

ISSN 1513-5934

Volume 7

January 2005

# **rEFLections**

KMUTT Journal of Language Education

Department of Language Studies

School of Liberal Arts

King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi

Thailand

## **Editorial Staff**

**Editors:** Jonathan Hull & Wareesiri Singhasiri

**Editorial Board:** Suvalee Chinkumtornwong, Pornapit Darasawang, Sonthida Keyuravong, Wilaksana Srimavin, Nuantip Tantisawetrat, Saowaluck Tepsuriwong, Ananya Tuksinvarajarn, Richard Watson Todd, Kulawadee Yamkate

**Research Assistant:** Tharinee Boonyuen

### **Information for contributors**

*rEFLECTIONS* is an annual publication featuring original articles on a wide range of EFL topics, mostly in Thailand. We welcome contributions from all sources. No payment will be made but contributors will receive two free copies of the journal.

Manuscripts for articles should be no longer than 5,000 words, and follow the conventions of the articles in this issue as far as possible. Please include an abstract and a biographical note. Send 2 hard copies together with a diskette (preferably Microsoft Word 97, IBM format) to the editor at the address below:

Department of Language Studies  
King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi  
Bangmod  
Tung Khru  
Bangkok 10140  
Thailand

Email: jonathan.hul@kmutt.ac.th & wareesiri@yahoo.com

Fax: (662) 428 3375

Deadline for next issue: 31<sup>st</sup> October 2005

## **Editorial**

In this edition of *rEFlections*, most of the articles present recent research conducted by teachers and masters students in the Department of Language Studies, School of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). In addition, we are delighted to include a paper written by Hayo Reinders and Marilyn Lewis, University of Auckland, New Zealand. This year, there are three themes: the first three papers address issues related to the use of computers in learning English in Thailand; next, there are two papers concerned with optimizing self-access centres; the final paper reports on a classroom study investigating the use of students' name cards.

The first article, by Richard Watson Todd, investigates mode of communication in computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Watson Todd observes that, while the most common mode is one learner with one computer, other modes are possible. Using a program involving a game, his study compares communication in three modes: one learner playing against one computer; two learners playing against each other face-to-face using one computer; and two learners playing against each other at separate networked computers.

The second article, co-authored by Lakkana Chaisaklert and Richard Watson Todd, looks at recreational use of English computers among Thai university students. The authors note these students' widespread voluntary use of computers beyond the classroom and the ubiquity of English on the internet and in computer-mediated communication (CMC). Their study focuses on the kind of English these students were exposed to during one hour of recreational use of computers.

The third article, written by Pongpet Pongsart, explores computer use from the teacher's perspective. Observing the huge potential of Web-based CALL (WBC) for English language teaching, the author seeks to address the fact that many secondary school teachers in Thailand lack training in its use. This study considers an innovative self-study approach to training. The author designed a CD aimed at allowing teachers to train themselves in WBC. This paper reports on the teachers' reactions to the CD.

The next two articles focus on self-access centres (SACs) for language learning. The first, co-authored by Wantana Chullawatchanatana and Wilaksana Srimavin, describes a comprehensive survey of users' reactions to an SAC that has been operating for over a decade. The authors then take the findings to make recommendations for the establishment of new SACs and the modification of existing ones. The second article on this topic, co-authored by Hayo Reinders and Marilyn Lewis, has a different focus: materials evaluation. They asked language consultants working in a SAC at a university in New Zealand to evaluate the materials in the centre for their suitability for self-access learning.

The final article, written by Phanitphim Sojisirikul, is firmly based in the classroom. Noting that, at Thai universities, class sizes for undergraduates are increasing considerably, the author investigates whether the use of students' name cards can facilitate the management of large classes. The study she conducted analyzes students' reactions at the end of a semester during which such name cards were compulsory.

**Jonathan Hull & Wareesiri Singhasiri, Editors**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>Page</b>
Three modes of CALL communication <i>Richard Watson Todd</i>	1
Surveying students' recreational use of English with computers <i>Lakkana Chaisaklert &amp; Richard Watson Todd</i>	13
Training teachers to use the Web in ELT <i>Pongpet Pongsart</i>	25
Factors affecting the use of the Self Learning Centre at the Bank of Thailand <i>Wantana Chullawatchanatana &amp; Wilaksana Srimavin</i>	34
Examining the 'self' in self-access materials <i>Hayo Reinders &amp; Marilyn Lewis</i>	46
The use of students' name cards in large classes <i>Phanitphim Sojisirikul</i>	54

