

Section B of the questionnaire asked students about the type of support in reading they received in school. The support here included provision of supplementary reading materials in school, library assignments and encouragement from teachers. As seen in Table 1, 85% of the respondents and 93% of the respondents did not receive any supplementary reading materials in primary school and secondary school respectively. These percentiles inform us that other than the textbooks prescribed by the schools, there were no other reading materials given by teachers. This includes work that required library research: about 80% claimed that they did not need to go to the library to do their homework. Over 94% reported not receiving any encouragement from primary school teachers to read for pleasure in English. Similarly, a collective 100% of students reported not receiving encouragement to read for pleasure in English while they were in secondary school. The data further indicate that only 9% of the students witnessed their teachers reading English materials in school.

Table 1

Support and encouragement to read English materials in school

Type of materials	Yes	No
Received supplementary English reading materials in primary school	15%	85%
Received supplementary English reading materials in secondary school	3%	93%
Were given library assignments in English	21%	79%
Encouragement from primary school teachers to read for pleasure	6%	94%
Encouragement from secondary school teachers to read for pleasure	0	100%
Seen English teachers reading English materials	9%	91%

RQ 1: What are the English reading habits of ELL first year university students in Malaysia?

Section C of the questionnaire listed eight reading behaviour-related items for which students indicated their degree of agreement on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The findings suggested that a majority of the respondents (over 50%) agreed that reading is useful only for those who want to study and that reading is only for those who don't have a hobby. 75.8% agreed that reading is better than doing other activities. This may not necessarily mean that they would read; it could mean that they wish they read more. However, about 67% disagreed with the idea that reading is boring. Another interesting finding also suggests that most students would read something if it was recommended by the lecturer.

Table 2

Habits towards reading

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Do not know	Agree	Strongly agree
Reading materials are only for people who don't have a hobby	39.4	36.4	6.1	12.1	6.1
Reading is useful only for those who want to study	24.2	18.2	3.0	12.1	42.4
Reading is better than doing other activities	0	18.2	6.1	60.6	15.2
I like surfing the Internet and prefer watching TV/DVD to reading	3.0	6.1	15.2	48.5	27.3
I will read something if it is recommended by my lecturer	0	27.3	18.2	48.5	6.1
Reading is boring	30.3	36.4	24.2	9.1	0

With regard to students' activities after class, it was found that 45% of the students seldom read English books after class. As seen in Table 3, 52% of students said that they sometimes read a book in English. They spent most of their time (73%) on social media and talking with friends (67%), and 48.5% sometimes or often checked their email in English. Interestingly, few students watched television (30%).

Table 3

What students do after class

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often
Read a book in English	3	42.4	51.5	3
Watch television	42.4	27.3	12.1	18.2
Do homework	0	6.1	75.8	18.2
Talk with friends	0	12.1	21.2	66.7
Engage in social media	0	3.1	21.2	72.7
Check email in English	6.1	45.5	39.4	9.1

RQ 2: What is the English vocabulary knowledge of ELL first year university students in Malaysia?

Descriptive statistics for the vocabulary measure is presented in Table 4. As can be seen, scores for 2000 level test ranged from 5 to 17, with a mean of 11 and a standard deviation of 3.39. For the 3000 level test, scores ranged from 2 to 15, with a mean of 9.3 and a standard deviation of 3.67. For the 5000 level test, scores ranged from 0 to 11, with a mean of 4.1 and a standard deviation of 3.32. For the academic level test, scores ranged from 0 to 11 with a mean of 6.0 and a standard deviation of 2.7. For the 10000 level test, scores ranged from 0 to 4.0 with a mean of 0.9 and a standard deviation of 1.2. These distributions suggest that the 2000 level vocabulary test was not difficult for the students given the relatively high mean scores and that some individuals achieved almost maximum possible scores. Results also suggest that the 3000 level, 5000 level and Academic level tests were difficult for the students given the low mean scores and the fact that some individuals scored 0. The 10000 level test was the most difficult for the students given the relatively low mean scores and that the highest score was only 4.

Table 4

Vocabulary test scores of ELL students

	Minimum	Maximum	Maximum possible score	Mean	SD
2000 Level	5.0	17	18	11	3.39
3000 Level	2.0	15	18	9.3	3.67
5000 Level	.00	11	18	4.1	3.32
Academic Level	.00	11	18	6.0	2.70
10000 Level	.00	4.0	18	.9	1.20

RQ3: What is the relationship between ELL first year university students' English reading habits and their writing performance?

A correlational analysis was conducted to investigate the relationship between students' reading habits and writing performance. As presented in Table 5, no significant correlation was

found between reading habits and content scores (p = .851). Similarly, no significant correlations were found between reading habits and language scores (p = .538) or between reading habits and vocabulary scores (p = .621). Contrary to expectations, participants' reading habits were not associated with their writing performance. Table 5 also reports the relationship between writing performance and the frequency of loaning library books. The findings indicate positive correlations between language scores and the frequency of borrowing library books, r = .424*, p = .014. There was also a positive relationship between vocabulary scores and the frequency of borrowing library books, r = .384*, p = .028. However, no correlation was found between content scores and frequency of borrowing library books, r = .166, p = .356. Overall, the finding suggests that as the frequency of borrowing library books increases, so does the likelihood of students getting higher writing scores, particularly in language and vocabulary.

Table 5

Correlations among writing scores, reading habits and the frequency of borrowing books

	Borrow library books	Reading Habits
Content	.166	.034
Language	.424*	.111
Vocabulary	.384*	.089

N = 33
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

RQ 4: What is the relationship between ELL university students' English vocabulary knowledge and their English writing performance?

Bivariate correlations between the vocabulary test and writing scores are presented in Table 6. The overall findings indicate positive relationships between students' writing performance and vocabulary knowledge. As can be seen, there were significant correlations between language scores and 2000 level (r = .497**) and between language scores and 5000 level (r = .456**). Similarly, there were significant positive correlations between vocabulary scores in writing and the 2000 level (r = .416*) and vocabulary score and the 5000 level (r = .421*). Although the rest of the findings did not show significant correlations, the overall results show a trend towards a relationship between vocabulary size and writing performance.

Table 6

Correlation between vocabulary test and writing scores

	2000 Level	3000 Level	5000 Level	Academic Level	10000 Level
Content	.282	.164	.314	.100	.205
Language	.497**	.278	.456**	.230	.305
Vocabulary	.416*	.258	.421*	.144	.272

N = 33
* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

RQ 5: What is the relationship between ELL students' English reading habits and their English vocabulary knowledge?

Table 7 presents the relationships between vocabulary scores and habits towards reading. As can be seen, there is a significant correlation between reading habits and the 2000 level test, r=.409*, p=.018. Additionally, results also showed that there is a significant correlation between reading habits and the 5000 level test, r=.458**, p=.007. The overall finding showed a trend towards a relationship between reading habits and vocabulary which suggests that as positive reading habits develop, so does vocabulary size. A bivariate correlation analysis was also carried out to explore the relationship between reading habits and interest in learning English. The finding indicates a significant correlation between the two variables, r = .432*, p= .012. This suggests that as interest in English develops, so do reading habits.

Table 7

Correlation between vocabulary test and reading habits

	Interest in learning English	2000 Level	3000 Level	5000 Level	Academic Level	10000 Level
Reading habits	.432*	.409*	.298	.458**	.036	.308

N = 33
*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$

Limitations and Future Research

There are a number of limitations suggesting the results should be considered with caution. A major limitation was the inability to ensure all the students were present on the two days of data collection. As a consequence, the data collected from 33 participants may not be able to represent the reading habits of ELL university students. A replication of the same study with a larger sample size would provide more reliable and generalizable results. Another limitation was the divided views for some of the items in the reading behaviour section. Although some items yielded conclusive and interesting findings, some remained inconclusive. Hence, future studies could possibly include a qualitative measure to ascertain students' reading habits to yield more decisive responses. This data could then be triangulated with the quantitative data so that a more substantive conclusion regarding students' reading habit can be made. Another limitation of the present research was that students were not asked specifically what they did online. The inferences that we made about their engagement in social media was restricted to social interaction in a fun and entertaining way. Whether students use social media such as Facebook, Twitter or Whatsapp for information gathering was not clear, although the credibility of news available through social media is a source of concern. Future research that considers change over time in the platform in students' reading is planned. This may entail an

investigation of students online reading habits, online activities, vocabulary size and how these variables correlate with each other.

Discussion and Implications

Based on students' performance on the PVLT, writing test and responses from the Reading Behaviour Questionnaire, four key findings emerged. Firstly, it was discovered that participants neither received a lot of support in terms of fostering reading in English from their teachers at elementary schools nor at secondary level. Areas of neglect include the lack of library assignments in school and encouragement to read for pleasure. Two-thirds of the participants believe that English benefits them, yet they do not see the connection between the importance of reading and language learning. This can be justified as only half of the participants read occasionally.

The second key finding relates to students' use of social networking sites. The present study confirms that millennial generations (adults between 18 and 29) have a high reliance on the Internet and social networking usage as previous studies have demonstrated (Chen & Yan, 2016; Chou, 2001; Junco, 2011; Lenhart et al., 2010; Rosen et al., 2013). Although students like surfing the Internet and spend most hours online i.e., about 94% (see Tables 2 &3), it is uncertain whether they engage in any form of deep reading. This form of reading which requires attention may be difficult for them as they tend to multitask with ICT (i.e., constant switching of phone/computer screens, where attention to content changes at a rapid rate). As Carrier, Cheeverb, Rosena, Beniteza & Changa (2009) have argued, digital natives utilised various types of media at the same time. Additionally, it was noted that students have been reading on screen, but often times they are browsing and scanning (Liu, 2005; Picton, 2014). Despite the surge in popularity of e-books in other parts of the world, a majority of the participants in the present study had never purchased an e-book. Yet, they were active social media users. Although this seems to be a hindrance in the development of good reading habits, it can also be regarded as an opportunity to motivate students to read via a much-preferred platform. Digital natives may be more open to the idea of accessing reading assignments via social media platforms such as Edmodo, Schoology and even Facebook. Thus, educators in general need to be aware of this changing habit in reading and address it by accommodating students' preferred reading medium via popular social media platforms. This can be made possible by supplementing conventional reading classrooms with virtual reading classrooms which blend online learning and face to face discussion through Edmodo or Facebook. This method allows the extension of regular classroom reading assignments which students can access conveniently. For instance, a recommended text posted by the teacher can be read, downloaded and discussed electronically. Online discussion such as this is a value-added channel as it encourages students who are reticent to share their views in a non-threatening way.

The third key finding of the present study relates to students' level of vocabulary and its relation to students' reading habits. Firstly, it was discovered that participants have not acquired the necessary vocabulary size required for university studies. Among all the vocabulary measures, the 2000-word level was the least difficult for the students. Results further indicated that the 3000 level, 5000 level, 10000 level and the Academic level tests were difficult for the students.

This vocabulary deficiency may prevent students from comprehending and writing academic text at the university level. This finding echoes that of Harji, Balakrishnan, Bhar and Letchumanan (2015) which revealed that undergraduates are not equipped with necessary vocabulary size for university studies. This is a great concern as a threshold level of vocabulary is needed for successful language learning. As mentioned in previous studies (Hsueh-Chao & Nation, 2000; Morris & Cobb, 2004; Waring & Nation, 2004) vocabulary knowledge is a significant predictor of academic performance and a prerequisite for academic success especially where second language is concerned. In order to achieve success in language learning, a second language learner must at least acquire a lexical base of 3000-word level (Harji, Balakrishnan, Bhar & Letchumanan, 2015).

