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The Efficacy of Teacher Agency in L2 Writing Instruction: Insights from the EAP Classroom

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ABSTRACT
L2 scholars (e.g., Gao, 2010; Mercer, 2011; Ollerhead, 2010) have underlined the importance of teacher agency in making classroom instruction successful. This article reports on the findings of an empirical study on the efficacy of teacher agency in an EAP writing classroom in Bangladesh. Studying five EAP learners, this qualitative case study examined what aspects of writing instruction with teacher’s agentive practices are useful and what students’ perceptions are when the teacher employs agentive practices. The analysis of data shows that teacher’s agentive practices were considered to be useful in the following aspects of EAP writing instruction: (a) instruction of grammar, (b) illustration of the purpose of writing, (c) raising awareness about audience, and (d) raising awareness about writing styles. Findings suggest that students perceived teacher’s agentive practices positively for the following reasons: (a) it helped them apply the learned topics to their writing, (b) it provided a more complete process of learning, (c) it minimized the stress of learning, and (d) it minimized the difficulty of internalizing grammar rules. Based on the findings, this paper argues that teachers’ agentive practices are helpful in making writing instruction more accessible to and meaningful for EAP students. Implications for teaching and learning are discussed.

KEYWORDS: teacher agency, EAP, L2 writing, student perceptions

Introduction
One of the common challenges second language (L2) instructors face is how to make instruction accessible to and meaningful for students. There might be many reasons for this. However, in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) context, the reasons behind this are as follows. First, EAP curriculum is intensive, requiring instructors to finish the lessons within a stipulated time (Alexander, Argent & Spencer, 2008; Jordan, 1997). This entails that instructors rush through the course materials regardless of student uptake. Second, the topics and content covered in an EAP course are pre-determined. Instructors select topics and content areas in an EAP course based on assumed student needs (e.g., Alexander et al, 2008; Caplan & Stevens, 2017; Charles & Pecorari, 2016; Flowerdew, 2013). This means that EAP curricula are prescriptive and there is little room for instructors to deviate from the lesson plans. Consequently, student concerns remain unaddressed (e.g., Benesch, 1999). Sometimes student concerns are overlooked so instructors can finish the curriculum on time. Another factor that also affects EAP teaching is large class sizes, which makes it difficult to implement an otherwise effective curriculum (e.g., Charles & Pecorari, 2016; Chowdhury & Kamal, 2014).
While these challenges are common in most EAP contexts, they are particularly prevalent in the writing classroom with such questions arising as: how to address students’ grammar errors, how to provide effective feedback, and how to tailor classroom instruction to the texts students produce in specific disciplines. On account of this, striking a balance between what a writing curriculum dictates and what a classroom context needs becomes challenging for instructors. This requires that EAP writing instructors be flexible and adaptable in order for their instruction to be effective.

The conceptual framework of the current study derives from the above challenges in EAP writing instruction. Considering that agency offers instructors the flexibility of impromptu decision-making in response to classroom contexts, it was hypothesized that the incorporation of teachers’ agentive practices in EAP writing classrooms would help address these challenges. Exploratory in nature, this qualitative case study was guided by the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What aspects of writing instruction with a teacher’s agentive practices are useful in the EAP classroom?
Research Question 2: What are the student perceptions about teachers’ agentive practices in such a setting?

Review of related literature

Writing instruction in an EAP context

Writing and reading are the two most important skills that EAP programs generally focus on (Alexander et al., 2008), with the main goal of a writing course to help students develop effective written communication skills in academic contexts. Tribble (2009, 2015) has argued that EAP writing instruction can be divided into three approaches: social/genre approach, intellectual/rhetorical approach, and academic literacy approach. According to Tribble (2015), of the three approaches, intellectual/rhetorical and social/genre approaches are the most prevalent.

An intellectual/rhetorical approach to EAP writing requires that students have sufficient mastery over sentence-level grammar, for without correct grammatical forms, sentences they write fail to communicate intended ideas. Based on empirical evidence, Ferris (2001) in this regard has argued that “both instructors and students perceive accurate writing to be important in academic settings” (p. 302). For intermediate and high intermediate learners, grammatical accuracy is an important goal in L2 writing.

Grammatical knowledge is important to incorporate feedback into texts in process writing as well. Research has found that correction of errors is most effective for feedback that is “selective, prioritized and indirect” (Ferris, 2001, p. 302). Without students’ knowledge in grammar such feedback practices (e.g., indirect feedback) are not effective. Considering that EAP students are expected to produce texts using a variety of sentence structures, knowledge in grammar is helpful to negotiate the meaning-making process in writing.
The efficacy of teacher agency in L2 writing instruction: Insights from the EAP classroom


The intellectual/rhetorical approach to EAP writing is important to prepare students for various academic writing conventions. Students learn how to incorporate outside sources into writing in a manner that is academically acceptable (e.g., Alexander et al., 2008). Incorporation of sources into the texts is an important skill that students master as this is required in academic fields (e.g., Leki & Carson, 1995). Students also learn various rhetorical patterns (e.g., compare-contrast and cause-effect) appropriate for their field of study.

In a social/genre approach to writing, students learn how to write effectively in various disciplinary contexts (Tribble, 2009, 2015). This is especially critical to succeed in discipline-specific writing tasks (Alexander et al., 2008; Carter, 2007; Lea & Street, 2000). De Chazal (2014) suggests that in order to make texts persuasive, students are expected to use the appropriate style, tone, and voice. Also, they need to be aware of their audience. These skills require that students have knowledge about the rhetorical strategies of academic writing which teach them the effective rhetorical moves responsive to the specific disciplinary contexts (Russell, 1997, 1999).

The review above suggests that the objectives of typical EAP writing courses are well laid down. However, there are many factors that make attaining these goals challenging. First, because the time is limited and the stakes for students are high (e.g., Alexander et al., 2008), instructors are under pressure to cover the curriculum. As well, with large classes, especially in a writing course, it is not only difficult to address student needs, but also to teach the lessons to a fixed plan. As Chowdhury and Kamal (2014) have argued, a perfect curriculum is not enough to make EAP courses effective. Benesch (1999) has found that the pressure of coverage is a factor that determines to what extent students have the Q/A time in the classroom.

This points to an inherent challenge associated with EAP writing course delivery—although the main objective of these courses is to address students’ writing needs (e.g., Charles & Pecarori, 2016; Flowerdew, 2013; Hamp-Lyons, 2001; Hyland, 2006), it is challenging, if not impossible, to account for all student needs in the classroom, for student needs are diverse and multifaceted. The practice of needs analyses cannot always account for context-specific needs. For one, although diversity is a given for any classroom, having multi-level students in terms of their English language proficiency is increasing in EAP (e.g., Caplan & Stevens, 2017; Fox, 2009). Multi-level classrooms are bound to have varying needs. Also, EAP students have interests in different academic fields, resulting in distinctive writing needs related to specific subject areas.

In summary, the discussion above suggests that a teaching approach that is responsive to constantly evolving context is essential for EAP writing instruction. L2 writing scholars (Casanave, 1995; Kubota & Lehner, 2004) have argued that the “context” of writing should be one of the important considerations in writing instruction, with Casanave (1995) highlighting the importance of the “local interactions” of the writing processes.

**Teacher agency in L2 contexts**

Agency is a quality that transforms an individual from acting mechanically to acting in response to the context of action. Agency in this sense is what differentiates humans from
mechanical objects. Ahearn (2001) defines agency as “the socioculturally mediated capacity to act” (p. 112). In L2 contexts, Duff (2012) relates agency to “people’s ability to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individuals leading, potentially, to personal or social transformation” (p. 414). These definitions serve to suggest that agency is a sociocultural attribute that helps make conscious decisions in an L2 teaching-learning context.

Mercer (2011) argues that two recent developments have put agency in the forefront of L2 research: (a) an increasing focus on learner autonomy and (b) the recognition of a “social turn” (Block, 2003) in explaining various L2 phenomena (p. 427). This stream of research maintains that L2 learners (and teachers) are important agents in language learning. Individuals involved in L2 learning engage in a bidirectional relationship with the context—they both influence and are influenced by each other (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Mercer, 2011). In other words, individuals not only react to an L2 context, but also work proactively to alter the context. Since agency is a socioculturally conditioned attribute, it has direct relevance to L2 research. While recent L2 research has explored the role of student agency in L2 learning, studies on teacher agency have been sparse. Considering that teachers play an important role in what goes on in the EAP classroom, it is important to investigate how teacher agency manifests itself in such contexts.

Teachers play crucial roles in making EAP learning successful in classroom contexts. What goes on in the classroom is determined by what activities teachers adopt as well as how they make students accomplish various tasks. Although scholars (Benson, 2011; Ding & Stapleton, 2016; Little, 2009) have underlined the importance of students’ autonomous learning, activities in a classroom are determined by instructors’ spontaneous decisions as to what the best course of action is at a particular moment. This is where teacher agency comes into play, offering insights into teachers’ decision making processes and subsequent teaching and learning outcomes.

In light of the above, teacher agency is important in classroom-based L2 pedagogy. As noted previously, empirical research on teacher agency has been sparse. However, based on the available literature it appears that a common thread that runs through the research in teacher agency is that agentive practices help instructors negotiate context-specific teaching challenges and make L2 pedagogy more efficient (Hamid & Nguyen, 2016; Kitade, 2015; Van Huy, Hamid & Renshaw, 2016).

Teacher agency has consistently figured as an attribute that helps L2 instructors deal with macro-level policy dumping (e.g., Hamid & Nguyen, 2016; Nguyen & Bui, 2016). Instructors are dependent on their agentive practices to deal with challenges such as large classes, lack of resources, target language proficiency as well as training and professional development. For example, Martin (2005a, 2005b) studying English classrooms in Malaysia and Brunei has found that teacher agency plays an important role in making textbooks accessible to students. By employing their agentive practices teachers align the textbook content with local students’ knowledge and understanding of the subject matter so as to make English learning more “engaging.” Teachers’ agentive practice manifested itself when they employed what Martin (2005b) describes as “safe” practices in which instructors adopt teaching “practices that allow the classroom participants to be seen to accomplish lessons” (p. 89). Martin (2005b) argues
that safe practices are helpful as they allow teachers to annotate difficult content for student understanding with limited English proficiency that teachers themselves have. It may be relevant to point out that teacher agency plays an important role in the classroom when language-in-education policy changes in a country. A good example in this regard is Malaysia where language policy changes in 2012 led teachers to adapt to new realities in the classroom (e.g., Ali, Hamid & Moni, 2011; Rashid, Rahman & Yunus, 2017).

Teacher agency helps transform pedagogical approaches and incorporate student voices (Phyak & Bui, 2014) into the teaching and learning process. Researchers (Phyak & Bui, 2014) have found that through agentive practices educator-activists revived the minority languages in alignment with students’ desires. This ensured pedagogical effectiveness as students were able to internalize the target lessons more enthusiastically. A more recent study by Colegrove and Zúñiga (2018) shows that a teacher’s agentive self enables them to utilize dynamic teaching practices in the classroom, creating effective learning opportunities, in particular, for marginalized students. These studies underline that teacher agency is an important factor in making instruction effective in a context that is unresponsive to cultural and linguistic diversity. This aligns with the results of Ollerhead’s (2010) study in which she found that teacher Paula overcame various constraints at the programmatic and institutional levels by exercising her agency, and made classroom lessons meaningful to her students.

Finally, research has shown that teacher agency helps create innovative solutions to pedagogical challenges (Kitade, 2015; Zacharias, 2013). Zacharias’ (2013) study shows how an Indonesian English teacher made use of Google translate in delivering English lessons. With limited English proficiency and few resources, this teacher had to resort to agentive practices to ensure effective policy implementation in the classroom. Kitade’s (2015) study reports on teacher agency in a Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) context. By tracking two CALL teachers’ evolving affordances and constraints in L2 teaching through the use of technology, the researcher shows how teacher agency plays out in mediating L2 learning.

Although the investigation of teacher agency is relatively new the review above serves to suggest its increasing proliferation and importance. As can be seen, most research has focused on the efficacy of teachers’ agentive practices in overcoming challenging situations in L2 instruction. While these studies provide valuable insights into general L2 instruction, none of these studies has focused on specific skill areas (e.g., reading, writing). The current study fills this gap by exploring a teacher’s agentive practices in an EAP writing classroom in Bangladesh.

**Research methods**

**Setting**

This qualitative single case study took place in an undergraduate EAP writing class at a Bangladeshi university. This research method was deemed appropriate for the study as it involved an in-depth analysis of a bounded case of EAP writing course of a single program (e.g., Merriam, 2009). The participants were enrolled in a 3-credit introductory English writing course. The focus of this course was introductory academic writing, which included
short paragraphs leading to writing short essays. Although discrete point grammar was not part of the content of the course, the instructor was expected to answer student questions about grammar topics. The overarching philosophy behind this approach was that to incorporate teacher feedback into writing, students needed knowledge about basic grammar. During actual teaching practices, however, it was challenging for the instructor to strike a balance between teaching writing and grammar simultaneously. As instructor of the course, the author of this article adopted agentive practices as a strategy to deal with this challenge. While implementing the strategy, throughout the term notes were kept regarding the most common questions arising in the classroom. The instructor would use the most opportune moment to discuss the questions.

**Participants**

All participants of this study were enrolled in ENG 001 (pseudonym). There were five participants—two males and three females—all of whom were first-year undergraduate students at a Bangladeshi university. They were between 18 and 21 years of age and spoke Bengali as first language. Two participants majored in Business, while one each in Economics, English, and Computer Science.

**Data collection and analysis**

A qualitative single case study method, as discussed by Merriam (2009), was adopted while data were drawn from students’ written texts and semi-structured interviews. Participants submitted their written papers and took part in approximately 1.5-hour long face-to-face interviews. The interviews were conducted by one of the author’s colleagues, who was not familiar with any of the participants. This arrangement ensured that the information gathered was unbiased and reliable, and that participants were able to speak freely during the interviews without worrying about consequences with final grades. The interviewer had a background in English language teaching. Prior to interviews, the interviewer was provided with detailed objectives of the study and semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix). All interviews took place at the end of the term. Participants’ writing samples and lesson plans were used as references during interviews. The researcher kept a journal throughout the data collection period, which was also used as an important reference during the analysis of data.

Upon completion of data collection, a working definition of teacher agency was developed as follows: teacher agency manifests itself when an instructor performs a contextually mediated act of student learning in the classroom (see Ahearn, 2001; Duff, 2012). This was used to identify instances of teacher’s agentive practices from student interviews.

Audio-taped interviews were transcribed for analysis. Qualitative data analysis protocols (Miles & Huberman, 1994) were used for analysis of data. In order to answer the research questions, interview transcripts and students’ writing samples were read several times for themes to emerge by themselves (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). To illustrate, in the following interview excerpt, the participant spoke about how the teacher addressed her writing style, going beyond grammar issues, as an agentive aspect of teaching. This transcript was therefore coded as raising awareness about writing styles.
Researcher (R): What do you have to say about the way this course has been taught this term? Give me as many details as you can.
Participant 1 (P1): I like it.
R: Can you give more information? May be examples?
P1: He uses our writing for teaching...I mean when we have problems in writing, he would discuss and explain them as examples, no matter [we have it scheduled or not?].
R: Can you be more specific?
P1: I know active and passive voice in English, it’s not a problem for me. At least I know the rules. But I don’t know how I don’t use them correct ways. I did not even know what the problem was when the teacher told me about the problem in my writing. But when he explained I realize this. It’s hard for me, but this way of explanation is [has] made me understand.

Similarly, in the following example, the participant noted how classroom instruction helped him become more aware about the audience. Consequently, this excerpt was coded as raising awareness about audience.

Researcher (R): Tell me about what stood out for you in instructor’s teaching. Just tell me anything about his teaching.
Participant 3 (P3): Teacher use our essays and discuss in the projector for everyone to see. He highlights the problems in our writing without our names [without mentioning anyone’s names].
R: Can you explain how it helped you?
P3: It makes me more careful about readers—what readers, the audience want or understand about my writing.
R: Can you give an example?
P3: Even though it is clear in your head it may not be clear for others, it helps me think like other people.

A total of 33 codes were retrieved at the end of the entire coding process. These codes were then grouped under eight different sub-categories that are discussed with examples in the section below. To ensure the reliability of coding, the researcher recoded a portion of data two months after the initial coding. It was found that the results of the second coding were consistent with the first.

Findings

**Research question 1: What aspects of L2 writing instruction with a teacher’s agentive practices are useful in the EAP classroom?**

Data analysis suggests that the teacher’s agentive practices were useful for the following aspects of writing instruction: (a) instruction of grammar, (b) illustration of the purpose of writing, (c) raising awareness about the audience, and (d) raising awareness about writing styles.

**Instruction of grammar**
EAP instructors often find it difficult to determine the role of grammar instruction in writing courses. EAP scholars generally agree that some knowledge in grammar is essential for good academic writing skills (e.g., De Chazal, 2014; Jordan, 1997). But when and how to teach grammar is a point of contention—should discrete-point grammar be taught in a writing course at all? If so, which topics should be covered? The findings of this study suggest that teachers’ agentive practices can play a role in incorporating grammar lessons into writing instruction. The findings provide insights into how grammar instruction can be integrated into writing courses. It appears that grammar instruction is most effective when it relates to students’ individual writing. The following excerpt illustrates this.