## Three modes of CALL communication

Richard Watson Todd

*King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi*

### Abstract

One aspect of CALL which has received little attention in both research into and design of multimedia language learning software is the mode of CALL communication. By this I mean who the software user is interacting with and how they are interacting. Most multimedia software is designed for a one learner – one computer mode of communication. However, modes where learners interact with each other either face-to-face with two learners sitting at one computer or over a network could be integrated relatively easily into most software. This study compares three modes of CALL communication, namely, one learner to one computer, competitive face-to-face pairs, and networked pairs. To conduct the comparison, a program involving a noughts-and-crosses (tic-tac-toe) game and multiple-choice questions on collocation was designed. Findings show that, in the two paired modes, learner-learner communication was impoverished, but that learners preferred these modes and were more involved in learning.

Historically, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has passed through three stages (Warschauer, 2000). Initially, in the 1970s and 1980s, most CALL was structural and behaviouristic consisting largely of drill and mechanical practice exercises focusing on accuracy. This was followed by communicative CALL, which placed a greater stress on communicative activities and fluency. More recently, integrative CALL utilising multimedia and the Internet and featuring more authentic discourse has come to the fore. This last stage takes a socio-cognitive view of learning stressing the importance of social interaction for language development. Although this three-stage model provides a potentially helpful summary of CALL, the reality is much messier than this neat picture. Each succeeding stage has not replaced, but rather supplemented, previous stages, and frequently CALL exhibits features of more than one stage. For example, much multimedia software contains a mix of drills, communicative activities and authentic discourse.

More seriously for the three-stage model, a single CALL activity from one stage may have a theoretical base from another stage. For example, Roe (1985), discussing drill-based structural CALL, places a much heavier emphasis on social interaction than most recent work within an integrative CALL framework. In this paper, Roe compares different “layouts” (p. 73) for CALL, such as one-to-one, where a single learner interacts with a single computer; competitive pairs, where two learners compete against each other on a single computer; and collaborative pairs, collaborative groups, and multiple groups, where different groups communicate competitively or cooperatively over a network. These different layouts result in different patterns of social interaction with different potential impacts on learning.

From a speech act perspective, Roe is suggesting different modes and channels (Hymes, 1974; see also Coulthard, 1977; Munby, 1978) that can be used for

communication by learners engaged in CALL. In ethnographic theory, *mode* refers to the nature of the interaction and *channel* to the medium of communication. In the one-to-one CALL layout suggested by Roe, the learner is communicating with a computer as the only other participant; this involves a computer channel and pseudo-dialogic mode (with the exception of some artificial intelligence programs (see Watson Todd, 1999), learner-computer communication is rarely truly dialogic). In other layouts, learners are communicating with other learners in true dialogic mode as well as with a computer. The learner-learner communication can occur over three channels (face-to-face, via a single computer, and over a network) for purposes of either competition or cooperation. From an alternative viewpoint, the different layouts can be seen as using computers as tutors offering language drills, as stimuli for discussion, or as a combination of these (see Warschauer, 1996). In this paper, I will use the term *mode* to distinguish between the different layouts, methods of communication and uses of computers as this term is frequently used with a broad range of meanings as well as its specific meaning within ethnography.

The different modes of CALL have received relatively little attention in the literature. Most CALL work appears to assume one learner to one computer (albeit with network capabilities to other computers), despite the fact that in many situations it is still the norm for two or three learners to sit together at one computer (e.g. Mirescu, 1997). One reason for the lack of attention paid to pairwork or groupwork CALL may be that the seminal research in the area was not promising. Piper (1986), Windeatt (1986) and Mohan (1992) all found that learners working in CALL collaborative pairs produced less language, and that the language which was produced was more impoverished, than learners working in pairs with a paper-based version of the same task. In contrast, in recent years, networked modes of CALL enabling computer-mediated communication (CMC) have become a major research area. In such research, however, CMC is often contrasted with face-to-face non-CALL communication (e.g. Harrington & Levy, 2001) rather than with other modes of CALL communication.

Research into the modes of CALL communication could be of great value, particularly if applicable to multimedia software design. As the prime commercial application of CALL, multimedia software has the potential to lead the field, but frequently programs consist of tedious drills (Watts, 1997) and rely on a “wow” factor emphasising technical wizardry at the expense of language learning (Murray & Barnes, 1998). Given that multimedia software is almost exclusively designed for a one-to-one learner-computer mode of use, one relatively simple way to develop such programs is to incorporate other modes of communication into the software. Without a research base to work from, however, it is unclear whether such program development would be worth the effort.