Secondly, it was also found that positive reading habits were significantly correlated with students' vocabulary size. This implies that as positive reading habit develops, so does students' vocabulary size. Based on these salient findings, certain pedagogical implications can be made. For the most part, teachers should strive to encourage students to read English materials for pleasure. Given the fact that half of the participants agreed they would read something if it was recommended by their lecturers, the responsibility to encourage students to read may rest with the teacher. As mentioned previously, teachers should give extended reading assignments via virtual reading classroom to extend students' reading activities. In an age where digital technology is pervasive, it would seem appropriate for teachers to develop and improve students' digital literacy skills. Other than that, teachers should integrate the teaching of vocabulary with the teaching of reading comprehension strategies. This integration allows for multiple approaches to reading tasks and may cater to learners' of different L2 proficiency levels. According to Hunt and Beglar (2005), the most effective form of learning with regard to vocabulary instruction involves a careful blend of both explicit and implicit instruction and learning. As such, explicit instruction through decontextualized lexis for acquisition of new words and implicit lexical instruction through meaning-focused reading should be carried out in ELL traditional and virtual reading classrooms. Explicit teaching involves teaching a set of words that are related to students conceptually which may appear in texts that students have read or will be reading later. This is followed by providing students multiple exposures with the aim to deepen understanding in addition to giving opportunities to students to use and internalise the words in different contexts such as group discussions, individual activities or teacher-led groups. These exposures promote incidental vocabulary learning i.e., learning words as a by-product of reading, listening, discussing and writing. In short, the combination of vocabulary instruction in reading activities will give students the exposure to new lexicon as well as enhance students' reading skills such as paraphrasing and summarizing. Other than teaching words that students will be expected to read, selecting useful words from the academic word lists to build students' academic vocabulary will also benefit second language learners. Many of them are unlikely to encounter much academic language in their everyday lives. Therefore, developing activities for them to use academic language for interaction among themselves and with the teacher to accelerate their vocabulary is crucial for their academic achievement.

The fourth key finding of the present study affirms that there is a relationship between productive vocabulary size and writing performance, particularly for language and vocabulary

scores. This finding is consistent with previous literature (Ashrafzadeh & Nimehchisalem, 2015; Lee, 2014; Wong, 2012) which links vocabulary size to writing performance. Indeed, this further emphasizes the significant role of vocabulary as one of the strongest predictors of writing quality. Based on this discovery, a practical implication can be made. Similar to the integration of vocabulary in reading, lexical instruction should also be integrated in writing. While reading gives students exposure to vocabulary and syntax, writing activities give students practice in using them. According to Wong (2012), by emphasizing and integrating vocabulary in writing lessons, students will be more accustomed to thinking of vocabulary as part of the writing process. In this regard, teachers could apply explicit vocabulary instruction by demonstrating how newly learned words can be utilized in a production task and how lexical variation can affect writing quality. This form of scaffolding method may require teachers to model and demonstrate the use of vocabulary in writing activities, provide appropriate language prompts for writing task and pre-teach vocabulary in preparation for a task.

Overall, the combination of findings in the current work provides some support for the conceptual premise that vocabulary, reading and writing are interconnected. It is argued that the integration of these interrelated skills in classroom activities may lead to successful language acquisition. It is also argued that in line with the change in students' reading habit and their high reliance on Internet and the social network, social media platform should be used as instructional tools for expanded reading instruction and vocabulary acquisition. Despite its exploratory nature, this study offers some insights into the possible initiatives that English language teachers could implement to develop vocabulary acquisition, and good reading habits.

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Effective Use of Peer-Feedback in Developing Academic Writing Skills of Undergraduate Students

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This paper investigates an effective way to develop academic writing skills of 4th year students of at a university in Myanmar in using peer reviewing and a guided peer-feedback process. A comparison was made to determine the effectiveness between the instructor feedback and peer feedback implementation based on the students' revision work. Twenty students' papers became the focus of four different types of written feedback: Error Identification, Error Correction, Descriptive Comment and Critical Comment. Data on the number of feedback on the students' final assignments and final paper were collected to study the feedback implementation rate and types of feedback students incorporated into their revision work. It was found that peer feedback effect had greater on error identification than instructor feedback. This is despite a significantly higher revision rate of instructor feedback on error correction. This study outlines some implications for second language writing on providing effective peer feedback in Myanmar and other contexts in the ASEAN region.
Keywords: peer feedback, types of written feedback, written corrective feedback, teacher feedback

In second language (L2) writing, written corrective feedback otherwise known as grammar correction (e.g. Truscott, 1996, 1999) or written error correction, has been a heated topic of interest in applied linguistics in the past decade. Different types of feedback such as direct and explicit written feedback; student-teacher individual conferences; direct, explicit written feedback and peer-feedback have been proven useful for varying degree of outcomes (e.g. Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Storch, 2004). The use of peer feedback in particular has been recommended by many researchers due its social, cognitive and affective benefits (Lundstrom & Baker, 2009; Min, 2008; Storch, 2004) and peer

assessment has been increasingly used in higher education with the least possible time invested by the instructor (Landry, Jacobs & Newton, 2014).

Despite the many studies on peer feedback in improvinsg the quality of students' writing (e.g. Cho, Schunn & Wilson, 2006; Gielen, Tops, Dochy, Onghena & Smeets, 2010; Topping, 1998; Van Gennip, Segers & Tillema, 2010), studies on the comparison between the efficacy of peer feedback and the types of feedback given in relation to teacher feedback are rare. This is especially evident in the context of undergraduate programs with a large number of students where provision of individual feedback from teachers is very unlikely. To date, there has only been a study by Yang, Badger & Yu (2006) that compares the efficacy of peer-feedback and teacher feedback in an examination focused program at a university in China with various administrative constraints resulting from a large number of students. With a large university in Myanmar being the research context, the study reported in this paper investigates the effect of peer feedback and that of instructor feedback to identify which type of feedback that undergraduate students implemented the most.

The presentation of the paper is as follows. First, it outlines the theoretical overview providing the rationale for the conduct of this study. Second, it elaborates on the methodological tenets employed to collect and analyze data in this study. Third, the findings of the study are presented in the subsequent section. Afterwards, the findings are discussed in light of relevant literature. Some concluding remarks are provided at the end of the paper.

Literature Review

An upsurge in research on peer feedback in L2 writing has occurred in the past two decades. Jacobs *et al.* (1998), argue that peer feedback is perceived by students in ESL writing class as one type of valuable feedback despite its efficacy and usefulness being secondary to teacher feedback. Jacobs *et al.*'s (1998) study, however, has been under scrutiny. Zhang (1999) questions the methodological validity in Jacobs *et al.*'s (1998) study) and emphasizes the need to reexamine assumptions about the ESL writing process in order to better address the affective disadvantage of peer feedback relative to teacher feedback in the ESL writing class. Yang, Badger & Yu (2006) reveal that although students in their study were more likely to adopt teacher feedback in the improvement of the writing performance, peer-feedback was essential for the provision of a higher degree of student autonomy, even in a highly-authoritative learning context such as China. Similarly, Tsui and Ng's (2000) study also demonstrates the preference of students in receiving teacher feedback to obtaining peer feedback, but there was a positive contribution of peer comments in the interview in terms of four specific roles: a sense of audience, raising learners' awareness, collaborative learning and ownership of the text. A study by Gielen et al., (2010) further demonstrates the cognitive advantages drawn from peer feedback as it is deemed conducive to the enhancement of students' ability to grasp the goals and criteria of feedback given its use of plain language. Peer feedback has also been proven useful in increasing insights into writing and revision processes (Peterson, 2003) and raising students' awareness of audience (Tsui & Ng, 2000), both prompting them to expend more considerable effort on their writing.

Research has consistently indicated that increased writing skills are feasible due to the quality feedback received from many different peers rather than instructor alone (Gielen *et al.,* 2010; Richer, 1992; Topping, 1998; Van Gennip *et al.,* 2010;). The benefits gained from peer feedback appear to have stemmed from the undeniable benefits of peer feedback (Zhang, 1999) when it is used judiciously as part of a combination of feedback strategies (Jacobs *et al.,* 1998). Bitchener, Young & Cameron (2005) found that the use of different feedback strategies such as teacher feedback and peer feedback has positive effect on accuracy performance. They recommended classroom L2 writing teachers to regularly provide their learners with both oral feedback as well as written feedback on the types of linguistic errors that are "treatable". Various studies have suggested that the benefits gained from peer feedback are not only due to the timeliness of the feedback as supposed to teacher feedback (Ngar-Fun & Carless, 2006) but also its supportive nature (Landry, Jacobs & Newton, 2014) occurring during the collaborative process in which learners work together with their peers and develop insight into their peers' ideas and opinions (Van Gennip *et al.,* 2010). There is also the affective advantage inherently attached to peer feedback that somehow could make peer feedback far more appealing than teacher feedback, although this is largely dependent upon certain learner characteristics (Zhang, 1995; 1999). When combined with pair composition, for example, pair processing of feedback provides learners with various cognitive processes that are conducive to language learning (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). According to Wigglesworth & Storch (2009), deliberation of feedback allows learners to draw their attention to the knowledge gap in their writing as well as their explicit knowledge of language, previously learned language rules and linguistic intuitions. For this reason, Rust, Price & O'Donovan (2003) suggest that students should be provided with opportunities to participate more actively in formative peer feedback.

Although there are many benefits to peer feedback in the EFL context, peer feedback implementation may be challenging to the students. One important finding about peer feedback implementation appears in Nelson & Schunn (2009) who examined the correlations between the feedback features, levels of mediating variables, and implementation rates. Nelson & Schunn (2009) discovered that *understanding* was the only significant mediator of implementation, which means students are likely to revise their writing only if they understand the feedback and know how to give one.

By way of implication, the benefits of peer feedback are unlikely without adequate training on the part of the students (Min, 2016). In order to develop an effective peer-reviewing activity, Min (2006) recommended giving peer reviewing training which should be a combination of in-class and individual conferencing with the instructor. Various studies on the types of intervention that teachers can provide to train students to conduct peer feedback have been reported, including in traditional face-to-face (e.gs. Hu, 2005; Lam, 2010) and online situations (Yang & Meng, 2013). Peers' increased awareness of the effectiveness of their comments (Lam, 2010), enhanced ability to focus on high-order issues (Min, 2005) and improved types of revision and quality (Liou & Peng, 2009) have all been reported as the positive impacts resulting from direct interventions on peer feedback. In Min's (2006) study, students' writing quality and revision types were significantly higher than before the peer review training. Lundstrom & Baker (2009) also found that the reviewers who only focused on their peer's

writing had more benefits in their own writing over the course of the semester than did the receivers, who focused solely on using peer feedback.

Despite the reported success in previous literature on peer feedback, scant knowledge is available about the effect of peer feedback and the types of feedback given in relation to teacher feedback. This is particularly relevant in the cases of various types of feedback given by students to their peers, including error identification, error correction, descriptive comment and critical comment. Conducting study within this line of inquiry is particularly important in the context of large writing classes at undergraduate level in Myanmar in which the class size of 75 to 80 students may not allow the instructor to give effective individual feedback on a regular basis during the course. The growing concern among English language instructor at a university in Myanmar where the study took place was that whether students would be able to implement the feedback appropriately in the revision of their writing tasks given their sole familiarity with teacher feedback. This gave the impetus for this study.

Therefore, this study investigated the effect of teacher (instructor) feedback and peer feedback on students' revisions and the types of feedback that most students implemented in their subsequent writing tasks. The student attempted to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the effect of instructor feedback and peer feedback on students' revision papers?
2. What type of peer feedback do most student writers incorporate into their writing?

