

ELT Research Papers 16.06

# Using action research to explore technology in language teaching: international perspectives

Anne Burns and Nur Kurtoğlu-Hooton

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# Abstract

There are no studies, as far as we know, that examine how ELT teachers around the world can be united through online engagement in a collaborative action research project. This study provides an investigation of the processes and practices involved in conducting action research on the use of ICT and new technologies in the classroom as experienced by 12 teachers who participated in such a project in 2015. The project was a collaborative partnership between the authors, university-based researchers who acted as facilitators, and teachers, instructing students from primary to university/adult levels, who volunteered to conduct action research with us over a period of six months.

The study reports on how the project was implemented, the responses of the teachers to conducting action research, and what lessons were learned about initiating a virtual action research process across a wide range of national contexts. It also provides accounts written by the teachers of their teaching practices, incorporating the use of new technology, that are potentially of value to other teachers, both within the specific local contexts concerned and also more generally. The findings indicate that the teachers were unanimously enthusiastic about opportunities to undertake research relevant to their own engagement with new technologies, despite various challenges, such as time, resource and course constraints, and differing levels of support from colleagues and managers. They also highlight that a virtual action research teacher development programme needs to be facilitated in an open and dynamic way, according to demands on teachers' time, workloads and unexpected eventualities. It is anticipated that the findings from the data could inform professional development policy and planning, particularly in relation to online strategies through which language teacher action research engagement could be promoted.

**Part 1:  
Investigating the use  
of action research to  
explore technology**



# 1

## Introduction

This study offered English language teachers working in different international locations the opportunity to conduct action research (AR) locally on the use of ICT and new technologies in their teaching contexts. This overall topic for research focused on a British Council priority research area for English language teaching. The study aimed to investigate the teachers' experiences of doing practitioner action research, and identify what they had learned as a result both professionally and about the use of technology. It also aimed to build a model of a community of AR practice for an international group of teachers. The project was innovative in that there are few, if any, studies of language teacher researchers working collaboratively across international boundaries to investigate a common area of practice and to share their findings and insights.

The key objectives of the study were to: i) introduce teachers to the concepts and processes of AR; ii) identify the nature of the teachers' AR experiences (both positive and negative); and iii) disseminate the major insights for effective practice in the use of ICT and new technologies arising from the teachers' research.

The 12 teacher researchers who participated were all English language teachers, with experience ranging from three to more than 30 years, with the majority having between ten and 20 years' experience.

Overall, the study aims to respond to the following research questions:

1. What are the responses of the participants to the training in AR they receive through virtual workshops?
2. What do the participants believe they have gained in learning about practitioner action research?
3. What challenges have they faced in conducting practitioner action research?
4. What recommendations about action research would they make to other teachers?
5. What examples of effective practice in classroom use of ICT and new technologies can be shared with other ELT teachers internationally as a result of this project?

# 2

## Literature Review

Action research has been increasingly viewed as a means for teachers to regenerate their practice through investigation of pedagogical interests, issues and concerns in their own classrooms (Burns, 1999, 2010; Borg, 2013). In many countries around the world, Ministries of Education are also advocating AR as part of English language teacher continuing professional development (CPD) and are encouraging the inclusion of an AR component in pre-service and in-service training programmes. However, there is still limited documented investigation of the experiences of teachers who carry out AR, their understandings of the processes involved, the changes in their self-perception of themselves as teachers, and the challenges and successes they encounter in this form of professional development. Such research as exists tends to focus on specific national locations, such as Australia (Burns, 2014), Chile (Smith et al., 2014), Hong Kong (Tinker Sachs, 2002), Oman (Borg, 2008), Singapore (Hadley, 2003), Turkey (Dikilitaş et al., 2015) and the UAE (Gallagher and Bashir-Ali, 2007), rather than the experiences of teachers across a wide range of locations. This study takes a first step in the direction of investigating the experiences of teachers across a range of national backgrounds working collaboratively towards addressing a common priority area. The area selected, namely the use of ICT and new technologies in the ELT classroom, is now one of wide interest to the ELT profession in general.

### What is action research?

Action research is a form of research conducted by participants in a social situation, who are at the same time both active agents and investigators of their own 'communities of practice' (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Burns, 2010). In language teaching, action research is typically conducted by teachers wishing to explore in depth various aspects of teaching or learning in the classroom. It involves conducting a systematic, but dynamic, process of research with the aim of gaining deeper understandings of practices within the classroom and enhancing the conditions for teaching and learning that already exist (Burns, 2014).

Action research is now widely advocated as a means for teaching practitioners to gain greater insights into their practices, to renew their pedagogical approaches in their local contexts, and to

accommodate recent innovations or changes in teaching approaches. Recent publications (e.g. Borg, 2010, 2013; Burns and Edwards, 2014) also reveal the complexities involved in such shifts in focus towards the notion of teacher engagement in research. Studies looking at teachers as both consumers and doers of research indicate that for teachers to successfully undertake action research they need opportunities to investigate issues closely aligned with their own questions or concerns about their daily work, support from experienced facilitators, and acknowledgement of their work from their institutions, administrators and peers. It is this close engagement and support that potentially leads to sustained changes in teaching practices (Burns and Edwards, 2016; Dikilitaş and Wyatt, 2015).

Recent research findings have also noted the importance of support factors at the macro, meso and micro level (see Burns and Edwards, 2014; 2016). In particular, supporting teacher engagement in AR means tapping into the realities of teachers' daily work and the inevitable restrictions on their time. Providing concentrated time release to conduct meaningful practitioner research at the classroom level can lead to enhanced teaching and improved student learning and is a productive investment. The virtual workshops central to this project provided such an opportunity. Under such supported circumstances, teacher research can then potentially contribute to larger-scale change and broader quality improvement. Teacher researchers also need opportunities to network with colleagues, including other teachers, teacher educator facilitators and those with expertise in AR, and have opportunities to report and disseminate their achievements. The international aspects of this project provided that opportunity on a broad scale, which proved to be attractive to practitioners. Finally, there needs to be a clear structural framework that steers the programme towards defined, but not pre-specified, outcomes and affirms teachers' participation by informing others. In short, the engagement of teachers in a well-supported action research process is seen to have considerable long-term effects and can "bridge the gap between formal qualifications and effectiveness in the classroom" (Borg, 2013: 217).

## The action research model

The process of conducting AR is generally referred to as a spiral or cycle of movements between action and research (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988; Burns, 1999). The teacher researcher identifies areas or topics for investigation that are perceived to be relevant to his or her teaching context and plans to undertake action to enhance the current situation and deepen understanding about it. The teacher researcher systematically observes and documents what happens as a result of these actions. The changes in practice and research findings that eventuate may be unpredictable and raise new directions for further action, which can then, in turn, be observed and documented. Various theoretical models of AR are available to guide the twin processes of action and reflection that are central to this form of investigation. One of the best known is that outlined by Kemmis and McTaggart (1988). While more complex and extended descriptions and representations of the processes of AR have been proposed (e.g. Cohen et al., 2000), Kemmis and McTaggart's model was selected for this project as it seems relatively self-explanatory and is intuitively appealing. The four stages in the model encompass:

- Develop a plan of critically informed action to improve what is already happening.
- Act to implement the plan.
- Observe the effects of the critically informed action in the context in which it occurs.
- Reflect on these effects as the basis for further planning, subsequent critically informed action and so on, through a succession of stages.

## Guiding principles for this research

In our approach to facilitating and conducting action research with teachers in this project, we also adopted the core principles outlined by Somekh (2006: 6-8):

1. Action research integrates research and action in a series of flexible cycles involving holistic rather than separate steps: the collection of data about the topic of investigation; analysis and interpretation of that data; the planning and introduction of action strategies to bring about positive changes through further data collection, analysis and interpretation ... and so forth to other flexible cycles until a decision is taken to intervene in this process in order to publish its outcomes to date.
2. Action research is conducted by a collaborative partnership of participants and researchers

whose roles and relationships are sufficiently fluid to maximise mutual support and sufficiently differentiated to allow individuals to make appropriate contributions given existing constraints.

3. Action research involves the development of knowledge and understanding of a unique kind. The focus on change and development in a natural social situation, such as classrooms, and the involvement of participant researchers who are 'insiders' to that situation, gives access to the kinds of knowledge and understanding that are not accessible to traditional researchers from the outside.
4. Action research involves a high level of reflexivity and sensitivity to the self in mediating the whole research process.
5. Action research involves exploratory engagement with a wide range of existing knowledge drawn from ... fields of social science, in order to test its explanatory power and practical usefulness.
6. Action research engenders powerful learning for participants through combining research with reflection on practice.

## Using ICT and new technologies in language teaching

Learning contexts today "are a hybrid of overlapping physical and virtual spaces which flow into and out of each other, tied together by new technologies" (Dudeny et al., 2013: 338), with "learning spreading into wirelessly networked physical spaces anywhere in the world" (ibid.). The Web 2.0 platforms, also commonly known as social networking, which include blogs, wikis, podcasting and e-portfolios, have over the last decade or so become increasingly popular as teaching tools in the language classroom context, providing an ideal e-learning context through mobile learning (see, for example, Jimoyiannis, 2012). Such learning "is a natural outcome of the growth in small portable devices" (Clarke, 2008), providing learners with opportunities to network with other learners and their tutors. Smartphones and personal digital assistants such as the iPad, which have encouraged the use of e-learning, are being advocated as powerful learning tools by many institutions across the world. Much has been written about technological innovation integrated within classroom practices. Here we include two such examples – the former for its practical use and guidance for teachers and teacher educators, and the latter for its adoption of a tool that was used successfully and provided the choice of platform for the researchers of the action research project reported here.

Kukulska-Hulme et al. (2015) discuss what it means for teachers to use a mobile pedagogy in the classroom and when designing learning activities for use outside the classroom. They explore features of mobile pedagogy for language learning and teaching, and investigate how teachers can enable mobile pedagogy for these purposes. Participants in their study, which was located in the United Kingdom, included migrants studying English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) at a college, international students studying English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at two universities, and their teachers. Using their phones and tablets, these participants experimented with the ideas included in a guide provided by the researchers. The authors pose important questions such as: Do all learners have mobile devices? Are learners willing to use their personal mobile devices as part of their learning in or out of class? Do learners and teachers understand how their mobile devices work? In relation to this last question, they note that “devoting part of a lesson to group exploration of some features and capabilities while accessing peer expertise would be a good way of ascertaining those useful to language learning and contributing to digital literacy” (ibid: 23).

Kurtoğlu-Hooton (2013) reports on the use of an e-portfolio-based system (PebblePad) with a group of 18 MA students undertaking supervised teaching practice. The students reflected on their experiences of teaching using the virtual system after each teaching practice session and were also encouraged to use a classroom blog, which allowed them to discuss teaching matters with their peers and their tutors. In-house training sessions were provided for the students and staff to maximise the benefits of using the online tool as part of blended learning. The findings from the study showed that an e-portfolio-based system provided a dialogic teaching space, enabling the teacher educator and the teachers to have reflective conversations individually and with one another as well as share information with one another as part of a community. In order to follow up on these findings, it was decided to also experiment with the use of Pebble+ for the current research and investigate its potential for connecting a group of teachers working in widely distributed locations.

# 3

## Methodology

The project was conducted in two phases. In this section, we first explain the process for the recruitment of the teachers before describing the model and processes developed for Phase 1, which involved the action research with the teachers. We then outline Phase 2 and the methodology used to investigate the impact of the action research phase of the project.

### The recruitment of the teachers

In order to recruit teachers, we identified a selection of countries in Europe, the Middle East and South East Asia, and used our international contacts to disseminate information about the research. In addition, the British Council requested that the opportunity to participate be opened to British Council teaching centre teachers who were interested in classroom research and ICT so that they could forge links with other non-British Council teachers.

We decided to recruit a maximum of 16 teachers so that the management of the workshops, which involved virtual interaction, could be facilitated in such a way that teachers would receive sufficient support and feedback. Participation in the project was on a voluntary basis and through the completion of an expression of interest to join the action research group (see the Appendix in Part 1 for a copy of this form). The call for expressions of interest was sent via email to 14 British Council centres (in Europe, the Middle East and South East Asia) and four non-British Council institutions with which we had personal connections. As a result of the call, we recruited 12 teachers in total. Six were from a British Council teaching centre while the other six were non-British Council teachers in local educational systems.

The teachers who volunteered to participate lived and worked in Spain, Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Vietnam, Hong Kong and Japan. Their teaching contexts were varied and included higher education institutions and private language schools. The teachers participated in two groups. The six teachers located in Spain, Turkey and Iran formed the first group working with the UK researcher, while the other six teachers from Hong Kong, Japan, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Vietnam worked with the researcher based in Australia. All the

teachers conducted their research individually in their various workplaces, apart from three teachers in Turkey and two teachers in Hong Kong who worked together.

### Phase 1: The model for the teachers' action research

Each of the two groups met regularly via Skype to discuss the different phases of the project. In Phase 1, over a period of six months the researchers each offered three virtual two-hour workshops (via Skype group interaction) from two different locations: the UK (where the second author was based) and Australia (where the first author was based). These locations meant that workshops could be accommodated for the participating teachers across different time zones. The workshops were held on 30 January 2015, 15 April 2015 and 12 June 2015.

The virtual AR workshops involved:

- Introduction to the concepts, processes and procedures of action research (before and during Workshop 1).
- Assistance in focusing and refining research topics and key questions (Workshops 1 and 2).
- Development of action plans to initiate and sustain the research over the project duration (Workshops 1 and 2).
- Advice on data collection approaches, methods and tools (Workshops 1 and 2).
- Input on approaches to data analysis and description (Workshops 2 and 3).
- Guidance on writing accounts of the research in forms relevant and appealing to other practitioners (Workshop 3 and via a Facebook closed group).

### Processes for the AR project

Several weeks before the first workshop, the teachers were given access to the virtual platform Pebble+ via a username and password. The teachers were informed that during the project the group, including the facilitators, would make use of Pebble+. Before Workshop 1 the teachers were asked to use

this virtual platform, to introduce themselves to one another and to share their initial ideas for their project. They were also provided with PowerPoint slides, prepared by the first author as preparation for the first workshop. The intention was that Pebble+ would also give them the opportunity to contribute to blogs during the different cycles of their research over the six months planned for this phase. Before the first workshop the teachers were also sent an ethical approval form to complete prior to the start of their research. Moreover, they were requested to seek participant consent as required by their own institutions.

The aim of Workshop 1 was to enable the teachers to discuss and expand plans for their research, to refine initial questions, identify appropriate teaching strategies and resources relevant to each of the teachers' research focus, and discuss the next steps for their various projects. Six weeks after the workshop the teachers were asked to respond to a blog post in Pebble+ (see Figure 1):

The aim of Workshop 2 was for the teacher researchers to provide updates on how their research was proceeding, and to discuss and refine their plans with colleagues and the researcher. As appropriate, and in relation to the milestones required for the projects, further focusing of the topic, data collection and analysis procedures, as well as resources for the research were identified. A few weeks after the second set of workshops the teachers were invited to respond to a new blog entry on Pebble+ (see Figure 2):