In this paper, I intend to compare three different modes of CALL communication, namely, one-to-one learner-computer, competitive face-to-face pairs, and competitive networked pairs. These three modes will be compared using the same language learning activity, and I will investigate how the learners communicate and their reactions to the different modes.

### **The program**

In order to be able to compare the different modes of CALL communication, we need a program in which the basic activity of the program remains the same irrespective of

mode, yet which also encourages users to exploit different modes where these are available. The program should also exhibit the criteria for effective CALL software design, such as those suggested in guidelines for CALL designers (e.g. Hemard, 1997; Otto, 1988) and software evaluation checklists (e.g. Bader, 2000; Murray & Barnes, 1998; Watts, 1997).

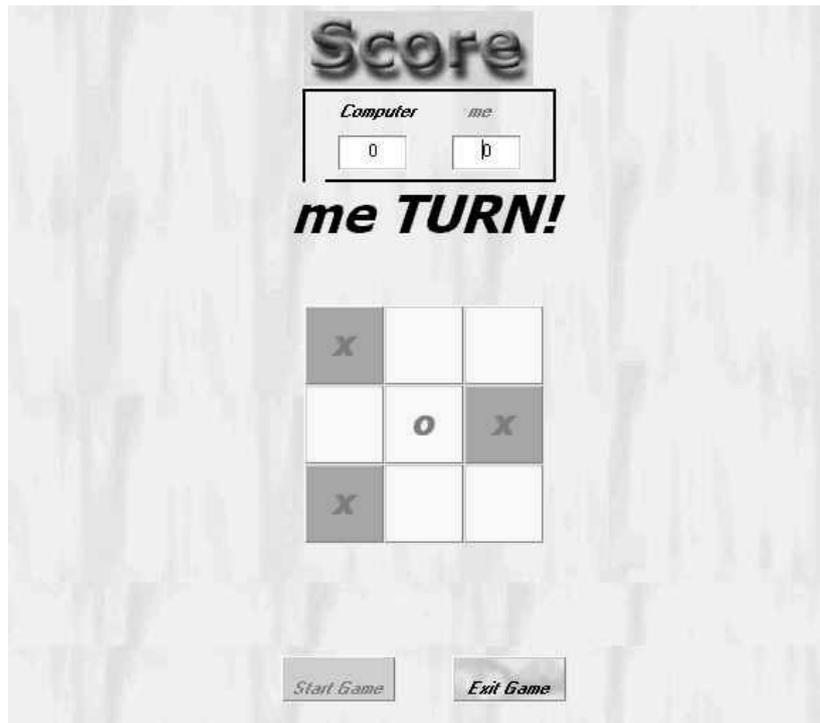
To meet these requirements, it was decided to design a program specifically to compare the different modes of CALL communication. For ease of design and to allow corrective feedback, the basic user activity in the program is to answer multiple-choice questions. To increase user interest and motivation, these questions are related to a noughts-and-crosses (tic-tac-toe) game, whereby the user can only insert a nought (O) or a cross (X) into a square of their choice on the noughts-and-crosses board if the multiple-choice question is answered correctly. Further aspects of the design aim to exhibit as many of the criteria for effective CALL software as is feasible:

- To maximise the match between language focus and activity type, the focus chosen is collocation which can be practised through multiple-choice.
- Collocation is also a language focus which matches the needs of the target users, Thai university students.
- To enable practice of collocations, multiple-choice gap-fill exercises are used.
- To promote learning, especially where incorrect distractors are chosen, corrective feedback is given.
- Where possible, the feedback should be generalisable (for some collocations, especially those in formulaic phrases, this is not possible).
- To enable some user control over the program, the 150 collocation items are classified into six categories (e.g. formulaic conversational phrases, collocations of verbs). Users can choose which categories to practise.