Methodology

In this study, sampling strategy was used to investigate the effect of peer feedback and peer feedback types (error identification, error correction, descriptive comment and critical comment). The number of in-text feedback and overall feedback given by the instructor and peers (reviewer 1, reviewer 2 and reviewer 3) on 20 randomly selected papers were counted. An analysis of the data on instructor-feedback and peer-feedback on these 20 papers was done. The effect of peer feedback on students' writing ability was assessed by the number of in-text feedback on final assignment which had been incorporated into writing after peer feedback. Then, this was compared with the rate of students' revision work after instructor feedback on the first drafts. The research was done on students' feedback implementation rate over final assignment and final paper by studying the number of evidences for changes in writing (grammar, punctuation, format, vocabulary) which was compared with the previous writings on the first drafts and final assignments. The data on the number of comments on final assignments were also collected to investigate on which assessment categories students gave peer feedback.

Participants and Procedures

Fourth year students of the University of Computer Studies, Mandalay were given an Academic Writing Course in the second semester of the 2015-2016 academic year, which lasted for a 16-week period. There were a total of 150 Computer Science and Computer Technology majors in two sections: 75 students in each section. Students' writing tasks were broken down into manageable assignments every two week in developing a specific writing task within each

assignment. In the first 12 weeks of the course, students had to do assignments on the given task as shown in figure 1. Each of the first six assignments was evaluated by the instructor over the week and the feedback was given in the following week, just before they submitted their next assignment. For each assignment, the instructor not only gave in-text feedback and overall comments on students' writing but also discussed common errors with the whole class and asked the students to revise their writings. Then, the students put forward their final assignment whereupon peer reviewing was engaged in the classroom. Each student reviewed 3 papers in a two- hour class and gave written feedback on peers' writing. Once the activity was finished, the students reviewed their returned papers with peer feedback. Finally, they revised their writing and put forward their final papers in the following week.

The Nature of Assigned Writing Tasks

The first five assignments were just pieces of writing tasks which are related with one another as shown in figure 1. In the first assignment, the students had to write only the research question statement. In the second assignment, they had to give a claim or thesis statement that is related with the research question presented in the first assignment. In the third assignment, reasons for the claim or thesis statement was given. In the fourth and fifth assignments, outline of the whole paper and introduction were assigned receptively. First draft assignment, which is the whole essay in the given format and outline had to be submitted as the sixth assignment. The students are required to complete an essay of 3000 -3500 words as the main writing task of the Writing Course wherein instructor feedback and peer feedback was given. The format of the paper (font size, margin, line spacing) and the main contents (Introduction, Body, Conclusion, Reference list) were described in advance.
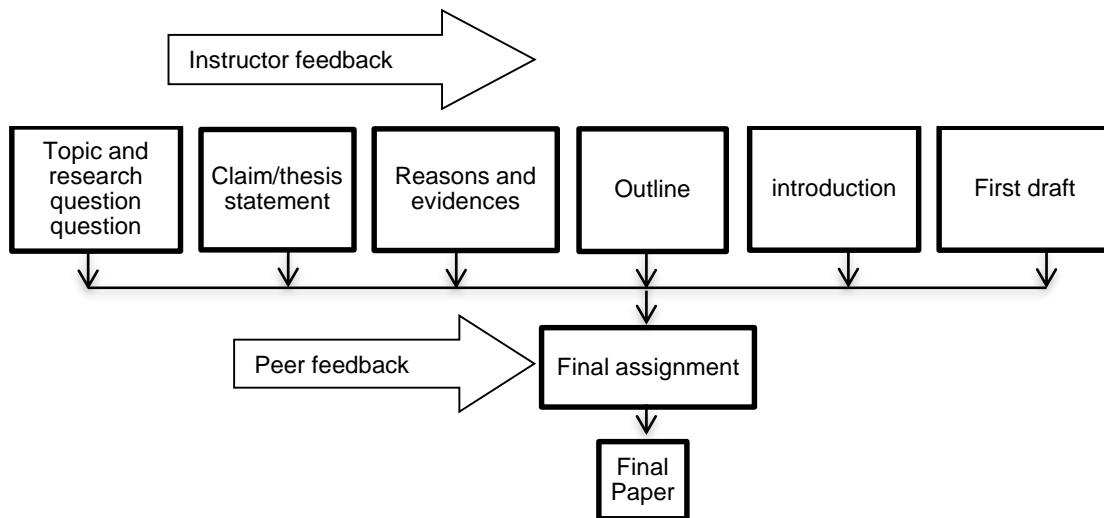
Procedure of Assignments

*Fig 1.*The procedure of assignments on categories showing where instructor feedback and peer feedback is given

Guided Written Feedback

In the peer-reviewing process, the students were guided how to write positive comments not only in-text but on a separate sheet of paper which was attached to the final assignment. Instructions was provided on the use of written feedback, in general of 4 types as the way the instructor did on their first drafts; Error identification, Error correction and Descriptive comment and Critical comment.

Regarding the Error identification, students were instructed to circle the misspelling word, cross out of an unnecessary word/phrase/morpheme, underline the incorrect tenses and structures, and point the inappropriate expressions by arrows. Error identification is a kind of indirect corrective feedback that indicates in some way an error has been made. (Ferris & Roberts, 2001)

For the Error correction, they were told to cross out the word or phrase and write a correct one nearby. It is a kind of Direct corrective feedback which may be defi ned as the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure above or near the linguistic error (Bitchener et al., 2005). It may include the crossing out of an unnecessary word/phrase/morpheme, the insertion of a missing word/phrase/morpheme, or the provision of the correct form or structure.

With respect to Content Comment, there are two types: descriptive comments and critical comments. Descriptive comments are imperatives for giving specific instructions to the writer. (e.g. Check your paper format, Rewrite your thesis statement, Check your citation). For the critical comments, students were asked to write positive comments on various parts of the essay both in-text and in a separate sheet of paper as overall comments. They were also asked to comment on the introduction and coherence and to detect grammar, punctuation and spelling errors. The purpose of encouraging the use of positive feedback is to reduce offence among students and to practice the use of more positive and objective language expressions. They were encouraged to mention impersonal nouns instead of first person pronouns. Some sentences from the list of peer review guidelines by Liu and Hansen (2002) were also used to engage the students with more appropriate language expressions.

Guided language expressions for giving feedback

Personal	Impersonal
You are weak in grammar.	This paper is grammatically weak/ Grammatical aspect needs improvement.
Your introduction has no direction.	Direction is required in introduction.
You don't write a thesis statement.	Thesis statement is missing in this paper.
Your sentences are not coherent.	Presentation will be better if sentences are more coherent.
Your citations are incorrect.	Citation must be accurate.
Your paper format is wrong.	Check the paper format which needs a slight changes.
Your references are incomplete.	Reference list needs to be rewritten.

Data Analysis

To determine the effect of instructor feedback, the number of feedback types and categories on 20 randomly selected first draft assignments were counted. Then the number feedback implementation on these selected papers were analyzed. Similarly, after 2 hour peer reviewing activity on final assignments, the same 20 papers were reviewed to investigate the number of peer feedback on the given categories and peer feedback implementation. Quantitative data of Instructor feedback effect was compared with the data on peer feedback implementation. In counting peer feedback numbers, redundant feedback of different types on the same purpose is not considered. Then any slight changes to the peer feedback given words or phrases are counted as feedback implementation regardless of the validity of the implementation.

Findings

In-Text and Overall Feedback
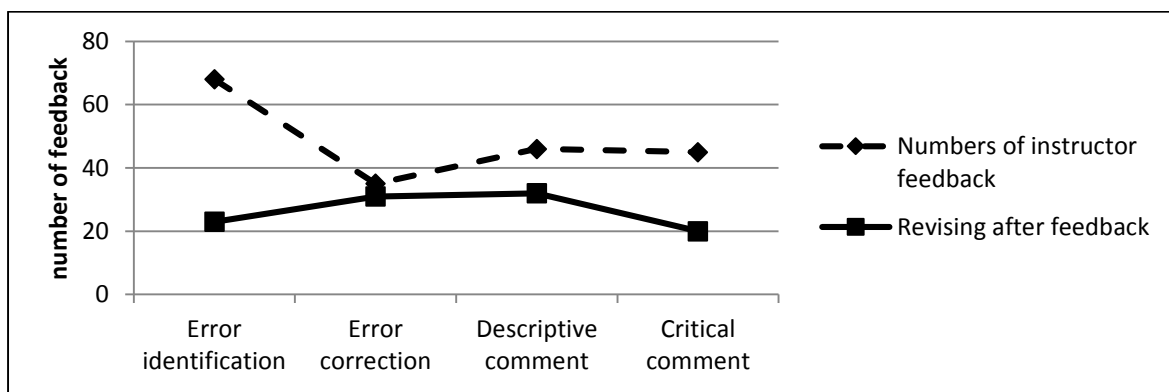
Figure 2. Total number of feedback comments given to 20 students' first drafts by the instructor and the number of feedback comments the students incorporated into their writing

It was found that only 20 out of 70 error identifications given by the instructor were implemented whereas 31 out of 35 error corrections on grammatical structure, punctuation and vocabulary use were revised by using instructor feedback. Most of the errors identified by the instructor are citations, quotations, vocabulary, coherence and structure. It was discovered that students implemented most of the underlined or circled vocabularies and structural expressions, very few identifications on quotations and citations were revised.

However, students' revision rate on error correction by the instructor was significantly higher. The instructor gave the direct corrective feedback to some of the errors found in text. Some tense errors, vocabulary errors, propositions, articles and punctuations are crossed out and the correct linguistic forms or structure was provided. In that type of written feedback, it was found that the students revised 31 out of 35 error corrections in their final assignments.

Descriptive comments of the instructor are related with format, citation, reference, grammar and structural expressions and punctuation. Some of which include "check your format", "change your font size", "put citation here", "it must be in passive form", "check your punctuation", and "citation and references are not matched". Some of the instructor's critical comments are "thesis statement is missing", "main points should be restated in conclusion",

"more references should be used", "organization of the paper is weak", "it should be more coherence" and "there should be background information in the introduction".

The number of descriptive comments and critical comments on 20 students' first drafts were nearly 50 on each comment type. However, it was discovered that only 30 and 20 comments on each category were revised as shown in Figure 2. On the students' final assignments, there was an evidence of highest revision work for punctuation, format and citation based on the instructor's descriptive and critical comments. Regarding the instructor's critical comments related with coherence and organization, students repeated the same writing on their following assignments.
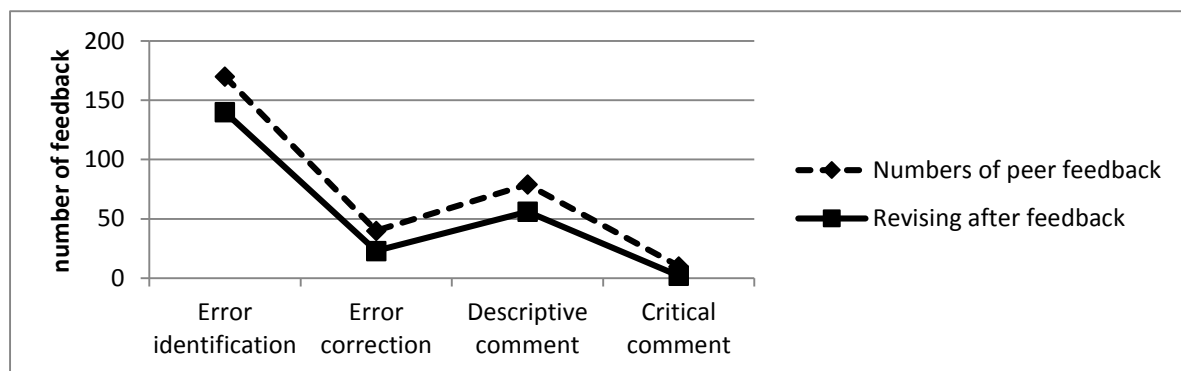
Figure 3. Total number of feedback comments on 20 final assignments by 3 student reviewers and number of feedback comments the students incorporated into their writing

Peer feedback comments on the same 20 final assignments were counted and final papers were reviewed to study the revision work. It was discovered that 140 out of 170 error identifications on 20 selected papers were revised using peer feedback. But just over 50% of the error corrections (23 corrections out of 40) by peers were incorporated into revision work. Then, 56 and 2 for descriptive comments and critical comments of peers were implemented although comment numbers were 79 and 10 respectively.