**Moving people to big cities** in these days are due to some causes such as easy like, better educational for them and their children, and better infrastructure and technology in cities than villages. (Participant 2)

In the student essay excerpt above, the topic of discussion was subject-verb agreement. Finding similar errors in other student texts, teacher agency manifested itself and made the teacher take advantage of the opportunity to discuss subject-verb agreement as a topic for the day’s class discussion. Considering the importance of this grammar topic for general writing skill development and its relevance to immediate context of student learning, the instructor chose to spend class time explaining subject-verb agreement rules in English.

During interviews, student participants reflected on the benefits of this teaching practice. They reasoned that this was most helpful because they could relate the grammar rule to their writing. For example, one participant noted:

I can learn this grammar [rule] from my writing [as opposed to contrived examples in textbooks]. (Participant 1)

Another participant pointed out:

The examples in the book is [are] not clear, so I cannot always follow it [them], but my own writing examples are clear to me, so it is easy. (Participant 3)

Indeed, it appears that helping students identify errors in their own writing and then explaining the relevant grammar rules mediate their learning process positively. This helps students connect to lessons and may even have a more lasting effect on them. Consequently, student uptake enhances.

Another aspect of grammar instruction that instructor’s agentive practices seem to have addressed is the timing of relevant instruction in students’ learning process. Discrete grammar tasks may not always result in effective student learning since learners do not always apply grammar rules they learn to an immediate writing context. However, the findings of this study suggest that when the instructor drew grammar rules from student texts, the process underlined relevance to student learning. One of the participants noted that:

There are many rules in the book and I cannot remember all of them when I am writing. (Participant 5)
Another participant mentioned the following:

Sometimes when I do grammar practice, I do not know when I am [going to] use them, I am not sure, so I sometimes forget them. [It’s] very hard to know exactly what rule you need to know when. (Participant 1)

Overall, it seems that the instructor’s agentive practices helped create opportunities for grammar instruction that students could relate to writing. This would not have been possible had grammar items been taught discretely.

**Illustration of the purpose of writing**

Accomplishing good writing is not possible without a clear purpose. L2 writers are usually pre-occupied with producing error-free texts. As a result, this important aspect of writing is an afterthought for them. Findings suggest that teacher agency in the EAP classroom helped raise awareness about setting the purpose in writing.

I think that it is helpful—I do not have many problems about grammar but I have a lot of problem[s] with the content. Because I always make a lot of ideas, because I often repeat a lot in my essay and this kind of practice help[s] me organize my ideas and structures of my essay better. (Participant 3)

In the interview excerpt above the participant referred to a class activity in which the instructor initiated an impromptu discussion on the purpose and focus of writing. The participant explained that in spite of not having grammatical errors, his text suffered from lack of purpose. This participant further explained that one of his problems was that he had too many ideas. As a result, the main purpose of his writing would be lost.

Another participant mentioned that she considered “writing as writing”; that is, for her writing meant producing a lot of texts as she did not consider writing as a means of communicating meaningful ideas coherently. The following excerpt illustrates this.

I see writing as writing. I never think writing means something else, so I write as much as I can always. I do not think anything. But now I think, I am wrong. I have to plan for it and I must follow the goal. (Participant 2)

Noticing other students struggling with similar problems, the agentive self of the instructor prompted him to highlight this when they were receiving feedback. Although teaching “the purpose of writing” may be covered in class, emphasizing this particular point with reference to students’ own texts seemed more meaningful to them.

**Raising awareness about audience**

Having a clear idea about the target audience helps contextualize the writing task. This helps students realize that every piece of writing is meant for communicating information with a target audience. The importance of audience while writing cannot be ingrained in students’
mind until they experience this at a practical level. The findings suggest that through the use of teacher’s agentive practices students’ audience awareness was enhanced. In order to implement this particular teaching technique, excerpts from student essays were projected on screen for the class to see and comment on. Students discussed the effect texts might have on an imagined audience. These exercises benefited students in ways that would not have been possible by explaining the notion of audience. The following interview excerpt illustrates this.

Even though it is clear in your head it may not be clear for others, it helps me think like other people. (Participant 3)

This participant explained although he knew that he had to write for a target audience, this wasn’t clear to him until the instructor initiated an impromptu discussion on his texts that highlighted the intricacies of audience.

Another participant made the following remark about this particular agentive practice by instructor. She noted that this practice helped her raise critical awareness about audience in writing.

When I write it makes sense, but when I read with others on the [projector] screen, it doesn’t make any sense. I really feel I was not thinking very hard when I write. When I read my writing with everybody in class it becomes more clear what I must do. (Participant 1)

Finally, another participant remarked that the activity related to audience helped make writing more meaningful and enjoyable to him. Realizing that his texts had to make sense to others, he noted that teacher’s agentive practice helped him discover it.

I never thought what others think about my writing, I just write when I have to. But now when everyone reads [on projector screen], and finds problems, although I feel bad, but it’s in good way. I now can see I must write more for others to understand; I will not write for my [own] understanding only. (Participant 4)

**Raising awareness about writing styles**

EAP students may feel frustrated due to the specific requirements of the academic genre. Making appropriate word choice, for instance, requires an advanced understanding about English language. The following excerpt from a student text illustrates this.

Children are the **colors** of our lives and **many people have changed their lives** when they have their first baby. (Participant 4)

This excerpt from student essay meant to describe the experience of the birth of his first child. At first reading, it might be apparent that the writer intended to use the word *colors* metaphorically. However, when read more critically, it would appear that the use of this metaphor may not collocate well for the intended meaning. On another level, it is also important for the student to note that metaphors are not commonly used in academic prose. This error thus created the occasion for instructor to delve further into the use of figurative
language in academic writing. The second highlighted part of the excerpt is an error related to subject and predicate. Although structurally correct, this clause would read more naturally if *their lives* is used in the subject position instead of *many people* as follows: *people’s lives change when they have their first baby*. Stylistic errors such as these were common in student texts. Use of agentive practices enabled the instructor to bring this to students’ attention as a useful instructional practice.

Another stylistic error noted by the instructor in student texts that prompted a follow-up class discussion is as follows:

> Thus, the quality of education will be definitely decreased. (Participant 1)

The error in the above essay excerpt resulted from an incorrect use of passive voice. Although structurally correct, the sentence fails to communicate the intended meaning. Considering the importance of such sentence structures, the instructor initiated a follow-up discussion on voice in English. Structures such as this, when referenced in the context of students’ actual writing, were easier to explain and more effective for student learning. Students seemed to find it easier to internalize the rules from their own writing. For example, the student who wrote the above sentence commented as follows.

> I know active and passive voice in English, it’s not a problem for me. At least I know the rules. But I don’t know how I don’t use them correct ways. I did not even know what the problem was when the teacher told me about the problem in my writing. But when he explained I realize this. It’s hard for me, but this way of explanation is [has] made me understand. (Participant 1)

From the student remarks it appears that teaching grammar alone is not sufficient to address stylistic errors associated with writing. Instant feedback on students’ own texts helps them identify such errors and internalize the corresponding rules. Instructors’ agentive practices provided such learning opportunities to students.

**Research question 2: What are the student perceptions about teachers’ agentive practices in such a setting?**

Findings indicate that participants perceived teacher’s agentive practices in the classroom to be positive. They provided the following reasons why they thought teacher’s agentive practices were effective: (a) it helped them apply the learned topics to writing; (b) it provided a more complete process of learning; (c) it minimized the stress of learning; and (d) it minimized the difficulty of internalizing grammar rules.

*It helped them apply the learned topics to writing*

One of the common concerns students shared during interviews was that there was usually little opportunity to apply what was discussed in the classroom to writing. Use of the teacher’s agentive practices helped minimize this. For example, through agentive practices the instructor was able to make instruction more tangible. Consequently, students were able to apply what they learned to writing, which made a big difference in their learning process.
From the grammar book it is very abstract but in context it helps me see the use of the rule. In the context it doesn’t remain just grammar it becomes the meaning from the entire sentence. (Participant 1)

In the excerpt above, the participant referred to the discussion on voice, which helped her identify grammar rules in the context of her own writing. She elaborated that although she knew the rules about voice, its application wasn’t clear to her until the instructor explained it in reference to her writing.

Another participant noted that he had been studying grammar for a long time but he always had grammar errors in his writing. He contended that although he had good control over English grammar, somehow he wasn’t able to apply it to his writing. This caused great frustration in his L2 learning process. Classroom feedback practices helped him see the connection between rules and their application to actual writing. The following interview excerpt illustrates this.

I have read grammar rules [for] a long time, when I was in Grade 3. But I still do not know what my writing problems are. Teacher marked many grammar problems in my writing. So it makes me frustrated. But this way [teacher’s agentive practices] I can see and establish the connection [between grammar rules and their application to writing]. (Participant 3)

Finally, in the following excerpt another participant noted that she was never sure why she had to use a thesis statement in essays. Although she could summarize her ideas into a thesis of a sentence or two, she thought there were other ways to organize ideas as well. It was through feedback she had received during the whole class discussion involving explanations of the purpose of writing that she became clear of the usefulness of having a thesis statement. The following interview excerpt illustrates this.

I don’t know why I write a thesis statement, but I know what is this. I can write this. But I can arrange my ideas other ways too. So why I write thesis statement? But it was clear when one day the teacher explained the purpose of writing. So I know now why [I need a] thesis statement. (Participant 2)

*It provided a more complete process of learning*

Somewhat related to the above, student writers reported that use of teacher’s agentive practices in the classroom helped them experience a more complete process of learning. They explained that in a pre-planned lesson, instructors spend little time explaining the concepts derived from class discussions, since there is little room for deviation from the main topic. However, agentive practices afforded the instructor the flexibility to side- or back-track and provide students with more nuanced explanations. This helped fill the gap between what students had already internalized and the information they might have needed to get a more complete understanding about topics. In the following excerpt, the participant explained how the follow-up discussions afforded by teacher’s agentive practices provided her with a more complete learning experience.
I can read the rules in grammar books many times, but I have problems, sometimes I don’t know the rules. I think this [follow-up discussions] makes me…, I think I know them better and completely. (Participant 1)

Another participant remarked that class discussions helped her apply the various writing rules that were discussed. She commented that until one knew how to use the rules one learned, they were of no use. The following interview excerpt illustrates this.

Rules don’t have any value [unless they can be applied]. I learned here how to use the rules. (Participant 5)

*It minimized the stress of learning*

The findings indicate that teacher’s agentive practices provided students with additional support which made them feel less stressed. Language learning is stressful; EAP students become especially stressed since there is an expectation that they already have basic knowledge of English, and therefore, advanced writing skills. Findings suggest that providing students with additional support helps reduce the stress of learning. In the following interview excerpt, the participant explained how extra feedback on common problems helped reduce her stress.

I think this [the use of agentive practices] helps, because common mistakes when we wrote the thesis statement, when the teacher gives feedback we know oh here’s my mistakes, when you show many statements, it shows many errors and I am not always thinking about these errors anymore that give me headache. (Participant 5)

Another participant commented on instructor’s incorporation of various topics into classroom discussion, even though they were not part of the course syllabus.

The teacher even taught us what is not in the syllabus because we needed them. This makes it easy for me and I learn clearly and without [being] afraid. (Participant 4)

*It minimized the unpredictability of learning language rules*

A common challenge for many L2 learners is to encode different language rules in a manner that is comprehensible. Considering that English has myriad irregular grammar rules and expressions, explanations are often necessary so students can overcome the challenges these irregularities pose. Instructors need to explain the differences between regular and irregular constructions of various English forms. Findings suggest that agentive practices afforded the instructor to explicate grammar rules that were confusing to students (e.g., articles in English, unwarranted passive forms, the use of static verbs). This made learning about L2 writing most helpful. One participant noted the following in this regard.

I did not know why passive voice doesn’t work, but when he [the instructor] explained on the [projector] screen now I know the reason. It is really helpful.
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( Participant 1 )

Another participant explained that after the instructor’s explanation, she realized that there was always a reason why certain rules were followed in a language. This was not clear to her until the instructor explained this in class.

     When the teacher show[s] it on the screen and explained I know there’s [a] reason why this rule exist[s] even if it is confusing. I am not confused anymore. (Participant 5)

In sum, the findings above provide insights into the efficacy of teacher’s agentive practices in an L2 writing classroom. It appears that teacher agency is helpful in making classroom instruction more meaningful for and accessible to students. Student perceptions suggest that they view instructor’s agentive practices positively and they believe that it helps enhance their learning.

Discussion

Considering the small sample size and short duration of the study the implications derived from findings need to be discussed cautiously. As well, one has to keep in mind that many implications may not be generalizable and will warrant further research. In spite of this, it can be said that the current study provides important insights into the efficacy of teacher agency in the writing classroom in an EAP context. The findings underscore that a teacher’s agentive practices can help make classroom instruction more effective. With various challenges facing EAP instructors, especially those in the writing classroom, the findings provide directions with regard to how limitation of resources as well as curricular constraints can be somewhat mitigated by teachers’ efficient handling of the teaching context. It seems that teacher agency plays an important role in helping instructors make the best out of a context of teaching.

From the findings it appears that some of the difficult choices that EAP writing instructors have to make with regard to selection of grammar items, feedback practices, teaching students about the purpose of writing, and importance of audience awareness can be accommodated if they use agentive practices—finding an appropriate moment to introduce these important but least discussed concepts. To illustrate, while it is not possible to discuss all grammar items in the classroom given the time constraints, instructors can focus on grammar errors that appear to affect most number of students in the class. It has at least two important benefits. First, student writers will see the relevance of attending to a specific grammar rule since it directly relates to their writing. Second, it will also draw students’ attention and interest, considering its applicability to their writing development. Similarly, agentive practices help make instructor feedback on student writing more focused and specific (e.g., feedback on Participant 2 and 4’s texts), which in turn, makes writing instruction more engaging. As the findings suggest, teaching the purpose of writing and importance of audience awareness in the EAP writing classroom can be implemented by whole class discussions using projector screens. When students engage in learning as a group, it reduces the stress of learning (e.g., Participants 4 and 5). In short, learning in the EAP writing classroom takes place more productively when students can make connections between discussion points and what they struggle with in their own writing.
Employing teacher’s agentive practices helps create an effective ecology of L2 learning (e.g., van Lier, 2004, 2008) as well. To illustrate, when teachers use their agency, they take cues for instruction from the classroom itself, instead of following a hard and fast lesson plan. This allows them to employ their impromptu decision making abilities and connect their teaching with learners’ real rather than assumed needs. On one hand, this allows teachers to focus on issues that are important for student learning in the classroom, on the other, students who have already mastered these topics can test the depth of their learning by participating in various classroom activities. In other words, through identification, creation, and application of practical activities within the context of EAP writing, instructors can provide students with experiences that are more complete and rewarding. This helps instructors build an organic relationship among instructional planning, learning tasks, discussions and tests. In a traditional EAP classroom in which instructors follow pre-planned lesson plans, students’ actual needs and classroom activities may diverge. But when instructional practices are drawn from specific teaching contexts, learning activities tend to converge with student needs.

It also appears that students appreciate classroom instruction that has direct relevance to their immediate learning challenges, even if this means that the instructor deviated from predetermined lesson plans. The efficacy of teacher agency, thus, seems to be reciprocated by students’ willingness to adapt to such teaching environments. This might seem to be the norm at least in contexts in which the current study took place.

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study is that teacher agency seems to help students’ noticing of important language forms and help their L2 development. According to L2 scholars (e.g., Chapelle, 1998; Richards, 2006; Schmidt, 1990) noticing is an important criterion of L2 development. It helps learners internalize the new language input. Considering that an input becomes an intake only when learners are made aware of the target language forms, teachers’ agentive practices can play an important role in helping students identify and learn essential writing conventions and grammar rules. The findings of this study show that student writers appreciated the use of teacher agency in helping them identify the cause of their L2 learning difficulties. For example, participants shared how the instructor’s deviation from the main course of teaching in order to explain various grammar rules or written expressions helped them follow these topics more effectively. The findings thus confirm that the use of teacher agency helps learners notice important L2 forms.

From an instructional point of view, while agentive practices provide instructors with more freedom in the classroom regarding what needs to be done in a specific context, this implies that instructors themselves have to reciprocate by taking responsibility of choosing the tasks that are relevant to student learning. This puts the onus on instructors in making sure that they make the right choices under pressure and without the advantage of having a structured approach to classroom instruction that comes with concrete lesson plans. Consequently, successful employment of teachers’ agentive practices will require experience and continuous reflection on the part of instructors.

This implies that instructors have to be open to learning from trials and errors and continuously reflect on what works best in the classroom. This also implies that teacher-administrators have to be more flexible and accepting of an open-ended curriculum and
instructional practices which would be a departure from a traditional, lesson-plan-based curriculum. Considering that program administrators invest a lot of resources in developing curriculums, including lesson plans, this may not come as a welcome change. However, as recent studies (e.g., Colegrove & Zúñiga, 2018; Kitade, 2015; Ollerhead, 2010; Phyak & Bui, 2014; Zacharias, 2013) on this have shown, teachers’ agentive practices have yielded success, especially in micro-level L2 policy implementation, e.g., classroom instruction. Since instructors are intimately related to various constraints in a classroom context, agentive practices help them overcome the challenges associated with these constraints.