**Figure 1:** Blog entry in Pebble+, March 2015

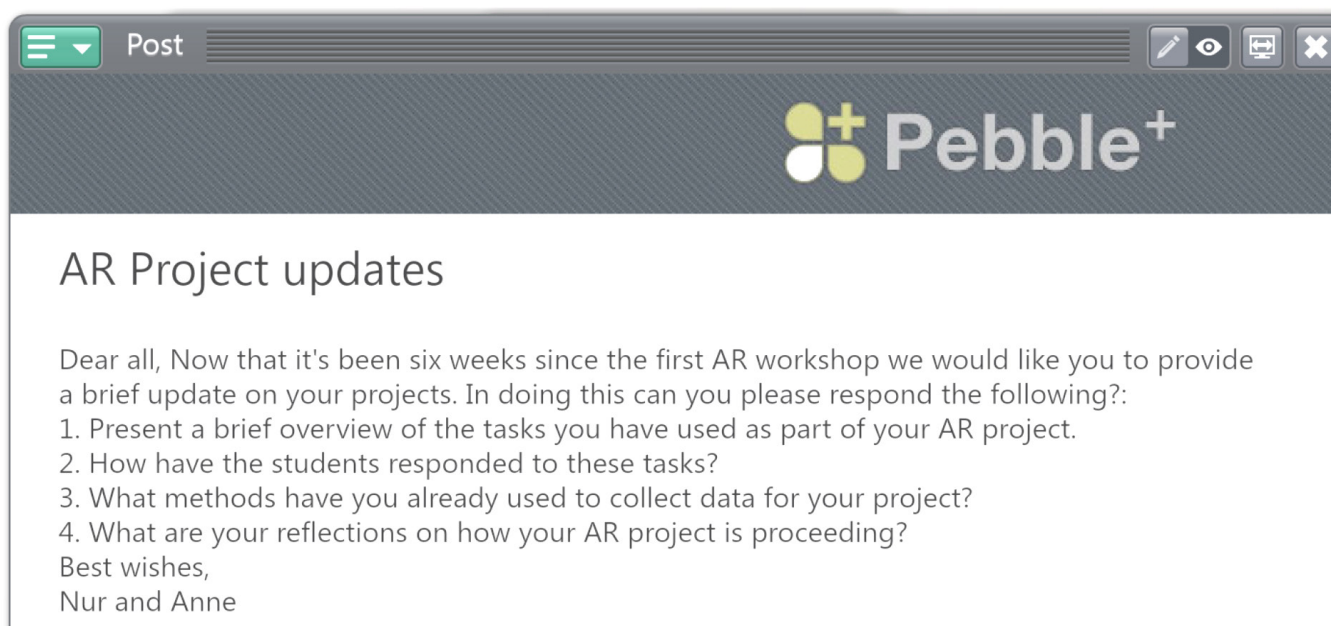
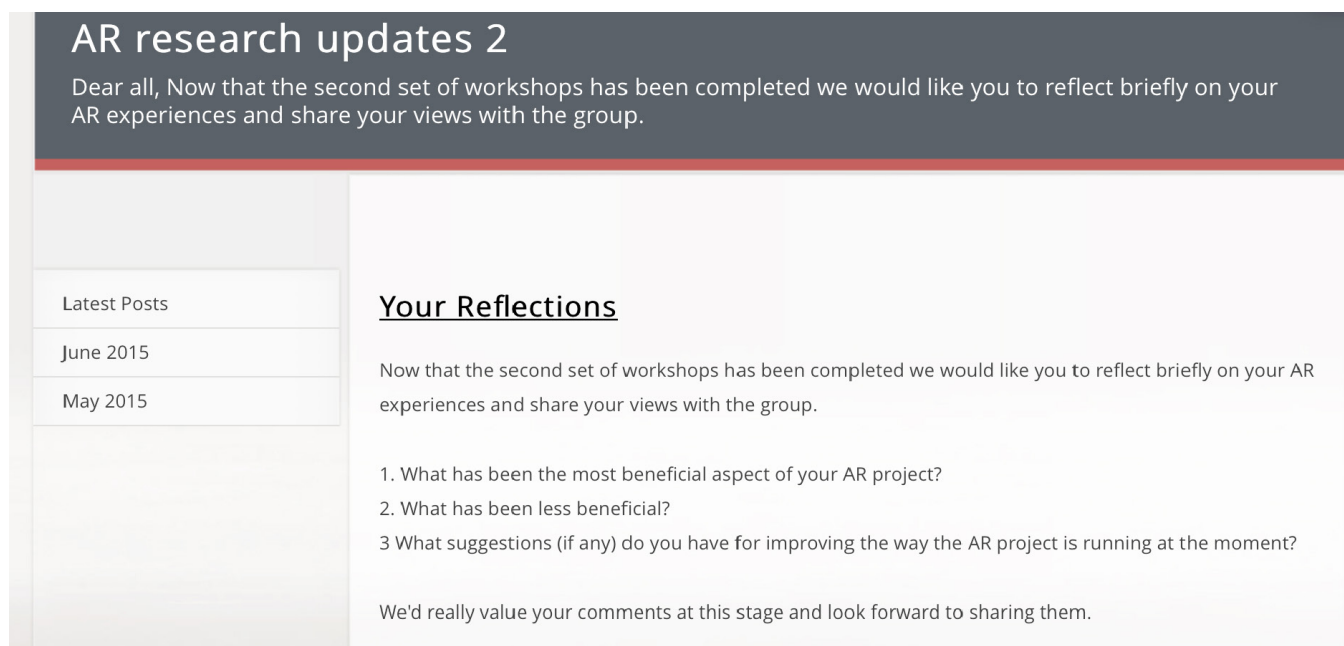


Figure 2: Blog entry in Pebble+, May 2015



Workshop 3 focused on discussing with the teacher researchers what conclusions they were reaching about their research and what support they needed to achieve the final stages. During this workshop, participants also discussed the writing of reports that would summarise their research projects.

Having outlined the model and processes for the project, we now turn to the research procedures that were used in the project.

### **Phase 2: Research procedures investigating the impact of the project**

In Phase 2, the researchers investigated the teachers' retrospective responses to their research experiences and supported their writing of short project summaries for dissemination to other ELT teachers internationally. These summaries are published in Part II of this report. Collectively, the data shed light on key issues related to the feasibility of action research conducted with teachers located in different international contexts. The impact on their practice relating to ICT and the use of technology in a range of different classrooms internationally was also documented.

The study of the impact of the project took a socio-cultural perspective on teacher education and continuing professional development (Johnson, 2009), which views teachers as key agents in their classrooms and critical players in their own professional development. We also adopted a qualitative interpretative-exploratory research paradigm (Dörnyei, 2007; Hart, 2009; Miles and Huberman, 1984) for this research. Our major goal was to obtain an 'insider' or emic (Burns, 2010; Richards, 2003; van Lier, 1988) perspective into

teachers' self-reported successes and challenges and to make these successes and challenges "visible for contemplation" (Hart, 2009: 46), thereby involving illuminative evaluation (ibid: 46–47). Qualitative evidence that captures participants' views, opinions and reflections is needed for such an orientation (Richards, 2003). Data was therefore collected through the audio recordings of the workshops (W), recordings of one-to-one meetings (M) with four of the teachers (Spain, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates, Vietnam), open-ended questionnaires (Q) conducted six months after the teachers' AR projects ended, and informal interaction through a blog tool on Pebble+ (P), the updated version of the virtual platform PebblePad.

The emphasis in collecting and analysing the data was on 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the teachers' experiences. Qualitative analysis aimed to identify major themes emerging from the data. Thematic analysis followed key steps as outlined by Lankshear and Knobel (2004: 336), and involved:

- Selecting texts and determining the units of analysis.
- Reading through the texts to be analysed a number of times, and marking each and all instances of the specific unit of analysis in the texts.
- Deciding whether contextual items need to be analysed and developing lists, categories or other organisation schemes.
- Developing lists, categories or other organisation schemes.

- Revisiting texts to see if anything has been missed out or overlooked.
- Interpreting results in the light of the theories framing the study.

In order to increase the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, the research assistant and both researchers conducted analytical triangulation through independent analysis. As the project involved investigating teachers' experiences of conducting AR on the use of ICT and new technology, we ensured that the use of the teachers' own words to represent their experiences was foregrounded.



# 4

## Findings and discussion

The data from the workshop recordings, one-to-one meetings, post-project questionnaires and the digital learning platform were all analysed qualitatively. The major themes arising from all the data sources are categorised in response to the first four research questions. The fifth question is addressed in Section 5. In presenting the data extracts, we refer to the teachers as T1, T2, T3 and so on in order to preserve anonymity.

### Participant responses to AR training

Overwhelmingly, the teachers were very positive about the training they received in conducting action research. Their responses indicated that they greatly valued the opportunity to develop research skills in such a way that related closely to their teaching. One particularly enthusiastic teacher commented: “There was nothing that I dislike about it. I love every minute of it” (T9M).

For most of them, conducting action research was a new experience and therefore receiving guidance in the processes of undertaking research, both from the researchers and other participants, was seen as valuable if not indispensable in “offering very constructive advice to move my research forward” (T9Q). The regular and predictable workshop structure during the six months that the teachers conducted their research was clearly valued, not only for the input provided by the researchers and other participants, but also because it helped maintain the momentum of the research:

*I would say the facilitation has been very effective. I benefit a lot from the online interaction, not only on Skype but also on our Facebook platform. [The researcher] was always there when I needed help and she was very effective when guiding me with the questions of my research questionnaire. All emails were answered with rich information. (T6Q)*

*I feel I work best when working towards goals and having ongoing deadlines and meetings has been very helpful to stay focused. (T5Q)*

Despite the fact that the teachers were unknown to each other at the beginning of the research and located across different geographical regions, they also pointed to the collaborative nature of the project as an important feature, and “one that has been particularly enjoyable” (T3Q). One major benefit of

collaboration was said to be the contact with other teachers working in a similar field. Another was the capacity to share resources, materials and teaching ideas:

*This project enabled me to contact other colleagues from all around the world, exchange information, seek consultancy. (T6Q)*

*It's been really nice getting to know other teachers from other parts of the world and their fascinating works. (T9Q)*

*Sharing recommended books/articles that are useful for research. (T8Q)*

*Really impressed by how much everyone else has done! (T9P)*

A further benefit was that it raised awareness of the fact that many challenges encountered in language teaching were common ones, no matter the location, which some teachers found reassuring:

*Collaborative meetings over Skype allowed me to connect with others and share ideas. Discovered that we share common problems. Received emotional support... (T2Q)*

In addition to the project collaboration, some of the teachers felt they had learned about a workable research model and tool for collaborating with other colleagues, through which they could share their findings and introduce other teachers to action research:

*I have been able to share some of what I have learnt with others who have been able to act on it. (T5Q)*

*I am now one of the two master trainers training teacher trainers on action research and I'm privileged to be able to share my actual action research experience with my colleagues and other teachers I come across, and I've already got three teachers on board so far. We're going to replicate my action research and do some others related to learner autonomy in the coming term. There'll also be other research interest groups to be formed and hopefully we'll start building a research community of practice. (T9Q)*

*I discovered the joy of working collaboratively with my colleagues and learned from their experiences*

*and found solutions to some of my challenges in the classroom. I believe it will have an impact on my own institution and colleagues if they see the published project summary. (T10Q)*

In their responses across all the data sets, none of the teachers expressed any regret or indifference about having participated in the project, a fact that could perhaps be attributed to the voluntary nature of their participation.

### **Professional and personal gains from learning about practitioner research**

The data suggested that the teachers had gained in numerous ways from participating in the project. Many of these gains were professional, relating to the advances they had made in their skills and knowledge as teachers, but also in using technology in their teaching practices. However, other gains emerged that were more personal in nature, relating to teachers' sense of their identity and agency, or "empowerment" in language teaching.

### **Professional gains as teachers**

There were numerous comments about how the project had contributed to the teachers' professional development and "was a great chance to improve my professional skills" (T9Q). One major gain related to the enhancement of practitioner research skills:

*It is ultimately the sign of an active practitioner – someone who has the skills and interest in continuously developing, and probing for observations of what is happening in their classes at various points during their careers. It also is a way to increase the objectivity of your own reflection. (T3Q)*

*I now understand more about action research and its potential benefits, and so I'll continue to do it in order to better my teaching and my students' learning experiences. (T9Q)*

*Working on this project has given me an even deeper understanding of the importance of how to approach and develop my action research techniques. (T1Q)*

The teachers also reported much greater awareness about various aspects of their classroom practices. One dimension related to the teacher's own teaching, where he or she "learnt and made changes where and when suitable in my classroom practice" (T5M). The research tools of action research were seen as an important catalyst to explicitly raising awareness and deepening understanding about teaching practices:

*Post-DELTA, we tend to lapse into a certain way of doing things, and this project has given me the chance to re-examine certain aspects of my teaching. (T6Q)*

*I think recording and transcribing your own classes is one of the best ways to develop an awareness of the way you teach – I have done so on several occasions in the last four years and each time have come away with a greater sense of particular aspects of my teaching. (T3Q)*

*Listening to myself has also made me significantly more aware of my own language use in class, and has made me more conscious of the model I am providing, and of using higher-order questions. (T4Q)*

*I have carried out several action research projects during my teaching experience, and I can say that this practice helps teachers reflect on their teaching. Since it focuses on a specific area that one chooses to work on, it provides the researcher with ample data through which they can reflect on their teaching and decide whether to keep on with their existing practice, alter it or to completely give up on it. Therefore, I strongly recommend other teachers to carry out action research since it is a great way to see how well a certain practice goes, and to solve any problems with their teaching. (T12Q)*

The teachers also reported becoming much more aware of their students' learning needs. As a result of "learning more about my learners themselves, and the challenges they face" (T7Q), they also felt better equipped to adapt and improve their teaching practices.

*The thing is that it is all because preparing it is one thing and as a teacher ... what you see is another and the students also what they see is a different thing, you know. (T6M)*

*By doing this research, I got to understand my students better and got the chance to really consider and analyse their backgrounds, needs, learning styles and preferences, strengths and weaknesses, and learnt how to deal with emerging issues and manage to keep improving myself instead of giving up at the first encounter. (T9Q)*

### **Professional gains in using technology**

Several of the teachers explained that the trial-and-error processes of action research had increased their knowledge of how to integrate technology into their teaching. In some instances they used the research insights to refine the content and activities they were developing:

*It made me feel much more confident about questioning and therefore redesigning activities in lesson plans/courses that require time spent “researching on iPads”. (T4Q)*

In addition, they were able to learn more about the technology tools they were using in a deeper and more systematic way:

*I did not know a lot about the tool and this study gave me the opportunity to further explore and learn all sorts of details and features of this great tool. Now, I am more aware of which features are more efficient and what is very attractive about the tool as well as the lacking points. I am so glad that I did so. (T6Q)*

*I boosted my awareness of the theories and approaches involved in teaching English, and developed a better understanding of the world of technology and the way it can be implemented in our day-to-day teaching and learning of English. (T1Q)*

The research process also increased awareness of how students might be reacting to the technology and how it might be assisting their learning:

*They've worked together a lot more ... and they've definitely become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in writing. I'm using Jing ... and they are getting a lot of verbal feedback ... they all said they would like to continue using the wiki. (T7W)*

*The research results provided some very useful data that enabled me to look at the tool in the eye of the students. (T8Q)*

In addition, the teachers' experimentation with technology sometimes had a 'ripple effect' into the institution more broadly. In some cases, they reported that their research and its outcomes were gradually being taken up by other colleagues or the adoption of technology was being considered more broadly into the institutional curriculum.

*My interaction with the tool, gave me the opportunity to collaborate with my colleagues who are also interested in using this tool. My colleague, who first introduced me to this tool, and I went to see the director of our institution so that an institutional membership for the tool can be granted. Once we have the pro version of the tool and it becomes a commonly used tool, I would like to share the findings of my research with my colleagues. (T6Q)*

## Personal gains

Personal gains were also reported as a result of the teachers' participation. Two major themes that emerged from the data were affective gains including increased motivation, confidence and a sense of “empowerment” or personal agency; while another was, rather surprisingly, the gains some of the teachers felt they had made in improving their own language development.

Among the affective gains, several of the teachers reported that the project had renewed their motivation for teaching, sometimes in situations where they were experiencing frustration, burn-out or lack of support. Conducting action research seemed to have helped some of them “reset my attitude towards my job” (T2Q). In addition, the project itself had created a structure that motivated teachers to undertake and complete action research:

*If I had not decided to participate in this project, it is unlikely I would have sustained the motivation to engage in action research, or at least to have made the effort to try to report this formally. (T5Q)*

Some teachers also referred to the way their own motivation for the project had increased their ability to motivate their students, while others reported they were more confident in trying out new approaches in their classrooms.

*The project helped me discover an alternative way of ... instruction, which was motivating for me to teach and motivating for the students to work. (T12Q)*

*If you remember for three weeks I paused the activity because it was this [national] holiday because some of my students were on a trip. You cannot believe me, they were just sending me private messages and they were asking me to post words. (T8W)*

Others felt their action research had been “empowering” in giving them “the tools to use to bring about change in classroom teaching and learning” (T2Q) and one teacher recommended it especially for teachers at the beginning of their career, stating that “it helps novice teachers to build confidence”. (T10Q).

An area related to personal gains that was more unexpected was the reference by some of the teachers whose first language was not English to improvements in their own language skills. These teachers felt that the systematic attention they had paid to the development of particular skills for their students had impacted on their own language learning.

All English teachers, particularly non-native ones, were students of English one day and there might be a lot of flaws in their knowledge of English. Participating in this project and helping my students improve their command of English vocabulary provided me with a golden opportunity to correct those faults. I improved my vocabulary in many ways such as pronunciation, collocation, part of speech, etc. I also boosted my awareness of the theories and approaches involved in teaching English and developed a better understanding of the world of technology and the way it can be implemented in our day-to-day teaching and learning of English. (T8Q)

### Challenges in conducting practitioner action research on technology

Despite the teachers' enthusiasm about their participation in the project, they identified several challenges. A major challenge, well recognised in the literature on practitioner research, was time:

*I must say time constraints would be the most challenging for me. (T9Q)*

*I think the main issue has been to do with time constraints; not having as much time to dedicate to the project as I'd have liked. This is not to do with restrictions from the AR organisers [i.e. the researchers], more to do with my own teaching schedule and other responsibilities. (T7Q)*

*Time is a major issue for learners to do regular writing, and a major issue for me in marking it! (T1P)*

Other challenges related to teachers having to work within prescriptive timetables or syllabus requirements set out by their institutions, which did not give them ready access to the student groups they worked with or the type of skills teaching they wanted to focus on through technology. In addition, they referred to a lack of technology resources, such as accounts for particular software they felt to be effective being cancelled, or limitations in the availability of hardware for students to use. These kinds of challenges were inter-related with the extent of support and recognition for their research they were receiving within their institutions. One aspect was a lack of interest from other colleagues or, as one teacher put it, the feeling of "swimming against a tide of teachers' negativity towards learning technology" (T2Q). However, lack of interest and recognition also extended to teachers' managers:

*Obviously, there were benefits to the learners and teachers involved; however, there was very little interest in the project from others [teachers or managers]. (T3Q)*

*[One challenge was] maintaining enthusiasm in the face of discouragement from less enthusiastic teaching colleagues and other institutional constraints. No support from my academic management team. (T2Q)*

*Another challenge is probably my lack of colleagues' and leaders' support, which could have helped me to have more time for the research. (T9Q)*

*In addition [to time], sometimes it is discouraging not to have any support [such as time, appreciation, etc.] from the institution that you are working for. (T12Q)*

Despite feeling well supported by the project structure, its collaborative nature and the availability of input and guidance from the researchers and other participants, the teachers were aware of limitations in their research skills. One challenge was understanding the cyclical and emergent nature of action research:

*I was reading [the Powerpoint presentation used in the first workshop] and one expression here 'critically informed changes' puzzled me a little bit. After I've listened to everyone I realise that I am going to need a lot of guidance. I am more confused now. (T6R)*

*My first challenge was to understand more about the AR approaches and techniques; I also encountered some problems with deciding exactly what to include and omit from my research. (T1Q)*

*'Messy' nature of collaborative action research. Not linear model. Possibly exponential? I attempted a number of things in parallel. (T2Q)*

Teachers also expressed their concerns about finding a research focus, collecting data "which is not really related to the study" (T6R), balancing the dual roles of classroom teacher and researcher, what kind of outcomes they were aiming for, and how they should report them:

*Action research is something totally new to me but still I'm not sure about the way I'm running it ... how I have to write everything down. (T8R)*

A final challenge related to the online model and process used for the research and how it was itself managed through technology. In conducting the project with two different groups located across different time zones, the first challenge was to find a platform that would enable group meetings to be held. The various university-based platforms available to the researchers often required internal access and additional technical support and were not very user-friendly for the teachers concerned.