Although peers' descriptive comments are more or less similar with the instructor, 8 out of 10 comments are about the overall impression of the paper such as "this paper is interesting", "this paper is weak in organization". The only two comments that was implemented in the revision is "thesis statement should be rewritten" and "thesis statement is not clear and it should be rewritten". Unlike the instructor, it was found that students gave significantly higher numbers of error identification feedback than error corrections. Then, critical comment numbers by peers was comparatively fewer than the instructor's.

Table 1

A comparison of implementation rate of instructor and peer feedback

Types	Instructor feedback effect	Peer feedback effect
Error identification	33.82%	82.35%
Error correction	88.57%%	57.5%
Descriptive comment	69.56%	70.88%
Critical comment	44.44%	20%

Table 2

A comparison of the number of instructor and peer feedback given and revision   work and by types and categories

Types	Categories	Total Instructor feedback given (N=20)	Total No of revision	Total Peer feedback Given (N=20)	Total No of revision
Error identification	Grammar	16	9	45	33
	Vocabulary	7	3	24	17
	Font and line-spacing	16	5	37	35
	Citation	8	2	41	37
	Punctuation	21	4	23	18
Error correction	Grammar	12	11	16	10
	Vocabulary	10	10	12	4
	Structures	5	5	5	3
	Punctuation	8	6	7	6
Descriptive comment	Format	10	5	25	18
	Citation and References	10	4	24	16
	Introduction	13	12	18	15
	Conclusion	13	10	12	7
Critical comment	Introduction	14	8	3	2
	Conclusion	10	7	2	-
	Organization	12	2	2	-
	Reasons and evidences	9	3	3	-

Table 1 shows a comparison of the effect of instructor and peer feedback. The rate of students' revising their writing using error identifications by peers is nearly 50% higher than the instructor feedback implementation. Regarding the descriptive comment implementation, instructor feedback and peer feedback effect are nearly equal, whereas the students incorporated the instructor's feedback into their writing 30% and over 20% higher on error correction and critical comment than the revision percentage after peer feedback of these types. Then a comparison of the number of peer and instructor feedback given and implementation by types and categories is shown in table 2.

Discussion

The first finding from this study was that the total number of feedback comments on error identifications that were incorporated into writing after instructor feedback was less than that of peer-feedback. This provides a response to the first research question. It can thus be raised as to why some students did not revise their writing after the instructor's feedback on error

identifications. Certainly timing was an important factor. In this study, the instructor gave feedback to peers a week after their assignment submission, whereas peer feedback was shown shortly after the writing activity. Thus, this present study adds to the contention of Ngar-Fun & Carless (2006) that the timeliness of peer feedback benefits learners, especially because it results in higher rate of error identification as opposed to teacher feedback. However, another explanation for this phenomenon is that this could have been because students had a lack of understanding of the instructor's feedback, which highlights only common errors in their writing. They might have only understood the correct use of citation, referencing and format only when they were exposed to good and bad examples of others' work.

Despite the significant effect of peer-feedback on error identifications, only a few students used descriptive comments and critical comments given by peers, which was less than the effect of instructor feedback. If the students' peer feedback implementation is to be interpreted by the findings of Nelson & Schunn (2009), it can be assumed that the types of peer feedback that the students understood most were error identifications and error corrections rather than content comments. It could have been the case that students suspected the authority or competence of peers to deliver descriptive or critical comments, while placing high value and authoritative role of the comments provided by the instructor. This is in line with previous studies such as Tsui & Ng (2000) and Nelson & Murphy (1993) that those incorporating a low percentage of peer comments perceived the teacher as the sole source of authority, demonstrating low confidence in their peers who were non-native speakers of English and might not be rendered authoritative to provide quality comments.

But the issue of linguistic authority seems to be hierarchical in this study. Even among students themselves, it appears that there is a hierarchy as to which students are considered more proficient than others, hence being more authoritative. This is evidenced by the fact that some students were asking for more competent students' papers for the 2nd and 3rd time reviewing during the activity as they were not impressed with the first paper they had reviewed. Most of the second- and third- time reviewers of the same paper gave feedback on different categories that were not addressed by the first reviewer. This indicates that the subsequent reviewers had a chance to learn the previous reviewer' feedback and tried to give different feedback. It suggests that the learning process in reviewing others' writing plays a more significant role than getting feedback, which may be in lined with the findings of Lundstrom & Baker (2009) in which the students learned better in reviewing others' work than receiving feedback on their own work. In this present study, it seems that most students realized the correct citations and referencing format only after experiences through peer reviewing. Therefore, the learning process of the students should also be investigated more: whether they learned better through reviewing the peer-feedback they obtained or seeing the common errors by reviewing others' work. In this case, the findings of the study are parallel to Jacobs *et al.*'s (1998) contention that peer feedback should be used as a process approach that guides students in their learning rather than as an end in itself.

The second finding answers the second research question. The second finding in this study was generally consistent with the study of Min (2006) on the kinds of feedback student writers

incorporated into their text after given peer reviewing training. Error identification is the feedback type which most students incorporated into their revision work. This indicates that the present study demonstrates parallelism with previous studies such as Bitchener et al. (2005) in which indirect corrective feedback has a greater effect than direct feedback. The instructor also gains insight onto the students' critical skills and language skills by reviewing the peer feedback categories.

Although it was recommended to engage students with out-of-class paper reviewing by Crowe, Silva & Ceresola (2015), the common learning style of Myanmar students is heavily reliant on teacher's instructions in the classroom. This was proven by the way the students in this study participated actively in this 2- hour intensive in-class peer reviewing activity. Attempts to replicate the strategies used in this study in other contexts in the ASEAN region that aims to enhance students' active participation in L2 writing classes must bear in mind this contextual factor.

In this regard, it might be necessary to even out the authoritative mode through the employment of several cycles of peer feedback of the same type. On the one hand, ensuring that learners have the opportunities to access feedback from different reviewers provides them with opportunities to access different cycles of feedback that is conducive to L2 writing (Wigglesworth & Storch, 2009). On the other hand, it also allows for the provision of fine-tuned and targeted written corrective feedback that can potentially increase student engagement (Han & Hyland, 2015). Moreover, implementing the combination of full, explicit and written teacher and peer feedback along with various cycles of feedback could also lead to increased accuracy performance. Employing error correction through various combined strategies of teacher and peer feedback could prove judicious and effective to improved L2 writing performance rather than sole reliance on teacher feedback (Bitchener et al., 2005; Gielen et al., 2010; Van Gennip et al., 2010).

Limitation of the Research

This study is limited by the weaknesses. First, the number of the students' revision work on their paper was counted by the evidences of some linguistic changes in terms of structure, format, punctuation, vocabulary and spelling on their returned paper. It may also be not because of the peer feedback effect but because of their skills development later. Second, the data collected from 20 randomly-selected papers has yielded a sampling of the effect of peer feedback in the writing course. There may be slight variations in peer feedback implementation on specific parts of the writing process if all students' papers are analyzed. Then, this study will be viewed within the context of Myanmar language education to gain insights into the reasons behind teaching writing in a large class.

Conclusion

Peer reviewing and giving peer feedback as an intensive in-class activity was done to investigate whether it is an effective way in teaching writing skills in a large EFL class in this research. This research is aimed to help EFL faculty members of other Universities in Myanmar and ASEAN region which have a similar context understand that peer feedback process can effectively be used in teaching writing skills. The study undertaken contributes

towards the good outcomes of the students' overall learning process to some extent and development of a positive attitude towards peers' feedback in their revision work. It can be said that the majority of students feel confident to give feedback on peers' language skills and there was evidences of using peers' indirect corrective feedback in the revision work although limited number of critical comments were discovered. In conclusion, peer reviewing and giving peer feedback is an effective learning process which should be used in other large EFL classes of other Universities in similar situation and in other subjects as well. In this in-class previewing and giving peer feedback activity, each paper was given feedback by three peers. It was found that 2nd and 3rd reviewers also had a chance to learn the former reviewer's peer feedback. Therefore, it is required to study the effect of the different peer feedback on the performance of the revision work and the influence of the former peer feedback on the performance of subsequent peer reviewers as a further study.

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Teaching Writing Using Genre-Based Approach: a Study at a Vietnamese University

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This paper presents an exploratory study of using the genre-based approach in teaching a writing module focusing on writing letters for first-year English majors at a university in Vietnam. The aim of the study was to collect data from questionnaires and test results with a focus on learning the students' perceptions of this approach in learning the letter genre and what they benefitted from the most from this approach. The analysis reveals that under genre-based instruction the students' awareness and understanding of the features of the letter types were noticeably enhanced. The results indicate that for low-level learners organization of ideas, awareness of context and paralinguistic features were the issues they could gain control over upon the instructions. However, linguistic resources including grammar and vocabulary still remained problems that need a longer and more focused approach to develop. The findings also highlight the value of L1 background knowledge in learning writing in a foreign language.
Keywords: academic writing, genre-based instruction, Vietnam, Systemic Functional Linguistics

In learning a language, writing is considered the most difficult skill to achieve compared with speaking, listening and reading. In order to write successfully, a language learner needs not only the linguistic resources, but also the knowledge and understanding of the cultural differences. The learner's learning outcomes, to some extent, depends on the approach employed in the writing classroom. That places a demand on the teacher to choose an effective teaching approach. Currently, there are three approaches to teaching writing skills: product, process and genre-based approach. While the first one is no longer in favor, the latter two are still topics in the literature and research and the debate continues as to which is more effective. In practice, the choice of either approach is open to the teacher who can make the decision based on the learners' needs and the aims of the writing the course. However, to compare them, the genre-based approach has a more sound theoretical and pedagogical foundation supported with Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) by Halliday (1994) and sociocultural theories of learning by Vygotsky (1978). Since the 1980's the genre-based approach has become popular in ESL contexts. However, it has captured the interest of teachers in Asian non-English speaking countries like China, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, and Thailand recently. The research results reported in those contexts suggest a positive effect

of this approach on EFL learners' writing skills. In an attempt to find whether this approach was applicable to teach the writing skills for English majors, this paper was advocated to the use of this approach in the context of a university Vietnam.

Literature Review

Genre-Based Approach

Byram (2004) in The Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning defines the genre-based approach as a framework for language instruction based on examples of a particular genre This approach emerged from SFL, first developed in Australia during the 1980's. According to SFL, language is functional and through language we achieve certain goals. It emphasizes that language is used and understood within a context. With this underlying principle, the genre-based approach aims at enabling learners to write meaningful passages with framework support (Byram, 2004). It promotes explicit teaching of how to write different school genres (recount, narrative, report, essay, etc.) by offering a model of teaching that stresses explicit identification and teaching of the stages of a particular genre (Christie & Unsworth, 2005). There are numerous definitions of what "genre" is. One of the first definitions of genre developed by Martin (1984) comes from SFL by Halliday (1978, 1985, 1994), who posits that genres are distinguished by choice of language suitable to the context in use to convey meaning successfully. Later, Swales (1990, p. 58) defines genre as "a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes".