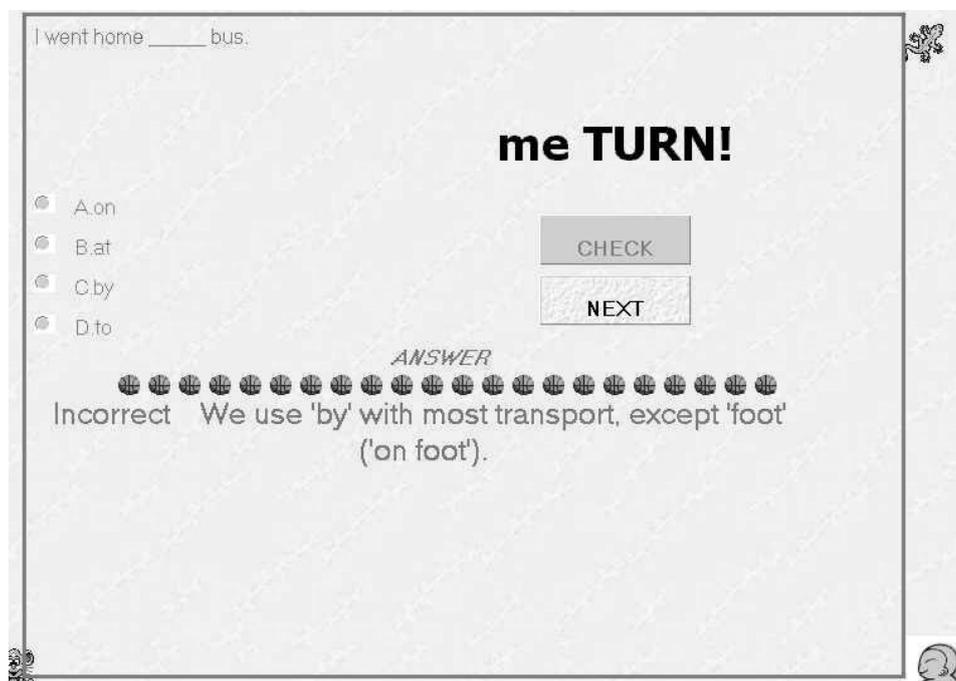
The basic activity then is a noughts-and-crosses game for which users must answer multiple-choice gap-fill questions correctly to fill in squares. Corrective feedback on the users' answers is given. This basic activity was then designed in three different versions for the three different modes of CALL communication being investigated.

#### *Mode 1: One-to-one learner-computer*

In this version, a single learner completes the activity alone playing against the computer. The learner and the computer take turns choosing squares on the noughts-and-crosses board and answering questions. The computer answers all questions correctly but chooses noughts-and-crosses squares at random to give the learner a chance. Figures 1 and 2 show the two main interfaces for this version. Figure 1 is the noughts-and-crosses board. When a square is chosen by either the computer or the learner, the interface changes to the question interface shown in Figure 2.



**Figure 1: Noughts-and-crosses board in Modes 1 and 2**



**Figure 2: Question interface for Modes 1 and 2**

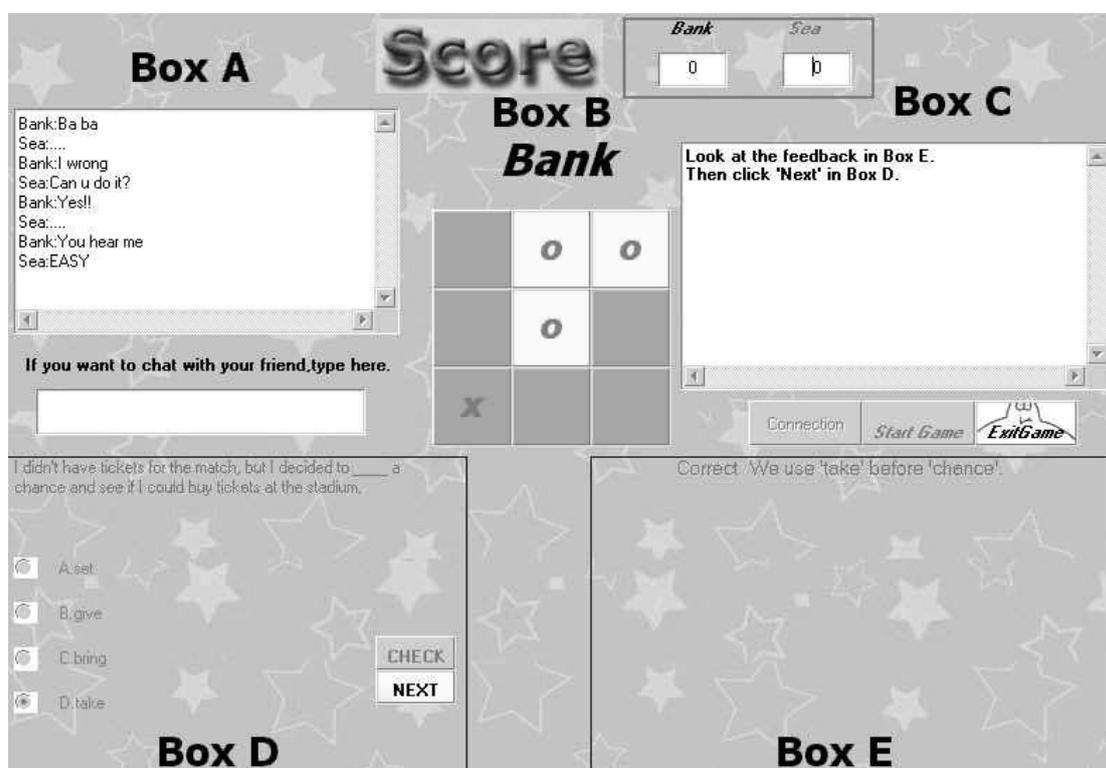
*Mode 2: Competitive face-to-face pairs*