Eventually, we decided to use Skype because of its group access facility. However, various problems arose in terms of speed and stable connections, and in some countries Skype is banned or restricted. In addition, the teachers' various commitments, or changes in duties, meant they were not always available at agreed times. These problems were noted by the participants:

*... unfortunately internet problems occurred and some of us were not able to fully participate in group discussions. (T1Q)*

*Technical glitches with Skype and Pebble+ meant that they did not always facilitate communication between participants. Future recommendations for good sharing platforms are Edmodo, Schoology and Google Group. (T7Q)*

Initial attempts to provide ongoing interaction between all the participants through Pebble+ also proved to be very difficult. Although most of the teachers attempted to introduce themselves, outline their projects and describe their early progress with their research, and the researchers also made some efforts to respond to the posts, the platform proved to be very cumbersome to use and most of the teachers reacted negatively to it:

*I personally found the platform we initially used extremely difficult to access and post to. (T5Q)*

*PebblePad (Pebble+) was a little slow and clunky: I find the whole log-in procedure is a bit of a barrier to entry. (T2W)*

*I think it was hard to get used to the platform we were recommended to use for communication. The platform itself was complicated, too. I wasn't able to interact with other participants in the study. We could have used a simpler platform like BlackBoard or even Facebook. (T10Q)*

As a result of such comments, we established a closed Facebook group, which was much more usable and familiar to the participants, and which they found easy to use.

*I am also glad we were able to move away from using Pebble +. Perhaps Facebook is a more convenient option. (T3Q)*

The virtual and online dimensions of the project, with its three workshop meetings spaced out across six months, also meant that the participants did not always feel well connected with their colleagues. While the teachers' collaborations during the workshops themselves always appeared positive and supportive (as in the comment "Exchanging ideas with the other participants through

videoconferencing was beneficial" (T10Q), it was clear that not all the teachers felt as connected with each other's research as they would have liked to be:

*I would like to have more contact and interaction with other participants. (T5Q)*

*I don't really know what other participants are doing. I have some understanding of what a few people are up to in my group, but no idea whatsoever about what's going on in the other group. (T2Q)*

*I would just like to make a suggestion for a final face-to-face meeting/seminar at a conference, perhaps, for us all to share our stories. (T9Q)*

This latter challenge needs to be acknowledged as a limitation of the way the programme was set up and one that requires further investigation. It is possible that if Pebble+ had worked as initially anticipated, this limitation might have been addressed to some extent. Comments such as the following post from the Pebble+ platform indicate this possibility:

*'This sounds great to me ☺.*

*When I read 'the vast majority have responded positively' I wondered how many students were involved? I also wondered about why you say this requires a very motivated group of students – was this IELTS group particularly motivated would you say? Maintaining motivation to write over the whole course or longer courses is something I can really relate to. I wondered about that and novelty; things often seem to work for a few weeks and then interest fades. I wonder whether there is a way of adding some novelty factor at regular two-week phases or something, or whether that might help sustain interest and motivation...?' (T5P)*

## **Recommendations about action research to other teachers**

The teachers were unanimous in indicating that they would recommend action research to other teachers, sometimes using emphatics such as "absolutely," "definitely," "certainly" and "yes!" although one teacher added "but with the caveat that they will almost definitely need to invest substantial unpaid time of their own" (T5Q). Some of them saw action research as an important opportunity for professional development, while others connected it with being active in developing as a professional teacher:

*Action research as professional development provided opportunity to reflect on what I do. Action research as extension of normal reflective practice is more rigorous and therefore might conceivably*

*lead to more effective outcomes? I think it is ultimately the sign of an active practitioner – someone who has the skills and interest in continuously developing, and probing for observations of what is happening in their classes at various points during their careers. It also is a way to increase the objectivity of your own reflection. (T3Q)*

Others valued its capacity to move their thinking away from the isolation of individual classroom practice and to build their professionalism through engagement and discussion with other colleagues involved in the broader English language teaching community:

*Collaborative action research can build a professional learning community with other teachers; a useful foil to ‘teachers as islands’ and practitioner isolation. Personally, I’m finding the experience of working closely with my teaching colleagues both enjoyable and rewarding. (T2Q)*

*Firstly, you get to do some research with guidance of experts who are willing to help all the time. Also, you find the chance to interact with colleagues from all around the world. (T6Q)*

They also perceived that action research offered considerable benefits for teaching practice, as it led to changes that were based on evidence, and also provided tools for further learning as teachers:

*I would [recommend it], for the benefits to their own teaching practice. (T4Q)*

*Completing the action research cycle results in some kind of transformation of the research into actual and observable actions. Empowers teachers by giving them the tools to use to bring about change in classroom teaching and learning. (T2Q)*

*Absolutely, it’s a flexible and simple way to get involved in research projects without the heavy workload or the necessity to do a lot of background reading. (T7Q)*

*I would definitely recommend it because it is a really helpful way to improve the efficiency of teaching methods. (T1Q)*

Other comments referred to the fact that teachers had knowledge to offer that was valuable to others, but that at the same time their involvement in action research offered them opportunities to deepen their knowledge about English language teaching and about their students:

*Action research is conducted by practising teachers who are valuable sources of knowledge about their own classroom situations. As a result,*

*change can be implemented more credibly because practising teachers will find the results more valid for their needs. (T2Q)*

*Doing action research gives them [other teachers] a chance to build up a working knowledge of ELT through experience first and reading second. (T8Q)*

*Main reasons include the above-mentioned benefits and the enriching experience I personally had with my students during my own AR project. (T9Q)*

The fifth research question related to what examples of effective practice in classroom use of ICT and new technologies can be shared with other ELT teachers internationally as a result of this project. The accounts offered by the participating teachers in the second part of this report provide such examples. While claims cannot be made that they are model or ideal responses to this question, they offer a set of interesting case studies on how teachers operating in different international locations took up opportunities to investigate the use of technology, and to initiate and change the activities they used to assist their students in the process. They offer ideas for other teachers that might resonate with them and encourage them to increase their own use of technology.

The comments presented to support the findings discussed in this section need, of course, to be seen within the context of this particular project, where the participants were guided and supported through a structured six-month action research experience. It may be that in many other contexts where teachers become involved in action research their experiences would be very different. Nevertheless, the findings suggest implications and recommendations that could be considered in other programmes designed to introduce a similar international action research model, and it is to these suggestions that we now turn.

# 5

## Implications and recommendations

It is clear that international online professional development opportunities are highly valued by teachers, as they learn to connect with others through various virtual platforms. Language teachers collaborating in this way can exchange information and ideas that enable them to enter an international community of ELT practice and potentially expand their perspectives on their work as English language teachers. They discover that they share common problems and similar goals and can receive professional and emotional support from one another. For teacher educators wishing to initiate similar opportunities a number of recommendations can be made.

First, participation in an international online action research programme should be voluntary, since it requires a commitment of additional time on the part of the teacher, and a willingness to be open to new ways of teaching, as well as confronting the need for changes in practice. Teachers who are enthusiastic about conducting research within their own classroom contexts are more likely to find the experience of participating enriching, as opposed to those who are required to participate.

Virtual learning platforms need to be selected carefully, with due consideration given to issues of connectivity, stability and ease of access. Platforms selected for workshops need to be supplemented with other means of ongoing connection, such as blog and/or social networking sites, so that teachers are supported during the whole process and can feel connected with each other's research. Moreover, as Kukulska-Hulme et al. (2015) suggest, it would be valuable for training opportunities to be provided to help teachers feel confident using technological tools in online interactions. Ongoing technical support needs to be available and individuals need to know who to contact when they require assistance.

The facilitation of action research virtually across international contexts requires flexibility. The setting up of mutually convenient times for virtual meetings must take account of different time zones, a wide range of institutional structures and timetabling arrangements, as well as unexpected changes in participants' teaching commitments. Moreover, virtual workshops provide opportunities for teachers to learn about each other's action research but are not sufficient in themselves. Consideration needs to

be given to what additional opportunities exist through discussion boards and webinars to create forums for research dissemination.

It is clear that while teachers themselves may be individually enthusiastic and willing to conduct research on their own teaching, managers play a vital role in recognising the potential of teacher action research. This potential extends both to the expansion of institutional professional development programmes and to the benefits for institutional curriculum development. Managers need to support the time and effort teachers invest in their research and encourage other teachers' participation. Teachers' research learning experiences and their project outcomes can over time become central to enhancing the quality of instruction across the whole institution. As Colin Hoy, one of the participating teachers, notes in his research summary in Part 2 of this report:

*Even a modest project like this can generate credible evidence for change and help shape new learning spaces. What is absolutely imperative is making a start. Our learners are ready and waiting!*

# Part 1: Appendix

Name:	Number of years teaching English:
Email:	Address:
Tel (work):	Tel (mobile) – Optional:
Institution:	
Research topic (related to ICT/new technologies):	
Please attach an outline (no more than one page) indicating what you would like to do in the project. In your outline include brief information about: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Your current teaching context.</li><li>2. The class(es) you would like to work with in your research.</li><li>3. The main teaching/learning issues in ICT you would like to investigate and why.</li></ol>	
Participation: Please confirm your commitment to participate in this project. Tick ✓ below <input type="checkbox"/> I am prepared to participate in the project and attend all three virtual workshops. <input type="checkbox"/> I am prepared to conduct action research in my classroom.	
Name (please print) _____	
Signature _____ Date _____	
Confirmation by the line manager or nominee:  I confirm that _____ (name of institution) endorses this Expression of Interest and will support the teacher's attendance at virtual workshops and involvement in this project. I understand that the project will be conducted over twelve months from January 2015.  Name: _____ Position: _____  Signature _____  Email: _____  Date: _____	



# **Part 2: Teacher researchers' project summaries**

# 1

## Improving the use of an approach to contextual design of Technology-enhanced Learning (TEL) activities in a teacher training course

Joshua Underwood, British Council Bilbao (Spain)

### Introduction

As a teacher trainer and technology enthusiast I want to know how I can help teachers identify and realise opportunities to use technology effectively. In my experience, teachers often recognise that technology can offer engaging learning opportunities but are concerned about whether these are more effective than alternatives and/or appropriate under the specific constraints in which they teach. Clearly, teaching and learning are highly contextual and require context-sensitive approaches (Arnold and Ducate, 2015). My action research builds on previous uses of an ecological design framework (Luckin, 2010) to develop learning activities that exploit technology in ways that are contextually appropriate. This approach foregrounds design of meaningful, effective learning activities while exploring how technology may make these activities possible, more engaging or easier to deliver, within the constraints of any particular setting. The action research described here aims to help make this design framework as accessible and useful to teachers as possible.

### Context

I introduced the design framework in a continuing professional development (CPD) English language course for teachers. I chose this course because it aims to develop English language proficiency and give participants experience of integrated uses of technology in language learning. The course participants are encouraged to reflect on their learning experiences and consider how these might transfer to their teaching practices and/or how these might help them to continue developing their own English after the course. The course consisted of two-hour face-to-face sessions, two evenings a week, for 20 weeks between November and May. Online interaction was supported throughout the course via Edmodo (see Figure 1). I was the only trainer for the course.

### Participants

There were 14 participants, nine women and five men. Five were infant or primary class teachers, seven taught subjects at secondary (e.g. Physical Education, Art, Music, Technology, Science) and two were teaching in further education. Evidence of English competence at higher than CEFR B2 level was an entry requirement. Attendance at face-to-face sessions throughout the course was consistently high. Participants were almost always well motivated and enthusiastic despite the course being held in the evenings after work. However, completion of voluntary, out-of-class tasks, was often below 50 per cent.

### Action research process

Although a single cycle of research is described here, this intervention built on earlier uses of the design framework and is informing a new run of the course. Previous work suggested the framework needs to be presented as simple, easy and quick to use, and useful.

Early in the course I gave a short presentation on my own use of the design framework to help teenage students develop their own Technology-enhanced Language Learning (TEL) activities (Underwood, 2014). We then discussed classroom research and informed consent. I explained that I was interested in understanding how participants might use technology to better support their own and their students' learning and that I would like to collect, analyse and report their ideas as collected through classroom discussions, comments in Edmodo and their responses to design tasks.

I presented the framework as seven key questions to consider in the design of TEL activities:

- What do we want students to learn?
- Why will students want to engage in the activity?
- How do we want them to learn?

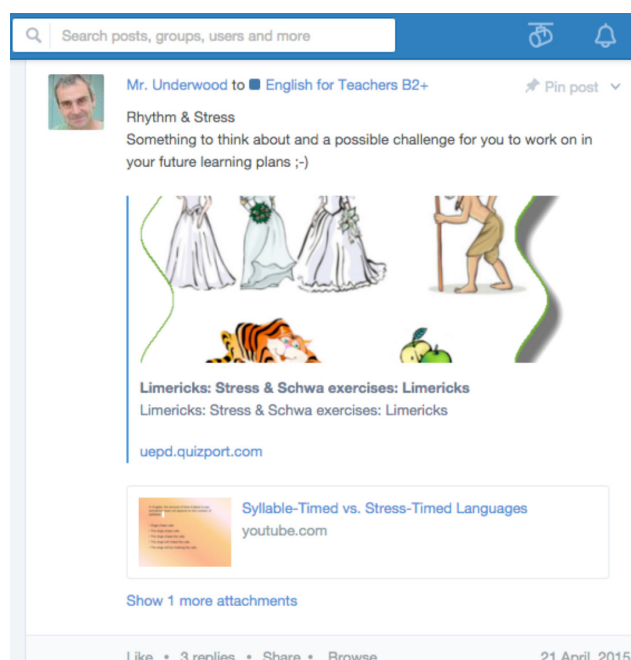
- Who might they learn with?
- Where might they learn?
- When might they learn?
- How might technology change answers to the above in ways that are likely to improve the teaching and learning experience?

To demonstrate utility I referred to my own uses of the framework, as mentioned previously, and over the course of several sessions we tried out a range of TEL activities. Finally, I asked course participants to develop individual plans, using the questions, to support their own learning beyond the end of the course.

### Course TEL activities

I introduced Edmodo<sup>1</sup> and created our group in a face-to-face class. We also occasionally used Edmodo on a class set of iPads in class. However, Edmodo was mainly used out of class: to share and comment on materials as a group; to support individual student–teacher communication; and to set, hand in and provide feedback on voluntary extension tasks. Tasks were completed as digital documents or links to audio-recordings. I provided feedback in comments on digital documents and occasionally audio-recordings. All participants used Edmodo at least once. Over the course there were approximately 50 teacher-to-whole class posts, 30 participant-to-class posts, 60+ replies to posts and several instances of one-to-one participants-to-teacher interaction (mainly requests for extra resources or other help).

**Figure 1:** Teacher-to-class post on Edmodo



Also, throughout the course participants were encouraged to find and participate in English language Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) aligned to their interests. Materials from two MOOCs were demonstrated and discussed in class. Many participants joined these MOOCs<sup>2</sup> and used Edmodo to share recommendations and links to other courses.

We also occasionally used iPads, my own and participants' mobile devices to demonstrate use of voice-recognition for pronunciation practice, to try out a variety of apps for language learning (e.g. EnglishMonstruo<sup>3</sup>, HowToSpeakEnglish<sup>4</sup>), to record and play back audio or video in speaking activities, for mobile access to Edmodo, to read and re-record digital storybooks, and to research and revise vocabulary (e.g. using WordReference<sup>5</sup> and Quizlet<sup>6</sup>).

### TEL design task

In the final TEL design task, I asked participants to identify areas of their English that they wanted to improve and develop a learning plan for after the course. To support this task I provided a form with a space to answer each of the seven design questions and space for a final paragraph outlining a personal learning plan. After initial individual completion of plans and time to think about these out of class, participants presented and fed back on one another's plans in small groups face to face.

### Data

Earlier in the course and prior to introducing the design framework, I had asked participants to complete a narrative frame (Barkhuizen, 2014) in order to gather information on past and present experiences and attitudes to language learning and future intentions. The frame (see Figure 2) also prompted participants to start thinking about questions used in the design framework. For example, after prompting for current learning problems and goals the frame directs attention to future intentions: *"I can imagine myself .... (doing what, who with, where, when, using what?)"* Frames were completed individually out of class.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.edmodo.com>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/understanding-language> and <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/explore-english-language-culture>

<sup>3</sup> [www.englishmonstruo.org/](http://www.englishmonstruo.org/)

<sup>4</sup> [www.kaplaninternational.com/blog/kaplan-how-to-speak-english-app-nominated-for-award/](http://www.kaplaninternational.com/blog/kaplan-how-to-speak-english-app-nominated-for-award/)

<sup>5</sup> [www.wordreference.com/](http://www.wordreference.com/)

<sup>6</sup> <https://quizlet.com>

**Figure 2:** Narrative Frame given to participants early in the course

**Instructions:** Below is a frame for a short story about your experience of learning English. First read through the frame and think about it how it relates to your English learning. Next complete the gaps to produce a coherent story\*.

Please also choose a name that I can use in your story:  
.....

*My English Learning Story*

In the past  
I first started learning English when.....  
because..... Back then I felt..... about  
English because..... I used to do most of my learning (*when, where, who with*)..... What I found most difficult was.....  
because..... What helped me most was ..... because.....