Finally, the implementation of teachers’ agentive practices has implications for future research. For example, it would be important to know what the commonalities and differences are in teachers’ agentive practices in different EAP contexts based on various factors such as learners’ proficiency levels, backgrounds, specific language skills, and class sizes. It is possible that certain agentive practices may work well in large classrooms, whereas they may not be as suitable in small classes. Similarly, certain agentive practices may be useful in a writing class, but may not work very well in a listening class. Research on these issues will provide clearer pictures of how teacher agency plays out in different teaching contexts. In this connection it is interesting to note that most teacher agency research up to this point has taken place in contexts where it is typical to have large class sizes and teachers often have to deal with constraints of teaching resources. L2 research has to build on the recent work to see how this particular classroom dynamic plays out in other contexts around the world.

**Conclusion**

The current study has been able to provide insights into how teacher’s agentive practices play out in an EAP writing context and student perceptions regarding this. It is clear from the findings that teachers’ agentive practices can help instructors overcome certain constraints in the classroom by making lessons more relevant to student learning, classroom tasks and discussions closely related to students’ immediate needs, and instructional practices more flexible. Because the enactment of teacher agency largely depends on an individual’s personal reflexes it is difficult to generalize common practices. On the same token, individual instructors need to be observant and must adopt a critical outlook while engaging in classroom practices.

Finally, it must be reiterated that considering the small sample size and shorter duration of the study, the findings must be interpreted cautiously. Similar research with a larger sample size needs to be conducted before the results can be generalized. In addition, to enhance the reliability, future studies should incorporate different and additional data sources. That said, the current study has been able to provide useful insights into how teachers’ agentive practices can play an important role in making EAP writing instruction more meaningful for and accessible to students.

**References**

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Appendix

Semi-structured interview questions

1. Can you tell me about the instructional practices in the writing course you are taking this term?
2. Tell me about what you have learned in this course. Explain how this learning took place.
3. How useful has this course been for improving you writing? Give examples.
4. Tell me about what stood out for you as far as the instructor’s teaching is concerned (you are not evaluating your instructor; just tell me anything about the instruction that you found new, helpful, odd, and/or different).
5. What did you do when you had something in the class that you did not understand? Give me the details with examples?
6. How useful was the instructor’s teaching techniques throughout the term? Was it effective? Why/why not? / Was it not effective? Why/why not?
7. Would you like other writing instructors to follow the teaching techniques used in this course? Why/Why not?
8. Do you feel that all your questions were answered in the class? Please give me the details with examples?
9. What difficulties, if any, did you face in the course? How did you overcome them—please give details with examples.
10. Sometimes the instructors may have discussed topics that were not part of the course outlines—do you think this was useful for your learning? Why/why not?
11. Overall, what do you have to say about the way this course has been taught this term? Give me as many details as you can with examples.
Engaging Dialogues to Experience a Bigger Picture: The Potential of Portfolios, Digital Storytelling with Video Shows for Reading Activities

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ABSTRACT

Dialogic reading develops the self. In EFL contexts, like in Indonesia, initiating dialogues as an objective in reading classes has not been extensively explored as these classes commonly focus on enhancing vocabulary and grammatical competence to prepare students for standardized tests. This study examined the potential of reading-mediated tasks incorporating portfolios, digital storytelling, and video shows which encourage both intramental and intermental dialogues in the reading experience. Anchored in Vygotsky’s tenet of dialogue in language learning, this study explored the potential of tasks to engage students to see reading activities as growing-self learning. Interviews were conducted to collect data of students’ experiences on instruction, digital storytelling as learning artifacts, classroom observation, photo elicitations, and the researcher’s journal. Data recorded indicate the understanding of five EFL students in making meaning; interaction, connection, interpretation of the text, and the making of reflection-based tasks of their life for reading activities. The result showed that the mediated tasks optimize reading as a dialogic social practice.

Keywords: dialogic reading, digital storytelling, intramental dialogue, intermental dialogue

Introduction

Learning with collaborative dialogues provides cognitive support for product and process of L2 learning (Swain, 2000; Watanabe & Swain, 2007). Therefore, learning reading should be seen as a social activity, rather than an individual one. However, for several reading classes in an English as a Foreign Language context, the process of making meaning of a text might focus more on linguistic decoding such as translation, surface grammar structure exercises, and text-based comprehension questions (Widodo, 2016a). I have witnessed that teachers with less preparation, teach reading with a focus on testing, for instance - when tackling difficulties -relating to the structure and grammar of texts, and -when seeking to improve vocabulary. They also structure reading instruction to highlight text comprehension questions and as a result they minimize chances of reading for learning and making connections with the world. With these kinds of instruction, reading feels like learning a ‘code’ to decipher the meaning of a text. Such teaching which are like tests, are insufficient as these lack a supportive environment where students invest in their learning, engage in interactive reading tasks and collaborate in learning communities (Widodo, 2016a). To address these weaknesses, several instruction methods have been designed and reported to be beneficial; portfolio (Goksu, 2015; Lo, 2010; Moore, Knight & Kibburz, 2014; Nunes, 2004), and digital storytelling with video-show(s) (Brenner, 2014; Anderson & Mack, 2017). However, how the two mediated-tasks are
used together in a reading classroom, what they mean within the frame of dialogues, and how these mediated tasks change EFL students’ experiences about a reading activity are scarcely reported.

This article reports five Indonesian university EFL readers’ experiences of dialogues through reading mediated-tasks with portfolios, and digital storytelling (henceforth DST) with video shows. Drawing on Vygotsky’s view (1978, 1997) and Wertsch and Tulviste’s (1997) perspective on dialogue; intramental and intermental dialogues, two research questions guided this study:

1. How do participants engage in intermental and intramental dialogues through the phases of reading-mediated tasks?
2. What changes in perspectives towards a reading activity do participants experience during mediated tasks?

Review of related literature

Reading Portfolio and Digital storytelling with Video Show

A portfolio has been used in teaching and learning in foreign language contexts since the 1980s (Lo, 2010). The benefits of using a portfolio have been documented such as providing teachers with artifacts of students’ ongoing learning progress as it shows what students know and can do, links assessment and instruction (Delett, Barnhardt, & Kevorkian, 2001), increases self-participation and self-reflection, and a more enhanced ownership of learning (Tierney et al., 1998). Despite the potential, studies in Asian contexts on the use of a portfolio revealed students’ and teachers’ problems such as lack of experience in using a portfolio, less preference for process-oriented than product-oriented instruction (Lo, 2007, 2010), time management, and autonomy of learning (Kuo, 2003; Lo, 2007; Yang, 2003). Nevertheless, acting as an autonomous learning instruction, a portfolio has greater affordances for students’ dialogues with peers, teachers, and their-self.

The use of digital storytelling as an instruction method has been well documented in the educational domain both in foreign and second language contexts (Widodo, 2016b). As a multidimensional skill, DST provides benefits which are empirically tested such as enhancing learner-centered learning and engaging the community of practice for learners (Anderson & Mack, 2017; Brenner, 2014; Sadik, 2008). DST connects social and cultural contexts through the language the DST writers use. Because of its multimodal characteristics (a composition of text, audio, and video), DST engages language learners’ agency and facilitates the writers’ meaning making over their narrative story, producing their digital end-product, and circulating it digitally to invite discussion and reflection. Anderson and Mack (2017), for instance, designed a DST instruction as an after school project for African American adolescents who lived in an economically-disadvantaged urban area with high risks of juvenile crime, teen-pregnancy and dropouts. During the 6-week project, the participants reflected on one life challenge they experienced and made meaning of it. The instruction was shown to help the students see themselves as active agents of their own life, not merely as recipients of life through their narrative production as they approached and understood their life experience in a greater depth and with new insights. Self-reflection and identity-development frame the experiences of DST creators to shape their interpretation of life.
Video sharing has long been practiced through online video-sharing platforms such as Youtube and Vimeo as stories are meant to be shared and enjoyed. DST with video shows cater for self-dialogue out of which a self could grow and move forward. Video-showing is meant for authentic audiences and from the lens of learning it brings videos beyond the classroom as a provocative media for sharing authors’ voices and building connections (Davis, Waycott, & Zhou, 2015). When a video is shared digitally, for instance via web 2.0, viewers are more global, dispersed, and unknown which may not suit a target of learning that aims at closer, empathetic and immediate connectivity, and belongingness with a certain community. It also neglects verbal, face-to-face, and live responses from viewers. The research of Davis and Weinschenker (2012) and Lenette et al. (2019) which practiced DST with video shows helped articulate learners’ stories to be understood better.

**Intermental and intramental dialogues in EFL reading**

Reading should be pictured as a social practice. The Vygotskian view (1978) proposes that the human mind is organized through a subject’s interaction with the world. It is the interaction with others that the human mind is empowered. Learning and development are *co-constructed* through the interaction with other adults and peers (Cole & Cole, 2001; Zeng, 2017). Dialogues, from Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, develop individuals’ capacity because of their social functioning activities (Vygotsky, 1978; Wretch & Tulviste, 1997). This social functioning or social process shapes and reshapes the mind, cognition, and memory of learners’ mental development. The dialogue itself is initiated between people (Eun & Lim, 2009), between teacher and student, between students, between the text and the reader (Wilson, 1999 as cited in Yang & Wilson, 2006) which is known as an *intermental dialogue* and dialogues within an individual’s psychological state or *intramental dialogue*. This suggests that a human learns not as an isolated individual but as an active member of a society (Yang & Wilson, 2006). The key to successful learning depends on the participation of others to the development of a self. ‘Others’ in Vygotsky’s notion refers to capable others, for example, teachers, adults with higher knowledge, and more capable peers. However, Shokouhi and Shakouri (2015), referring to Mercer’s work in 1996, 2004, 2008, mentioned that ‘others’ are not necessarily those who are more competent, but anyone who thinks differently. Watanabe and Swain (2007) conclude that social mediation comes from peers from all proficiency levels, not only from those who are highly proficient. Fitzgerald and Palinscar (2017) and Zeng (2017) add that the dialogues can take place not only in face-to-face interactions but also in digital platforms.

By intermingling with others through dialogues, a learner works on making meaning of texts from different points of view as different readers engage with similar texts differently. Wells (1990, p.369 as cited in Kiili, 2012) argues that learners will see that “meaning is treated as tentative, provisional, and open to alternative interpretations and revisions”. This means that the existence of others in the process of making meaning of texts help readers broaden, revise, delete, and add perspectives. These developments correspond with intramental and intermental functioning (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1997). Vygotsky (1997, 105–106) explains that “any function of the child’s cultural development appears on the stage twice, or on two planes, first the social, then the psychological, first between people as an intermental category, then within the child as an intramental category”. Based on this view, learners who experience joint activities and internalize working together with others would gain new strategies and knowledge about the world (Fitzgerald & Palinscar, 2017). To conclude, in
reading instruction, dialogues through social interactions provide a media where individuals develop their mental functioning of making meaning of texts.

In meaning making, readers need not only have linguistic capacities to decode the text but also to relate the text with themselves and their surrounding world. Hedgcock and Ferris (2009), following Kern (2000), state that readers must learn about discourse and the processes by which the text is created. The readers must engage in events that promote both social and cognitive activities (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009), represent and cognize about themselves, others, and (their) world, ‘figure out relationship among words, larger units of meaning, and between texts and real or imagined worlds’ (Kern, 2000: 17). In other words, in teaching reading, the instruction should be geared on encouraging readers to see a bigger picture of the texts; that is not only what the text means, but also how the text relates to him/her, to others, and to the world. Additionally, texts choice should be with a connection and relevance to students and context to match their learning purposes, and initiate and keep learners’ reading motivation.

**Methods**

**Research context and participants**

This study was conducted on a semester course of Reading 1 in an English Literature Department of a university located in the eastern part of Java, Indonesia. The syllabus for this reading course aimed at emphasizing vocabulary, enhancing reading strategies (scanning, skimming), and optimizing language exposure through various reading texts or extensive reading. The participants were five students aged 18-20 years old. There were 33 students who followed the mediated tasks; 13 males, and 20 females. From these students, 5 participants were selected because they were the most active participations during the classroom activities. They were also more open to share their changing experiences related to reading activities. More importantly, they were nominated for the best video and most engaging video shown to the public awards. Due to these three reasons, their experiences were further explored. The reasons are relevant to the research questions. The five participants were two males; Surya and Dodik, and three females; Inda, Nadhifa, and Sandri. Four of them except Inda were in their first year. Inda was in her fifth semester but she took the Reading 1 course. Everyone, except Inda, never took a course which assigned portfolios, Digital Storytelling, and video shows before. Therefore, they did not have any experience in creating DST. Inda had experience with the portfolio task but not with DST and video show. I first met the four freshmen during the Reading 1 course, but I have known Inda since she was in her first semester. These students were in their post beginning level of proficiency with a TOEFL score of around 450-500.

**Instructional activities**

The participants were tasked with developing the reading portfolio, DST, and video show.
Table 1

Details of the Reading Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Students’ and teacher’s activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Portfolio</td>
<td>Go online or offline to decide one text to read, print or copy, and read on a weekly basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(7 weeks)</td>
<td>Write a summary, respond to the content of the text by agreeing or disagreeing with the writer or share what they thought interesting about the text, and write new vocabulary or structural/grammatical patterns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Share the text they read with their classmates with the teacher acting as a moderator.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take questions and responses from peers on their sharing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher checks students’ portfolio, provides feedback for comprehension, and keeps records on their progress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital Storytelling</td>
<td>Choose one out of 7 topics from the reading portfolio file.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4 weeks)</td>
<td>Write on general idea how the selected topic relates to them personally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write a DST draft.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Discuss the content of the presentation with the teacher.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get some grammatical and structural suggestions from the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher keeps records of the students’ progress on the DST project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Video show</td>
<td>Go forward voluntarily and play on a video on the DST.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4 weeks)</td>
<td>Take some questions and respond to peers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make some changes on their video DST where necessary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepare for public video DST presentation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take questions and responses from the audience about their video DST.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher asks for audience to nominate 5 best DSTs.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Within 7 weeks, the participants read 7 different articles, created individual reading portfolios, and shared their texts with their classmates. In the 8th week, I asked them to select one topic out of 7 topics of texts from their reading portfolio to focus on. The students were asked to link the topic with their life and made a reflection based on an idea from the chosen text. To develop their DST, I scaffolded discussions, ideas on how to relate their text with what happened in their life, and provided feedback on their DST draft and linguistic revisions. When they finished their first draft in the 11th week, they were asked to do classroom presentations. The purpose of this classroom presentation was to provide a class interaction, so that the students obtained feedback from peers. This phase lasted for two weeks. In the following weeks, they were checked on their finished DST to prepare for public exhibition of their video DST. This exhibition was an activity when all members of the reading class exhibited their DST to 90 students from the sophomore year that willingly came, enjoyed, and discussed their video DST. At the end of the public presentation, each of the 90 students was asked to nominate which DST that was the most attractive, interesting, and left a strong impression.
Data collection

This study is a multiple case study (Duff 2008; Duff & Anderson, 2015) aimed at exploring participants’ experience with dialogues in the reading mediated tasks. Empirical data were collected through group and individual interviews, participants’ reading portfolio and digital storytelling as learning artifacts, classroom observation, photo elicitations, and the researcher’s journal. Data from the interviews were collected after the class ended. Interviews were conducted to explore the participants’ experience and to inquire their meaning making over the experiences. The interviews were open-ended sessions in groups of two or three participants at the time they were available for it. It was done in the faculty’s canteen and at my office while sitting on the floor to help build comfortable situations and allow flexibility for gathering data. The interviews were carried out in Bahasa Indonesia to minimize language constraints and gain more detailed descriptions. Each interview lasted around 1.5 - 2 hours. Learning artifacts in the forms of reading portfolio and DST products were documented and treated as classroom artifacts. The artifacts were examined to see what the participants had accomplished as the result of experiencing dialogues in learning reading. Besides the learning artifacts, classroom observations and photo elicitation captured the nature of interaction between me as a teacher/researcher and the participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, 2000), and between participants. The researcher’s journal gave me an opportunity to make meaning of what happened in the events. Edge (2011) states that this method helps to process, record, and reflect on how a researcher was involved with, relating, responding to, and experiencing the study.