Mode 2 is similar to Mode 1 except that two learners sit at one computer and play against each other. They take turns choosing squares and answering questions, and have the opportunity to communicate face-to-face with each other while playing. They are therefore communicating both via the computer screen in choosing squares

and answering questions and orally in face-to-face interaction. The interfaces are similar to those for Mode 1, shown in Figures 1 and 2.

### *Mode 3: Competitive networked pairs*

Unlike Modes 1 and 2, Mode 3 requires two networked computers. Two learners each sit at a separate computer and play against each other over a network. In addition to choosing squares and answering questions, there is also a chat facility so that the learners can engage in real-time networked communication. This chat facility was designed to accept English characters only, meaning that the learners could not use their first language (in this study, Thai) to communicate. All aspects of the program – the noughts-and-crosses board, the chat facility, the questions, and the feedback – were included in a single interface. A screenshot of this interface is given in Figure 3.



**Figure 3: Interface for Mode 3**

The three versions exhibiting the different modes were incorporated into a single program, allowing users to choose the mode they wished to use. The program was written using *Visual Basic 6.0*, and can be downloaded from <http://arts.kmutt.ac.th/SLA/XOgame.html>. (It should be noted that some basic technical knowledge is required to run the program, especially the Mode 3 version.)

### **The study**

In order to compare the three modes of CALL communication, twelve learners were asked to use all three versions of the program. The subjects were all first-year computer engineering undergraduates at a respected Thai university (11 male, 1 female). They all volunteered to take part in the research.

The subjects were divided at random into three groups of four. Each group worked through the three versions of the program in a different sequence, since the sequence may affect the subjects' preferences for the modes. After experiencing all three modes, the subjects engaged in a free session where they used whichever version of the program they wished to play further.

Data concerning the three modes of CALL communication were collected in three ways:

1. After using the three versions and before the free session, the subjects were asked to fill in a form listing the advantages and disadvantages of each version.
2. The versions of the program chosen by the subjects in the free session were noted. It was assumed that these were the preferred versions.
3. For the third of the three versions used before the free session, *Lotus ScreenCam* was used to record how the subjects used the program and the subject-subject communication. *Lotus ScreenCam* is a program which, in effect, makes a video recording of what happens on the screen during the recording period. Thus it can record the whole of the noughts-and-crosses game with subjects' answers to the multiple-choice questions and the subjects' interaction through the chat facility. In addition, while recording using *Lotus ScreenCam*, subjects were asked to wear microphones to record any oral comments they might want to make for Modes 1 and 3 and to record the face-to-face communication between subjects in Mode 2. These recordings can be overlaid on the video recordings in the *ScreenCam* file. In this way, some subjects' reactions could be recorded and subject-subject communication could be related to the use of the program for Modes 2 and 3.

### Reactions to the three modes

Before we look at how the subjects communicated through each of the three modes, we can examine their attitudes and reactions to the modes. The main source of data concerning these is the forms for listing advantages and disadvantages of each mode. Table 1 shows subjects' answers on the forms.