Now  
Now I feel..... What has changed is that..... Now I am learning because..... I do most of my learning (*when, where, who with*)..... For example, I remember.....  
I use..... and.....  
to help me because..... What I find most difficult is..... What helps me most is.....

In the future  
I ..... would ..... like  
to..... My  
ambition is..... I feel the biggest problems I will face  
are.....  
..... I think I ought  
to.....  
..... but ..... I suspect  
that.....  
..... Some of the things I might actually do are  
.....  
..... I can  
imagine ..... myself.....  
..... (*doing what, who with, where, when, using what*).

\*Extend the story as you like but please do not delete the framing text – do delete dots .... and prompts in italics.

Most participants completed the initial narrative frames. However, only seven participants completed written plans for post-course learning. Other data includes participants’ comments on Edmodo, my own reflections on participants’ engagement with TEL activities used in class, and feedback in standard end-of-course questionnaires.

**Figure 3:** A section of a participant’s initial learning plan

<p><b>What activities?</b> What kinds of activity and task should help achieve desired outcomes? What will make you want to do these activities?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Free online courses (MOOCs the style of 'Future Learn' and 'Coursera')</li> <li>- Reading short stories (the style of 'Adrian Mole' by Sue Townsend)</li> <li>- Reading articles about art, science, education, sports, from online from 'Flipboard', 'Pinterest', etc.</li> <li>- Listening to presentations on the Internet as with Ted Talks.</li> <li>- Writing at least in those MOOCs with short (or longer) entries (<i>pieces of writing?</i>).....</li> </ul>
<p><b>Who with?</b> Alone, with someone else? Who, why? Who else could help?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Alone (if you can be alone in a MOOC)</li> <li>- I could try to encourage my son to try to do so also, <b>which would be beneficial for him too, but I am uncertain whether the result will be good or not.</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>When?</b> ...might you engage in this activity? How often? What earlier? What later?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Everyday, since <b>I don't see any achievement if I set these activities aside for being made just at stated days in the week.</b></li> </ul>

## Initial analysis

For those participants who completed learning plans, the activity suggestions made appear to differ from those mentioned in the future section of their narrative frame responses. All seven completed plans that address the issues of when, where and with whom participants might learn. Four out of seven identify roles for mobile devices in increasing opportunities for study (for example, when commuting to work, in bed or to look up and note language encountered when out and about). Four plans also mention the use of MOOCs. This often appeared to relate to the ‘with whom’ question and be connected to the need to maintain motivation or be part of a learning community. Several course feedback forms also included MOOCs and Edmodo in an open question about what participants found most useful. Furthermore, I noticed that several participants joined MOOCs, installed Edmodo on their phones and changed settings to English to use speech recognition.

In summary, all feedback on the course was positive and some participants appear to have identified new ways in which they might use technology to help them learn. However, no participants explicitly referred to the design framework. Nor was there any evidence of participants employing the framework to develop activities for their own classes, though there was some evidence of participants utilising technologies used in the sessions with their own students or suggesting how they might do so. As an example, one participant wrote a reflection on his professional development blog about his experience with MOOCs on the course and how MOOCs might be used with his students.

My own reflections, at the time of introducing the design framework and later, suggest some possible improvements. Firstly, at the time of introducing the design questions I found it necessary to prompt participants to think about *why* and *how* for all questions. For example, whom do we want students to work with? Why? How might technology help? Secondly, using the design questions to prompt reflection on how we could improve TEL activities engaged on in class after each activity, might help participants acquire the habit of using the framework. Thirdly, narrative frames worked very well for scaffolding thoughts about past, present and future language learning experiences. Providing a narrative frame to produce a final learning plan, after initial consideration of the prompt questions, might result in more concrete and actionable learning plans. This final point connects to an improvement to the course and the action research design. Future learning plans could be specified as a course outcome and required task, and worked on more in class time. Many participants on this course find it very difficult to dedicate any more than minimal time to their English learning out of class. Moreover, as these plans should be acted on after the course, the task would need to be designed so as to integrate a reflection step to be completed several months after the course. This might include explicit instructions to reflect on the utility of questions used in the design framework.

### **Reflections on my action research experience**

I found the experience of engaging in classroom research demanding and time consuming but useful. It led me to try things out that I would not have done otherwise, such as narrative frames. Narrative frames provided a wealth of fascinating insights into students' past experiences of learning English and their attitudes, as well as perceived problems and current motivations. However, the frames did not reliably provide information about participants' current uses of technology to support their own or their students' learning. My intention is to more explicitly explore this in future courses through show and tell sessions.

I was concerned during the course as to whether my attempts to get data for my research and what was best for the class were well aligned. The primary aim of the course was to help participants develop their English towards C1. Engaging participants in thinking about how they could use technology effectively to support their own language learning was a subsidiary aim. Not all participants could quickly see the value of this and I did not feel it was fair to spend too much classroom time on understanding a design framework for TEL as opposed to demonstrating

potentially useful activities. Ultimately, I believe that engaging in action research was beneficial for me and for participants. However, I felt there was sometimes tension between progressing a preconceived research plan and being responsive to a course and community as it developed. I feel it will be much easier for me to be responsive to emerging student needs and changing circumstances without the added complexities of needing to consider whether and how I will be able to report the work as research and/or gather sufficient data to answer specific pre-formulated questions. In short, in order to incorporate ongoing action research as part of my teaching practice, I need to develop a more flexible and lightweight approach to my classroom research.

# 2

## Exploring writing instruction through WebQuests

Canan Önal Satiç, Elif Başak Günbay and Ilknur Elma, Izmir (Turkey)

### Introduction

Our action research project aimed to discover the students' performance and their perceptions of web source integrated language learning in writing classes using WebQuests. Dodge (1997) defines WebQuest as an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet optionally supplemented with video conferencing. It requires students to use higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking, problem solving and consensus building. In our project, we explored the following research questions:

- How does WebQuest mediate writing performance of A2-level students?
- What are students' perceptions on using WebQuest in writing classes?

### Context

The project was conducted in an English Language Preparatory School on a programme that aims to provide students with an intensive English course and prepare students for their studies at their faculties. The modules in the programme are designed in accordance with CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) as A1, A2, B1 and B2. A student who completes these four modules within a year can study at the faculty. The students get four hours of writing instruction each week, which totals 32 hours of writing instruction in a module. They are expected to form a well-developed paragraph each week throughout the module. These paragraphs are graded every week and have an important place within the module, as the grades they receive constitute ten per cent of their total pass grade. We collected data from four A2-level writing classes. The participants were 80 students (42 female, 38 male) whose ages ranged from 18 to 22. They were motivated students who gained high scores in the previous exit test.

### Process

There are two ways to prepare a WebQuest: one is from scratch, while the other is adapting an existing WebQuest. In our project, we preferred the first option, since designing a new WebQuest would be more suited to our students' needs and the institution's syllabus. In order to design a WebQuest from scratch there are certain steps. Firstly, the topic, title and the grade that it can be used in should be specified. Then, the plan of the WebQuest should be designed by following the related tabs on the website, which are specified as introduction, task, process, evaluation, conclusion and teacher page. In the introduction and task part, the task is introduced and the instructions are given. In the process part, the task is explained step-by-step in detail to make sure the students understand how to perform it. In the evaluation tab, students can see how their performance will be evaluated. Lastly, in the conclusion section, the objective of the task is summarised and made clear for the students. It is possible to add more tabs such as games, further study, etc.

We prepared three different WebQuests on descriptive, expository and cause-effect paragraph instruction in line with the syllabus using <http://zunal.com/>, a web-based software for creating WebQuests (see Appendix for further details). The rest of the paragraphs in the syllabus were written through traditional materials, which included comparison, opinion and a basic paragraph. In the weeks when participants used WebQuests, they were instructed during two lessons and performed some tasks the same day through WebQuests.

Observations, student weekly tasks and a modified questionnaire were the main data collection instruments used in the process. Observations were held during the class hours. The involvement and engagement of each participant was also monitored, as each student was required to email us any tasks they did together with their peers. In order to find out students' perceptions of using WebQuest in writing

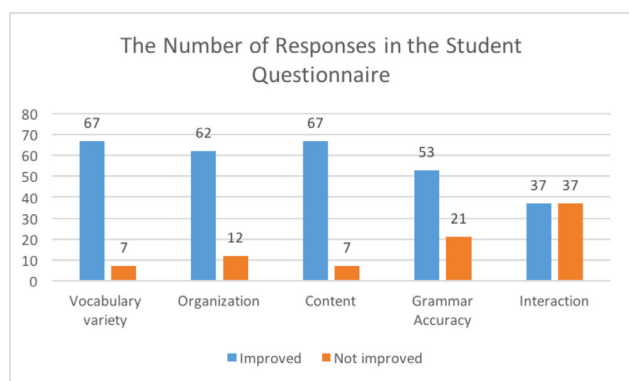
classes, a post-instruction perception questionnaire (adapted from Chuo, 2007) was used. The questionnaire was given after a six-week instruction of writing. Three of them involved a traditional writing class and the other three were WebQuests. The questionnaire consisted of eight questions. Section A consisted of six statements with a two-level Likert scale of “agree” and “disagree”. The option “unsure” was not included. Section B included two open-ended questions that allowed participants to express their ideas on advantages and disadvantages of using WebQuests by reflecting on their learning process.

The participants studied how to write descriptive, expository and cause-effect paragraphs through WebQuests and wrote their first drafts at home and second drafts in the classroom. They were also required to send their outlines of the paragraphs to their peers and teachers to gain feedback before they wrote their first drafts. In addition, they sent their outlines, which included supporting ideas and details of a topic they chose, to gain feedback from their peers and teachers. They also made vocabulary lists out of the videos and sent them to each other. After receiving feedback from their peers, they wrote their first drafts and sent them to us. We checked them using correction symbols, and students wrote their second draft in the classroom. Each of us evaluated the paragraphs individually to ensure inter-rater reliability. The average grades were taken and recorded for six weeks.

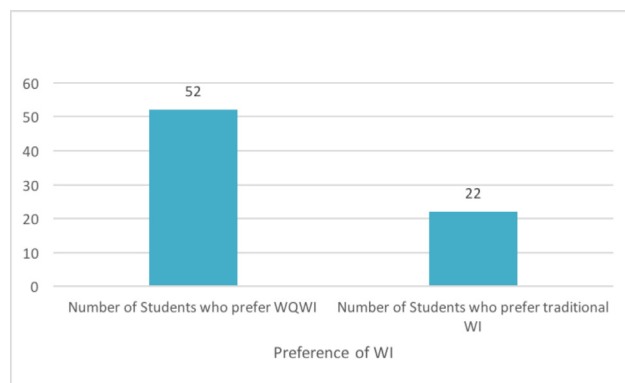
## Findings

After six weeks of instruction, the students were given the WebQuest Writing Instruction (WQWI) Questionnaire. The figures below (Figures 1 and 2) demonstrate the number of student responses to questions one to five in the questionnaire.

**Figure 1:** The number of responses in the student questionnaire



**Figure 2:** Response to WebQuest writing instruction



The following open-ended questions were used in the questionnaire:

- What do you think are the advantages of learning through the WebQuest Writing Instruction? How did you benefit from the WQWI?
- What problems or difficulties did you come across when you were engaged in the WQWI? Please suggest ways to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the instruction.

The patterns below were extracted as advantages and disadvantages after analysis of these open-ended questions:

Central themes	Sub-themes	n
<b>Advantages</b>	• Having more time to write	36
	• Benefitting the materials' variety	23
	• Use of technology	13
	• Motivational effects	5
	• Improvement in	
	– vocabulary choice	13
	– content	8
	– grammar	2
	• Interactional benefits	3
	• Microsoft Word benefits	3
• Structural variety	2	
<b>Disadvantages</b>	• Having technical problems	31
	• Lack of teacher support	10
	• Adaptation problems	5
	• Interactional problems	4
	• Intense task schedule	4
	• Time consuming	2
	• Not being parallel with needs	2

**Table 1:** Central themes that emerged from student responses to 7 and 8

Regarding the advantages, eight categories emerged:

1. Time issue.
2. Variety of material.
3. Use of technology.
4. Motivational effects.
5. Improvement in writing.
6. Interactional benefits.
7. Microsoft Word benefits.
8. Using more complicated grammatical forms.

## Reflections

Based on the findings, we can conclude that:

- Using WebQuest helps students lessen writing apprehension.
- Using WebQuest helps students improve their writing.
- Using technology in learning L2 increases motivation and eases the writing process.
- Interaction with a classmate through WebQuest is beneficial.

The results have shown that WebQuests can be used efficiently to support writing instruction. Students find it very useful to be guided to reliable materials on the internet. They feel much more motivated to write and their results tend to be not only better in numbers but also in quality. Students who have prior knowledge of the topic– i.e. pre-selected sources on WebQuests that inform about a specific topic – can form well organised paragraphs with a wider range of vocabulary and with fewer mistakes.

However, it should also be taken into consideration that there may be technical problems during the instruction that should be dealt with immediately. The technical issues encountered varied from not having access to the internet to connection problems and even poor computing skills. There were a lot of students who missed the deadlines because of these problems. Secondly, some students complained about the problems they had during interaction, stating that it would be better if they were trained beforehand to be aware of the benefits of co-operation and collaboration. The problems they encountered included sharing the workload and having problematic partners who constantly missed the deadlines. Although they learned from each other and enhanced their skills throughout the study, they thought it was hard to write paragraphs while co-operating and collaborating with others. Another concern is about possible adaptation problems using technology. Some of the students stated that they

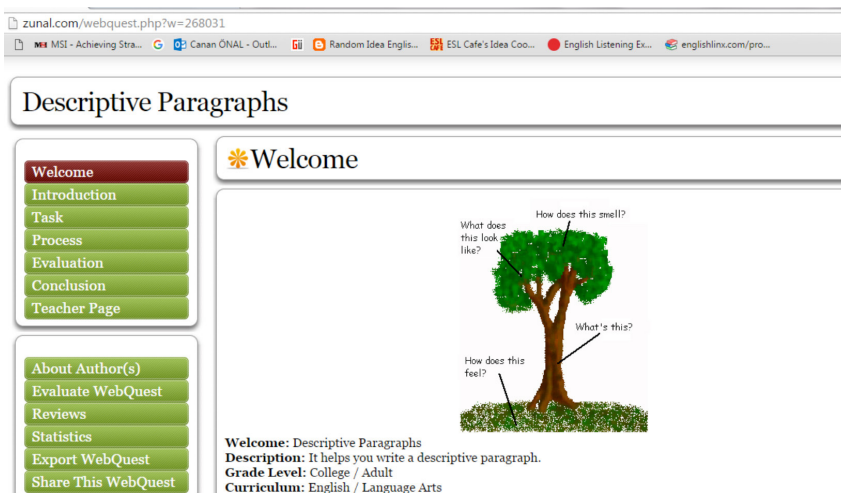
had adaptation problems writing through WebQuest since they were only used to traditional classroom instruction. This concern is understandable since most of them came from traditional Turkish high schools where the use of technology is not integrated into language instruction. Finally, it is vital that student autonomy should be stressed and made known to the students since they felt a lack of teacher support during WebQuest instruction. As teachers, we should help them see that WebQuest itself is a good way of enhancing student autonomy.

Conducting action research has been a rewarding experience for us in many ways. During the process we were able to explore more about adapting technology to language teaching. We are already aware of the fact that integrating technology into the classroom is rewarding. However, implementing technology and monitoring the change in our students' beliefs encouraged us to explore more about technology use in language learning. This, of course, affected our teaching practices, too. We believe teaching is a dynamic process and teachers can only know the new generation's needs by trying new teaching practices. We discovered that a well-designed WebQuest is a good way of practising writing in language classes. We also found out that we worked co-operatively and challenged ourselves by using technology while doing online meetings with our AR project facilitator. All in all it was a fruitful process. We taught and learnt at the same time.

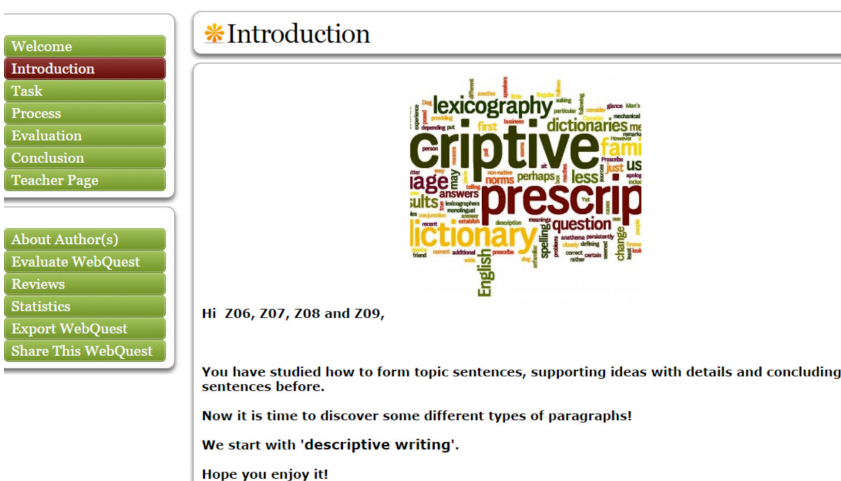


# Appendix

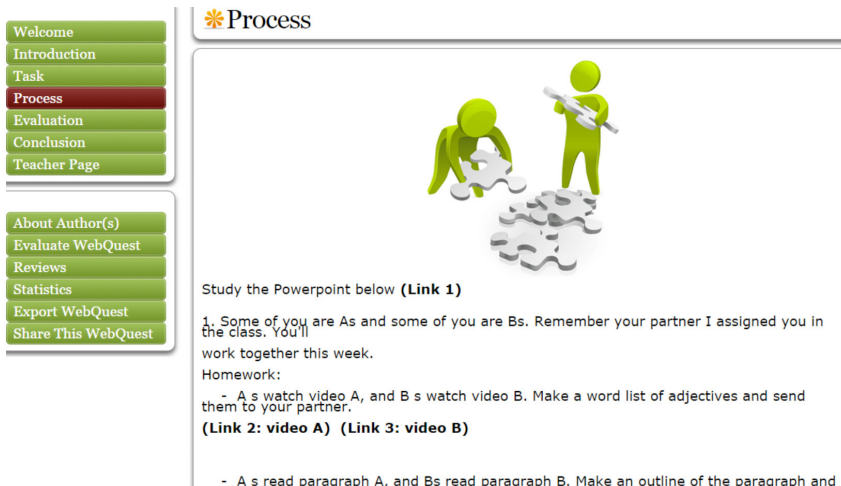
**Picture 1:** A screenshot from the first page of descriptive paragraph WebQuest. For further information visit <http://zunal.com/webquest.php?w=268031>.