Data analysis

A qualitative inductive approach was adopted in data analysis (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013; Yuan & Zang, 2017). First of all, I reviewed the interview transcripts. To gain rich and relevant data, the Essence Approach to translation when transferring data from one language to another, such as from Indonesian to English, was used (Bashirudin, 2013). Widodo (2015) asserts that the act of translating data is meant to get the gist of the data of which the act itself is a meaning making process. To do so, I served as the translator and the translated version was checked by the participants to ensure the meaning of the data. Data from the interview data and classroom observation were read multiple times for a close reading and interpretation of participants’ understandings and experiences. The repeated readings over the data were used to compile experiences of reading activities through the tasks experienced by each of the participants. For example, while in the portfolio reading phase, Nadhifa experienced interaction with textual meaning and her own interpretation over the text. In this phase, she also experienced taking responses and commenting on peers’ different text meaning making while presenting in front of the class. The dialogue experiences of each participant were then examined with reference to the intermental and intramental dialogues and relevant research on tools for learning (Vygotsky, 1978, 1997; Wertsch, 1991; Wertsch & Tulviste, 1997). A cross-case comparison was also conducted to compare, modify, and integrate the findings from each of the cases to gain an in-depth understanding on the phenomena investigated (Yuan & Zang, 2017). Following that, the findings were confirmed, modified, enriched with participants’ learning artifacts, classroom observation, photo elicitation, and researcher’s journal. These were also subjected to detailed coding and analysis using the Qualitative Inductive approach outlined previously. To increase research trustworthiness for transferability and conformability (validity) of data and interpretations, the findings were sent
to the participants for checks and additions, or deletions which helped ensure the validity of the analysis (Thomas, 2006).

Findings

The findings are presented in a chronological order based on the mediated-tasks (reading portfolio, DST, and video show) to shed light on the participants’ experiences of intermental and intramental dialogues and changing perspectives of the reading activity.

Reading Portfolio: Interacting with the texts

The participants experienced intramental dialogue with the texts as they engaged the texts’ choice and texts’ meaning from linguistic resources. First, they interacted with the selected text. As the selection of topic for the reading portfolio was free, the participants were drawn to select texts based on several reasons. They were inspiration from a talk with parents, connection to life experiences, belief that their chosen topic was everybody’s favorite, and closeness to everyone’s life.

My text was “Protecting our environment”. I have a certain bonding with this topic, because I usually watched TV news with my dad and talked about disasters that occurred in Indonesia. At the campus, I spotted many students leave garbage and made some beautiful spots in the campus dirty. I felt angry. (Sandri, interview excerpt)

Sandri chose a text talking about the environment and how to protect it as it was initiated from her discussion with her father about many disasters happening in Indonesia like flood, and landslides. The bonding between her interests on a certain text started right at the moment she picked the text over others. For other participants, like Nadhifa, and Inda, a life experience described in the text led them to choose the text to read. For Surya and Dodik, their choice over the text to read was based on their projection of how they would get values from peers’ responses to their selected topic. These suggest that intramental dialogue is activated from their motive to choose what text to read.

In this phase, the participants also experienced intermental dialogue as they made attempts to understand the texts by comprehending the linguistic codes to comprehend the writer’s idea over the text’s meaning by tackling vocabulary unfamiliarity and writing a summary. When doing response writing for the reading portfolio, some participants tried to find other perspectives from similar readings to contest or add their initial belief on the text’s issue. One part of the portfolio is an individual sharing of a text’s choice. Each of them was asked to go forward and share their text with others and receive questions related to text content and related issues. In this phase, they experienced taking responses and questions from peers to confirm, clarify, explore, and challenge their understanding of the text. One of the participants reflected:

I remembered the time when my friends listened and responded to my presentation about homeschooling in the classroom. My friends asked whether homeschooling made a learner become introvert, what the negative impact of homeschooling is, how a student got a graduation certificate by homeschooling, I was sure about my stance because nowadays there are many homeschooled which could mean that many good things were offered by homeschooling system. Those questions helped me develop my understanding to the text. Frankly, I never
thought about some of those questions before. That time was good but tense too (Nadhifa, interview excerpt).

After receiving questions, Nadhifa realized that she would need to check her stance with the other opposing ideas to make her stance stronger. This learning experience suggests that intermental dialogue helps a learner check, delete, add, and revise the initial belief on something. This dialogue occurs as social mental functioning system to cater for the development of cognitive dialogue within the self and the self-internalization of new knowledge of an individual (psychological mental plane) namely intramental. I remembered offering her to choose this text to be her material for the DST project. I told her to find and meet someone who studies via homeschooling and do an interview and see what she could learn from there. This also highlights the fact that teacher’s scaffolding in the form of instruction is crucial in the shaping of knowledge and skills advancement of learners. This is because the instruction is meant as a rule to obey and a firm signal that learners should go on a certain path to eventually achieve the desired aim.

These intermental and intramental dialogues were experienced through various forms by the other four participants. For Inda, for example, her text’s title was ‘Meditation: a simple fast way to reduce stress’ which talks about techniques to find peace within a self. Both dialogues engaged her experience of reading activities differently. She chose the text out of several topics she had worked through the first seven weeks of doing the reading portfolio. She was connected more to the text because at that time she was concerned on finding self-peace because she had witnessed her parents arguing and fighting frequently. The text she chose engaged her intramental plane, that is the dialogue within herself. For Dodik and Surya, their selection of the texts was a starting point to create a video based on their prediction that their video would attract public attention more because the topic is everybody’s favorite. All these participants interacted with all texts and especially with the text for their DST by projecting their contribution to the people who were going to watch and enjoy their story. This suggests that such reading instructions which collaborate outside viewers mediating reciprocal social interaction frame their engagement with the text. The interaction broadens their understanding of the text in relation to the world. Chein and Schneider (2012) contend that it could develop individuals’ meta-cognitive system where such reciprocal interactions institute new behavior and monitor the quality and progress of the behavior. Additionally, such joint activities can generate a new understanding which is then internalized as personal knowledge and capabilities (Mercer, 2002).

Reflecting from my journal, in the classroom discussion, the participants somehow showed tensions when performing in front of the class because they needed to make sure that they delivered the messages well using English. The task requires them to showcase their speaking ability. Some questions became quite demanding as the peers sometimes argue back and refute. Teacher’s role in class switched from a facilitator to that of a mediator as well as a contributor to make sure that the discussions remained relevant, and ran accordingly. Seen from the Vygotsky model of intermental dialogue between peers, Mercer (2002) agrees that peers dialogue may become brief, superficial, bland, and arouse disputes in group dialogues. This suggests a teacher’s presence is significant to frame the dialogue as an exploratory talk to value learning.
Digital Storytelling: Creating digitally reflection based text for others

This phase discusses participants’ dialogues mediated through the Digital Storytelling (DST) project. After they presented their selected text, they worked through their DST draft. However, beforehand they needed to come up with a theme initiated from the text they read. They were asked to interpret the text by connecting the issue with thing(s) that relate to their life.

During this phase, they experienced intramental and intermental dialogues while drafting their DST. None of them had the experience of making a digital storytelling before. This posed some difficulties. Although I had given them some examples, the instruction asking them to reflect on their life and make connections to the chosen topic is somewhat bizarre. They have never experienced such a reading sequence before. One of the participants admitted:

This DST project was my first experience. I felt it was a bit strange that my teacher asked me to reflect to my life to explore the text. However, I read it over and over again, and started to think about myself and how I love meditation. I tried to get into the text by recollecting my memory about my past. I found out that my past had shaped me into who I am now. I always prioritize peacefulness as the result of what happened between my parents. When I was a child, I saw my mom and my dad got into fights so many times that I felt insecure. I was afraid and lonely. I guess that is why I become a silent person. I feel that by being silent I feel secure. This was what I shared in my DST. I felt that my story was in line with the purpose of meditation that is to get ourselves out of distress. I thought that my story would have a chance to inspire other people. (Inda, interview excerpt)

Referring to her experience, the DST task exercised her way of making meaning to what she read. She connected the text with what happened in her life, and decided to create a DST entitled Silence. In her DST, she shared how insecure the life of a kid is when their parents are in arguments most of the time and how she grew into an introvert because she felt that being silent was the most comforting. However, she eventually realized that being silent is not helping her because silence was actually a repression. She invited people with a similar trauma to open their heart and talk. Then, they will find peace. Highlighting her experience in creating the DST, she undergoes dialogues with her mental plane. With this dialogue she engaged the meaning of the text with her DST draft. A new target after reading and creating a DST for people to enjoy and get inspired feed her reading and meaning making engagement.

This intermental dialogue was enacted differently by the other four participants. Surya for instance, got his first click to the text when he read it the first time. The text he chose as an initiator for his DST was his first text. The connection was put through his field research to find a traditional toy maker. The toy maker made him realize that money is not the source of happiness. The toy maker told stories about what made him happy about his life. It was when he saw children with no much money could play with his hand-made toys. Hand-made toys were much cheaper and because of that, he could help the children play.

I for a traditional toy maker then, it was very hard actually because no one seemed searched to care about a traditional toy. But I found one fortunately. I talked to him, asked why he chose to sell a toy, what was the story. When this conversation ended, I felt like I became a person with much more positive thoughts. That life is...
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a grace. People seek happiness from external forces, like money, become who he wants, but there is true happiness, when we can help somebody else. (Surya, interview excerpt)

For Dodik, during this phase, he experienced intermental dialogue by making dialogues on what and how important music was for him. He went further to explore how music helped him walk through his life with all problems. Although he did not mention what problems he faced, in the DST draft, he shared how being different was actually nothing to be afraid of. Sandri, on the other hand, experienced both intramental and intermental dialogues. She at first had an idea to retell what the text was. In the discussion session of drafting of the DST, I gave some alternatives on how her idea should be developed as her idea was not relevant to the instruction given.

My text was about environment and how important it is to preserve it. When it came to a DST project, my idea was that I was going to talk about how nature can help people. She (my teacher) said that it would feel like a TV show on how to prevent a disaster and my DST would not reflect the connection to my life/world. My teacher said that I had to know that environment is not only psychical environment like a forest and a river for example, but it can be psychological, like what surrounding family for example has made me into. I felt awaken. Afterward, I thought about something big in my life that had impacted me in so many ways, I thought about my parents’ divorce. In my DST I talked how I felt as a child and how it turned me into. But my DST is not about how sad and miserable my life is. It is about how we need to be grateful over something. My DST is an invitation to feel grateful to what we have because somewhere someone has a worse life compared to us. The DST project has taught me that what we understand about ourselves can help someone. What reading this text helped me is developing my understanding, and going beyond the text has inspired me that reading can touch someone else. (Sandri, interview excerpt).

The scaffolding I provided her in the form of examples on how to connect a text with the surroundings or her life helped her feel convinced of what she wanted to share in her DST. This scaffolding is an intermental dialogue. Reflecting on what occurred with all the participants, examples of how to connect a text with somebody’s life set a model on how to make meaning out of a text. The participants’ experiences of reading activities before the project only covered on understanding the text by handling linguistic barriers for example vocabulary, grammar and structure of the statements. When asked to relate what they understood from the text to something else, for example, to their life, or the life of someone else, they felt a bit strange as it was an unfamiliar reading activity for them. However, they kept doing it because a teacher is an authoritative figure. The pattern of a teacher-student dialogue is authoritative (Mortimer & Scott, 2003). Reflecting on my journal, imposing students what to do felt like dictating them. It leaves them to have no options. However, many times when I left them with open options, they would come back a week later with no progress. Mercer and Howe (2012) suggest that a teacher needs to balance the ‘authoritative’ mode with the dialogue. Based on my experience, an authoritative mode of talk was needed at the beginning, when students did a project just to create a firm start as students seek for an acknowledgement to begin their work.
**Video show: Engaging experiences of reading for dialogic social practice**

In this phase, the participants were exposed to two kinds of intermental dialogue. They experienced interactions with peers in the classroom exhibition, and interactions with a wider audience who were not their classmates as they engaged in an outside the classroom exhibition of their DST story. Each experience in each of interactions was different.

**Figure 1**

*One of Students’ in-Classroom Exhibition and Participation*

With reference to Figure 1, the participants were asked to present their video in front of their peers for gaining initial responses to the content of their DST, the video layout, music, sound clarity, and general feedback for their linguistic inappropriateness such as its grammar, structure, and lexical choice. Although not all students came forward to gain responses because of the long duration of presentation of all participants’ DST, I recommended them to learn from other responses and make notes from the responses for the improvement of their own DST. For example the color of the text they used in the video was initially white. Therefore, they gained feedback from peers on its feasibility. This use of color needed changing. The students who came forward and made their first showcase of their DST in the classroom experienced intermental dialogue in the form of questions and feedback from their peers and me. However, the feedback was more focused on the technical problems they encountered, and problems on grammar, structure, and lexical choice. Sato (2017) and Loewen and Sato (2018) show that this negotiation of forms is common, resulting in L2 development when positively responded by learners. However, different intermental dialogues from outside the classroom video show were found.
Figure 2

Situations in Outside Classroom DST Exhibition

As reflected from Figure 2, the intermental dialogue the participants felt were various due to some differences. First, the audience of the DST in the out of class video show was not their classmates, but their seniors. This highlights the fact that a new audience means new experiences of dialogues. These new dialogues engaged them with the text they created. The feeling of accomplishment and excitement toward the dialogues helped them build their new meaning to reading activities as a social activity, not only as an individual experience.

I felt very happy about what I did in the outside classroom exhibition. Many seniors who enjoyed my DST said that I am very brave to tell and share my personal story to public. Some of them got into tears, and I went on tears too together because it turned out that they had a similar story to mine. We ended up cheering each other and learnt that we are not alone. To me then, reading should not be meant as an activity to study, but also an opportunity to develop together with friends. (Sandri, interview excerpt)

What happened in the outside classroom exhibition was beyond what I expected. The story that I have kept it for years could be beneficial to somebody else. They who came to enjoy my DST shared their story too. I learn that I can relate what I read to what happened to me, and the idea of transforming one text into producing another different text is rewarding. (Inda, interview excerpt)

Secondly, the responses the participants obtained in the out of class video show were more content-related. These consisted of questions about what inspired the DST, impressions from the audience toward participants’ DST. The audience interacted with them in a face-to-face fashion, not in a whole class to one-person interaction. This also showcased the fact that peer interactions with out-of class participants in an EFL context with the tasks established dialogical patterns that was based on meaningful content negotiation. Feedback on grammar and structure were minimum and the participants engaged in language production more. This suggests that dialogues provided more engagement with the audience, therefore giving more positive and rewarding L2 use experiences. One of participants admitted.

In the outside classroom exhibition, my seniors asked my inspiration, and what make true happiness is. They agreed on what I thought. I felt proud because they seemed to be inspired. (Surya, interview excerpt)
The number of questions from the audience and the degree of intensity of bonding between the participants and the audience gave an impact to participants’ well-being. This is in accord with Clark and Dumas’s (2015) statement contending that the feeling of contentment and excitement due to extended collaborative activities and participation encourages motivation. This implies that a video show mediates a collaborative interaction mindset from peers to occur as they engaged in content type of questions rather than grammatical and structural feedback. In conclusion, this phase mediated social engagement which led to a rewarding peer-learning. The interaction is as a channel through which the participants’ ideas, intentions, and values are accessible to, understood, and reciprocated by others.

In the outside classroom exhibition I enjoyed the process. Many came to me and asked about homeschooling. My reading activity initially was only to read to get information. Now it changes into getting information and finding the real facts, and connecting it to me. This is not only beneficial for my growth, but also brings good impact to others and surrounding. (Nadhifa, interview excerpt)

This also shows that intermental dialogue and instrumental plane are correlated and affirms the understanding that tasks which mediate both dialogues will intrinsically motivate students.

**Discussion**

The participants’ experiences in these reading mediated-tasks with the portfolio, and digital storytelling with a video show indicate clearly that intermental and intramental dialogues help shape experiences and understanding of what reading as a dialogic activity is. Before having the tasks students as readers see reading as processing a linguistic puzzle to get the meaning of the text. This means they understood reading as merely a cognitive workload but not as social engagement. These practiced reading activities exercise their meaning making as social practice (Kozulin, 2003, Mello, 2012; Swain, Brooks, &Tocalli-Beller, 2002; Tellado & Sava, 2010) as it involves dialogues between a student and the writer of a text, between peers, between teacher-students, and among students- people-environment, and within themselves. Changes the participants had gone through were propagated through phases; portfolio, digital storytelling, and video show. Psychologically these changes are manifested in the enactment of intramental and intermental dialogues. Throughout the three phases, students experienced intermental dialogues by having their peers contributing to their textual comprehension activities. Events of explaining, refuting, adding, confirming with either positive or negative responses enable students to learn to see an issue from different perspectives. Peer dialogue also offers support in terms of cognition, and human socialization so that students are both affectively challenged and nurtured. Additionally, content-related responses the participants gained during the video show from the invested collaborative-minded peers result in enhanced reading motivation. Intermental dialogue also occurred in the teachers’ scaffolding activity they received to improve understanding and textual engagement, and prepare for their independent learning. An interaction with the community as a stakeholder of students’ learning products (public audience) enhances their understanding that reading is not only personal, but social because they learn that what they do in a reading activity is relatable and beneficial for community beyond their classroom.

Changes in participants’ perspectives also happened within their mental plane or intramentally. The mediated tasks initiated the experience of intramental dialogue from readers’ choice over what text they read. During the phase of writing their reading portfolio, they were invested in their reason of selecting a certain text over others. Many times in regular meetings of the reading class, teachers who assign their students to pick a text to read...
and write a summary or response do not go further to ask their students to relate what they read with what happens around them or inside them. When a text is linked to a reader, the text has the potential to widen and contribute to new layers of meaning. This extension of the reading activity of a text engages readers with their mental state causing them to reflect on the message deeper or in some cases beyond the original issue in the text. The textual connection and reflection the participants made during the phases of instruction when transformed into an end-product of DST which were shared publicly fed on the participants’ feeling of satisfaction of making a successful contribution towards somebody else. This positive mental episode certainly builds on engagement.