The genre-based approach supports learners to write with a very specific focus on vocabulary and grammar which characterize each type of genre, familiarizing them with the varying schematic structures. For example, the schematic structure of narratives (Martin & Rothery, 1986) starts first with an orientation stage, then a complication stage and ends with a resolution stage. It may also be completed by a coda in which the writer expresses his or her own perspective on the story that has just been told. Further, Nunan (1999) emphasizes that genres have grammatical forms that reflect their communicative purpose; that is, each genre needs a particular language and grammar resource to realize the communication. The genre-based approach places the focus on the grammatical peculiarities of each genre, not on general grammar. For instance, the particular grammar of the narrative is the use of verbs of motion, feeling and thinking to describe a series of events and performers of actions; and that of adjuncts of time to show connections of actions across time. This approach also highlights that using the conventionalized knowledge of linguistic resources of each genre fosters successful achievement of a specific communicative purpose (Bhatia, 1993). The letter genre is an example that shows distinctive features in the conventional layout, tone and choice of language. A personal letter in English often conventionally starts with a greeting in a friendly tone to maintain good relationships, while a business letter is written in a formal tone and language to inform readers of specific information. It is also important to know that the organizations of these types of letters may bear differences from those in other languages.

Genre-Based Instruction

Genre-based instruction was first introduced in Australia and realized in the teaching-learning cycle which was first initiated by Callaghan and Rothery (1988). It includes three stages: Deconstruction, Joint Construction and Independent Construction. Later, Derewianka (1990),

and Hammond and her colleagues (1992) further developed it into four recursive stages: Preparing or building knowledge of the field, Modelling of text, Joint-construction of the text and Independent construction of the text. Nunan and Lamb (1996) describes these four stages as follows. In the initial stage learners are provided with background content knowledge so that they can carry the task and achieve the goals. In the second stage, learners are introduced models with whole language in context. The teacher explicitly states the purpose of the modeled text, its generic structure and language features to foster an understanding of the language style and the social function of the genre. In the third stage, teacher and students work collaboratively to produce a text reduplicating the model. In the final one, learners work on their own independently to produce their texts. The teaching-learning cycle is "an interactive process of contextualization, analysis, discussion and joint negotiation of texts" (Hyland, 2002, p. 126).

In the context of Australia, the genre-based approach was initially used to develop students' literacy skills in writing and reading in the context of English as a first and second language. However, in the EFL context this approach is used to teach integrated language skills. It has captured the interest of EFL teachers and researchers in the recent decade. There are many studies which focus either on the students' perceptions of the GBA or the use of GBA to teach a particular genre (see e.g. Amogne, 2013; Chaisiri, 2010; Chen & Su, 2012; Johns, 2011; Kongpetch, 2006; Liang, 2015; Viriya & Wasanasomsithi , 2017; Wang, 2013; Watanabe 2016; Yasuda, 2011). For example, several research studies have been dedicated to the effectiveness of the genre-based approach on teaching argumentative essays in the EFL classrooms. Studies by Amogne (2013), Kongpetch (2006), Luu (2011), Promwinai (2010), Trinh & Nguyen (2014) provide evidence of learner improvement in relation to the essay features including organization, argument logic, thesis construction and language. Different research by Chen and Su (2012), Luu (2011), Tuyen et al. (2016), Yasuda (2011) Wang (2013), Watanabe (2016) and Viriya and Wasanasomsithi (2017) report the learners' progress on summary writing, writing recount genre, research papers, email-writing, apology letters, exposition essays and enhancement of writing ability, respectively. These research findings reveal that most of the learners gained control over the key features of the target genre in terms of social purposes, language features and organization.

Compared with the product approach and process approach, the genre-based approach is relatively new. However, it provides new perspectives on teaching writing which are distinguished from the previous approaches with the clear focus on and explanation of the genre features and functions. The genre-based approach also facilitates clear links between learning in the classroom and the writing beyond it (Lin, 2006). Some proponents of the genre-based approach suggest the combination of this approach either with the product approach (Dudley-Evan & St. John, 1998) or with the process approach (Badger & White, 2000) to make use of the strengths of all these approaches. The choice depends on the teacher in each context of teaching. However, it could be stressed that what differentiates the genre-based approach from the others is the advocacy that language is functional and the choice of language and grammar is determined by the context, purpose and audience. Since its development, the genre-based approach has now become influential in the field of language

teaching (Derewianka, 2003) and one of the major trends in the new millennium (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Despite its popularity in L1 and L2 context since 1980's, the genre-based approach remains a fresh topic for the EFL context. In Luu's (2011) opinion, Vietnamese teachers endeavor to examine the effect of the genre-based approach on students' writing performance and attitudes towards the implementation of this approach in learning writing. The positive reports of the use of this approach in EFL writing classes have encouraged the researcher to continue investigating its application to teaching writing the letter genre as a university writing module for Vietnamese English-majored students.

Methodology

Context and Participants

The national context of the current study is Vietnam. In Vietnam, before being admitted to university, students must sit and pass the national exams, which are inclusive of an English test. The English test is norm-referenced and is scored on a 0-10 band range. The results of the test impact on students in the sense that they have an increased chance of gaining admission to university the higher their band score is. It is also important to note that in 2008, the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training officially adopted the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) as the national framework of reference for English education in Vietnam.

The specific participants in the current study had emerged from this Vietnamese educational context. Sixty participants were invited to participate in the study, all of whom had passed the English test, and were of A2 proficiency with regard to the CEFR, as this is the minimum required level for freshmen in the Vietnamese context. The students were enrolled in the writing course of the first-year majors, in their first semester of university, and were spread across two classes (30 students in each class). Like many first-year Vietnamese university students, the participants had learned English as a school subject and had not been instructed in any formal writing course before. As university English majors, the participants would study English for four years to use English professionally to work as English teachers, tour guides, translators, interpreters or office workers. The demographic information of the participants can be seen below in the Table below.

Demographic Information of Participants

Number	Gender		Age	Level	Level expected to achieve after the first year
60	Females 43	Males 17	18-21	A2 of CEFR	B1 of CEFR

The sampling approach adopted in the study adheres to what is commonly referred to as "non-probability" sampling, and specifically "purposive sampling". Purposive sampling is in alignment with the goals of qualitative research projects where the overarching aim is generally to "describe the aspects of an idiosyncratic experience rather than determining the most likely, or mean experience, within a group" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 126). Within an overarching, purposive approach to selecting the sample, a more specific strategy of "typical sampling" was

adopted. With regard to the overarching purposive approach, it was necessary to make decisions about who the participants would be. Within this study, the participants needed to be students of a writing course within the Vietnamese context, for the purpose of focusing on the genre-based approach. In relation to the "typical sampling" strategy, the participants were chosen based on the fact that their experiences was typical in terms of the focus of the research. Dörnyei (2007) explains that while it is not immediately possible for the experiences of the sample to be generalized, it is possible to establish certain typical features which could bear similarities to other similar contexts within Vietnam, as is the case in this study.

The study was implemented over one 15-week semester for Writing 1 Course. This was the first in five compulsory writing courses named from Writing 1 to Writing 5 English majors had to attend at university. Each course was 100 -minute lesson a week. In Writing 1, the participants learned how to write different types of letter, which include writing a response to an invitation, writing a response giving advice, writing a complaint letter, writing an opinion letter and writing a letter to editor.

The researcher was the course instructor of the participants. The instruction used in the class was the genre-based instruction (GBI). The choice of this instruction was argued as follows:

- The genre-based approach (GBA) provides a systematic explanation how such texts are organized in different social and cultural contexts (Hyland, 2003).
- GBA suggests explicit instruction and intervention from the teacher in class (Hyland, 2003).
- The genre-based instruction (GBI) allows the teacher to provide learners with scaffolding at any stage in the teaching-learning cycle (Vygotsky, 1978).

Data Collection and Procedure

In order to collect data for the study, the following sets of questionnaires were used:

Preliminary questionnaires. These were delivered to the students at the beginning of the course to find whether they were accustomed to writing the various letter types in the mother tongue as school assignments and/or in their daily communication (Appendix A).

Primary Questionnaires – these were repeatedly delivered to them to record their responses to the effect of the four stages of the genre-based instructions used in the class after they finished learning a letter type. This set of questionnaires included the questions to ask for the participants' opinions about the effects of stage 1 to stage 3 of the teaching-learning cycle; and the questions for stage 4 served as a final draft checklist for them to answer when they practiced writing at home (Appendix B)

Post-questionnaires . These were delivered to the students at the end of the course to have their feedback on their improvement of writing the letter genre (Appendix C).

The participants were asked to give their responses every two weeks after they finished learning a different letter type. The answers were counted and analyzed by constructing frequency and percentage distribution tables based on the items in the questionnaires.

In addition, there were two writing tests administered after the first three types of letter and after the last one were taught to measure the students' progress (Appendix D). The tests were modified from Part II and III of the Cambridge B1 proficiency Test -Preliminary English Test (PET). Regarding the difficulty of the tasks, topics were selected so as to enhance the participants' background knowledge of current and familiar issues. The students' papers were assessed based on the use of letter conventions, understanding of the test requirements, organization of ideas and the choice of proper language resource. The test results were tabulated from the highest scores to the lowest with corresponding grades according to Vietnam's grading system at university.

In order to ascertain the impact of genre-based instruction on the participants in the study, the following research questions were developed:

1. What are the students' perceptions of the effect of the genre-based instruction in learning the letter genre?
2. What features of the genre letter do they benefit from the most under the genre-based instruction?

Findings

The following details the findings in relation to the research questions that guided the study.

Students' Letter Writing Skills in L1

The results displayed in Tables A1 and A2 show the familiarity of the participants with the letter genre in their mother tongue (see Appendix A for the questionnaire). Table A1 shows 71.6% and 58.3% of them had experienced writing a response to an invitation (type A) and a response giving advice (type B). However, it records that no one had ever had experience with types C (complaint letter), D (opinion letter) and E (letter to editor). Table A2 also reveals that the respondents wrote letters of types A and B only in informal situations, such as writing to their friends or relatives.

Table A1

Types of Letter Genre Students Wrote in L1

Types of letter genre		n = 60	Percent
Type A	Writing a response to an invitation	43	71.6
Type B	Writing a response giving advice	35	58.3
Type C	Writing a complaint letter	0	0
Type D	Writing an opinion letter	0	0
Type E	Writing a letter to editor	0	0

Table A2

Situations Students Wrote Letter Type A and Type B in L1

Types of letter genre			Situations	
			Informal	Formal
Type A	Writing a response to an invitation	n = 60	43 100%	0 0
Type B	Writing a response giving advice		35 100%	0 0

Students' Perceptions of the Effect of the Teaching-Learning Cycle (TLC) in Learning the Letter Genre

In this section, the participants' responses to the four stages of the TLC under investigation are presented (see Appendix B for the questionnaire).

Table B1

Students' responses to Preparing or Building Knowledge of the Field

	Very helpful	Helpful	Not much	Not at all
1. Raising the awareness of the letter type	28 46.7%	32 53.3%	0 0%	0 0%
2. Raising the awareness of the format of the letter	25 41.7%	33 55%	2 3.3%	0 0%
3. Raising the awareness of the intended readers of the letter	22 36.7%	38 63.3%	0 0%	0 0%
4. Raising the awareness of the purpose of the letter	27 45%	32 53.3%	1 1.7%	0 0%
5. Raising the awareness of the context of the letter	17 28.3%	38 63.3%	5 8.3%	0 0%
6. Raising the awareness of the culture-specific features of the letter	19 31.7%	33 55%	7 11.7%	1 1.7%

Table B1 reports the participants' average responses to the first stage in leaning all the letter types. The question items focused on finding whether it enhanced their awareness of the paralinguistic features (items 1-2), the contextual features (items 3-5) and the culture-specific feature (item 6) of the five letter types. For all the items, the results show positive answers with more than 90 percent agreeing that this stage was either very useful or useful. The negative responses ranging from 1.7% to 11.7% fell into items 4-6.