**Picture 2:** A screenshot from the introduction page of descriptive paragraph WebQuest. For further information visit <http://zunal.com/webquest.php?w=268031>.



**Picture 3:** A screenshot from the process page of descriptive paragraph WebQuest. For further information visit <http://zunal.com/webquest.php?w=268031>.



# 3

## Using WEB 2.0 tools in teaching reading

Okan Bölükbaş, Sabancı University,  
Istanbul (Turkey)

### Introduction

For my action research project, I explored a tool called *Actively Learn*, which is a web-based tool that enables teachers to enhance reading by adding comments, questions and other items into online texts. Teachers can customise instruction, provide real-time feedback, allow peers to collaborate, and get analytics on student performance. Reading is transformed from a passive activity to an active, collaborative one. I integrated this piece of technology within my classes that focused mainly on the teaching of reading skills.

I use many web-based tools such as *Kahoot*, which is useful for practising and revising vocabulary and grammar. I also use tools for speaking, listening and writing, such as *Quill*. *Actively Learn*, though, is the first web-based tool I used for reading. It is a thrill – at least for me – that students are doing something different to what they conventionally do on printed material. I used the tool with B2-level university students who are competent in using technology and willing to experiment with it in class. Sixteen students attended the classes.

### Context

I teach academic English to Foundation Year Programme (FDY) students ranging from CEFR A2 to C1. The students study a locally produced book and read an average of 20 paragraph-long academic texts about various subjects such as psychology, sociology, education, science and history. These texts can be demanding for students and challenging for the instructors themselves, too.

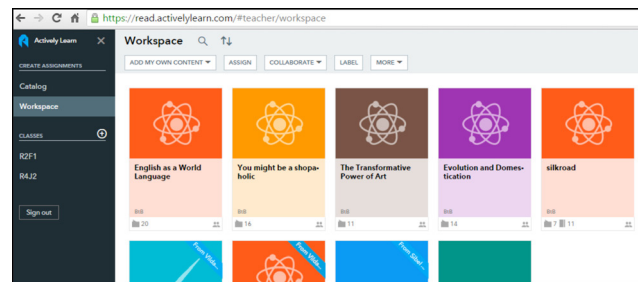
The students have the opportunity to use technology during their study at university. Students and instructors are given a free laptop. Newly admitted students are given training in using the technology available on the campus. In each classroom there is always a projector, a sound system (speakers), ethernet cables and connections. Wireless internet coverage is everywhere within the campus.

### Process

Most of my students are externally motivated when it comes to reading long academic texts in class and they often express how boring and tiring this can be. My challenge in the project was to implement some sort of technology that would not only motivate but also engage my students in reading classes. Therefore, I started thinking about reading-related technological tools.

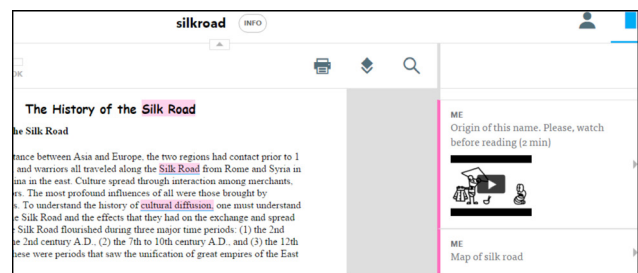
In using *Actively Learn* I had to first upload a text (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Workspace



In one of the classes the text was about “The Silk Road” (Figure 2), and so I found some informative short videos on YouTube that would reinforce the text. In *Actively Learn* you can embed YouTube videos and/or add multiple choice, true/false or open-ended questions in any part of the text. These can be placed between paragraphs and students cannot proceed with the rest of the text before they complete these tasks. In this instance I used comprehension questions (see Figures 3 and 4).

Figure 2: The text



I realised that students perceived the task more like one that involves watching some videos and answering questions rather than a reading task. In this case, I had to find a way to balance the amount and type of tasks. Therefore, for a reading text I put one or two short YouTube videos while the rest of the tasks were comprehension questions.

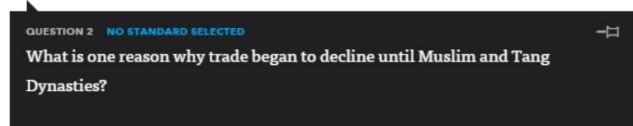
Figure 3: True/False

eastern-most boundary of Alexander's empire. Chinese control of this region meant that for the first time easily transported for trade with the Parthians. The Parthians acted as middlemen, trading the silks to the



Figure 4: Comprehension questions

small states paying taxes and fees in each one. As a result, the level of trade declined until the 7th century A.D. when the Central Asian region was again unified under the Muslim Dynasty and China grew powerful and united under the Tang Dynasty.



The 7th Century A.D. to the 10th Century A.D.

6 In the 7th century, a new influence began to dominate the area of Central Asia - the Islam religion. This new religion, which was based on the life experiences of the Prophet Muhammad, quickly spread throughout the Middle East and Central Asia. The conquests of the Muslim Empire unified the area from Arabia in the west to Kashgar China in the east. With the safety brought by unity, the Muslim merchants traveled freely throughout these regions, trading their wares and spreading their beliefs.

7 At the same time, the Chinese were venturing out beyond their conventional frontiers to the west. Trade resumed, and in the Tang dynasty, China was open to ideas and goods imported from abroad. During this time Muslim merchants introduced the grapevine to the Chinese, and many technological inventions were taken from China, including the mechanical clock, printing, and gunpowder, all of which had enormous impact on the West. Yet the desire for luxury and the corrupt ways of the Tang government weakened the empire, and by 907 A.D. the dynasty had fallen. This overland trade again became difficult, and the Arabic traders relied on sea travel to bring their goods to China.



I used *Actively Learn* with my students four times. Only four students experienced all four texts, with the others fewer times, either because they were absent or forgot to bring their laptops and had to share with one of their peers.

At the end of the semester I collected data anonymously via SurveyMonkey, five open-ended questions to find out about their experiences with *Actively Learn*.

## Findings

I was aware that students are given so many questionnaires all the time and that I had to make sure they would participate. As a result, I waited until the end of the semester and asked them to complete the survey in class. Unfortunately, this put extra stress on the project, limiting the available time.

I wanted to hold interviews with some of the students but realised I did not leave enough time because students had already left after they completed the survey at the end of the semester. I know that next time, I will complete everything in advance.

Secondly, in terms of findings, the project taught me not to have any expectations at all about the findings after research. As I have a highly positive feeling for technology use in class, I expected the students' reactions to be all positive. What surprised me is that although many students reacted in a positive way, saying that they found the tool very beneficial, three students showed a very negative reaction. To me, this means that assuming all young people will like using technology in class is a false expectation. One participant stated that "*it blunts your writing and scanning skills.*" I presume what they meant is that when doing tasks there is no actual writing with pen/pencil on paper. However, the same participant found copying and pasting answers a useful feature.

Another participant disliked the idea of reading on the screen but liked the feature that enables all students to see each other's responses to tasks. Finally, another participant showed an extremely negative reaction to the tool, rejecting it completely without providing any justification.

In terms of positive responses, apart from the usual answers such as "*yes, it's very beneficial,*" a prominent finding is that technology can contribute to student autonomy, since using this tool they feel less dependence on the teacher. As the response of one participant indicates: "*Dont run around the teacher to see if answers are correct or not.*" Vocabulary learning, too, was mentioned in several responses. Students can highlight and right click on a word to see its dictionary definition. In addition, students can, as was mentioned in a participant's response, study the text in chunks divided by tasks. The participant found this to be a very effective and memorable way to study reading and used the following words to describe *Actively Learn*: "useful, clear, fun".

## Reflections

During the project I learnt that the whole process of doing action research was in many ways very beneficial for me, as I was given the opportunity to collaborate with other researchers in this project via

Skype, Facebook and other means. I was able to explore a tool, undertake research and gather findings.

I learnt that teachers need to be careful when choosing technological tools for their learners. What I had in my mind and what the tool could offer were not the same. I was originally looking for a tool that would enable me to send questions to specific students at any time. I thought the tool called *Geddit* would suit my need. Not only did it not help, but, as of 2016, the tool also ceased to exist.

When I changed the technological tool I had selected to use in the project, I had to change my research question, too. It is in the nature of AR that one might have to change one's research focus. Knowing that I could change it made me feel relaxed but I also became aware that a change of focus might put constraints on the timing of one's project.

Students' mixed reactions to the use of technology in reading classes helped me understand that not every student might appreciate it. Moreover, some students can be so exam oriented that they might find any method other than the traditional ones a waste of time. However, I believe that there should be a fine line in terms of balancing the use of technology in class. For instance, if I use *Actively Learn* from time to time I believe I can spice up the reading classes. It is a powerful tool, as it helps students interact with the text and read it in chunks – letting them have some break between long paragraphs. Therefore, I will keep using it.

Finally, I have learnt that doing research, or at least collecting feedback after introducing students to a technological tool, provides insights into how effective your teaching can be for students.

# 4

## Using smartphone texting applications to help students boost their vocabulary

Somayeh Jalilnia, Tehran (Iran)

### Introduction

For my action research project I chose a popular mobile phone and platform application (initially Viber, then Telegram) to supply my learners with learning opportunities beyond the walls of the ELT classroom and explore the following questions:

- In what ways does vocabulary practice on Viber/Telegram help my learners boost their vocabulary?
- How might the vocabulary practice on Viber/Telegram contribute to the teaching and learning occurring inside the ELT classroom?

### Context and participants

I conducted the project in one of my Cambridge ESOL Key English Test (KET) exam preparation courses. The coursebook used in class was *Objective Key* (Capel and Sharp, 2013), while supplementary materials to maximise students' success in the exam were *Oxford Practice Grammar Basic* (Coe et al., 2008) and *Oxford Word Skills Basic* (Gairns and Redman, 2008).

Five students participated in the research, two of whom wanted to emigrate to Canada. The other learners completed A1 and A2 levels before joining this course, but their learning objectives varied: for one of them English was the sole means of communication with his business partners in other countries, another wanted to speak fluent English, while the third needed to improve her English skills to an advanced level to undertake a PhD in the US.

### Process

Initially I had selected Viber to use in the project because it is a free application that offers texting, video calls or group chats to enable users to contact one another and is accessible to both smartphone owners and PC users.

However, while I was conducting this project, we switched to Telegram because:

- a. Viber stopped working properly in Iran and many people started using Telegram instead.
- b. Telegram offers more security. In fact, as is stated on its website (<https://telegram.org>), 'speed' and 'security' are the main concerns for its developers.
- c. Telegram offers a "reply" option that enables the user to reply to a specific message within a group. Therefore, students could find the correction of their sentences more easily and speedily among the messages shared in the group.

Online learning activities "are generally quite motivating for language learners, in part because learners feel they are gaining technical skills which will prove beneficial in the future" (Warschauer, 2001: 210). The novelty of the practice had the potential to motivate my learners. Thus, I created a vocabulary practice group on Viber in which I shared five words along with their pronunciation (in the form of a voice message), definition and examples two or three times a week. In my selection of vocabulary, I used the words labelled for A2 learners on the English Vocabulary Profile website ([www.englishprofile.org](http://www.englishprofile.org)), which has corpora that inform many English textbooks.

Since students lose their motivation if they do not know or agree with the purpose of the technology-mediated tasks (Warschauer, 2001: 210), I discussed my project idea in class with them first. Once I obtained their agreement, I added them to the group where they were given the instructions about the vocabulary activity.

### Data collection

In collecting the action research data for this project a number of observational and non-observational methods (Burns, 1999 and 2010) were employed. I used field notes, a questionnaire and also kept a journal to write my reflections and identify the possible changes happening to my attitude and practice. In addition I used documents (i.e. the sentences my students produced on Viber/Telegram and the written texts they brought to the class) to trace the possible changes in my students' knowledge and use of English.

## Data analysis

### Framework for analysing vocabulary

I used Nation's (2001: 39–44) framework of 'productive vocabulary' to interpret and report the findings of this study, as I believe it covers different aspects of a word that a learner needs to know and produce. Due to word constraints I can only provide a summary of one aspect pertaining to the categories of form, meaning and use respectively.

### Form: Pronunciation

Students showed improvement in the area of pronunciation while a few of them showed awareness over the American and British ways of pronouncing words, where applicable, and started using the one they felt comfortable with. Figures 1 and 2 demonstrate some examples.

Figure 1: Field note – Pronunciation

Date: 06 April 2015	What happened? → a change in pronunciation
<p>Teachers' Day I entered the class and everyone shouted, "Happy Teachers' Day". One of the students came forward and handed a gift to me, saying, "Congratulations, Somayah!" ...", but her pronunciation of the word was wrong. One of the friends said, "Congratulations! Che (tʃə) Che (tʃə)! Do you remember Telegram?". "Oh, yeah! CongraTulations, Somayah!", she said again, trying to correct the mispronunciation by repeating herself and emphasising the sound /tʃə/!</p>	<p>1- Most students used to pronounce it /kənˈgrædʒuːleɪʃn/, but it seems the ATTENTION note I left in the post worked as no one looked surprised or disagree with the correction their friend made.</p> <p>2- awareness of error and feel confident to express what they think is right!</p> <p>3- The student who made the correction used to be the quietest of all!! Motivation! Confidence!</p> <p>4- The one who made the mistake wasn't surprised at the correction at all!! It shows she knew the right pronunciation, but because she was used to do the wrong one, she made the mistake!!</p>
	<p><b>Analysis</b></p> <p>📌 congratulation</p> <p>Noun</p> <p>/kənˈgræʃ(ə)leɪʃn/</p> <p>📌 ATTENTION: 'tu' in "congratulation" is pronounced /tʃə/ as in 'che' in "teacher".</p> <p>📌 congratulations [plural] a message congratulating someone (= saying that you are happy about their good luck or success):</p> <p>📌 to offer/send your congratulations to someone</p> <p>📌 Many celebrities have sent their congratulations to the royal couple on the birth of their little</p>

Figure 2: Field note – Pronunciation

Date: 18 February 2015	What happened? → BrE vs. NAmE
<p>Students were asked to bring a postcard or a photo about a city or country in the world to the class for extra speaking practice. At first, each individual was supposed to talk about the photo she or he had brought, but when I saw we had an absentee, I thought it would be a better idea to pair them up for filling in any possible information gap.</p> <p>While they were working in pairs then, I made myself busy with the flashcards on my desk, pretending they were left on their own in order to share the control of the class with them, just like I usually do.</p> <p>One of them said, "We can see a airplane ... sorry! An airplane in this photo ...". "aeroplane or airplane?", the other one interrupted. "British English, <i>aeroplane</i>, but American English, <i>airplane</i>", she said.</p>	<p><b>Analysis</b></p> <p>1- Showing awareness of errors and self correction: a airplane → an airplane</p> <p>2- Another instance of growth in their awareness of British and American ways of pronouncing words in English.</p> <p>3- The word was shared almost a month ago on Viber, but they can still remember it. ☺</p>
	<p>📌 aeroplane</p> <p>📌 airplane (North American English)</p> <p>📌 plane (British English, North American English)</p> <p>📌 a flying vehicle with wings and one or more engines.</p> <p>📌 I can't understand why some passengers are so stressed when aeroplanes take off or land.</p>

### Meaning: Associations

The students gradually became more adventurous and started to bring more variety into their language production; i.e. they became flexible with their choice

of vocabulary and started to avoid repetition. Some examples of their work can be found in Figure 3, and my reflections in Figure 4.