Two practical implications could be drawn from the findings of this study. First, in teaching reading, a teacher should not only focus on linguistic patterns of the text but to readers’ self-growth. For example, a teacher should exercise both intermental and intramental dialogues of the students. Second, the use of a portfolio acting as assessment and compilation of works help students see reading as a targeted activity. Additionally, creating a DST as one of the creations after a reading activity provides opportunities for students as readers to engage in dialogic community practice. This shall help enhance the motivation of readers.

Although this study provides evidence that both types of dialogues embodied within the tasks contribute to more dialogic reading practices, it has two limitations. While this study used a written portfolio, digital or electronic portfolio would facilitate students to navigate and provide links to support their description on the issue. Second, providing more facilitative space for a public DST show will likely result in more engagement as students and audience can interact freely without so much noise. A talk-show from nominated students after the video show may also give different experiences of both dialogues in the readers.

**Conclusion**

A reading activity for EFL learners usually lacks making use and function as an educational process. Educational process, from the Vygotskian perspective, is considered a source rather than a consequence of the development of cognitive and learning skills (Kozulin, 2004). Designing an external mediated activity provides a system through which readers will benefit from some assistance. This assistance, or scaffolding, gives different lenses of making meaning over something. When learning is contextual and occurs as dialogues, students learn different views to complete a puzzle or to broaden a description. This means that a reading classroom instruction should work as a situated practice that embraces the society of practice. Therefore, I argue that this situated practice can actually be manifested as a social practice when students are given an opportunity to share their understanding to a society beyond their classroom social community.

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The potential of portfolios, digital storytelling with video shows for reading activities


Monitoring Preservice Teachers’ Language Assessment Literacy Development through Journal Writing

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ABSTRACT
Researchers in the field of language assessment literacy (LAL) remark the need to strengthen assessment and testing courses in undergraduate teacher education programs. Several studies conclude that in-service language teachers lack the knowledge, skills and principles to conduct sound assessment practices in their classrooms. In order to contribute to local and global discussions on prospective teachers’ LAL development, the current paper reports on the implementation of the learning journal as a tool to monitor candidate EFL teachers’ progress in an assessment and testing course at the Faculty of Education in a private university in Colombia. Results reveal substantial modifications in student teachers’ understandings regarding the definition and purposes of language assessment, students’ and teachers’ roles, the what and how of assessment, ethical considerations, and desirable classroom-based assessment practices. Moreover, the research offers insights into the influence of teacher educators’ assessment practices on pre-service teachers’ LAL development.

KEYWORDS: language assessment literacy, language assessment, teacher education, pre-service teachers, classroom-based assessment

Introduction

Attention towards discussions on the nature and role of language assessment literacy (LAL) has increased worldwide. The 39th Language Testing Research Colloquium, held in Colombia in July 2017 by the International Language Testing Association (ILTA) offered a view of the extent to which the field has expanded. Nonetheless, despite the amount of work, developed in both international and local contexts, it can be concluded that little has been researched on pre-service teachers’ LAL development.

A review of studies on the extent to which Colombian language teachers develop LAL allows us to conclude that 1) in-service teachers lack knowledge, skills and principles for classroom-based assessment and testing, 2) teacher education programs are to a big extent responsible for this situation, and 3) it is imperative to provide both pre-service and in-service language teachers with professional development in this area (Arias & Maturana, 2005; López & Bernal, 2009; Herrera & Macías, 2015; Giraldo, 2018). Therefore, as a language teacher educator, I felt strongly committed to contribute to the field by attesting achievements in LAL development among a group of Colombian candidate EFL teachers. The aim of this study was to describe prospective English teachers’ progress regarding LAL through the implementation of the learning journal in an assessment and testing course.
Problem Statement

Studies in the field of LAL relate language teachers’ underdevelopment of assessment knowledge, skills and principles to the low quality of training they receive in teacher education programs. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the extent to which assessment and testing courses actually promote LAL development among candidate teachers. Consequently, I have been implementing the learning journal as an alternative assessment procedure to appraise student EFL teachers’ deconstruction and construction of knowledge regarding course objectives.

Moreover, according to Herrera and Macías (2015), for prospective teachers to build their own expertise in language assessment, it is necessary that teacher educators model sound assessment practices inside their courses (p. 310). Therefore, the learning journal has been also implemented as a strategy to motivate prospective teachers to use them in their own classrooms to foster students’ learning. Eventually, I collected some of these journals to report on candidate teachers’ progress regarding LAL to contribute to discussions in the field.

Review of related literature

In order to attain a better understanding of the research reported in this text, it is important to first approach the concepts of language assessment literacy and learning journal.

Language Assessment Literacy

Historically, the definition of language assessment literacy (LAL) has expanded from a narrow view of required knowledge and skills into considerations of ethical practices in language testing and assessment (Davies, 2008). In a broad sense, LAL can be understood as teachers’ and other stakeholders’ proficiency for the design, administration and use of testing and assessment results. However, a closer examination of the different authors’ definitions allows us to conclude that the concept has been refined. Currently, LAL involves not only test designers’ competencies but the need to promote an “assessment culture” in which those practices are properly inserted.

Pioneer explicit reference to the features that constitute proficiency in language testing can be found in Fulcher’s (2012) definition:

The knowledge, skills and abilities required to design, develop, maintain or evaluate, large-scale standardized and/or classroom based tests, familiarity with test processes, and awareness of principles and concepts that guide and underpin practice, including ethics and codes of practice. The ability to place knowledge, skills, processes, principles and concepts within wider historical, social, political and philosophical frameworks in order understand why practices have arisen as they have, and to evaluate the role and impact of testing on society, institutions, and individuals. (p. 125)

Expanding on the definition above, Vogt and Tsagari (2014) conceive LAL as “the ability to design, develop and critically evaluate tests and other assessment procedures, as well as the
ability to monitor, evaluate, grade and score assessments on the basis of theoretical knowledge” (p. 377). Despite these attempts to define LAL, Inbar-Lourie (2017) concludes that there exist more uncertainties than shared understandings regarding the specific knowledge language teachers are expected to acquire for conducting language assessment. However, the author advocates for an assessment culture where learners play an active role in self-assessment and peer-assessment experiences, and where teachers communicate assessment results as descriptions, using them to inform instruction, not as simple grades (Birenbaum; Wolf et al., as cited in Inbar-Lourie, 2008, p. 387).

On the other hand, the fact that most of the times the knowledge base of assessment and testing courses is determined by experts outside the classroom has been debated. In their study, Berry, Sheehan and Munro (2019) point at the need for teachers to offer their perspectives on what language assessment literacy means to them. Through classroom observations, individual interviews and focus group discussions with 54 in-service teachers, the researchers found that participants’ assessment practices are not always guided by a conscious understanding of what language assessment entails. Therefore, the authors suggest that in order “to foster teachers’ awareness of the relationship between good teaching practice and good assessment practice, explicit links should be made during initial teacher training” (Berry et al., 2019, p. 121). Furthermore, they advise that “during initial teacher training teachers should be encouraged to reflect on their own experiences of assessment and project forward on how they will be expected to assess their students” (Berry et al., 2019, p. 121).

Altogether, regardless of the theoretical transitions in the field of LAL, there is wide agreement on the need for language teachers to develop knowledge, skills and principles which enable them to conduct appropriate and sound language assessments inside their classrooms.

Learning journal

Varner and Peck (2003) define a learning journal as:

> a semistructured written assignment that provides evidence that you can use to translate course concepts for use in the real world. Entries should apply the theories to your personal experiences, assess those experiences through the lenses of the theories, and propose some action steps based on the assessment. (p. 69)

According to the authors, learning journals can vary in form. Depending on the degree of structure, expected output or assessment purpose, learning journals can differ from one another. Regarding the first feature, learning journals can be structured or unstructured. In other words, they can be guided by pre-established questions or opened to writers’ natural flow of extended thought. However, all of them involve students’ reflections emerging from the relationship between individual understanding and course subject matter.

Furthermore, depending on the desired outcomes, learning journals can be used to promote learners’ mindfulness—inward focus—or their understanding of course material—outward focus. Finally, with regard to how learning journals vary according to assessment aims, the authors state that “internally oriented journals may be used by students for self-assessment of progress toward their personal development goals. Externally focused journals may be used as a way for
students to demonstrate to the instructor their knowledge of course material” (Varner & Peck, 2003, p. 54).

According to Moon (2006), the content of a learning journal is the product of the writer’s reflection process, recorded on a regular basis, with the aim of enhancing his/her understanding of a particular subject or area. It is suggested that “writing a journal can have the effect of bringing knowledge presented as ‘out there’ into the ownership of the writer. It involves working with meanings and ensuring that the meanings relate to the current understanding of the writer” (Moon, 2006, p. 47). Additionally, the author states that journal writing for learning purposes requires a certain degree of assistance, as well as the provision of useful inquiry.

As stated at the beginning of this paper, research on pre-service teachers’ LAL development is limited. Studies about the use of learning journals to monitor candidate EFL teachers’ progress towards LAL were not found during the revision of relevant work in this field. Related studies conducted in the last few years examined journal writing as a resource to promote both pre-service and in-service EFL teachers’ reflective practice, but not as a tool for prospective EFL teachers to account for knowledge and understandings of language assessment.

Abednia, Hovassapian, Teimournezhad and Ghanbari (2013) investigated in-service EFL teachers’ views about journal writing in a Second Language Teaching Methodology course. Their findings revealed that teachers considered reflective journal writing as helpful to unveil, reflect on and express their assumptions about English Language Teaching (ELT). On the other hand, teachers remarked the required preparation–prior readings–to enroll in class discussions and reflective skills development as the main challenges in journal writing. Additionally, participants suggested teacher educators to clarify the nature and aims of journal writing, and to promote peer feedback, in order to increase its efficacy. The researchers conclude that teacher educators’ role in guiding reflective journal writing is crucial to maximize student teachers’ ability to express opinion, and to critically analyze and refine their beliefs and values regarding ELT.

In their study, Nurfaidah, Lengkanawati and Sukyadi (2017) reported results from a phenomenological case study aimed to explore levels of reflection in journals written by prospective EFL teachers in their teaching practicum. The researchers found that journal entries were descriptive-reflective in nature with evidence of participants’ ability to support their decisions regarding teaching. The content reflected pre-service teachers’ awareness to provide explanations and hypothesis to judge their experiences. However, results signaled a low level of critical reflection observed in the journals mainly explained by student teachers’ limited experience and time in real teaching scenarios. In the same vein, Afzali’s (2018) study, regarding the quality of recall and reflection journals produced by pre-service teachers in EFL practicum courses, revealed that entries are mainly characterized by descriptive and affective content. Accordingly, the author calls for action into the development of student teachers’ skills to write critically.

In her paper, Kim (2018) discusses the focus of eighteen Korean candidate EFL teachers’ reflection, and their views of journal writing. The study showed participants’ positive perceptions of journal writing as a beneficial activity to 1) promote reflection on their practice, 2) establish critical positions towards themselves as teachers, the context and teaching, 3) lower
anxiety towards the process of writing, and 4) enhance their vocabulary for appropriate expression of ideas. Kim’s findings contradict to some extent the results from the two studies mentioned earlier where entries were mostly descriptive. In relation to this, the author calls the attention towards the importance of taking into account previous writing experiences, and providing guidance through preconceived questions to facilitate writers’ critical observation, analysis and interpretation processes, in order to maximize journal writing effectiveness.

In a similar study, Khanjani, Vahdany and Jafarigohar (2018) convoked twenty-four candidate EFL teachers to write journal entries based on guidance provided for reflection, or in response to contents developed in different language teaching courses they had enrolled. The purpose was to determine journal writing effects on teacher trainees’ reflective practice. The researchers compared the focus of teachers’ reflection, from a list of twenty-eight aspects related to teaching practices, before and after journal writing implementation. The study concluded that journal writing promoted participants’ reflective practice since it allowed them to critically evaluate their practice to inform decision-making.

A recent research by Donyaie and Afshar (2019) involved thirty EFL teachers working at private language institutes in Iran. The study aimed to identify teachers’ perceived obstacles and motivating factors for engaging in reflective journal writing. Participants were asked to write individual and collective journals previous to and after a workshop they were expected to attend. For teachers in this context, the predominant barrier in reflective journal writing is the lack of training; followed by inflexible institutional rules; insufficient salaries, time, reflective skills and motivation; as well as tension between teachers’ educational background and school demands. Nonetheless, the findings revealed an acknowledged contribution of conscious writing to participants’ awareness on action.

Much of the current literature on the implementation of journal writing in EFL teacher education pays particular attention to the ways in which reflective writing contribute to candidates’ understandings of teaching practices. Journal entries quality as well as participants’ perceptions of reflective writing constitute the focus of research in the field. Together these studies highlight the need for maximizing journal writing effectiveness, allowing writers to move from analytic descriptions into critically constructed judgments. On the other hand, research into the implementation of journal writing to monitor pre-service EFL teachers’ LAL development is non-existent.

**Research methods**

**Context and sample**

This research adopted an action research approach to investigating the following research question: How does the implementation of a learning journal in an EFL undergraduate course affect their language assessment literacy? This research was conducted in a language assessment and testing course to train EFL teachers in an undergraduate program at a private university in Medellin, Colombia. My major concern after graduating from a Master of Arts in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning has been English teachers’ scarce knowledge and underdeveloped skills for language assessment and testing. Therefore, I have devoted considerable time and effort to examine the extent to which student EFL teachers develop LAL
in this course.

In this attempt, the learning journal has proved to be a helpful tool. A twofold purpose guided its implementation in the course: to model alternative assessment procedures and to monitor student teachers’ comprehension of course contents. There were 23 student teachers in the class. Although everyone kept his/her learning journal, not all of them were suitable for the purpose of this research since some were incomplete. In total, 18 learning journals were selected for analysis.

**Data Collection and Analysis Procedures**

They were semi-structured learning journals in which candidate teachers responded to prompts suggested by the teacher on a regular once a week basis during four months. Some prompts read: What is your definition of assessment? What guides your decisions regarding assessment in the English class? What should be assessed in the English class? What type of procedures can be used to assess learners in the English class? What are the results from assessment useful for? Who should make decisions regarding assessment in the English class? I collected them three times during the term. Based on the insight gained each time, I conducted whole class conferences for favoring the interpretation process and providing revisions on course materials. In order to control levels of practicality, entries had a length limit of one page (letter size paper). Other important requirements involved using English language, exhibiting neat handwriting, and providing deep and critical reflections. Each selected learning journal included sixteen entries.

The method used to analyze journal entries was content analysis, based on the steps suggested by Saldaña (2009): establishing preliminary codes and categories, recoding and recategorizing, and determining themes. It consisted of a manual process comprising two stages: individual treatment of data within each entry and journal, and the construction of a matrix to compare developed codes and categories among all learning journals. Five categories, explained in the results session, emerged from a total of fifteen codes developed. Some codes were definition, passive role, active role, authentic assessment, fairness, formative assessment, language to be assessed, and democracy.

Furthermore, feedback provided by participants during conferences highly contributed to enhance trustworthiness in this research. These conferences took around twenty minutes at the end of each class, and consisted of sharing partial interpretations from entries with pre-service teachers. After listening to them, they briefly commented on the extent to which they agreed or not and why. I took notes of students’ comments to contrast them with my initial interpretations to make adjustments. Final interpretations were shared during the last class and were approved by participants.

**Findings**

Data analysis revealed five dimensions in which pre-service EFL teachers made progress. Firstly, LAL development was evident in student teachers’ evolving definition of assessment and their changing views of assessment purposes. Secondly, writers exhibited a turn of mind regarding initial conceptions of teacher and student’s role in language assessment. A third
element that constituted evidence of growth regarding LAL was candidate teachers’ gained clarity on language assessment constructs (what) and procedures (how). Similarly, reference to ethical considerations in language assessment, signaled the fourth dimension in which candidate teachers demonstrated LAL development. Finally, the fifth dimension deals with their ability to contrast language assessment practices taking place in different scenarios with their self-constructed views of desirable and expected language assessment processes.

### Assessment definitions and purposes

Early in the course, trainees’ definitions of *assessment* were very limited. Some of them just used the word *process*; others added adjectives such as complex, systematic or continuous before this word; and a third group referred to *assessment* as a moment, procedure or tool; all of these words followed by what prospective teachers considered to be assessment purposes. Furthermore, some pre-service teachers offered rather unclear definitions of the concept by using “vague” terms.

Similarly, disjunctive formative and summative purposes in language assessment were acknowledged by most prospective teachers. A group of students thought of language assessment as primarily aimed to adjust teachers’ and learners’ practices, course plans and school programs, and to provide feedback in order to enhance students’ performance, while a second group expressed a rather opposed view where language assessment served just the purpose of valuing learning outcomes, measuring knowledge, determining progress, and proving achievement of goals at any time during language teaching-learning processes. The following excerpts from student’s journals exemplify these cases.