Table B2

Students' Responses toward Modelling of Text

	Type A	Type B	Type C	Type D	Type E
1. Recognizing the format of the model letter	60 100%	57 95%	57 95%	59 98.3%	59 98.3%
2. Aware of the writer and the intended audience of the model letter	60 100%	56 93.3%	55 91.7%	53 88.3%	57 95%
3. Distinguishing the tone of the model letter	57 95%	51 85%	40 66.7%	40 66.7%	40 66.7%
4. Recognizing how ideas are organized in the model letter	57 95%	51 85%	47 78.3%	41 68.3%	45 75%
5. Able to pick up the language features of the model letter	50 83.3%	47 78.3%	38 63.3%	33 55%	36 60%

Table B2 presents the findings whether the participants were able to recognize the paralinguistic features (items 1 & 3), the context of the letter type (item 2), the organization of ideas (item 4) and the language features (item 5) of the modelled texts. Among the items, the responses to items 1- 2 were very high for all the letter types. This was confirmed with the data of items 1, 2 and 3 in Table B1. With item 3, the highest response was for letter types A and B, while the remaining received equally lower replies.   This finding coincided with the data in Table A1 and Table A2, which show the students' familiarity with types A and B in their mother tongue. With items 4 and 5, type D had the lowest number of selectors.

Table B3

Students' Responses toward Joint-construction of the Text

	Type A	Type B	Type C	Type D	Type E
1. = Fostering understanding of features of the letter type	56 93.3%	50 83.3%	47 78.3%	53 88.3%	49 81.6%
2. Enabling joining writing practice	55 91.6%	45 75%	39 65%	38 63.3%	33 55%
3. Providing useful feedback from the teacher	51 85%	50 83.3%	45 75%	43 71.6	44 73.3%
4. Building up confidence for individual writing in stage 4	51 83.3%	50 83.3%	37 61.7%	32 53.3%	40 66.6%

Table B3 shows the majority of the students agreed with item 1 for all types, which indicates group works could further develop their understanding of what they learned in the previous stages. With the remaining items, high responses were recorded with letter types A and B. However, the positive answers went down with other types. For item 5, the proportions again decreased by around one thirds for the last three types of letters.

Table B4

Students' Responses toward Independent Construction of the Text

	Type A	Type B	Type C	Type D	Type E
1. Understanding the requirements of the writing task	60 100%	60 100%	60 100%	60 100%	60 100%
2. Aware of the intended reader	60 100%	60 100%	60 100%	60 100%	60 100%
3. Able to use the conventional format	50 91. 6%	51 85%	49 78. 3%	47 76. 7%	47 76.7%
4. Choosing the right tone for the letter	51 85%	45 75%	34 56.7%	33 55%	33 55%
5. Considering the cultural context	56 93.3%	53 88.3%	55 91.6%	55 91.6%	53 88.3%
6. Paying attention to organization	60 100%	60 100%	60 100%	60 100%	60 100%
7. Choosing language resource suitable for the context	44 73.3%	41 68.3%	27 45%	26 43.3%	31 51.7%

As presented in Table B4, all the participants gave positive answers to items 1, 2 and 6, which reminded them of the purpose of the letter, the addressee and the organization of ideas. The next three items 3, 4 and 5 were closely related to each other. Compared with the positive answers to types A and B, those to item 4 were much lower for letters of types C, D and E. Similarly, more than half of negative replies were recorded for letters of types C and D for the last item.

Students' Improvements under the Use of Genre-Based Instruction

Table C1

Students' Responses to their Improvements under GBI

Features	n = 60	Percentage
1. Organization	57	95%
2. Context	51	85%
3. Conventions	48	80%
4. Tone	48	80%
5. Grammar	41	68%
6. Vocabulary	37	62%

Table C1 (see Appendix C for the post-questionnaire) summarizes the features of the letter genre the participants claimed to have experienced improvement in. The data is arranged from the highest to the lowest.

Table C2

Types of Letter Genre Students Able to Write Successfully

Types of letter genre		n = 60	Percent
Type A	Writing a response to an invitation	51	85%
Type B	Writing a response giving advice	45	76.7%
Type E	Writing a letter to editor	37	62%
Type C	Writing a complaint letter	33	55%
Type D	Writing an opinion letter	29	48.3%

Table C2 displays the students' feedback on the types of letter genre they felt confident to write after learning (see Appendix C). The data is arranged from the letter type with the highest percentage to the one receiving the lowest percentage.

Table D

Students' Test Results

Tests	Mark Results				
	8.5 and above A	7.0 to 8. 4 B	5.5 to 6.9 C	4.0 to 5.4 D	Under 4.0 F
Test 1	7 11.7%	24 40%	23 38.3%	6 10%	0 0%
Test 2	5 8.3%	27 45%	25 41.7%	3 5%	0 0%

The two tests (see Appendix D) examined the students' skills of writing the letters they learned. They aimed to link learning in the classroom and the communication beyond it (Lin, 2006). The participants' letters were marked based on the items as criteria shown in Table C1. Table D presents the students' marks based on 10 grade points and the corresponding letter grades A, B, C, D and F. While A grades went down in the second test, D grades seemed improved. The numbers of D grades and C grades combined did not much fluctuate in the two tests.

Discussion

The data analysis of this research revealed two key findings. The first was that the GBI increased their awareness and understanding of the features of the letter genre. The second was the noticeable improvements that the low-level learners claimed to have gained under this instruction. The follow sections will address the specific research questions of the study to highlight what has been learned.

Research Question 1

It is widely recognized that the local text structures within a text type often have differences across cultures. In this case, the letter types in Vietnamese do not resemble those in English in many aspects. The use of GBI aimed at enhancing the participants' perception of the differences and raised their awareness of the distinctive features, especially for the letter types they were not familiar with. As the students had not experienced writing formal letters in their L1, the explicit genre-based teaching, for example, was able to help them quickly identify the differences in the layout and the structure of an English formal letter. The results from Table B1

to Table B4 indicate the learner's perception of the importance of the questions and issues used to orientate the learners to the social context and the communicative purpose of each letter type. The aspects which received the most approval from the participants relate to the context, format, conventions and the organization to make the letters accepted in the culture of the target language. This is in alignment with Hyland's (2003, p. 27) belief that learning writing is best achieved "through explicit awareness of language", "with a sense of self, of others, of situation, of purpose". Similarly, Hammond et al (1992) emphasizes that assisting learners to gain an understanding of a context is essential in genre-based writing.

In view of the participants' responses to the effect of GBI on learning different letter types, the results were not the same. Their positive responses to letter types A and B may indicate the connection of L1 knowledge with the target genre in L2. Results from acquisition research supports that languages can promote each other's development reciprocally and that a foreign language learner must build upon existing skills and knowledge acquired in and through the mother tongue (Butzkamm, 2003). The background knowledge and skills in L1 enabled the participants to acquire the first two types of letters more effectively. Though the participants underwent the same stages of instruction in learning all the letter types, they encountered more difficulty with the features of the formal letters of types C, D and E (see Table B4). Despite their claim of improved awareness of the conventions and cultural context of these letters, around half of the participants admitted having problems with the tone and language resource characterizing the formal style. Their problems were almost certainly the result of their unfamiliarity and lack of exposure to these types of letters. This links with Hammond et al (1992)'s view that in order to learn to write effectively students first need to have an extensive understanding of and familiarity with the topic they are writing about in the preparing stage. This suggests the teachers' more attention and scaffolding given to the students in teaching them the skills that they have no experience in their L1.

Research Question 2

As shown in the Table C1, the most noticeable improvements the participants claimed to have achieved were the organization and understanding of the context. Research by Wang (2013) supports this idea by emphasizing that most of the participants report progress after the genre instruction on the rather surface-level aspects, such as proper salutation and complimentary closure, layout of the letter, and degree of formality in vocabularies. Table C1 indicates approximately one thirds of the participants reported not having improvements with grammar and vocabulary. These results were consistent with findings by Kongpetch (2006) and Trinh & Nguyen (2014) that students showed improvement of the text organization, audience awareness and purpose, but not the language itself. This is supported with a study on the students' email writing ability by Yasuda (2011) that though the students showed significant improvement with cohesion and organization, grammatical control, they did not show much student improvements on vocabulary size. That means the control over the language features practically requires more time and to tackle. With this finding the researcher believes that the GBI which was implemented only for 30-hour class time could not bring about much significant change in the language resource for the participants.

The feedback the participants gave in Table C2 again confirms the value of L1 knowledge in enhancing their learning of the letter types in L2 with more than 75% felt able to write successfully with types A and B. The findings match with the researcher's anticipation that the students tended to feel more confident with the letter type they had experienced in L1. Nonetheless, more than half of the participants were not able to successfully write letter type D, opinion letters. Compared with the data on Tables 1-4, this type received nearly all the lowest responses among the five types. There are many reasons for their problems, of which the obvious ones can be how to make their points clear and persuasive with the use of proper grammar and vocabulary in a formal tone and style.

In the mid-test and post-test, the task requirements examined the skills they learned in the course. The topics were chosen to link the background knowledge of current and familiar issues. They aimed to link learning in the classroom and the communication beyond it as mentioned by Lin (2006). Regarding to the results, though there was not much fluctuation of grades B and C combined, the mid-test had more grades A (11.7%) and D (10%) compared with the post-test. As the first test required the students to write the letter types they were familiar in L1, to some extent it increased their chance of having good grades. However, 10% of the students with D grades also indicated that the GBI was not as effective as expected for a small group of students at the first time when the instruction was implemented. In the post-test, both A and D grades fell down (8.3% and 5%, respectively). The decrease of A grades indicates the difficulty of the letter types as the students revealed in Table C2. However, the decrease of D grades shows the students' improvement under GBI.

Limitations

This study has some limitations. Firstly, it employed purposive sampling. This fact may give rise to the question of the validity of the methodology, design and data collection of the study. With a limited number of 60 participants, the results were not intended to give a generalization beyond the context of the study but rather to report an application of the instruction in a particular context in which this instruction had not been used before. Secondly, the data was collected by means of the questionnaires and test results within a short period of time of the class hours. Thirdly, the subject of the study focused on a micro genre, the letter genre, namely five types of the letters the participants learned in their first writing modules at university. The results need more support from in-depth research on the learning results in the tests of language competence of a larger population to confirm these findings and further explore the full potential of the approach. Further longitudinal research can be developed to observe the effectiveness of the genre-based approach on teaching other genres with learners of other language levels. A topic that may draw from this research is the role of background knowledge in L1 in promoting the genre awareness and language competence for EFL learners.

Conclusion

This is an action research in an educational setting with the aim to examine the writing classroom under the genre-based instruction. It was conducted among low-intermediate level participants in learning writing letters. The results suggest that the instruction had positive effects on the participants in learning letter writing thanks to the explicit teaching of the

purpose, audience, social context, the language and structure of a particular genre. After 30 hours of classroom time, the features that showed the participants' most improvements were the awareness of the context, the choice of appropriate conventions, the organization of ideas and the paralinguistic features. However, the progress in the language resource, i.e. grammar and vocabulary was not as high as other features. The results indicate that learners need a long-term instruction under this approach so as to make improvements with the language features in their writing skills.