Figure 3: Examples of students' effort to bring more variety into their language production

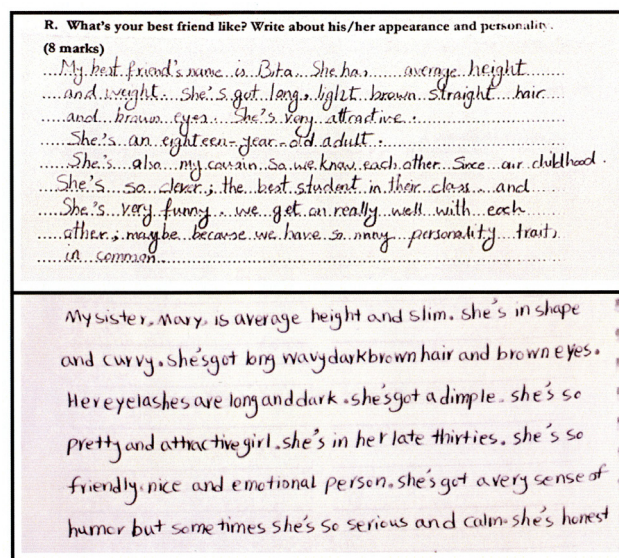


Figure 4: Teacher's journal – Associations

Date: Week 1 - July 2015	Variety!! ☺
<p><b>Self-reflection:</b> It seems the activity helped them use variety of words to communicate their ideas. These days I can feel how adventurous they are being with their knowledge of vocabulary. Previously, they would use a lot of "beautiful" when I asked them to describe their hometown for example, but one of them used combinations like "excellent shopping centres", "wonderful weather" and "gorgeous girls" ☺ while describing her city. The other one used "horrible" to describe the weather condition in his hometown and "terrible" to talk about the traffic there. It seems they are trying to stay far away from repetition in their speech and bring more variety into it.</p>	

### Use: Collocations

The students showed great awareness and skill in using collocations as we progressed with the activity. Frequent collocation-related mistakes such as 'write my homework' or 'angry by somebody' gave place to the right collocates (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Examples of students' awareness of collocations

<p>📌 alarm clock</p> <p>Noun [countable]</p> <p>(Also alarm)</p> <p>📌 a clock that you can set to ring a bell, etc. at a particular time and wake you up:</p> <p>📌 set the alarm (clock)</p> <p>📌 I set the alarm clock for 7 o'clock.</p>	<p>Alarm clock my sister set the alarm clock but she doesn't wake up herself! I have to wake up and wake her up.</p> <p>Alarm clock: I never need to set an alarm clock to wake</p>	Collocation
<p>📌 air</p> <p>Noun</p> <p>📌 [uncountable] the mixture of gases that surrounds the earth and that we breathe:</p> <p>📌 air pollution</p> <p>📌 fresh air</p> <p>📌 Let's go out for some fresh air.</p>	<p>Air Fresh air and nature are the best present that we can give to people of the future.</p> <p>For the second meaning of the word air: Every time I prefer to travel by air.</p> <p>📌 it only takes three hours by air (= in a plane).</p>	Collocation

## Findings from the questionnaire

Students stated that they spent hours thinking in English, trying to make the best sentences possible and this helped them activate their knowledge of vocabulary and grammar.

They all believed that the practice helped them with their productive skills. They believed they made good progress, particularly in pronunciation, spelling and punctuation.

They also all emphasised the importance of learning in modern ways in our modern world, stating technology is a must in education. Most of them also mentioned that the use of technology provided them with a free and easy access to English outside the class and encouraged them to be in touch with English more. It also gave them a feeling of competition and motivation to put their best use of English on display.

No-one faced any difficulty using the applications. They all expressed their satisfaction with the practice, but some wished to have the vocabulary practice on a daily basis and to make more than one sentence with a word for more involvement in English.

## Reflections

The results of this AR project suggest that the vocabulary practice on Viber/Telegram could help students boost their knowledge of vocabulary in many aspects involving form, meaning and use.

As Willis (2003) states, learners use improvising in the beginning levels of learning by stringing words and phrases together to communicate their ideas, but as they grow in their knowledge of English, they wish to communicate more complex sentences and there is a need for grammar to put words meaningfully together. By looking at the simple and short sentences they shared on Viber, it seems in the beginning they were mostly concerned about using the words in a way that could convey the message they desired, but later there was a conspicuous change in the length and complexity of the sentences, which encouraged me to simply teach the grammatical patterns that could help them in this regard. Therefore, the progress was not only vocabulary oriented; their improvement in the area of grammar, which largely took place inside the class, came to their assistance.

The changes that occurred inside the ELT classroom are as significant as those mentioned on Viber/Telegram. Students improved in their use of grammar and vocabulary and made good progress in the skills of speaking and writing as the findings suggest, but their motivation levels increased too. Most students

mentioned they felt a sense of competition for producing the best sentences possible. I also observed a noticeable change in the level of participation inside the class and on Viber/Telegram as we progressed with the activity. According to Warschauer (2001), online learning activities motivate students by giving them an opportunity to publish their work (the sentences, in my students' case) and they can encourage quiet or shy students to participate more; thus I believe the use of technology was a great facilitator in this regard. Increase in participation is not the only instance of their motivation enhancement; the change from the use of simple sentences to more complex ones and the curiosity they showed over different areas of English (e.g. the American/British use) also indicate their motivation.

It was not only my students who improved in different aspects throughout this action research; I also changed in my beliefs about teaching conspicuously. What we do in the classroom signals our beliefs about language and language learning, and these beliefs are usually shaped by our previous training and experience (Willis, 2003), but I have learnt experience and prescriptions given by teacher trainers do not always work like rules of thumb; our students' needs define what needs to be done in the classroom, and when we have a comprehensive knowledge of their needs and learning strategies we can improve our language instruction by attuning our instruction to such knowledge (Oxford, 2001). Thus, by working with my learners beyond the walls of the ELT classroom, in a virtual setting where most of the interaction occurred in an informal manner, I was provided with a chance to learn more about their needs. By drawing on my knowledge of English and ELT, I tried to attend to their needs more and improve the quality of my teaching.

# 5

## Integrating technology into TEFL training

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### Introduction

Nowadays, pre-service English teachers are surrounded by different types of digital media. Modern technology influences the way they study and search for information. As technology is becoming critical in education and language learners are using it more and more, teacher training programmes need to pay more attention to training in this area. The intention of my action research was to explore my students' responses to digital technology and its practical use for teaching purposes.

### Context and participants

In my study I worked with three different senior student classes at Prince Sultan University in Riyadh, in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I taught three groups who had classes three times a week and the students had three contact hours per week.

Group A were TEFL students who were in an introductory TEFL course for those considering a career in teaching English. Through a series of lectures, discussions, classroom observations, practical teaching assignments and interviews, trainees explore the educational environments in which English is taught and learned. One of the course objectives is to understand current methods and approaches to TEFL, as well as to critically evaluate existing and past methods of teaching. This course also serves as a prerequisite for Group B.

Group B students were enrolled in Language Testing, a course aiming to enable students to assess/write tests. The first part of the course helps a student to identify the necessary qualities in a good test. The second part of the course assists them in putting the principles of testing into practice.

Group C was studying Research Writing III, which builds on the students' former writing classes and teaches them in a step-by-step manner how to write research. At the end of the course, students are expected to formulate, submit and orally present a research paper in an area of their own interest. Because of circumstances and issues regarding the

TEFL course that are explained later, I chose this third group as a comparison group for the previous groups. All of the students in this group were either my previous TEFL or Language Testing students.

Apart from the direct participants (a total of 35 senior students in the three groups), I encouraged two more colleagues to collaborate and co-research. One of my colleagues played a 'critical friend' role and helped me not only to observe the classes but also interpret outcomes from the research. Another colleague gave a similar assignment in her computer-assisted language learning (CALL) class and provided samples of her course assignments.

### Process

Before starting my action research (Burns, 2010), I informed the students and also the Dean and the Department Chair about the aim of my research to gain their consent. My research aimed to answer the following questions, via the data collection methods indicated for each question:

- How do TEFL students come to understand modern teaching methodologies and gain the ability to apply them? (survey)
- Can TEFL students apply their technical/practical skills in using digital media for improving modern teaching methods? (student assignments)
- How should the trainees' education be altered to optimise the effectiveness of their learning experience? (survey, interviews)

I began by studying research initiatives in the literature regarding the need for modernising teaching methodologies (e.g. Dodigovic, 2014; Dudeney and Hockley, 2014). After this first stage, I prepared different types of activities for the students, which I then tried out in class. As the research proceeded, I collected data through the methods noted above for each research question. I also conducted end-of-semester semi-structured interviews and in-class discussions. One problem I encountered when deciding about methods was that



cultural restrictions in Saudi Arabia forbid videoing students or taking photos. Therefore, for the entire study, I used observational methods and audio-recorded some students' presentations. Finally, I analysed my data, interpreted the findings to guide my research and made any changes that were needed in the process.

Initially, as mentioned above, I wanted to work just with Group A (a total number of 15 trainees). However, I realised as the research went on that they appeared to lack motivation and creativity. Therefore, I added groups B (seven students) and C (13 students) to my research plan, because there was a link between all three courses. In future research, it would be worth following up the reasons for the apparent lack of motivation of the Group A students.

## Discussion

The process of the research was the same for all three groups. First, I handed out and explained the major coursework for the semester. I gave the students the details and requirements for their assignments in the third week and informed them that they must complete their tasks a month before the end of the term. I also encouraged them to consult regularly with me about their plans and progress. The assignments for the three groups were as follows:

- Group A: Prepare a micro-teaching session (15 min). Choose the skill you would like to teach. During the micro-session, you should use digital technology to make your teaching motivational and contemporary.
- Group B: Prepare five test items using audio/video technology. Choose any skill you wish.
- Group C: Conduct a practical case study or theoretical mini-research study about using digital technology. Evaluate the present day status from the perspective of a future teacher.

At the beginning of the semester (end of September 2015), I asked students to complete the survey (see Appendix) in which I asked them to rate their overall skills in using electronic tools. I was also interested in their access to technologies, opinions about using technology in the teaching-learning process and their attitudes towards the use of technology for teaching-learning purposes. At the end of the course, I conducted semi-structured interviews as well as in-class discussions. My aim was to gather feedback, suggestions and comments on the usefulness of the assignments, and the practical and student-focused teaching approach.

## Findings

In relation to the first research question in my study, 32 female students, whose ages ranged from 20 to 25, responded to the survey regarding their understanding of digital technologies in English language teaching. I was interested in identifying how often they used digital technology, how they rated the importance of technology, their views on the future of technology in their profession, what they saw as its limitations, and their personal attitudes towards technology. Generally speaking, the students believed that technology is essential for the future; it enhances learning and teaching, supports collaboration and motivation. They also pointed out some limitations such as IT literacy, the time-consuming nature of technology, and the lack of access to free internet learning/teaching resources.

My second question explored how students in my classes could apply technology. As already noted, motivation appeared to be low in Group A and only three (20 per cent) of the 15 students fulfilled the task. One of these students prepared, micro-taught and then presented her teaching ideas as well as a lesson plan for a "Twitter Week of creative writing". First of all, she asked students to write fictional short stories of no more than 150 words (10 min activity) and then she asked them to summarise the story in one Tweet (5 min). As this student also attended my Testing English course, she then used her ideas for the Group B assignment. The two other students used short internet videos and images for teaching speaking and writing skills. However, these activities were presented rather 'traditionally' as they followed a pattern of watching the video/looking at the picture and then creating a dialogue/writing about feelings in a free-writing activity.

In Group B, however, seven out of nine students showed an innovative and creative approach to developing test questions, mostly focusing on listening. For example, the student from Group A used her Tweet ideas for reading/writing test purposes while another student used a speech-to-text app. The assignment for Group C was an extension of knowledge and practical applications gained from previous courses. One innovative assignment was produced by a student who worked with her ten-year-old brother. She taught him Spanish via English (both languages were second languages for him) using Duolingo as a Bilingual Learning App. She worked with him for one semester preparing the learning plan, observation sheets, two achievement tests and end-of-case-study interview. In her study, she showed that this modern application facilitates acquiring a second language. She also pointed out some limitations of the app; for example, that it is suitable only for beginners, and sometimes a

teacher's explanation is required. This student also co-operated with another student who supported her findings with her qualitative research on the effect of bilingual apps on students' academic levels.

For question three, from the final semi-structured interview, I learned that students appreciated the way I conducted their semester work. They mentioned that they not only gained more theoretical knowledge and practical skills, but they could also identify connections between the three courses. The overall feedback was very positive, with students making such comments as "enjoyable" and "practical as all elements merged, creating a clearer overall picture". It seemed that, although the changes I had made could continue to be explored, they were already making a difference to the way students felt they could use technology.

## **Reflection**

The research I conducted was beneficial and efficient. It helped me to reflect on my teaching and identify gaps in teaching practice. This type of practical, in-class research contributes to building teacher confidence, and improving teaching methods and approaches. However, I feel that I could have approached the data collection slightly differently, and it was quite difficult to analyse some of the questions in the survey (especially those where students were allowed to choose more than one answer).

The following semester after this project I decided to continue with my research, conducting very similar assignments in three identical groups. I believed that if I continued to compare my findings from two semesters, I would get a more accurate picture regarding the use of digital media in TEFL courses.

Overall, I think that action research helps teachers to keep up with new trends and use research for improving teaching methods. Conducting research, I not only learned more about my students and their potential but also gained valuable knowledge and created motivating assignments for them.

# Appendix

Adapted from: [www.edweek.org/media/teachertechusagesurveyresults.pdf](http://www.edweek.org/media/teachertechusagesurveyresults.pdf)

AR

Questionnaire on the use of information technology in the classroom

What is your age? \_\_\_\_\_ What is your major? \_\_\_\_\_

What is your class standing?

- a. Freshmen                      b. Senior                      c. Graduate

1. How often are you typically doing stuff online (includes things like email, anything on the web, texting, online gaming, etc.)?

- a. Always                      b. Usually                      c. Sometimes                      d. Almost never

2. Have you used a cell phone during class?

- a. Always                      b. Usually                      c. Sometimes                      d. Almost never

3. If you have used a cell phone in class, what do you use (check all that apply)?

- a. Talking                      b. Texting                      c. Recording                      d. Writing notes  
e. Emailing                      f. Games

4. To what extent do you now use any kind of electronic tools when studying?

- a. Almost always                      b. Usually                      c. Sometimes                      d. Almost never

5. If you use electronic tools, how important are they in helping you to learn the course content?

- a. Extremely important                      b. Moderately important  
c. Minimally important                      d. Not important at all  
e. Doesn't apply

6. Do you think that electronic tools help students achieve the course goals?

- a. Almost always                      b. Usually                      c. Sometimes                      d. Almost never

7. How often do your teachers use technology in the classroom?

- a. Almost always                      b. Usually                      c. Sometimes                      d. Almost never

8. Out of the following list, what are the TOP 3 classroom techniques/technologies that you like instructors to use?

- a. PowerPoint                      b. Images and pictures                      c. Demonstrations  
d. Videos or video clips                      e. Pop quizzes                      f. Movies  
g. Writing notes by hand on the smart board

9. How would you rate your overall skill in using educational technology?

- a. Challenged                      b. Basic                      c. Proficient                      d. Advanced

**10. How do you feel about using technology as a teaching/learning tool in your future professional career?**

- a. Technology is essential to success for my future (teaching) career.
- b. Technology can be a useful tool for enhancing learning/teaching.
- c. Technology will not be very important.
- d. We overestimate use of technology.

**11. If/When you become a teacher, how often do you think you will use technology for supporting your teaching?**

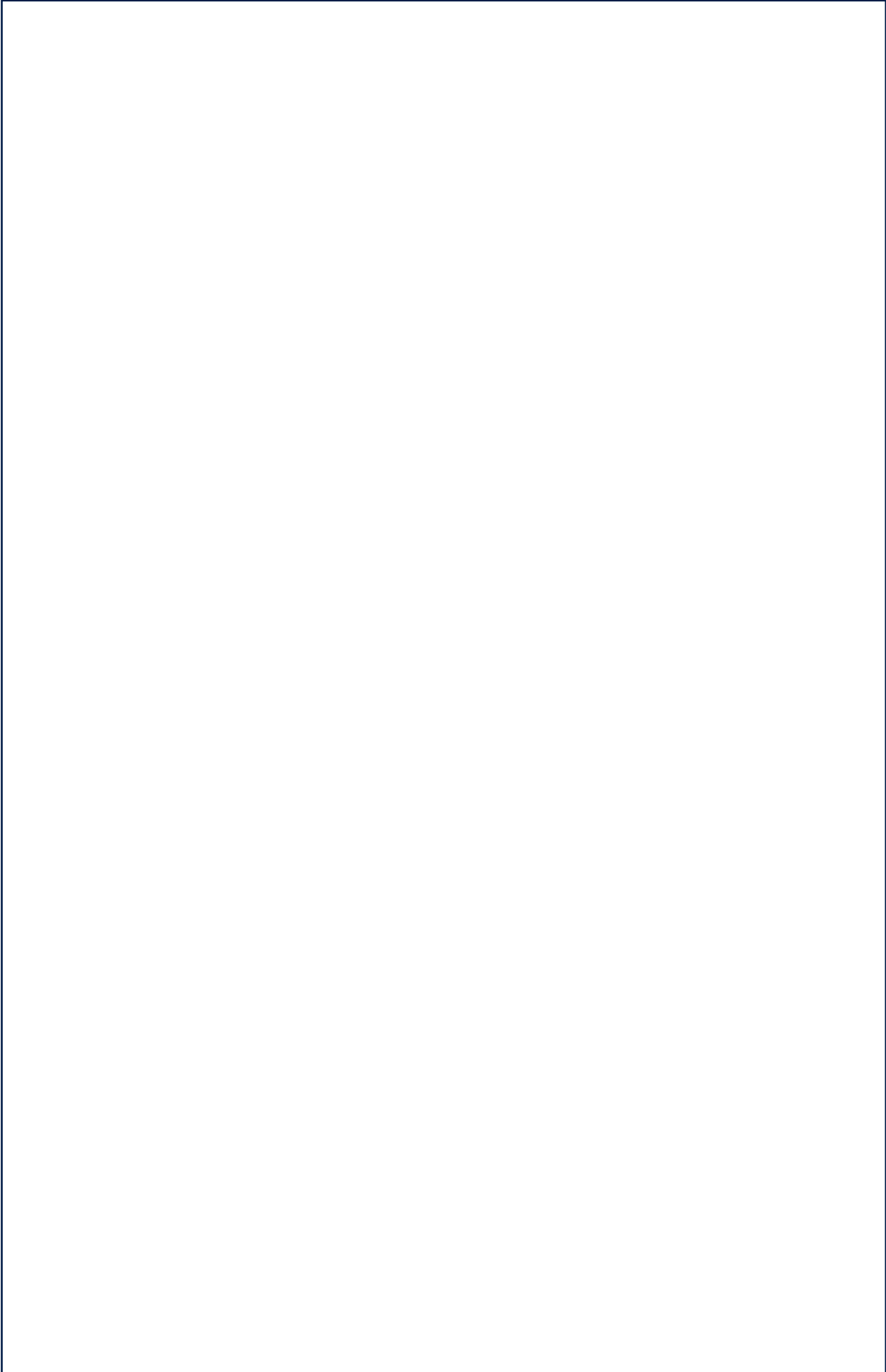
- a. Always
- b. More often than nowadays
- c. As much as my teachers
- d. I don't know

**12. Please indicate for each tool whether or not you find it of any use, whether it's working effectively, whether you plan to use it in the future.**

	I currently use it.	Is it working effectively?	Topic and comments	I plan or expect to use it in the next two years.
Email	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Moodle	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
WhatsApp group chat	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Tools to support collaborative writing/research	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Other communication tool: -----	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO

**13. The following refers to delivery of course content, aspects of teaching that can be supported with electronic tools:**

	I/Teachers currently use it,	Is it working effectively?	I plan or expect to use it in the next two years.	I would like more PSU resources directed into this area.
Syllabus on MOODLE (calendar, outline, assignments, office hours, course policies)	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Online lecture notes	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Online Tutorials	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Online Lab assignments or analytic tools	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Links to online resources	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Online Quizzes or quiz results	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Online Surveys	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Lecture audio/video	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Online PowerPoint presentations	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO
Other tools for presenting course content: _____	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO	YES/NO



# 6

## Using Edmodo to build personal learning networks and develop digital literacies

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### Introduction

I was motivated to undertake this collaborative action research, as it enabled me to explore the realities of my teaching context and develop a critical perspective on my daily teaching practice. I also wanted to test out new forms of action and develop research skills. Working with colleagues and engaging in group problem-solving also increased the possibility of instigating whole-school change.