Trainee #2: “Assessment is...the follow up of students development and improvement, it help monitor students and take actions about them, suggestions, help, and give advices.”

Trainee #11: “Assessment is a process or activity that involves collecting and interpreting data from teaching and learning in order to make decisions to improve these processes.”

Trainee # 5: “Assessment is a procedure to measure individuals’ knowledge in a particular period of time, to see what they are or aren’t able to do.”

Moreover, the content analysis of learning journals revealed pre-service teachers’ view of language assessment as useful just to look back on the past. They expressed that assessment allowed them to check if teaching had been accurate, if learners had learned what they were expected to or if policies had been applied. At this point, it was evident that preservice teachers did not see assessment as helpful in determining further actions conducive to future success in the language teaching and learning process. As a case in point, trainee #9 expressed that “assessment is useful to verify that the learner understood and acquired the knowledge given by the teacher in the class, and to see if he accomplished the learning objectives”. On the other hand, trainee #15 asserted: “assessment is useful to see if students achieved the goals, what knowledge was or wasn’t acquired.”

In contrast, last journal entries exhibited future language teachers’ ability to conceptualize assessment from a more complex perspective in which they were able to connect different terms
to offer a more complete definition. Additionally, it was found that some trainees articulated their point of view about language assessment purposes from both summative and formative perspectives, and considered it useful to plan subsequent actions, as illustrated in the following journal excerpts:

Trainee #14: “Assessment is a process in which the teacher gathers relevant information about the student’s weaknesses and strengths in the learning process to make decisions about the instruction and students’ learning.”

Trainee #15: “Assessment is a permanent process where the teacher gathers information to monitor students’ learning progress.”

Trainee #17: “[Assessment] is the process of collecting data, information or evidence of the student’s learning process. [It] can be used to check the progress of the students, and to make decisions about either teaching practices or learning processes.”

**Teacher and student’s role in language assessment**

The analysis of pre-service teachers’ learning journals evidenced their preconceptions towards the teacher and the learner’s role in language assessment. It was found that, at an early stage in the course, most of the trainees saw the teacher as an active participant in the language assessment process who uses outcomes to inform and improve his/her own practices, while learners were assigned a rather passive role where they just show what they have learned and receive feedback. At this point in the course, it was clear that future teachers thought of a teacher-centered assessment process, as illustrated below:

Trainee #3: “Through assessment the teacher can analyze the students’ performance during the process, determine the students’ strengths and weaknesses and create a plan to improve that.”

Trainee #7: “Assessment determines if a student has reached the stated goals to move to the next level. It is also useful for teachers to analyze gaps in students’ understandings”.

Trainee #14: “...students’ assessment results let the teacher improve his/her teaching practices and performance to be more accurate and successful inside the classroom, also these results allow the students receive a feedback from the teacher...”

Surprisingly, by the end of the course, prospective teachers had abandoned the view of learners as passive agents and acknowledged the essential and dynamic role they play in language assessment processes. The following passages from their journals portrayed this turn of mind:

Trainee #5: “Assessment is not only the work of a teacher, also the student her/himself has to analyze their performance to give his/her own judgment and to know their own strengths and weaknesses, promoting the self-assessment.”

Trainee #7: “The student is the protagonist in his learning process. For this reason, assessment must be focused on the student, taking into account multiple intelligences, learning strategies and all the individualities of the student regarding the learning and assessment process.”
Trainee #12: “[Assessment] is a bidirectional process, which is guided by the teacher…but becomes so much richer if students are allowed to take part in it…”

**The what and how in language assessment**

At the beginning of the course, most prospective teachers regarded the mastery of contents, and the development of reading, listening, speaking, writing skills and attitudes as the primary focus of language assessment. Few trainees alluded to performance, through which students can show acquired language abilities regarding language use and where process and output are taken into account, as the what in language assessment. Moreover, it was evident that most preservice teachers did not make a clear distinction between the language and skills to be assessed and the kind of procedures to be used. They interchangeably used terms such as the four skills, tests, tasks, language abilities, dialogues, roleplays, communicative competence, performance, ability to use grammar and syntax, workshops, objectives, activities, participation to refer both to the what and the how in language assessment. For instance, Trainee #4 expressed: “In the English class, what teachers should assess is students’ ability to state utterances appropriately, taking into account grammar; moreover, their ability to listen, read, write and speak” However, later in the course, one of his annotations in the learning journal read: “In the English class what is assessed is students’ use of the language, how they organize and give coherent messages and how they use resources of the language to formulate clear messages.” In other words, this journal exhibited the future teacher’s insights regarding the what in language assessment. He moved from considering mere development of knowledge and skills to focus on language use as the language to be assessed, which is consistent with what current views state about the ultimate goal of teaching and learning a language.

Furthermore, data analysis evidenced their progress in differentiating the what and how in language assessment. The following assertions were found in journal entries by the end of the course:

Trainee #11: “Depending on the skills we want to assess, we must choose the appropriate procedure that allows us to collect this information. For instance, if we want to check students’ comprehension through listening or reading, selected response and constructed response are a good option, however, if we need to check productive skills, personal response will be the appropriate option.”

Trainee #17: “We can assess syntax, cohesion, coherence, discourse, punctuation, morphology, phonology, functions of the language and the use of the language within social contexts, among other aspects of the communicative competence, through tasks and tests.”

**Ethical considerations in language assessment**

Findings derived from the analysis of preservice teachers’ learning journal at an early stage in the course suggested participants’ tendency to associate fairness in language assessment with the degree of transparency offered by assessors along the assessment process. Particularly, participants remarked the importance of providing test takers with clear assessment criteria in advance, as well as including contents or tasks already familiar to them. Moreover, removing
bias; using rubrics; making accommodations; and providing feedback, continuous assessment and opportunities for learners to demonstrate achievement were considered key factors to promote fair language assessment practices. This can be observed in the journal excerpts below:

Trainee #8: “Assessment is fair when the learner knows in advance what is going to be assessed, there is rubric and he is given more than one chance to perform”.

Trainee #10: “Assessment is fair if the what and the criteria for assessment are clear in advance, when each student is demanded according to his capabilities, and based on what was taught; also if the student has opportunities to show what he knows.”

Trainee #14: “Assessment is fair and reliable, when you do not allow your feelings and your personal problems affect the value you give to your students, also do not surprise your students with a ‘pop-quiz’ or assessing and goal you did not state to be reached by your students, and at last keep your students knowing what are you requiring from them and giving them the enough time to learn or acquire the language.

Prospective teachers kept this view along the course. At the end of it, they still associated fairness with reliability and transparency. Nonetheless, it was possible to identify a new element in their conception of fair assessment. They acknowledged a correlation between teachers’ LAL level and the implementation of fair assessment practices. As a case in point, Trainee #18 wrote: “The teacher needs to be updated of the latest trends in assessment because in that way the learning process will be assessed in a framework of principles which will turn the assessment in a fair and inclusive process”.

Actual vs. expected language assessment practices

Previous to the course, most prospective teachers had already framed a view of improper versus ideal language assessment practices, derived from what they lived as learners in high school, from their current experiences as trainees in the English teaching program, and from their observations as student teachers in practicum scenarios. A high number of trainees agreed on the fact that students’ motivation towards learning is affected negatively by the overuse of traditional assessment procedures in these contexts, aimed at testing students’ ability to memorize contents, to control discipline or for pure progress check. Similarly, they referred to other practices in language assessment that could have an unfavorable impact on learners; namely, the high influence of teachers’ subjectivity on his/her judgments, lack of clear criteria and feedback, use of grading as a discrimination tool, disregard of students’ individuality, implementation of unplanned assessments which include contents and items which are not familiar to learners.

On the other hand, participants’ views of acceptable assessment practices included making accommodations based on learners’ capacities; assessing not only products but processes; keeping goals, topics, instruction and assessment aligned; proposing alternative assessment procedures; and assessing students’ performance in authentic situations. These views are exemplified in the following journal excerpts:

Trainee #6: “… For instance, the teacher where I am carrying out my practicum is used to assess...
students when they are having any kind of disrupting behavior in order to manage the situation...at my school I was not good at taking exams... he [the teacher] used to assess students in the traditional way...that was the reason why I failed almost all the exams. I think that there are many ways of assessing students, like through participation, presentations, and task, etc.”

Trainee #14: “Above all, applying assessment implies in my opinion have into account the students’ language level, the context that surrounds students, the use of the communicative competence, how I taught the language in my class, the objectives and goals your students supposed to reach. Moreover, the assessment in my point of view is done or implemented in different ways...how they use the language in class in order to communicate or complete tasks...”

By the end of the course, it was evident that prospective teachers’ initial perspectives on what constituted good assessment practices were no longer incidental ones but corresponded to the result of deliberate reflection on action. Regarding this attainment in the course, Trainee #16 wrote: “To be honest, what I was implementing in my practicum was just summative assessment…But, all my learning process in this course, I realized that assessment must not be isolated from everything in a course, even I learned that I can plan my lessons from the assessment results. I really hope to apply all the things I learnt…”

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to attest preservice EFL teachers’ progress in their development of LAL through learning journals in an assessment and testing course. Findings revealed advancements regarding five specific areas: candidate teachers’ understanding of the concept of assessment and its purposes, perceptions of teachers and students’ roles in language assessment, clarity about the what and how in language assessment, acknowledgment of ethical considerations in language assessment, and awareness of what acceptable assessment practices imply.

Beyond yielding valuable information to release accurate judgments on prospective teachers’ LAL development, learning journals provided the teacher educator in charge of the course with useful insights to adjust lessons. This can be considered an authentic response to theoretical shifts regarding the knowledge base of assessment and testing courses. In relation to it, Inbar-Lourie (2008) asserts that language assessment courses must “focus on learning, negotiating, discussing, experiencing and researching” (p. 396) instead of providing a set of prescribed methods to future teachers.

In the same vein, Scarino (2013) argues that “in relation to developing language assessment literacy on the part of teachers, therefore it is necessary to consider not only the knowledge base in its most contemporary representation, but also the processes through which this literacy is developed” (p.316). Consequently, it can be claimed that the learning journal written by preservice EFL teachers in the assessment and testing course proved to be useful in order to trace the path through which student teachers constructed and deconstructed knowledge and understandings regarding language assessment.

In their paper, Babaii and Asadnia (2019) claim that “in ‘language assessment’ courses,
educators rarely go beyond briefly reviewing language assessment theories” (p. 12). This can be considered one of the reasons that supports low levels of LAL development in EFL teaching education. Nonetheless, results from the current research suggest that transformations in the knowledge base of assessment and testing courses are not sufficient to contribute to LAL development. It is necessary for teacher educators to model sound assessment practices, and to implement tools intended to monitor student teachers’ actual understandings of what language assessment implies.

When properly implemented, learning journals provide teacher educators with reliable information about candidate EFL teachers’ achievements regarding course objectives. Without the pressure that traditional assessments often put on learners, trainees displayed not just critical thinking but feelings in their writing, allowing the teacher to access information that would not be possible to obtain through different means. In this way, student EFL teachers experienced a sound assessment practice they will probably implement in their own classrooms.

In reviewing the literature, no studies were found on the association between monitoring of pre-service EFL teachers’ LAL development and learning journal writing. Furthermore, very little has been researched on journal writing in EFL teacher education. Regarding the latter, prior studies have noted the influence of journal writing on the promotion of EFL teachers’ reflection on action (e.g., Abednia et al., 2013; Nurfaidah et al., 2017; Khanjani et al., 2018; Kim, 2018). Moreover, these studies conclude that guidance is essential to favor critical reflections over mere descriptive ones. Consequently, the claim that, because of its nature, a learning journal is more likely to foster this type of reasoning among student teachers is one of the main contributions of this research to discussions in the field.

Additionally, findings from this research support results reported in Yastibaş and Takkaç’s (2018) study. Participants in their study were eight English language teachers working at a Turkish University. As part of the data collection, researchers inquired them about learning gained in assessment and testing courses they had previously engaged in. Two participants expressed the following:

I remember that I failed in this course because presentations were made and composed of theoretical knowledge and numerical values. The course teacher did not pay enough attention to our learning. As a result, I was not interested and engaged in the course. I think it was not attached enough importance. (p.98)

We should not think that we can expect a student to have the expectation that what he has learned will be useful in an environment if the teacher does not give importance to assessment and evaluation. Therefore, I had trouble in this course. (p. 98)

Therefore, the researchers argued that the design and implementation of varied assessment methods to which student teachers are exposed contributed to a big extent to their assessment knowledge. They suggested that “this old experience has been found to cause the participants to form different beliefs about different assessment methods depending on the effects of assessment methods, which is a part of teachers’ assessment and evaluation knowledge” (Yastibaş & Takkaç, 2018, p.101).
Finally, results from the current study advance to some extent the research developed by Berry et al. (2019). Regarding teachers’ perspectives on what language assessment literacy means, the authors explain that teachers tend to include assessment practices within their teaching practice and therefore do not consider assessment, as such, to be part of their teaching role. It is possible that they associate assessment with tests or exams, and not with classroom practice techniques such as monitoring and giving feedback. (p.118)

Moreover, they found that participants’ confidence to engage in testing and assessment practices was low.

The implementation of the learning journal in the current study allowed to evidence pre-service English teachers progress in five specific areas of LAL: candidate teachers’ understanding of the concept of assessment and its purposes, perceptions of teachers and students’ roles in language assessment, clarity about the what and how in language assessment, acknowledgment of ethical considerations in language assessment, and awareness of what acceptable assessment practices imply. Consequently, it could be claimed that language teachers’ misconceptions or underdeveloped areas of LAL described by Berry et al. (2019) can be avoided or reoriented during training courses. This can be done by applying tools such as the learning journal which allow teacher educators to effectively determine candidate teachers’ understandings regarding language assessment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the implementation of the learning journal as a tool to monitor prospective EFL teachers’ LAL development, in an assessment and testing course, allowed the teacher in charge of the class to collect evidence of progress in five specific areas. Progress involved 1) an evolving definition of assessment and changing views of assessment purposes, 2) a turn of mind regarding initial conceptions of teacher and student’s role in language assessment, 3) gained clarity on language assessment constructs (what) and procedures (how), 4) reference to ethical considerations in language assessment, and 5) ability to contrast language assessment practices taking place in different scenarios with own their constructed views of desirable and expected language assessment processes. Additionally, these outcomes provided her with meaningful information about their training needs to adjust the course.

This work contributes to existing knowledge on journal writing in EFL teacher education by providing evidence of its effectiveness to monitor candidate teachers’ LAL development in an assessment and testing course. It highlights the importance of modelling sound assessment practices to collect evidence of student EFL teachers’ progress in LAL development in a systematic and reliable way. Its findings have important implications for designing and conducting assessments in courses devoted to develop EFL teachers’ LAL. Together with other research in the field, this information can be used to implement targeted interventions aimed at improving the quality of assessment and testing courses in EFL teacher education programs.

Although the data reported appear to support the assumption that learning journals are effective...
tools to account for LAL development, future studies are therefore recommended since no prior research was found on the topic. Moreover, further research could explore the extent to which specific guiding prompts for entries in learning journals affect the quality of their content. For instance, it would be desirable to compare entries that come from unstructured learning journals with those from structured ones to establish the influence of the journal format on prospective teachers’ elaborations regarding their understandings on assessment and testing.

References


Will Anxiety Boost Motivation? The Relationship between Anxiety and Motivation in Foreign Language Learning

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ABSTRACT

While anxiety is widely regarded as a type of negative emotion, it has been noticed that certain types of people could be more motivated when they face certain degrees of anxiety. However, previous studies have not provided definitive results on anxiety’s correlation with motivation in foreign language learning contexts. We aim to investigate the relationship between anxiety and motivation in order to explore the possibility of using anxiety to boost motivation in foreign language contexts. This study adopted the Achievement Anxiety Test (AAT) and the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS), which led to the analysis of data collected from 173 Chinese participants using the Pearson Correlation Method. The findings reveal that facilitating anxiety is significantly and positively correlated with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as well as amotivation (the status of not intrinsically or extrinsically motivated). In addition, debilitating anxiety is also significantly correlated with extrinsic motivation and amotivation. The findings provide theoretical support for the possibility of using anxiety to boost motivation in foreign language learning contexts. Future studies could use the findings to explore the causes of facilitating anxiety, the contributory factor of motivation and then draw a connection between anxiety and motivation for enhanced foreign language learning outcomes.

KEYWORDS: anxiety, motivation, correlation, foreign language learning

Introduction

Anxiety is an important affective factor and a vital variable in foreign language learning (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986; Jain & Sidhu, 2013; Kim & Cho, 2018; Scovel, 1978). However, Scovel (1978) states that anxiety is not a well-understood construct and that it is “mixed and confusing” (p. 132). At the same time, motivation is accepted as a significant factor in relation to anxiety, but the related research on their correlation is both scarce and inconsistent. For example, Kirova, Petkovska, and Koceva (2012) proposed that anxiety is
negatively correlated with motivation in foreign language learning while Chapell et al. (2005) and Lavasani, Weisani, and Ejei (2011) indicated that motivation is positively correlated with anxiety. Therefore, Alico (2016) suggested that there is a need to study the interrelationship between anxiety and motivation in foreign language learning contexts.