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Appendix A

Pre-Questionnaires

Please answer the following questions:
1. Which of following types of letter genre have you ever written in Vietnamese?
    a. Writing a response to an invitation
    b. Writing a response giving advice
    c. Writing a complaint letter
    d. Writing an opinion letter
    e. Writing a letter to editor
2. In which situation did you write the letter?

Types of letter genre	Situations	
	Informal	Formal
a. Writing a response to an invitation		
b. Writing a response giving advice		
c. Writing a complaint letter		
d. Writing an opinion letter		
e. Writing a letter to editor		

Appendix B

Please choose the answers to show your responses to the four stages of the teaching-learning cycle used in your writing class.

Stage 1 Preparing or Building Knowledge of the Field

1. This stage was… in raising your awareness of the letter type you learn?
   ☐ a. very helpful   ☐ b. helpful   ☐ c. not much helpful   ☐ d. not helpful
2. This stage was … in raising your awareness of the format of the letter type you learn?
   ☐ a. very helpful   ☐ b. helpful   ☐ c. not much helpful   ☐ d. not helpful
3. This stage was … in raising your awareness of the intended readers of the letter type you learn?
   ☐ a. very helpful   ☐ b. helpful   ☐ c. not much helpful   ☐ d. not helpful
4. This stage was … in raising your awareness of the purpose of the letter type you learn?
   ☐ a. very helpful   ☐ b. helpful   ☐ c. not much helpful   ☐ d. not helpful
5. This stage was … in raising your awareness of the context of the letter type you learn?
   ☐ a. very helpful   ☐ b. helpful   ☐ c. not much helpful   ☐ d. not helpful
6. This stage was … in raising your awareness of the culture-specific features of the letter type you learn?
   ☐ a. very helpful   ☐b. helpful   ☐ c. not much helpful   ☐ d. not helpful

Stage 2 Modelling of Text

1. Did this stage help you recognize the format of the model letter?
      ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
2. Did this stage make you aware of the writer and the intended audience of the model letter?
      ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
3. Did this stage help you distinguish the tone of the model letter?
      ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
4. Did this stage help you recognize how ideas are organized in the model letter?
      ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
5. Did this stage enable you to pick up the language features of the model letter?
      ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No

Stage 3 Joint-construction of the Text

1. Did this stage foster your understanding of features characteristic of the letter type you learn?
      ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
2. Did this stage enable you to join writing practice?
      ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
3. Did this stage provide you useful feedback from the teacher?
      ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No

4. Did this stage build up your confidence for individual writing?
   ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No

Stage 4 Independent Construction of the Text

1. Do you understand the requirements of the writing task?
   ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
2. Are you aware of the intended reader?
   ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
3. Can you now use the conventional format for the letter type?
   ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
4. Can you now choose the right tone for the letter?
   ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
5. Do you consider the cultural context of the letter?
   ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
6. Do you pay attention to the organization of the ideas in the letter?
   ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No
7. Do you consider choosing language resource suitable for the context of the letter?
   ☐ a. Yes   ☐ b. No

Appendix C

Post-Questionnaires

Please answer the following questions. You can tick more than one option.

1. Which of the following features have you felt improved under the genre-based instruction?

    ☐ a. Context

    ☐ b. Conventions

    ☐ c. Tone

    ☐ d. Organization

    ☐ e. Grammar

    ☐ g. Vocabulary

2. Which letter type do you think you are able to write successfully after learning?

    ☐ a. Writing a response to an invitation

    ☐ b. Writing a response giving advice

    ☐ c. Writing a complaint letter

    ☐ d. Writing an opinion letter

    ☐ e. Writing a letter to editor

Appendix D

Test 1

Duration: 60 minutes
Word length: 100-120 words for each letter.

Task 1
You have received a letter from the Youth Club to invite you to a charity event held in your school next week. Write a response to the invitation.

If you are able to participate in the event, accept the invitation and confirm your attendance. Ask if there is anything you need to prepare for the event.

If you are unable to participate in the event, give the reason and ask for joining another event of the club.

Task 2
Your cousin has been busy preparing for the high school graduation exams. Write a letter giving advice to him/her, sharing your experience.

Test 2

Duration: 60 minutes
Word length: 120-150 words for each letter

Task 1
You are the freshman and have just become the member of your school English speaking club. However, you find the activities as not interesting as you expect. Write a letter of complaint to the club leader to suggest changes.

Task 2
Universities in Vietnam are giving a poll to ask for the reform of the subjects in the university entrance exam. As a freshman who just passed the exam, write a letter to editor to express your point of view.

Teaching Practice

Off-Shore and out of Reach: Student Voice in Pre-Departure EAP pedagogies

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This paper explores the complexities of developing and delivering English for Academic Purposes (EAP) pre-departure programs. We reflect on experiences of co-teaching in a Lao PDR based program for students planning to undertake tertiary studies in New Zealand or Australia. Taking a sociocultural perspective, we examine the way that the Lao pre-departure program aims to attend to the particularities of both local and target contexts and to facilitate student adaptation to the chosen institution and discipline. The program takes a participatory approach to EAP and the broader acculturation processes, making space for individual student voice as part of the modeling and scaffolding of academic English. Based on this experience of transnational collaboration in development and delivery, we discuss critical issues of relevance to the planning and delivery of EAP pre-departure courses and productive international study experiences.
Keywords: English for Academic Purposes, pre-departure training, academic culture

Context

Pre-departure English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs, delivered in students' country of origin, take a wide variety of forms, though most have similar aims in preparing their students for study in an English speaking tertiary context. Whatever the form of the program, it is often underpinned by the conceptualisation of the student as deficient in knowledge and skills (Leung & Street, 2012). This article takes up some of the key notions in EAP to examine the importance of context and student voice in academic readiness / pre-departure programs. The article arose from opportunities the authors have had to travel to Lao PDR to teach in the final weeks of a pre-departure course, over a period of several years. Students on the course had gained partial acceptance into a scholarship program funding study of diploma or degree qualifications in Australia or New Zealand. In order to confirm their places, scholarship

applicants have to meet the entry requirements of the target institution, including English language proficiency requirements. Like many scholarship programs, NZ ASEAN and Australia Awards have a focus on social and economic development in the home country, in this case, Lao PDR, supporting communities and growth in a number of target fields, as well as on establishing and maintaining links with the donor countries (Australia Awards, 2016; Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2017). This article is based on two cohorts, 2014 and 2015, that were similar in terms of age range and gender representation, with similar proportions of students from cities and provinces in Lao PDR.

The article begins by reviewing threads in the EAP and transnational education literature that reinforce the value of including student perspectives and experiences in teaching and learning practices. This is followed by a description of the program as a whole, and an outline of the pedagogy on which we based our contribution. We then report on ways that we used student questions as a resource to promote discussion, reflection and, more broadly, student agency.

Background

Here we explore the manner in which the Lao program identified students' academic and social needs: a process that we observe is different from traditional needs analysis. Traditional forms of needs analysis often set parameters for student needs through asking pre-identified questions or statements and asking students to agree or disagree (Benesch, 2001; Evans & Green, 2007). In this way the design of a needs analysis questionnaire may limit students to using criteria pre-determined by teachers or course designers to describe their needs. From the beginning of our work with the program in 2011, the course coordinators approached this issue by inviting students to come up with questions that they would like answered by the visiting academics and these wide-ranging questions then formed the basis of what we covered in our component. What struck us was the way that this provided an important channel for students to say what it was that they needed to know, and gave space to student voice in determining the content of the program (Kumaravadivelu, 2012). As we observed the agency that use of their questions gave students, we saw that their concerns could provide an organic base for the program. This drew us to use Kumaravadivelu's postmethod lens to investigate how the overall program and our component could respond to the Lao students' needs. Questions that we sought to answer were: how do students get prepared; what helps to build their cultural competence, confidence and knowledge; and how can our pedagogy demonstrate diversity as a resource?

EAP curricula typically include English language development in use of grammar and vocabulary, awareness-raising of features of academic discourse, production of academic written and spoken texts, preparation for entry tests, cultural awareness and tertiary study skills development. Courses may offer discipline-specific learning or take a generic focus. When following an EAP program, students may experience a generic representation of educational cultures, in terms of an eastern – western dichotomy (Doherty and Singh, 2005; Holliday, 2007; Kumaravadivelu, 2008; Kumaravadivelu, 2012). It is not uncommon to see learning materials that discuss ways that people may approach academic work without addressing what is really meant by "academic culture". One exception is the work by Brick, Herke & Wong (2016) that helps to address this by explicating academic culture, although this conveys the

assumption that students will be acculturating to a Western model.

The program under investigation takes into account the Lao students' educational backgrounds. Lao students are not necessarily experienced in the expectations and practices of New Zealand and Australian academic cultures (Souriyavongsa, Rany, Jafre Zainol Abidin, & Leong, 2013), which require that students be independent learners and critical thinkers and manage a large load of academic reading. The Lao college recognises that the students will need the opportunity of time to add other ways of learning and study to their existing repertoire of skills. Their program draws on contemporary EAP, TESOL and education research and practice as evidenced in the teacher and student materials and references.

Literature review

Setting out Some Key Principles

Viewed from a socio-cultural perspective, intercultural academic preparation demands recognition of both students' and teachers' contexts which are "not necessarily limited to specific geopolitical boundaries" (Johnson, 2006, p. 245), but can encompass a range of contextual factors including socio-political and socio-economic diversity as well as prior educational experiences. As course designers and practitioners we were aware of not setting up a hierarchy or dichotomy in terms of how tertiary academic culture in English language settings is portrayed in relation to the Lao educational culture students have experienced. We think it important to value students' previous academic experiences and successes. Support for validating what students bring comes from observing that some students see themselves through a deficit lens and are daunted by fears about the expectations of lecturers in their target academic context. Along with the Lao teachers, we needed to build self-confidence and what Sawir et al. (2012) call a sense of security.

Doherty and Singh (2005) point out the potential for idealised and particularized images of Western education settings or student behaviour to be held up as norms in a way that "positions the international student as outsider or Other" (p. 53). This can impact students' feelings of legitimacy and have the effect of silencing or at least making them less confident of their right to speak (Norton, 2013). Idealising or presenting a "sanitised" view of Western academic tradition (Doherty & Singh, 2005) may also fail to acknowledge the constant and rapid change occurring in tertiary institutions worldwide.

One challenge of EAP or tertiary preparation courses is the fact that they are by nature focused around the notion of an "imagined community" (Norton 2013; Norton & Toohey, 2011). The communities of practice of the target context are inevitably being evoked and in a sense imagined into being by EAP teachers and course materials, but are understandably hard for students to connect with in any real sense. Course designers and teachers target the building of confidence but their work may also undermine that same confidence as students may have the sense of never quite measuring up, and can become conscious of the need and, in many cases the pressure, to both adapt and to downplay their own linguistic and cultural individuality, rather than people in the target institution adapting to them and learning about other ways of doing and being (Holliday, 2007).