“Digital literacies are the individual and social skills needed to effectively interpret, manage, share and create meaning in the growing range of digital communication channels” (Dudeney et al., 2013: 2). Teachers should promote digital literacies along with other 21st century skills (e.g. autonomy, creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, flexibility, etc.) to fully prepare our learners for an uncertain future as global citizens in digitally networked post-industrial knowledge economies (ibid).

“Print literacy is the ability to understand and create a variety of written texts, using knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and discourse features alongside reading and writing skills” (ibid). Print literacy, on which language teaching focuses, underlies digital literacy, as most digital communication incorporates written language. November (2010: 8) argues that if students do not understand the basic grammar of the internet, they will be manipulated by people who do.

Being literate is also about creating, contributing and collaborating (Gillmor, 2010). “People can be smarter because they have access to networked intelligence” (Burbules, 2009: 17). Teachers should encourage network literacy, which is “the ability to deploy online networks to filter and obtain information; to communicate with and inform others; to build collaboration and support; and to develop a reputation and spread influence” (Dudeney et al., 2013: 29).

As we move from physical learning places to virtual learning spaces, it is important for learners to

develop online personal learning networks (PLNs), consisting of both human resources (experts, peers) and material resources (websites, documents, etc.). PLNs are consistent with learner-centred educational approaches, which advocate active participation, collaboration and personalisation.

I was interested in helping my learners navigate and communicate effectively in online PLNs and in getting them to appreciate the value of learning seamlessly across in-class and out-of-class contexts. The research questions I wanted to investigate, with a colleague, were:

If we integrate an online PLN with our face-to-face teaching:

- Will learners use it?
- How will they use it?
- Will it improve communication and collaboration between learners and encourage them to become more autonomous and independent?
- Will it improve learning outcomes?

### Context and participants

My action research was conducted at the British Council Dubai, which is a medium-sized teaching centre with 13 full-time teachers and ten classrooms. We teach general English, business English and IELTS exam preparation courses to approximately 500 adult learners in 42-hour courses over seven-week terms.

Part of my role was to lead developments in the use of technology for teachers across the centre. During my research, I first taught a pre-intermediate general English class intensively for four weeks. Their proficiency level was measured at A2 on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This class contained seven males and four females aged between 18 and 46, whose nationalities were Afghani, Emirati, Egyptian, Iraqi, Pakistani, Saudi and

Syrian. In a further cycle of the research I taught an upper-intermediate general English class over two consecutive 36-hour terms. This class (at B2 level) contained three males and three females aged between 19 and 45. Their nationalities were Greek, Iranian, Iraqi, Romanian and Russian.

## Process

The focus for this action research came from my concern that teachers were not integrating digital technologies into teaching, as they were encouraged to do. My explorations progressed through three stages.

My first intervention was to ask teachers to be candid about what barriers were preventing their use of technology. They reported lack of knowledge, fear of failure when trying something new and lack of training as impediments. With this knowledge I decided to experiment with using Edmodo. The second intervention was to create an Edmodo group as a PLN for the pre-intermediate general English class I taught.

Edmodo is a free social network where teachers and learners can connect and share knowledge. It has a similar look and feel to Facebook, so most users can use it without training. Teachers can quickly create an account for themselves and secure groups for each class they teach, and learners can access these groups very easily using a 'group code' without disclosing any personal information. Each group can share comments, links, files, videos and so on to a central wall. Teachers can also create polls and quizzes. Kongchan (2013) reports positive perceptions and high levels of acceptance from teachers apprehensive about using technology, while Thongmak (2012) argues perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use are the two important variables influencing teachers' adoption of Edmodo.

I worked collaboratively with Alan (pseudonym), who was not enthusiastic about using technology in teaching, although we shared a common aim in developing learner independence. We guided learners through the initial login process in class. Alan posted links and text-based content to the wall every day, responded regularly to learners' posts and corrected their errors. I experimented with creating quizzes and polls to revise prescribed coursebook-driven lesson content. Learners reported problems accessing these quizzes and completion rates were low. From feedback in anonymous written questionnaires administered at the end of the course, we discovered that the majority of learners used handheld devices to access Edmodo and that quizzes were not supported on mobile apps.

Concerned about the amount of teacher time we spent on Edmodo, in the third intervention we decided to investigate whether higher-level learners could become a self-supporting learning community and use Edmodo effectively as a PLN by themselves with less teacher-led activity. We created a new Edmodo group for the upper-intermediate learners, where they logged in for the first time during class. We posted links to online multimedia including bespoke AudioBoom recordings. We experimented with flipping the classroom, by posting target language in advance of lessons. Then, after a few weeks, we slowly reduced our presence on Edmodo. Across both classes we analysed learners' adoption of and engagement with Edmodo through their use of the platform (e.g. number of logins, posts to the wall and likes). We also canvassed learners' opinions using both quantitative and qualitative measures. An anonymous written questionnaire containing eight closed questions provided us with quantitative data while semi-structured, open-ended classroom conversations at the end of term generated qualitative data.

## Findings

To answer our first research question we combined data from both classes. 17 out of a total of 23 learners logged into Edmodo at least once. The six learners who did not log in reported they were too busy or did not know what to write.

Our second research question related to how learners would use Edmodo. Pre-intermediate learners used this educational social network in sophisticated and unexpected ways. Posts were short, but communicative nonetheless, and learners spontaneously shared their own hyperlinks to online dictionaries and collocation websites. They even shared photos taken in class of language presented on the interactive whiteboard. One learner posted an apology for not being able to attend class owing to a car accident. She received sympathetic replies.

Upper-intermediate learners posted extended prose, such as personal anecdotes. They spontaneously posted links to YouTube content and tourist information websites to showcase their respective countries. There were also some impromptu posts in reaction to current affairs (e.g. the Colectiv nightclub disaster in Bucharest), which generated online discussion. Unexpectedly, a learner posted a scan of her handwritten assignment with my corrections saying: "I would like to share it, because it's nice to see yourself in front of the mirror."

In relation to question three, Edmodo provided a 'safe' venue for learners to communicate and collaborate. It increased opportunities for learner

interaction and extended the potential for learning outside the classroom. Learners asked their classmates questions, appealed for help and responded to each other, which fostered co-operative learning and digital citizenship skills. Among their comments were: “Edmodo is like learning social media”; “good communication”; “better to share our things in a group”; “learning from other mistakes when teacher corrects [sic]”; and “learn from other colleagues.”

Regarding whether Edmodo improved learning outcomes, conclusive evidence is elusive, as end-of-term assessments, based on analogue print literacies, told us little about learners’ digital literacies. We can only assume that Edmodo did no harm.

## Reflections

Undertaking this research meant that I critically examined my teaching practice and identified opportunities for learning to break out of a cycle of standing still. Security is very comforting! I moved flexibly across this new ‘learnscape’ through cycles of observing, questioning, reflecting, acting, evaluating and modifying. The collective findings that came from working with a colleague provide a potentially better chance of achieving acceptance from other teachers reluctant to use technology. We learned that when attempting to develop new literacies and use new technologies, it is a good idea to start small. Even a modest project like this can generate credible evidence for change and help shape new learning spaces. What is absolutely imperative is making a start. Our learners are ready and waiting!

## Notes

Edmodo (<https://www.edmodo.com>) was designed by Jeff O’Hara and Nick Borg in 2008. It has more than 6.5 million users and is ranked at number 39 in a list of the top 100 learning tools on the internet curated by over 2,000 professionals across 48 countries and published in 2015 (<http://c4lpt.co.uk/top100tools>).



# 7

## Introducing peer review in the writing class: A story of “bring your own devices”

Xuan Nguyen, University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, and British Council Hanoi (Vietnam)

### Introduction

My action research was inspired by findings from some recent research I had conducted regarding teachers’ limited use of learning technology. I became aware of a digital divide between the application of technology for non-educational and educational purposes, and differences in technology practices inside and outside the classroom. I focused on peer review in a writing class, utilising technologies including personal digital assistants (PDAs). My aim was to develop students’ academic skills, both generally and particularly in writing. I also wanted to develop critical thinking, co-operative learning and other study skills.

### Context and participants

The research took place in a Vietnamese university of engineering and technology. The two-year programme for non-English major students is structured according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), starting with A1 in the first term. The course I taught was *Foundation Academic English* (A2 CEFR level). Classes were held twice a week with each session comprising four periods of 50 minutes with 10-minute breaks in between, using *New English File* (Oxenden et al., 2005) and supplementary materials. During this 15-week course (29 lessons and two progress tests), only about 50–60 minutes were allocated for writing.

I taught a group of 36 first year Vietnamese students (29 male and seven female) in their second term of the Information and Engineering Technology course. Most of the students had similar learning experiences of examination-orientation and teacher-centred approaches where the focus was on grammar vocabulary learning, while productive skills and especially writing were often neglected. All the students volunteered to join the project, which had a major focus on peer review within and outside class hours.

### Process

I began by adapting the faculty timetable to allow for three periods of 50 minutes each (150 minutes in total) for the writing module. I then developed writing correction codes (see Appendix) and a feedback form using multiple resources, including the British Council website. Next, I decided on some tentative data tools including participant observation of eight writing sessions, students’ writing samples and semi-structured one-to-one interviews.

In the first session, I introduced the idea of peer review and its potential benefits, described my plan to do action research, and explained what the students’ participation involved. To ensure understanding, I used Vietnamese and encouraged students to ask questions. All students agreed to participate in the activities and five volunteered to be interviewed. Five writing samples of these students were selected for analysis with their consent. Because of time restrictions, I decided to undertake a focus group interview via Facebook and followed it up with one-to-one interviews also using Facebook. My class observations were recorded in reflection notes before, during or after the lesson in either written or spoken forms.

In the first lesson, the writing correction code, feedback form and step-by-step procedures for peer review using track changes in Microsoft Word were demonstrated to the students. I guided them on how to submit their writing and give feedback to peers using a closed Facebook group. Useful writing resources including online dictionaries and other tools (e.g. *Phraseup*) were recommended to them. We also established a reward system where, for each topic, three students received certificates and books for the best performance and progress.

A typical writing lesson during the research consisted of three phases of language input, writing practice and peer review. After students finished their writing, within a time limit of 20–30 minutes,

they swapped Word files via the group Facebook or by using a USB. If the writing was collaborative, students worked in groups of four or five. They used track changes to display their comments on errors and suggestions. Then they gave feedback on various aspects of their peers' writing by filling in the feedback form. When students returned their classmates' writing, we held an open-class feedback session to look at some common errors. At home, students revised their writing and posted them on the group Facebook page for others to read and make comments. Students could then revise again before sending their edited version to me for feedback. After receiving my feedback, they revised one more time and shared their final version on the group Facebook or as displays in class.

## Findings

This action research could be considered as a 'trial-and-error' process with constant problematising, planning, implementing new ideas and approaches, observing what happened and reflecting on what worked or did not work. I learned to deal with emerging issues and kept developing my teaching ideas. My biggest challenge was my students' fear of writing, and their negative views about peer reviewing and my student-centred approach. These impressions were recorded in my observational notes for the first three lessons and then confirmed by the focus group with the five volunteer students. However, as the research went on it was rewarding to observe a positive shift in students' attitudes and perceptions, which can be briefly summarised with quotes from the focus group and student interviews:

Students' perceptions	Beginning of course	End of course	Source of data
<i>Me as a teacher (and my teaching method)</i>	"lazy", "irresponsible"	"dedicated", "creative", "enthusiastic", "supportive"	Observation notes, focus group
<i>Student-centred approach</i>	"lack of confidence", "lost", "low motivation"	"empowering", "free", "independent", "supported"	Observation notes, focus group, interviews
<i>Peer review</i>	"challenging", "hard to understand", "difficult", "time-consuming", "demotivating", "complicated"	"creative", "beneficial", "useful", "fun", "motivating", "time saving for using the software Microsoft Word", "easy to recognise mistakes and things to improve", "interactive"	Observation notes, focus group, interviews

Despite the modest number of student participants, there was a considerable range of opinions about peer review practices. Three of the five students said they preferred peer reviewing to conventional feedback for a number of reasons. These included feeling "more relaxed", "less pressure" and "more confident" with "more opportunities to improve [our] writings with the help of friends before submitting to the teacher" (focus group); "more time to correct the mistakes" themselves (interviews); knowing which "frequent mistakes" to note and avoid (interviews, writing samples); and feeling more "engaged" and "responsible" for their own learning (interviews, focus group).

In contrast, two students did not seem to benefit, as it was "too much work for students", they did not trust their classmates' "marking skills" and they received poor quality or discouraging "peer feedback" (interviews). Even though these students liked using their laptops and the freedom to be creative, their motivation seemed low, which could perhaps be explained by the conventional learning and teaching methods they were used to, their rather low level of English competence and their lack of familiarity with feedback and grading.

These kinds of comments led me to try different ways of encouraging my students to revise their writing using peer feedback. I revised the peer feedback form, simplified the tasks and gave students more freedom to choose topics, used different kinds of feedback and monitored more closely the in-class peer reviews. Students became more engaged and their motivation and language uptake increased considerably, as shown in their writing samples and my observations. Many students even started using meta-language and gradually demonstrated gains in group-work skills and communicative competency. They also began to show critical thinking in their peer review comments and in their responses to feedback. As one student noted: "We used to be afraid of writing and we don't want to 'touch' it but now it's not that scary anymore". These positive findings confirmed my beliefs in this pedagogical approach and gave me more confidence and motivation to continue with the lessons learned from my research.

## Reflections

This project was my very first experience of action research and it was an exploratory journey for both my students and myself, as we tried multiple ways to improve our classroom experiences. I had the opportunity to pay closer attention to my students' reactions, listen more carefully and purposefully to their feedback and opinions, and hence gain better understanding of their backgrounds, language proficiency, learning styles, needs and expectations, as well as their strengths and weaknesses.

By communicating and negotiating openly with each other, we also attained a mutual understanding of what we were trying to do to support each other's learning and teaching practices in a way that respected individuals' preferences, and that built a supportive, collaborative, responsible and inspiring learning environment. My students also appreciated the rationale for our activities when they saw benefits from the peer review activities. As mentioned, most of the approaches I used were new to the class. Yet, once familiarised, my students felt a considerable growth in motivation and eagerness, which also

increased my readiness to commit to this method. As a result of my research, I am supporting three other colleagues in using this approach for their own action research. I strongly believe that classroom teacher

researchers benefit from a community of practice, where they can co-operate with and support each other, share experiences and exchange ideas with each other.

## Appendix

### Writing correction codes

Code	Use	Example
<b>Mechanics and structure</b>		
Sp	Spelling	My <b>mather</b> is the best cook in my family.
C	Capitalisation	My dream is to visit <b>europe</b> .
P	Punctuation	We had salad <b>beefsteak</b> and bread.
---	Not necessary	There're <b>are</b> many visitors to the Old Quarter in Hanoi.
/	Space needed	We miss you <b>alot</b> .
(?)	Something missing	My favourite <b>drink milkshake</b> .
Frag.	Fragment (incomplete sentence)	<b>If we study hard.</b>
///	Repetition	
//	Separate this sentence (run-on) into 2 or more sentences.	
→	Start a new paragraph here.	
Par.	Paragraphing	
Plag.	Plagiarism	
<b>Grammar and Vocabulary</b>		
WW / WC	Wrong word / Word choice	We have to return materials we <b>lend</b> from our library by the due date.
WF	Wrong form (N, A, V, etc...)	I'm very <b>interesting</b> in this game.
Art.	Article mistakes	Going to <b>an</b> university is a popular goal among high school students.
S/P	Singular/plural mistakes	My house has two <b>bedroom</b> .
C/Uc	Countable/uncountable noun mistakes	We had a lot of <b>foods</b> and drinks at the party.
Prep.	Wrong preposition	I often talk to her <b>with</b> everything.
WT	Wrong tense	I <b>see</b> her yesterday.
WO	Wrong order	I am not sure where <b>is it</b> from.
SVA	Subject-Verb agreement	English people <b>is</b> very polite.
A/P	Active / Passive form use	The cat <b>was died</b> in a car accident.
<b>Meaning</b>		
???	It's not clear. I don't understand.	<b>I enjoyed the party, he liked it.</b>
Style / voice	Inappropriate formality	I want to complain. (in a formal complaint email)
Exp.	Poor/awkward expression	I love to try <b>other countries' food</b> .
Ref.	Reference / cohesion mistakes	My mom gave me a <b>book</b> on my birthday. I really like <b>them</b> .
Reg.	Register	This paragraph will talk <b>about</b> my favourite picture.