We aim to answer one main research question: what is the relationship between anxiety and motivation in foreign language learning for university students? This study conducted a comprehensive literature review on previous studies on the current topic, examined whether it is possible to use anxiety to boost motivation, and provided better understanding to the role that anxiety and motivation play in foreign language learning.

Hypotheses for the current study are:

Hypothesis 1: Facilitating anxiety is significantly and positively correlated with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Hypothesis 2: Debilitating anxiety is significantly and positively correlated with extrinsic motivation and amotivation.

Hypothesis 3: Facilitating anxiety is not correlated with debilitating anxiety, and amotivation is not correlated with intrinsic or extrinsic motivation.

Review of related literature

Anxiety and Motivation in foreign language learning

Horwitz et al. (1986) defined language anxiety as “a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours (which are) related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process” (p. 128). MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) defined it as “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language contexts” (p. 284), which will “interfere with the acquisition, retention and production of the new language” (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991, p. 86). Therefore language anxiety refers to the feeling of tension provoked by the language learning context.

Language anxiety is important due to its universality, unavoidability and importance in language learning. Firstly, language anxiety universally exists among students, especially in testing situations (Horwitz et al., 1986). Anxiety is also unavoidable in language learning contexts since language learning “entails risk-taking and is necessarily problematic” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125), which threatens learners’ sense of self and worldview. Additionally, anxiety is considered to have profound effects on language learning by preventing students from receiving inputs, which interferes learning efficiency (Krashen, 1982). Hence, anxiety is widely accepted as a type of negative emotion that brings negative effects on language learning. However, Eysenck (1979) suggested that anxiety would not impair performance efficiency once the students are aware of it and then make “sufficient effort expenditure” (p. 363) to facilitate their learning. More recently, Morrison and Heimberg (2013) conducted a study and showed the possibility of using attentional control to mediate anxiety to achieve positive effects on learning. Morrison and Heimberg (2013) suggested that a better
understanding of anxiety could help control the negative impact on students’ ability to receive inputs, which therefore contributes to positive and effective language learning.

Motivation is also a crucial factor in foreign language learning and plays a driving force for individuals in performing tasks and achieving goals, which can be categorized as intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (Qiao, Abu, & Kamal, 2013). One of the most important affective factors in education, or language learning, is motivation (Al-Hoorie, 2017; Vallerand et al., 1992). As to the classification of motivational factors, we divided them into three categories: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation. In accordance with Chastain (1976), Scovel (1978) proposed that “the most direct and simplest” (p. 129) way is to categorize motivation as intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Keaney and Mundia (2014) supported this way of classification by saying that “human behavior is always generated by either an inner force commonly known as internal motivation or an outside force referred to as external motivation” (p. 122). In addition to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, Deci and Ryan (1985) posited a third type of motivation construct: amotivation, which refers to a situation of neither being intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated, such as “I don’t know why I come to study” and “I think I am wasting my time at school”. There are three subcategories for both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, as shown below:

Intrinsic motivation toward simulating experiences (IM-Experience). Learners engage in activities or performing tasks to experience stimulating sensations such as fun and excitement. For example: “I learn English because I enjoy communicating with my teachers”.

Intrinsic motivation toward achievement (IM-Achievement). IM-achievement is the motivation that occurs when a person can be driven by success or achievements. For example: “I study because of the satisfaction of mastering difficult subjects”.

Intrinsic motivation toward knowledge (IM-Knowledge). IM-knowledge refers to “Internal constructs such as curiosity, feeling and self-interest, which motivate individuals to explore new ideas and develop knowledge for personal satisfaction and enjoyment” (Qiao et al., 2013, p. 201). For example: “I study because I enjoy the feeling of increasing my knowledge”.

Extrinsic motivation identified regulation (EM-Identified). EM-identified describes how motivation is regulated because one individual highly values the behaviour or sees its usefulness. It occurs when a learner will “act out of a belief in the personal importance or perceived value of the activity” (Ryan & Deci, 2017, p. 188). It is “external and somewhat self-determined” (Qiao et al., 2013, p. 201). For example: “I study because I know studying is good for me”.

Extrinsic motivation introjected regulation (EM-Introjected). EM-introjected describes when the learner’s behaviours are regulated due to the “external pressure incorporated into them” (Qiao et al., 2013, p. 201). Cook and Singleton (2014) defined that EM-introjected occurs when students accept the externally imposed rules as norms they should follow so as not to feel guilty. It is “external and somewhat self-determined” (Qiao et al., 2013, p. 201). For example: “I must be at school on time” and “I study because I want people to keep thinking I am a good student”.

Extrinsic motivation external regulation (EM-External). EM-external comes entirely from external sources such as rewards or threats (Cook & Singleton, 2014). It is “external and least self-determined” (Qiao et al., 2013, p. 201). For example: “I study because I can get rewards from parents”.

The relationship between Anxiety and Motivation in English Learning Context

Previous research has had contradictory findings on the relationship between anxiety and motivation in learning or foreign language learning contexts (see Table 1). The unsettled concerns are about the overall correlation, interaction, dependability and causality of the two affective factors. The specific unsettled concerns are: 1) Whether motivation and anxiety are correlated. If yes, is the correlation positive or negative? 2) How do motivation and anxiety interact with each other? Is motivation influencing anxiety or anxiety influencing motivation? 3) Which variable is dependent, namely is motivation a part of anxiety or vice versa? and 4) Which variable causes the other one?

Scholars have not presented consistent results on whether anxiety and motivation are correlated. While most previous studies assumed that the two variables are somehow correlated, the study by Zhang (2009) suggested that there is no correlation between learning motivation and writing anxiety in language learning.

Among the studies that confirmed the correlation between anxiety and motivation in foreign language contexts, scholars did not reach an agreement on the specific relationship (e.g. positive vs. negative, direct vs. indirect). A considerable number of researchers viewed anxiety as a factor negatively correlated with motivation. For example, Alico (2016) concluded that the two variables are negatively correlated “as language learning motivation increases, writing anxiety level decreases” in language learning (p. 6); Jain and Sidhu (2013) found that anxiety has a negative impact on motivation among tertiary students; Amiryousefi and Tavakoli (2011) stated that (test) anxiety negatively affects motivation in TOEFL reading preparation; Magelinskaitė, Kepalaitė, and Legkauskas (2014) concluded that lowered anxiety may enhance learning motivation after investigating the relationship of learning motivation, school anxiety and social competence in primary school; and Kirova et al. (2012) conducted an experiment in Macedonia and found that decreasing anxiety level is a way to improve motivation. Other studies demonstrated a similar tendency (Gardner, Lalonde, & Pierson, 1983; Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997; Hashimoto, 2002). However, recent studies highlighted the possibility of a positive correlation between the two variables. Strack, Lopes, and Esteves (2015) described that “while some individuals experience anxiety as debilitating … others seem to thrive in similarly adverse circumstances” and “the latter may be driven to work harder when they experience anxiety in the face of difficult challenges” (p. 579). As a result, certain types of people get more self-motivated when under pressure (Strack & Esteves, 2015; Strack, Lopes, Esteves, & Fernandez-Berrocal, 2017). Though not for foreign language learning, the study by Wang, Shakeshaft, Schofield, and Malanchini (2018) sheds light on the possibility of the positive correlation between anxiety and motivation in learning. Wang et al. (2018) supported the view that anxiety and motivation could be positively correlated as their findings showed that the most engaged students were characterized by a combination of high exam anxiety high motivation in (math) learning.
Whether the correlation is direct or indirect remained an issue. According to Dai and Zhao (2007), academic motivation has a direct and significant effect on academic achievement anxiety in foreign language learning; in contrast, in the study of Qin and Wen (2002), motivation and anxiety are correlated but not correlated directly, namely, other variables are influencing their relationships, such as language competence and gender.

Previous research also reported contradictory findings on which variable has an effect on the other. Lavasani et al. (2011) called for using motivation to describe anxiety. In that study, all intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation have an effect on anxiety. Papi (2010) argued that anxiety has a profound effect on motivation with the statement “anxiety is a key factor of self-confidence and thereby a prominent characteristic of motivated language learners” (p. 470). Scovel (1978) stated that it is anxiety that deals with motivation, but Baloğlu (2003) proposed that it is motivation that affects anxiety since the difficulties in testing anxiety are originated from the attitude, emotion and motivation variables. However, because of the difficulties assessment, most of the studies laid focus on the general relationship between the two factors instead of the cause-effect relationship.

There are also other interesting viewpoints on the dependability of the two variables. For example, Lavasani et al. (2011) suggested that motivation constitutes a part of anxiety, while Schwartz (1972) and Scovel (1978) proposed that anxiety is a part of (intrinsic) motivation. In the second language Motivational Self System by Dornyei (2003), English anxiety is one of the five latent variables contributing to motivation.

Besides, researchers have argued on the causality of motivation and anxiety in learning or foreign language contexts. Deng (2004) and Liu (2015) proposed that motivation causes academic achievement anxiety, while some other researchers supported the viewpoint that anxiety causes motivation. For example, Elliott and Dweck (1988) found that the motivation of ‘getting a certificate’ will directly increase test anxiety, and Chapell et al. (2005) believed that anxiety can be good for certain types of students, since anxiety, especially test anxiety in foreign language learning, trigger more time input on study more careful attention to questions on the examination.

Since motivation and anxiety in foreign language contexts are multi-faceted constructs (Cakici, 2016; Wang et al., 2018), researchers have attempted to focus on the constructs of the two affective factors for enhanced understanding. Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2000) divided motivation into the ‘motivation for successes’ and ‘motivation for failure avoidance’, following the statement that ‘motivation for success’ is connected to low anxiety and ‘motivation for failure avoidance’ is connected to high anxiety. Therefore, the general term motivation and the term anxiety are both positively and negatively correlated. Deng (2004) reviewed motivation as ‘intrinsic motivation’ and ‘extrinsic motivation’ and concluded that intrinsic motivation is negatively correlated with anxiety.
Scholars explained the inconsistent research results by suggesting there is an interaction between facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety (Qin & Wen, 2002; Zhao & Xie, 2013; Zhou & Ying, 2011). Facilitating anxiety is a concept differentiated from debilitating anxiety by (Alpert & Haber, 1960; Kleinmann, 1977; Scovel, 1978). “The facilitating anxiety refers to anxiety that contributes to good performance, whereas the debilitating anxiety can lead to poor performance” (Liu, 2015). If facilitating anxiety outweighed debilitating anxiety, the general effect of anxiety might be positive, and vice versa. According to Child (2004), with the increase of motivation, the level of anxiety rises as well; when the motivation is increased to a certain degree, anxiety will begin to bring negative effects. Child (2004) did not mention where is the ‘certain degree’, nor the concept of facilitating and debilitating anxiety, but his theory is coherent with the facilitating/debilitating anxiety theory.

We suggest that the concept of facilitating and debilitating anxiety can explain the mixed research results via further empirical studies. Hence, the current research adopts facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety as constructs of anxiety.

**Research methods**

In the current study, we used an online survey which we distributed to college students via
emails. This was a random sampling study involving 186 students from three colleges in Chinese universities. Since the target colleges have summer school programs for secondary-school students, we designed a filter question about the participants’ educational level. After removing 12 surveys from secondary-school students and one survey with all answers being 3 (Neutral), we got 173 valid surveys. The number of valid participants in the current study is 173. As shown in Table 2, 42.2% of the participants were males (n=73) and 55.68% were females (n=100). The majority of them were undergraduate students (n=154, 89.0%). The self-report survey results indicated that the majority of the participants were “above average but not top 20%” in foreign language learning (n=125, 72.3%), followed by participants “below average but not the last 20%” (n=24, 13.9%) and students scored top 20% academically (n=23, 13.3%). Only one participant reported that he or she was the last 20% in academic performance (0.6%).

Table 2

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>42.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>57.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>89.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The last 20%</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below average but not the last 20%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above-average but not top 20%</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>72.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The top 20%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>13.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study adopted the Achievement Anxiety Test (AAT) by Alpert and Haber (1960) and the Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) by Vallerand et al. (1992). Both scales are 5-point Likert scales from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The AAT contains 19 questions, including nine for facilitating anxiety and 10 for debilitating anxiety; AMS contains 27 questions, covering seven sub-categories related to intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation and amotivation. Since several items are repetitive in the same category, we removed three items from AAT (item 10, 15 and 17 of the original scale) and six items from AMS (item 2, 5, 10, 14, 15, 25 and 28 of the original scale). The final questionnaire items were restructured as showed in Figure 1 and the appendixes.

We computed Cronbach's alpha to assess whether the 16 items in AAT and the 21 items in AMS formed a reliable scale. The Cronbach's alpha for AAT and AMS were 0.846 and 0.809 respectively, and the Cronbach's alpha for the overall questionnaire was 0.890, which indicated that the items from both scales had reasonable internal consistency reliability (higher than 0.70). We also calculated the Guttman’s reliability of the two scales for enhanced reliability. The results showed that the Guttman’s reliability for AAT ranged from 0.76 to 0.893 and that for AMS ranged from 0.77 to 0.891.

Before analysing the data, we organised the 37 sub-questions into nine subcategories (seven for motivation and two for anxiety) by counting the Mean; for example, item 1, 6 and 17 in Luo, Z., Subramaniam, G., & O’Steen, B. (2020). Malaysian Journal of ELT Research, Vol. 17(1), pp. 53-71
AMS contribute to IM-Experience, so the Mean of the three answers for each participant was calculated. The final analysis was based on the transformed data. The correlation was calculated with Pearson Correlation provided by the SPSS software.

**Figure 1**

*Item allocation of AMS and AAT*

Results

**Descriptive data**

Table 3 demonstrates the descriptive statistics of college students learning English as a foreign language in China in terms of their motivation and anxiety.

The data shows that the participants were more extrinsically motivated than being intrinsically
motivated, with the *Mean* of the three sub-constructs of extrinsic motivation ranging from 3.82 to 4.18 and that for intrinsic motivation ranging from 3.57 to 4.02. The participants reported a low level of amotivation (*Mean* = 2.68). The reported amotivation has a high Standard Deviation (1.168), which indicates that the amotivation level of the participants spread out over a large range of values. In terms of foreign language anxiety, the participants reported higher level of facilitative anxiety compared with the debilitating anxiety (*Mean* = 3.47 and 3.23).

**Table 3**

*Descriptive Statistics of the Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Sub-construct</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic motivation</td>
<td>IM-Experience</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>0.574</td>
<td>-0.202</td>
<td>-0.269</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IM-Achievement</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>0.625</td>
<td>-0.261</td>
<td>0.068</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IM-Knowledge</td>
<td>4.02</td>
<td>0.631</td>
<td>-0.392</td>
<td>-0.096</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic motivation</td>
<td>EM-Identified</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.517</td>
<td>-0.490</td>
<td>0.460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EM-Introjected</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>0.650</td>
<td>-0.282</td>
<td>-0.114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EM-External</td>
<td>4.09</td>
<td>0.559</td>
<td>-0.602</td>
<td>0.823</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amotivation</td>
<td></td>
<td>2.68</td>
<td>1.168</td>
<td>0.264</td>
<td>-1.034</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>0.714</td>
<td>-0.128</td>
<td>-0.053</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debilitating anxiety</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.23</td>
<td>0.681</td>
<td>0.089</td>
<td>-0.203</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: IM: intrinsic motivation; EM: extrinsic motivation

**Correlation of anxiety and motivation in foreign language learning contexts**

Table 4 and 5 below report the correlation among the constructs of anxiety and motivation for university foreign language learners.

Table 4 shows that the survey results confirmed Hypothesis 1 (“facilitating anxiety is significantly and positively correlated with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation”) since facilitating anxiety is correlated with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation at a significant level (*p* < .001). To be specific, facilitating anxiety is significantly correlated with intrinsic motivation (*ρ* = .651) and extrinsic motivation (*ρ* = .333), as well as the sub-constructs of the two types of motivation except for the extrinsic motivation for external rewards (EM-External) (*ρ* ranged from .259 to .644, *p* < .001). As shown in Table 5, facilitating anxiety is related to the providence of intrinsic motivation, including the motivation towards experience (IM-Experience), the motivation to get achievements (IM-Achievement) and the motivation to get knowledge (IM-Knowledge); even though facilitating anxiety also helps in triggering extrinsic motivation (*ρ* ranged from .321 to .345, *p* < .001), the correlation is not as strong as it with intrinsic motivation (*ρ* ranged from .523 to .644, *p* < .001). The correlation between facilitating anxiety and extrinsic motivation for external rewards (EM-External) is not significant.
Hypothesis 2 suggests that debilitating anxiety is significantly and positively correlated with extrinsic motivation, and is possible to be correlated with amotivation. The Pearson correlation tests support the hypothesis at a significant level ($p < .001$). The data further indicate that debilitating anxiety and amotivation are closely related to each other with the $\rho$ value of .688, which implies that debilitating anxiety is less likely to trigger learning motivation in foreign language learning contexts. It is notable that debilitating anxiety is also significantly correlated with IM-Experience, with the underlying reasons worth further explorations.