For EAP to be effective and allow students to adopt or adapt to a somewhat new academic identity, the program needs to address the wide range of student needs from a socio-cultural perspective and not narrowly focus on instrumental skills. The key constructs of a socio-cultural perspective - internalization, transformation and mediation - inform Kumaravadivelu's (2003) postmethod pedagogy which allows a contextualized, flexible approach to program design and delivery. Postmethod pedagogy refutes the idea that there is a methodology that will suit all contexts at all times. His broader pedagogical framework rests on three pedagogic parameters: particularity, practicality and possibility. The parameter of particularity takes into account the particular needs and particular context of the learners when making decisions about how and what to teach. That of practicality recognises and acknowledges the teacher's sense-making, that is, the teacher-generated theory of practice which informs and is informed by teaching. This sense-making sees the classroom walls as permeable; the learners are situated within the context that exists outside of the classroom. The third parameter of possibility takes account of the socio-political world and is the dimension that is concerned with identity and social transformation. Language teaching and learning is much more than teaching and learning language. Teachers must be aware of both the socio-political and cultural reality that shapes their and their students' lives and of their capacity to transform their own and their students' realities. This highly responsive framework allows program designers and deliverers to acknowledge the students' background knowledge and experiences, to validate the teachers' own learning and theory-making as well as the potential for students and teachers to change. Kumaravadivelu identifies ten macrostrategies that teachers are able to draw on as part of postmethod pedagogy; we address those relevant to our work in the Lao program later in the article.

Aspects of EAP Course Design and Pedagogy: the EAP Program

The pre-departure program under discussion here worked with a multi-dimensional curriculum with the following key features:
  • Critical thinking: making thinking explicit and visible. Students and teachers are encouraged to use questions to generate critical thinking;
  • Reflection: students are encouraged to reflect on their previous and current learning. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a reflective stance in relation to their own practice and to student output/outcomes;
  • Communicative skills: the teachers provide opportunities for input and for students to give written and spoken output;
  • Awareness of teacher talk and the fact that this can help or hinder student output;
  • Language discovery: along with awareness of text purpose, audience expectations, genre and specific discourse features;
  • Resourcefulness: expanding awareness of tools and resources students can draw on to help achieve their goals.

The basis for this appears to be language teaching within a sociocultural model that emphasises that language use is shaped by social contexts and purposes, as described by Johnson (2009). Although the leaders and teachers did not refer to a specific theory when describing the course to us, they said that they aim to develop in students a willingness to consider how choices of features such as genre, discourse patterns, level of formality, sentence

level grammar may be made differently depending on factors such as the relationships among the participants, the purpose of a text or utterance and the context in which it is used. Their teaching and learning processes encourage teachers to work collaboratively with students in a way which seemed to us to align with the postmethod pedagogy of Kumaravadivelu as described above (2003, 2006). The program as a whole is built on a generative interactive model of curriculum design, as part of which the students and teachers meet regularly to discuss the students' progress and concerns. These discussions then inform the program design. The design is underpinned with the notion of looking forward to the new tertiary environment and identifying what additional knowledge and skills the students need. This concern with providing coherent and cohesive academic preparation led to the inclusion of practising Australian and New Zealand academics to provide insights into how things may be done in the destination universities.

The existing EAP program therefore allowed space for sociocultural perspectives and methodologies to guide our teaching. Through foregrounding particularities of context and student needs, we aimed to establish an exploratory classroom environment in which we all shared. We wanted students to develop their willingness to reflect on academic and linguistic practices and to actively inquire and participate in shaping them (Johnson, 2006). However, we needed to be realistic about the fact that power issues were still present. As academics in the students' destination countries, we were asked by the college to provide an "expert" voice, so we were prepared to answer the students' questions based on our knowledge and experience. We took up the challenge of Kumaravadivelu's focus on contextualisation, so that discussion and understanding of the local context was central to how we could link student experience in Lao classrooms to the new tertiary context. In assisting students to internalize new information and to develop other ways of thinking about a situation (Johnson & Golombek, 2011), a question we often posed to students was: *How would that happen here*?

We were therefore aiming to bridge the space between the pedagogies of the current EAP pre-departure program and the varied, perhaps less predictable pedagogies that students might encounter overseas. We went about this with reference to the postmethod pedagogy of Kumaravadivelu (2003, 2006) and more broadly the socio-cultural and inquiry based approach (Johnson, 2009) discussed above. Kumaravadivelu's postmethod approach (2003) proposes ten macrostrategies. Out of the ten he identifies, those most relevant to how we worked are discussed here:
- *Maximise learning opportunities*: establish an environment where students can express views, seek clarification and initiate. In the class we incorporated authentic university texts and samples of New Zealand or Australian students' writing, and used these as the basis of group discussions and activities.
- *Contextualise linguistic input*: the authentic academic materials provided examples of "language required for the process of meaning-making" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 205) within the soon-to-be new tertiary context.
- *Foster language awareness*: this meant critically working with the students' linguistic resources, extending their linguistic repertoires, acknowledging the communicative academic strategies they already used and introducing new forms of language use they might encounter in Australian and New Zealand academic contexts.

- *Raise cultural consciousness*: by addressing the notion of academic culture (Brick, Herke & Wong, 2016) we were able to elicit the students' individual experiences and cultural knowledge "to help them connect norms of their own cultural practices with those of the target language community" (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 275).

Findings and Discussion: Towards a New Tertiary Context

These macrostrategies provided a framework for conversations with students about the links or dissonances between the student's prior study experiences and those they might have in the new higher education setting. As previously mentioned, the students wrote questions for the visiting lecturers and Lao college staff sent these to us prior to our intensive component. In designing our component of the program we were keen to foreground the students' questions to make their concerns our starting point; in particular, their desire to know how things are done differently in their destination universities.

Initially the number of different questions seemed an overwhelming list of demands for information that was going to vary for each specific study context. For example: *If I cannot finish my assignments on time, what should I do? Is it okay to discuss with professors very often in order to find a solution to a specific problem?* Our initial concern was that students would expect us to answer all questions; they might depend on us to provide responses and to tell them about student life in the destination countries. However, rather than giving direct answers, we decided to design class experiences for students to focus on and consider features of the target academic culture. So, viewed more positively, the large number of questions was a highly effective way to tune in to the range of interests of the students and to plan sessions that would meet their needs, for example: W*hat type of academic assistance is available to international students?"* – a question that students could answer for their specific tertiary institution, once they had an idea of what to look for on websites. We felt as if we could "hear" the voices of the students and also get a sense of what they had learned so far on the pre-departure course. They were clearly imagining the tertiary community that they were going to join, and effectively anticipating situations and issues that might arise, which in a sense is a step towards being proactive and prepared to deal with social and study situations. Their questions therefore enabled us to both maximize learning opportunities and contextualize linguistic input, while encouraging students themselves to seek out and share an appropriately diverse range of responses.

The pre-course elicitation of students' needs allowed them to canvass areas that would not necessarily be addressed in a pre-set questionnaire (Helmer, 2013). The student questions functioned as a mediational tool (Johnson & Golombek, 2011) both for teacher learning and for student agency. The questions stimulated teacher and student thinking and constituted a material tool to make up independent and interactional learning activities. Several of the students' questions were not about language, but about how problems could be solved, for example: *In the case that I am weak in learning some subjects where can find tutors? Do I have to find them by myself? How much will they cost in general?* Many questions were not about academic matters, but rather about the pragmatics of everyday life, for example: *Should I avoid presenting that I am a scholarship student as local students may have negative feelings against us?* The Lao college staff organised afternoon sessions in which previous scholarship holders

met the pre-departure students and responded to issues such as these. They also surveyed students while they were in-country, asking them to advise their peers on how to prepare for the overseas study experience. In this way students learned from their peers about sociocultural expectations and interactional competence in the new setting (Johnson, 2006). The information from peers and the class discussion of possible responses between us and the students seemed to lead to greater awareness that cultural appropriacy is highly nuanced. We were aiming to raise cultural consciousness without doing so in a simplistic, one-size-fits-all way. As Johnson (2009) notes, "once an individual's concepts have become explicit, they are open to dialogic mediation that can promote reorganisation and refinement" (p. 66).

One benefit of inviting questions is that it provides a basis to acknowledge and work with the students' prior knowledge, skills and experience, working pragmatically by focusing on their perceptions of areas of need, but also critically in the sense of opening up areas of ambiguity and uncertainty for discussion (Benesch, 2001; Helmer, 2013; Lin, 2012). For example, the following student question clearly identifies the student's self-recognition and desire to find ways to work differently:

> I would like to ask about time management skill and willpower to force yourself to do what you need to do. It is easier said than done that you just have to plan and follow your plans. Thus, I would like to receive concrete tips and strategies, something new that can be really helpful, workable and applicable in practice. I have a problem with starting something early. I tend to wait till it's getting closer to the deadlines.

The generation of questions provided an opportunity for students to identify their existing academic practices, language, literacy and linguistics repertoires and see what they might need to add. We applied this critical, additive approach (Helmer, 2013) to our work in Lao PDR, seeing students as already skilled, knowledgeable and capable of extending their academic literacy repertoires. Drawing on recollections of students' proactive management of earlier study experiences was a way to show that diversity of language, background and experience can be a strength and a resource rather than a limitation. This activity fostered language awareness, and at the same time encouraged a positive view of self and the potential for personal agency.

Some student questions about adaptation and social interaction indicate concerns about identity or agency that go beyond identity as a student. It appeared that student identity and agency (Arkoudis & Tran, 2007; Norton, 2013) were less of a concern for students, perhaps because being proactive learners is a role they are already familiar with. The questions showed a concern with appropriate ways of interacting in English to fit in as students and as members of a new society. This view acknowledges that a good command of English, while helpful, may not be the key factor that opens doors in the new academic and social community. As Sawir et al. (2012) note, "improving language proficiency is not the magic key that suddenly makes every doorway spring open to the international student" (p. 449). Also, if the role and expectations of students are viewed differently in the target disciplinary academic setting (Johnson, 2006), some discourse functions and pre-rehearsed routines may no longer

seem appropriate. On the spot responses to contextual particularities and awareness of the social pragmatics of communication in academic settings may be more helpful.

Overwhelmingly the students found the sessions and integration of information about the academic cultures in Australia and New Zealand to be an important component in the program. Both in their questions and in evaluation responses students clearly expressed the idea that they were going to a new academic culture and it was important to prepare themselves and to additively adapt. Some examples of student evaluation comments emphasise this point:

> because the sessions include not only English, but the culture of NZ; which is the basic information for students to adjust themselves to both studying style and culture and, from another student: the knowledge that I can approach my lecturers or tutors about assignments, ask questions about the subject content and other things that affect my study.

The comments suggest that they feel confident to mediate the sometimes unpredictable aspects of culture (Zuengler & Miller, 2006), to participate and to function independently in the new setting.

Conclusion

Taking a socio-cultural perspective (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2006; Johnson, 2006, 2009; Zuengler and Miller, 2006 add refs), the teaching practice examined in this article is based on an organic model of program design. The teaching methods are informed by interactions between the students and the teachers, addressing student language needs, knowledge of academic cultures and expectations in relation to students' own perceived readiness for study. In our view it is a responsive program and in Kumaravadivelu's (2003, 2008) terms, it responds to the particularities of students and teachers, the teachers' practicalities, their sense-making, theory building and the seeking of possibilities for transformation. The program's responsiveness to the students' needs and giving space to student voice provides a useful model of pre-departure EAP. The program, while contextualised within the Lao setting, also provides a framework that would be suitable for pre-departure EAP programs delivered elsewhere. It is based on principles which incorporate contemporary approaches to EAP and, perhaps more importantly the central focus on the particularities of the students' needs. The gathering of the students' questions enhances the program's authentic responses to students learning about a new academic culture.

The process of collecting students' questions and concerns seems of great benefit, as students' initial questions, responses and attitudes to new academic practices will undoubtedly be significant to their success. We acknowledge that our suggestion of using student questions as a basis for teaching decisions is only one way of incorporating student voice into course design and teaching practice and teachers in other contexts may come up with different, more locally relevant alternatives. For EAP to be effective and develop students' confidence to expand their academic identities in ways appropriate to the target academic culture, programs need to

address the wide range of student needs and concerns from a sociocultural perspective with a central focus on student voice.

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