# 8

## Speaking of ICT: Does it enhance the language learning environment?

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### Introduction and context

Our project was conducted at the British Council Hong Kong where we provide extra-curricular classes, mainly at weekends and during evenings. The Hong Kong Government's Native English Teaching scheme means most local students receive one hour of study per week with a NET (Native English Teacher). It is not uncommon for their remaining classes to be conducted with their local teacher mainly in Cantonese, meaning our students typically enrol with us to focus on speaking.

At our centre there are clearly defined, ICT-specific teaching skills criteria against which teaching performance and job applications are routinely assessed (British Council, 2011). Therefore, we felt it would be most relevant to explore the use of *new technologies* that are being actively promoted – namely iPads and apps – and how these influence classroom speaking tasks.

### Participants

We conducted the project with four classes of students aged ten to 11 years, and two classes aged eight to nine years, with an average class size of 20 students. All the classes in our project were of very mixed abilities, ranging from A2 to B1. The majority of the students were first-language Cantonese speakers.

All of the classes involved were our own and we were directly responsible for the planning, data collection and analysis.

### Process

We chose the app *Sonic Pics* on our school iPads because we were already familiar with it, it is simple to use and it lends itself well to collaborative speaking tasks. Using the app, students create a story or presentation, write a script and source images to complement the script. They then order the images and voice-record their presentation while swiping through their ordered images. The final

product is a narrated series of images, saved as a video file.

Using dictaphones taped to the desk, we took voice recordings of main task activities over two weeks. In the first, we took recordings of students writing the script for their final project. This was presented to the students before they knew they would be using the iPads. In the second week, we took recordings during the preparation and recording stages, where students were sourcing digital images to complement their script, ordering the images, rehearsing their script and recording their project.

This produced two sets of data: one in which students completed a 'traditional' collaborative task, and another where students completed collaborative tasks that were ICT-dependent. In total we took ten recordings: four traditional and six ICT-based tasks. Each recording was transcribed using *Transcriba* software. We annotated each transcript to identify the types of classroom talk that emerged between students and teacher.

Chappell (2014) refers to the need for teachers to be aware of, and intentionally direct, the kinds of talk occurring between all individuals in the class. Categories of talk analysed in our classrooms were based largely on descriptions in Chappell's discussion (see Table 1). He argues that classroom tasks that promote discussion and inquiry-based interactions provide a richer, more effective language learning experience.

**Table 1:** Types of classroom talk

Types of talk	Description
Rote	Repetition, drilling or chanting words in order to remember them
Recitation and Elicitation	Repeating/recalling information in order to demonstrate understanding
Instruction/ Exposition	Giving/explaining facts, ideas, descriptions or procedures
Discussion	Sharing ideas/information to solve problems
Inquiry	Structured discussion through reflecting, considering options/ possibilities to construct common understanding

### Findings

Although our students appeared more engaged in ICT-driven tasks, we felt that concurrently using the *Sonic Pics* app, searching for images, matching them to their stories and then ordering them meant successful task completion also depended on students negotiating control of the iPad *on top of* the cognitive demands required to perform all of this in English. Combined with a relatively high need for teacher validation by completing tasks as quickly as possible, these demands undermined their ability to use L2 reliably. To allow for the task to proceed fluidly, it was easier for them to switch into L1 during difficulties in communication or task management.

This suggests that:

- Using ICT may require intensive training for young learners.
- Teachers must focus on frequent exposure to a limited range of new technologies to familiarise students with it and reduce cognitive load associated with task management.
- Teachers adopt a greater threshold tolerance for the use of L1 depending on the objectives of the class and needs of the students, or place high emphasis on task/ classroom language.

With respect to the nature of emergent classroom talk, we were focused on higher-order types of talk in our recordings.

### Instructions/expositions

In the app-based recordings, we noticed expository talk usually occurring in relation to saving an image, or re-ordering the images in their story.

**Student 1:** *OK ... we need pictures*

**Student 2:** *We need to ... sailing boat*

**Student 1:** *Sailing a boat [mutters in Cantonese]*

**Student 2:** *Sailing a boat*

**Student 2:** *Just sailing boat*

**Student 2:** *s-a-i-l-i-n-g and there ... yes is that*

**Student 1:** *That one!*

**Student 2:** *No no no ...*

**Student 1:** *No ...*

**Student 2:** *Ah ... yeah ...*

**Student 1:** *James! I don't know ...*

**Teacher:** *Yes girls, how can I help?*

**Student 1:** *We don't know*

**Student 2:** *We don't know how to ...*

**Teacher:** *OK, so when you find the image, right, you can click on this one, OK, and then you do this. Just one at a time. Save. So you press and hold, until that comes up*

**Student 1:** *And then go save*

**Student 2:** *And then it save*

**Student 1:** *Save ... save ...*

In the traditional written task, this type of talk tended to occur when the teacher approached a group and asked questions to encourage the students to report back on details and descriptions related to their story.

### Discussions

We found some examples of discussion-based dialogue, typically occurring during the traditional written task, as students were proposing ideas and content for the story they were writing.

In the app-based task, students often attempted to disagree with each other or propose alternative ideas. However, they often struggled to formulate these functions effectively, and they were not entirely successful in negotiating control of the iPad among their group members.

**Student 1:** *Need to download this thing. This thing need to download so we can't do this. No no no no ... What are you doing?*

**Student 2:** *I don't know. I don't want download.*

**Student 1:** *This ah. You like to do this.*

**Student 2:** *I don't like.*

**Student 1:** *No lah. This.*

*Talking in Cantonese*

**Student 2:** *No no no!!*

*Talking in Cantonese*

**Student 2:** *NASA people. NASA worker. NASA worker.*

**Student A:** *This one.*

**Student 1:** *This this this.*

*Talking in Cantonese*

### Inquiries

There were some examples of inquiry dialogue in our recordings, occurring more frequently in the traditional written task, though our attempts to engage students in inquiry tended to cause students to respond with factual information and descriptions rather than exploration of the content and the possible outcomes of group work.

**Teacher:** *so ... they ... what happens next?*

**Student A:** *Saw some pirates?*

**Teacher:** *They saw some pirates? OK, I wonder if the pirates are friendly?*

**Student A:** *No.*

**Teacher:** *They're not friendly? So what are they doing that doesn't look friendly, I wonder.*

**Teacher:** *So how do they know? What do they see? What do the pirates look like?*

**Student C:** *Ugly.*

**Teacher:** *They're ugly... maybe ... how do they ... are they angry?*

**Student A:** *Yes.*

**Teacher:** *Are they shooting at them?*

**Student A:** *No.*

**Teacher:** *No?*

**Student A:** *Because they gave the pirates all their money and gold.*

### Echoing

We also found some examples of what we called 'echoing', which occurred predominantly during the app-based task. It is a type of discourse play, where typically weaker students repeat words, phrases or speech acts previously uttered by a partner or teacher. It often caused the group distraction, and

led to the stronger students (or the student(s) in control of the iPad) becoming frustrated.

**Hayden:** *Play with the monkey.*

**Ben:** *Play with the monkey \*Cantonese\**

**Hayden:** *This one.*

**Ben:** *Why? It is the space monkey.*

*Talking in Cantonese*

*... play with the monkey ... space... play with the monkey ... space monkey ... space monkey ... special monkey ...*

*Talking in Cantonese*

*... space banana ... banana ... space ... this one! This one! Play with the famous ... play with the famous ... play with the famous ... play computer games with aliens ...*

Informal feedback, through five-minute whole-class interviews immediately following the ICT-based tasks, indicated that our students thoroughly enjoyed them because "it was 'new' or 'a different type of lesson'", and also because "we used the iPads". However, teachers need to consider whether the novelty factor outweighs the development of language ability. We also need to acknowledge that the lack of higher-order inquiry-driven dialogue may reflect the fact that this type of dialogue is not a natural feature of young learner-spoken interactions for a number of cognitive, social and educationally contextual reasons, and that this type of discourse may not be a realistic expectation of young learners. We concluded that the uses of ICT we observed did not markedly enhance the language learning experience for our students, but our research does suggest a number of implications for teachers.

First, using ICT may require intensive training for young learners. Second, teachers should focus on frequent exposure to a limited range of new technologies to familiarise students with them and reduce the cognitive load associated with task management. In addition, we found a higher instance of L1 when students were using ICT, implying that teachers may need to adopt greater tolerance for the use of L1 depending on the objectives of the class and the need to place emphasis on the task as opposed to the classroom language. Finally, further teacher training on the nature and importance of the quality of classroom talk would be valuable to influence more effective language development. As Chappell notes:

*The pedagogical implication here is that the objective of the classroom activity and the kind of*

*functions and forms that will realise that activity are important features to make explicit to students.*  
(p. 10)

## **Reflections**

Since technology is so prevalent in Hong Kong, we had made assumptions about how competent the students would be in using iPads and the internet. These assumptions, which turned out to be incorrect, had a big impact on the way we introduced the ICT-based tasks, gave instruction and managed classroom behaviour. We found the process of making recordings of our students' talk highly enriching. Through this process we observed a number of features of ICT-based lessons that we had not expected. In particular, we found that our assumptions that the use of ICT would automatically enhance the language learning experience were unsubstantiated.

# 9

## Using a collaborative online wiki and voice recordings to improve IELTS writing

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### Introduction

As a regular teacher of exam preparation courses, I am often frustrated both by the limited feedback that I can give individual students on their writing and the inefficient use of my own time spent correcting the same mistakes in multiple pieces of writing. My action research project, therefore, stemmed from a desire to:

- Give students more meaningful feedback on their writing.
- Encourage students to become more involved in reviewing and learning from their own writing.
- Encourage students to use each other as learning resources.
- Use my own time more productively.

To achieve these goals, I created an online wiki (a website which any registered user can edit) where students could write their homework tasks and interact with one another. I also decided to use *Screencast* software to give feedback, which allowed me to record both my computer screen and my own voice as I went through the students' work, commenting and suggesting changes.

### Context and participants

For this project I worked with two different IELTS preparation classes at a British Council teaching centre in Tokyo. The first group consisted of 13 Japanese and one Saudi Arabian student, all at B2 on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). The second group contained 14 Japanese students and one Korean who were at level C1. All students in both groups were planning to take the Academic IELTS test in the near future, in order to study in either the UK or Australia. However, their experiences of IELTS varied greatly; only four in the B2 class and nine in the C1 group had sat the test prior to this course.

Figure 1: Student IELTS scores



Of the remaining 16 students, four had experience of taking an IELTS preparation course but most students had little idea of what the test entailed.

From the students' needs analysis conducted at the centre at the beginning of the course, it immediately became apparent that writing should be a key focus of my course to help them achieve their desired scores. As can be seen from the graph detailing students' previous IELTS scores (if any), every student scored consistently lower on the writing section of the test (see Figure 1).

### Process

#### First cycle: Group 1

At the beginning of the course, I conducted a needs analysis to learn about the students' IELTS history, perceived strengths and weaknesses, and aims for their course. The top three perceived weaknesses were writing, speaking and vocabulary, and so I asked for their permission to be involved in my action research project, explaining that:

- They should publish their weekly writing homework on a private 'wiki', visible only to the other members of the class and to me.
- Once a week, I would use video 'screencasts' to record videos of up to five minutes in which I would read aloud through their work, highlighting appropriate language, suggesting improvements, explaining corrections I made and giving overall feedback on their task.



- I would expect them to watch their own screencast feedback, as well as that of at least two other classmates every week, and they should then leave constructive comments, explaining what they had learnt from their peers' work.

The students took to the idea immediately and began publishing their homework on the wiki within 24 hours of the first lesson. They were overheard enthusiastically discussing “the wiki” before the following lesson by one of my colleagues. Another teacher, who covered one of their lessons in my absence, said that, when checking the meaning of some unfamiliar vocabulary, he had been surprised that one of the students commented on its use by another student in a recent homework task. This enthusiasm continued for the duration of the ten-week course, with participation remaining high.

I had anticipated initial resistance to the idea of sharing student writing, and indeed this response was voiced in written feedback I collected at the end of the course. However, as one student put it:

*The key is participation. At first I hesitated to show my writings to the others but I was getting used to posting after the first time. And now that's fair to post my writings because everyone shares with other students.*

Giving students the option to use a pseudonym alleviated privacy concerns, and I also ensured that users' email addresses were invisible to other wiki users.

### Second cycle: Group 2

After the success of the first cycle of action research, I decided to rerun the project with a new group of C1 students. Similar findings from the first week's needs analysis showed a need for a clear focus on writing, and the students responded equally enthusiastically to the idea of using a wiki for writing tasks.

In response to Group 1's end-of-course feedback, I became more involved in wiki discussions, and also uploaded some general feedback and a weekly sample answer. This addition meant more of my time was dedicated to the project, but it proved to be worthwhile. One issue I did need to consider was handwriting practice, as IELTS candidates are required to handwrite answers in the exam. I consistently encouraged the students to write their work by hand, then type it up on the wiki. I also made it clear to them that the wiki was voluntary and they were welcome to submit handwritten work if they preferred. No-one on either course ever took this option. Another concern was that this project would raise student expectations about future teachers and

courses. In the first lesson with both groups, I ensured they were aware that this was my own project and not connected to other teachers' classes.

At the end of the second cycle I felt that the research had been even more successful than in the first. Indeed, I invited the C1 students to a discussion group at the end of the course to gather feedback on the wiki and they were unanimous in their view that the project had been beneficial to them. The rare criticisms of the screencasts included the five-minute limitation (imposed by the software provider), as well as technical issues such as the lack of a download option, and the inability to view them on tablets. I continued to teach the C1 group after the project finished but, due to other commitments, I decided to discontinue my action research. It was interesting to note, however, that many of the students continued to interact on the wiki in their own time.

### Examples of individual student responses

To illustrate how students responded to the project, below I present four short descriptions using data from the end-of-course questionnaires (Group 1) and end-of-course questionnaires and interview (Group 2), as well as log-in statistics from the wiki itself.

#### Student 'K' (Group 1)

Student K logged on much more than the average for her course, 436 times in ten weeks. She highlighted that in previous courses it was sometimes unclear why her writing had been corrected but that the screencasts made it “easy to know why [she] had made a mistake”. She continued to log into the wiki around once a week, even up to six months after her course finished.

#### Student 'S' (Group 1)

Before her course, S had an overall IELTS score of 6.5, but only 5.5 in writing. She was “really motivated” by the idea of the wiki and particularly enjoyed being able to “see so many samples of work” and that “we could discuss our writing in class ... it helped [us] to [get to] know each other”. She cited peer pressure as a motivation in that “when [she was] tired and didn't want to write an essay, if [she] found others uploaded essays already, [she] felt ‘I have to write’”.

She accessed the wiki more than average (“several times a week”), checking her own and other students' writing, watching “three or four” screencasts and keeping a diary of “new vocabulary and useful expressions”.

#### Student 'A' (Group 2)

This student joined the class three weeks into the course, and she admitted to feeling “awkward” about taking part as the project had already begun.

However, at the end of the course, when asked if her initial worries were warranted, she replied: “Not at all, it was not difficult to use at all and was actually very useful!” Later, she stated that in the past she had felt “isolated” in her studies, but that the screencast feedback had made it “very easy to understand the revision of [her] tasks”.

She reported that she accessed the wiki “once or twice a week ... to browse how others did ... to write my tasks and listen to my voice feedback”. However, time constraints limited how many other screencasts she could watch. As clear evidence that the project benefitted her, her writing score for IELTS [in the actual exam] “raised [sic] by 1.0” between the beginning and the end of the project.

### **Student ‘Y’ (Group 2)**

An extremely motivated student, Y used the wiki more than anyone else on either course, over 500 times over the ten weeks according to the wiki data, and at least five times a day according to his own estimates. He declared himself “disappointed” when he logged on to find no updates and felt the project “helped greatly” with his writing, especially in terms of being able to “understand the question” and learn from “checking other students ... as [he] could learn a lot not only from the teacher but also from my classmates”.

### **Findings**

I gained a number of new insights from conducting this research. The screencasts provided much more meaningful feedback than students were used to, but the majority (75 per cent) of students believed they had benefitted from them, with the others indicating that they had not exploited them as much as they wished. Nevertheless, students unanimously agreed that sharing their work led to greater involvement and motivation in writing. A wide range of factors led to this motivation, including peer pressure to upload work, email notifications about wiki updates, encouragement from other students’ comments post-task and my regular spoken feedback on their writing. There was broad agreement that checking other students’ work improved learning in a variety of ways, including keeping a language diary of expressions learnt from classmates, and borrowing inspiration from classmates’ work about how to formulate their own response.

In terms of my own time, these courses were more time consuming than my usual IELTS courses. Roughly ten minutes per student was needed to record a screencast and upload it, in addition to the time needed to interact with students. However, overall I believe I used my time more productively by providing more meaningful feedback to the whole

class rather than just to individual students. In addition, most students studied the feedback more carefully than usual, and it seemed much more beneficial to them in terms of quality and quantity.

### **Reflections**

From a personal perspective the action research project was challenging yet incredibly rewarding. Because I had a better rapport with the students, I definitely looked forward to those classes more than to other lessons. It is clear to me that my feedback techniques (even without the wiki) have improved, I am more aware of my students’ needs and I now consider more carefully how to meet them.

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