Based on the definition, we raised the third hypothesis that facilitating anxiety is not correlated with debilitating anxiety since the former one is regarded as beneficial while the latter one functions contradictorily; we also hypothesized that amotivation is not correlated with intrinsic or extrinsic motivation because the term amotivation refers to the status of being non-motivated. The data confirmed that amotivation is not significantly correlated with general intrinsic or extrinsic motivation; however, it is significantly correlated with the extrinsic motivation introjected regulation (EM-Introjected) ($\rho = .265$, $p < .001$). An example of EM-Introjected in foreign language learning is students who attend classes because they fear the negative comments of their peers. The result indicated that compared with the extrinsic motivation identified regulation (EM-Identified) in pursuit of personally valued outcomes and the extrinsic motivation external regulation (EM-External) for external rewards, the motivation that involves the internalization of external controls (EM-Introjected) is possible to demotivate students in certain foreign language learning contexts.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Intrinsic motivation</th>
<th>Extrinsic motivation</th>
<th>Amotivation</th>
<th>Facilitating Anxiety</th>
<th>Debilitating Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrinsic motivation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extrinsic motivation</td>
<td>.500**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amotivation</td>
<td>-0.064</td>
<td>.012</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating anxiety</td>
<td>.651**</td>
<td>.333**</td>
<td>.259**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debilitating anxiety</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>.161*</td>
<td>.688**</td>
<td>.324**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>IM-Experience</th>
<th>IM-Achievement</th>
<th>IM-Knowledge</th>
<th>EM-Identified</th>
<th>EM-Introjected</th>
<th>EM-External</th>
<th>Amotivation</th>
<th>Facilitating Anxiety</th>
<th>Debilitating Anxiety</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IM-Experience</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM-Achievement</td>
<td>.620**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM-Knowledge</td>
<td>.641**</td>
<td>.714**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM-Identified</td>
<td>.358**</td>
<td>.594**</td>
<td>.606**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM-Introjected</td>
<td>.281**</td>
<td>.321**</td>
<td>.251**</td>
<td>.289**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM-External</td>
<td>0.105</td>
<td>.332**</td>
<td>.308**</td>
<td>.499**</td>
<td>.400**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amotivation</td>
<td>0.081</td>
<td>-0.139</td>
<td>-0.127</td>
<td>-0.218**</td>
<td>.265**</td>
<td>-0.078</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating anxiety</td>
<td>.644**</td>
<td>.540**</td>
<td>.523**</td>
<td>.345**</td>
<td>.321**</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>.259**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Debilitating anxiety  .201**  0.053  0.064  -0.038  .321**  0.047  .688**  .324**  1

Note: **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data also revealed other information. For example, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are positively correlated with each other with a \( r \) value of .500 at a significant level \( (p < .001) \). A notable result is that facilitating and debilitating anxiety are reported with significant correlation \( (\rho = .241, p < .001) \), which is in contradiction with the assertion made by the AAT scale designer Alpert and Haber (1960) that facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety are contradictory. Since the reliability of AAT is high in both previous studies (Alpert & Haber, 1960) and in this research \( (\alpha = .846) \), the inconsistency might be caused by other variables or different cultural context.

To sum up, this study confirmed the first hypothesis (“facilitating anxiety is significantly and positively correlated with both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation”) and the second one (“debilitating anxiety is significantly and positively correlated with extrinsic motivation and amotivation”), with the last one partially confirmed. One valuable finding of the current study is that facilitating anxiety is highly related with intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, therefore it is possible to use this typically-regarded ‘negative emotion’ for positive learning outcomes, as proposed by Strack et al. (2017), Strack and Esteves (2015) and Strack et al. (2015). Another finding is that in contrast with the expectation, debilitating anxiety is positively and significantly correlated with facilitating anxiety. The underlying reasons worth further explorations. Besides, debilitating anxiety was proved to be correlated with IM-Experience, which has not been covered in previous studies.

**Discussion**

*The correlation between anxiety and motivation in foreign language learning*

The first finding of this research is that there is a significant and positive correlation between anxiety and motivation in foreign language learning. To be specific, intrinsic motivation is significantly correlated with facilitating anxiety, and extrinsic motivation is highly correlated with both types of anxiety. Amotivation is strongly correlated with both types of anxiety, especially with debilitating anxiety. This result is different from the conclusion that anxiety and motivation in language learning settings are negatively correlated (Amiryousefi & Tavakoli, 2011; Jain & Sidhu, 2013; Kirova et al., 2012; Magelinskaité et al., 2014) or non-correlated (Qin & Wen, 2002).

The second finding is that facilitating anxiety is significantly and positively correlated with three types of motivation. The differentiation of facilitating anxiety from debilitating anxiety explains why students with intense motivation are tested with a high level of anxiety (Liu, 2015) and why the level of anxiety increases with the improvement of motivation level (Child, 2004).

As to debilitating anxiety, it is not correlated with the general intrinsic motivation but is positively connected with IM-Experience. Namely, the motivation for experience will bring harmful anxiety which stops students from active learning, mainly because the nature of language learning “entails risk-taking and is necessarily problematic” (Horwitz et al., 1986, p. 125) threatens learners’ sense of self and world view. Meanwhile, it is EM-Introjected that
correlated with debilitating anxiety. Since EM-Introjected involves the internalization of external controls like “I run because I want people to keep thinking I am a good runner”, the fear of turning people down or the fear of negative evaluation leads to a negative sense of anxiety.

Furthermore, amotivation, a negative status that might eventually make students stop participating in academic activities (Vallerand et al., 1992), has a very high correlation with debilitating anxiety. This explains why intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is more correlated with the ‘beneficial’ anxiety but in some empirical studies motivation seems to bring negative effects to anxiety: there is a status called amotivation besides intrinsic/extrinsic motivation, which is largely ignored but is playing an important role in affecting anxiety level.

To be noted, even though Alpert and Haber (1960) asserted that facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety would be highly negatively correlated, data in this research indicates a strong correlation between these two variables. If Alpert’s AAT scale is still valid in the 21st century, its different cultural context or the involvement of other variables may cause a contradiction in findings. This assumption can more specifically explain why empirical studies in China show different conclusions such as ‘anxiety and motivation do not correlate’ (Zhang, 2009).

**Why is anxiety positively correlated with motivation in foreign language learning?**

The survey results confirmed the hypothesis that facilitating anxiety is positively and significantly correlated with intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation (p < .001). This result is different from the conclusion that anxiety and motivation in language learning settings are non-correlated (Qin & Wen, 2002) or negatively correlated (Amiryousefi & Tavakoli, 2011; Jain & Sidhu, 2013; Kirova et al., 2012; Magelinskaitė et al., 2014). The result could be unexpected since the term ‘anxiety’ is widely regarded as a type of negative emotion. The result aligns with the statement of Strack et al. (2017) that “negative emotions have important motivational properties” (p. 114). Even though anxiety as a negative emotion brings an unpleasant experience, it “can also provide energy, focus and determination, helping an individual to work hard toward a future goal” (Strack et al., 2017, p. 122).

Strack et al. (2017) explained why certain groups of people claim that they are more motivated in circumstances that tend to elicit anxiety. Anxiety as a type of negative emotion exists to signal problems or threats, and in learning contexts, it indicates a gap between one’s desire and actual progress. Anxiety is also connected with the motivation to avoid unexpected situations, therefore when students are “interpreting their anxiety as facilitative”, they could be more willing to input time and effort to reach the expected goals (Strack et al., 2017, p. 113). Eventually, facilitating anxiety triggers persistence and performance, which is correlated with high motivation (Strack et al., 2017).

Wang et al. (2018) summarised that the learning motivation and anxiety are “distinct constructs rather than two opposing ends of a continuum” (p. 2). Similarly, the relationship between anxiety and motivation in foreign language learning contexts is not linear.

**The contributing factors of the varied correlation between anxiety and motivation in**
Previous studies presented contradictory results in terms of the relationship or the correlation between anxiety and motivation in foreign language learning, as well as the factors contributing to the varied results.

Both motivation and anxiety in foreign language learning contexts are multi-faceted constructs, so the varied selection of constructs contributes to distinct correlation results. For example, in the study supporting positive correlation of anxiety and motivation, authors concluded that the highly-motivated students are likely to experience exam anxiety, but are less likely to experience learning anxiety (Wang et al., 2018). Kim and Cho (2018) suggested that learning motivation could be categorised into exam motivation and career motivation, and the effect of each type of motivation could be different on learning anxiety. Furthermore, learning anxiety may reflect the “lack of confidence in their abilities” (debilitating anxiety) or “their desire for better achievement” (facilitating anxiety), so the students with high anxiety were observed at “all levels” of motivation, which brings confusion to the relationship between anxiety and motivation (Wang et al., 2018, p. 12). There is a type of obviously-debilitating anxiety named somatic anxiety. Somatic anxiety, also known as somatization, refers to a situation that brings “physical complaints and distress” such as chest pain, headache, dyspepsia, insomnia and dizziness (Gelenberg, 2000, p. 50). In a study by Amiryousefi and Tavakoli (2011), the adopted scale is the Test Anxiety Scale (TAS), which focuses on somatic anxiety such as appetite or stomachache before the examination. With a focus on debilitating-oriented anxiety, Amiryousefi and Tavakoli (2011) naturally concluded that anxiety negatively affects motivation in language learning. In conclusion, a single correlation between the general motivation and the general anxiety “seemed insufficient in capturing these complex mulit-dimensional relations” (Wang et al., 2018, p. 2). Consequently, the correlation study of affective factors including language learning motivation and anxiety requires researchers to address the contextualized differences of these variables. There is also a need of systematic reviews focusing on the relationship of different constructs of motivation and anxiety in language learning contexts.

Without realising the existence of facilitating anxiety, the scales aiming to test debilitating anxiety also bring mixed results in terms of the correlation between foreign language learning motivation and anxiety. For example, the Attitude Motivation Test Battery (ATMB) developed by Gardner and Smythe (1981) included items testing both anxiety and motivation, in which the anxiety is the debilitating one that hinders motivation. The same with ATMB, the Test Anxiety Scale (TAS) aims to test the severe and debilitating-oriented anxiety such as “I seem to defeat myself” and “During exams, I sometimes wonder if I’ll get through college” (Sarason, 1977). The same tendency also exists in School Anxiety Scale (SAS) by Lyneham, Street, Abbott, and Rapee (2008). In SAS, questions are referring considerably high level of debilitating anxiety, such as “this child appears nervous when approached by other children or adults” and “when this child has a problem, (s)he feels shaky” (Lyneham et al., 2008, p. 296).

Since strong anxiety will stop learners from getting input, performance drops accordingly, which results in a decreased level of motivation accordingly. Hence, with the use of debilitating-anxiety-oriented scales, the conclusion tends to be ‘motivation and anxiety are

negatively correlated’. However, once having considered the existence of facilitating anxiety, this research shows contradictory results.

MacIntyre and Vincze (2017) proposed that in cognitive psychology, the assessment of language anxiety combines the “various internal physiological signals (e.g., a fast heartbeat)” with an interpretation of the social context, urge to act and other specific conditions (e.g., “giving my first speech”, “I want to quit the class” and “the audience looks confused” respectively) (p. 65). In consideration of the existence of facilitating anxiety, future studies could focus on the exploration of valid internal physiological signals for facilitating anxiety, as well as the correspondent social contexts, urge to act and other conditions.

Language proficiency, or language competence, is another factor contributing to the varied results in terms of the correlation between anxiety and motivation in foreign language learning (Alsowat, 2016). Most previous studies used language achievement as the measure of language proficiency or language competence, such as language test results, course grades, self-assessment results and Grade Point Average (GPA) (Teimouri, Goetze, & Plonsky, 2019). Rezaei and Jafari (2014) reported that poor linguistic and writing ability were the primary reasons behind students’ writing anxiety, which was furtherly confirmed by the study by Kim and Cho (2018). Kim and Cho (2018) interviewed English learners of different language proficiency levels for their language motivation and anxiety. The interview responses revealed that students’ language competence plays an important role in language learning as the students tend to be anxious when they do not understand the learning content. According to Teimouri et al. (2019), “much of the research in this domain (second language anxiety) has examined the relationship between anxiety and L2 (second language) achievement” (p. 363). Without involving language proficiency or language achievement, the investigation on the relationship between language learning motivation and anxiety could be incomplete.

The interactions between facilitating and debilitating anxiety is another factor influencing the results. The finding that ‘there is a significant and positive correlation between anxiety and motivation’ is not the same as the conclusion made by Qin and Wen (2002). In their empirical study, language anxiety and motivation have no correlation, which is different from mainstream theory. As suggested by Zhou and Ying (2011), Zhao and Xie (2013) and Qin and Wen (2002), this situation might be caused by the interaction of facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety. Since motivation contributes to both ‘helpful anxiety’ and ‘harmful anxiety’, the two types of anxiety can interact with each other and end with confusing effects.

**Conclusion**

The previous studies about the correlation of achievement anxiety and academic motivation show mixed results. This study has differentiated facilitating anxiety from general anxiety and has explored the relationship between them with intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation within a foreign language learning context. The final results of this study indicated that even though anxiety is widely regarded as a type of negative motivation, it is also significantly and positively correlated with all types of motivation (intrinsic, extrinsic and amotivation).
One implication of this study reflects on the potential of teaching students to manage their anxiety by interpreting anxiety as facilitative. Strack and Esteves (2015) suggested that students should learn to manage their anxiety since “whether or not anxiety has a negative effect on our well-being or performance may depend on the way we interpret our emotions” (p. 212). Two specific ways to manage anxiety are to “(be) clear about the feelings” and “interpret anxiety as facilitative” (p. 205). Strack et al. (2017) supported this viewpoint by saying that “individuals who are clear about their feelings are more likely to thrive on anxiety” (p. 115). For example, since the IM-Experience is significantly correlated with debilitating anxiety, which is taken as “harmful” anxiety (Jain & Sidhu, 2013), teachers need to pay more attention to bringing positive learning experiences for students when they are immersed in new language learning settings. Take foreign language writing anxiety for example, since the anxiety causes could be “time pressure” and “fear of teacher’s negative comments” (Rezaei & Jafari, 2014, p. 1549), teachers could consider the flipped classroom approach (which provides students with access to online learning materials prior to the face-to-face sessions) for more preparation time and the shift from teachers’ comments to peer feedback (Luo, O’Steen, & Brown, 2020).

In addition to this study being wholly situated within a foreign language setting in China, it is also limited in its scope in that it did not explore the role that language proficiency or other factors might have on the relationship between language learning motivation and anxiety. For further research, it is suggested to investigate the correlation between facilitating anxiety and debilitating anxiety in different cultural contexts. As suggested by Alico (2016), future investigations can focus on three issues including 1) the causes of facilitating anxiety, 2) the contributory factors of motivation and 3) the connection between the anxiety and motivation for enhanced learning outcomes.

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**APPENDIX A. Achievement Anxiety Test (AAT)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitating anxiety</td>
<td>2. When the task is very important, I work most effectively even with high pressure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. While I may (or may not) be nervous before taking an exam, once I start, I seem to forget the nervousness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Nervousness while taking a test helps me do better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9. When I start a test, nothing can distract me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. I look forward to taking exams.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. I enjoy taking a difficult exam more than an easy one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15. The more important the exam or test, the better I seem to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debilitating anxiety</td>
<td>1. Nervousness while taking a test stops me from doing well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. In a course where I have been doing poorly, my fear of a bad grade cuts down my efficiency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. When I am poorly prepared for an exam, I get upset and then get a worse score.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. The more important the examination, the less well I seem to do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. During exams, I forget some answers, even though I might remember them as soon as the exam is over.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. I find that my mind goes blank at the beginning of an exam, and it takes me a few minutes before I can function.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. I am so tired from worrying about an exam, that I find I almost don't care how well I do by the time I start the test.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Time pressure on an exam causes me to do worse.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16. When I don't do well on difficult items at the beginning of an exam, it tends to upset me so that I block on easy questions later on.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**APPENDIX B. Academic Motivation Scale (AMS): Why did you go to school?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Item</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IM-Experience</td>
<td>1. Because I enjoy communicating or writing my ideas to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. For the pleasure I experience when I participate in interesting discussions with some teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17. For the satisfaction of doing something I like, for example, an experiment in biology, or prepare a project, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM-Achievement</td>
<td>7. For the satisfaction I experience as I achieve my goal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. For the satisfaction I feel when I perform difficult activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18. Because high school allows me to experience personal achievement in my pursuit of excellence in my studies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM-Knowledge</td>
<td>2. Because I enjoy learning new things.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Because I enjoy it when I increase my knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19. For my studies allow me to continue to learn many things that interest me.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM-Identified</td>
<td>3. Because I think education will help me to be better prepared.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Because it is possible to allow me to enter the labour market in the field that I like.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13. Because, in our society, it is important to go to school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM-Introjected</td>
<td>9. Because I like to have good grades.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14. Because I do not want to fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20. Because I do not want to disappoint my family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EM-External  4. Because the diploma helps to find a well-paid job in the future.  
10. For a more prestigious job in the future.  
15. To have a better salary in the future.

Amotivation  5. I do not know. I really feel I'm wasting my time at school.  
16. I cannot understand why I go to school. I don’t care.  