**Table 1: Subjects' reactions to the three modes**

Mode	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenging with computer</li> <li>• You can play it every time you want</li> <li>• Funny</li> <li>• Practice my English</li> <li>• I must be try to play carefully because I'm a living</li> <li>• Can play from one person</li> <li>• You must winner because the computer never wrong</li> <li>• Can play only one on my home</li> <li>• Practice grammar</li> <li>• The computer is correct all the answers, so the player can learn</li> <li>• I can play the game by myself</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The computer is stupid than me</li> <li>• Computer is clever in answering questions but it's not clever in playing game, it cannot think what box it want to select</li> <li>• Computer plays not so good but it's never answered incorrectly</li> <li>• Not enjoy</li> <li>• Because of computer never answers incorrectly, some player would get bored</li> <li>• It's easy to win</li> </ul>

2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More interesting than play with computer</li> <li>• Can talk together sometimes it made suitable for 2 friend or lover</li> <li>• You can prove your skill</li> <li>• It's very interesting</li> <li>• Funny</li> <li>• Practice my English</li> <li>• Don't worry about the answer and so fun while playing</li> <li>• It's more excited than playing with computer</li> <li>• Enjoy more than computer</li> <li>• Fast, use only one computer for playing</li> <li>• More exciting than playing with computer</li> <li>• Have very funny with my friend</li> <li>• You can look at his answer</li> <li>• The program is easy to use and it's very clear showing who have to play that turn</li> <li>• It's very fun because I can play the game with my friend and I can see everything while we played the game</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can help my friend to answer the questions because I can see and click it or told him to answer the questions</li> <li>• The interface of the program is not interesting</li> <li>• No comfortable to change turn</li> <li>• Have competition</li> <li>• Two people must use the same mouse – sometimes inconvenient</li> <li>• It isn't individual enough</li> <li>• It isn't comfortable</li> <li>• 2 people can talk together so sometimes they will give an answers for one</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The most interesting if have many people</li> <li>• You can practice your English so much because you don't scare another side's view</li> <li>• Funny</li> <li>• Practice my English</li> <li>• I can play with other</li> <li>• Enjoy</li> <li>• I think this version it work, I like it</li> <li>• Each person have own computer</li> <li>• I can play with other without getting off my seat</li> <li>• Can play from other place</li> <li>• You can chatting and typing</li> <li>• It's fast and allows players to chat together</li> <li>• OK! It's very fun too because I can play the game with my friend and I can chat too</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes I think I can chat to my friend so I can ask him for the answers</li> <li>• Hard to join the game to server</li> <li>• Have many competition</li> <li>• There's connection problem</li> <li>• Slower than other versions</li> <li>• Network have many problem, can't talk to player if network slow</li> <li>• There is some connection problem</li> <li>• Feel lonely</li> <li>• Hard to connection with other computer</li> </ul>

Overall, the subjects' reactions to all versions of the program were positive, with the number of advantages outweighing the disadvantages. Furthermore, most of the disadvantages identified concern practical problems rather than criticisms of the program concept. It may be that these positive reactions are due to a novelty factor (Clark, 1983) – a common source of bias in evaluating CALL – but the subjects' high computer familiarity (as students of computer engineering) suggests that novelty should not be as important a factor as for learners with low computer familiarity. The competitive and fun elements of the noughts-and-crosses game therefore seem to make what is essentially a multiple-choice test more palatable.

Comparing the three modes, although the one-to-one learner-computer mode is generally received well, this mode compares unfavourably with the other two more interactive modes. For example, four of the subjects explicitly compare the one-to-one learner-computer mode with the competitive face-to-face pairs mode, favouring the latter. It is difficult to tell which of the two more interactive versions of the program is preferred, especially considering the practical problems of the competitive networked pairs mode. Nevertheless, overall, the two competitive pairs modes are preferred to the one-to-one learner-computer mode.

This finding is confirmed by the choices of program versions of the subjects during the free session of computer use. Ten of the twelve subjects attempted to use the competitive networked pairs mode during the free session, with the other two subjects using the competitive face-to-face pairs mode. When four of the subjects could not successfully set up the networked mode because of connection problems, they elected to use the competitive face-to-face pairs mode. During the free session, then, there was an equal split of subjects using the two competitive pairs modes, although there was an initial preference for the networked version. None of the subjects elected to use the one-to-one learner-computer mode, strengthening the finding that competitive pairs modes are preferred.

### **Communication in the three modes**

In recording the last of the three versions played, four subjects were recorded for each mode. Looking at both the screen and voice recordings should shed light on the extent and purposes of communication between learners in the three modes, especially in the two competitive pairs modes.

For the one-to-one learner-computer mode, as should be expected, there was no learner-learner communication. Indeed, two of the four subjects recorded using this mode said nothing while playing the game. The other two subjects voiced very occasional comments and complaints about the game, such as "Why the question is so difficult?" and, translated from Thai, "Sometimes I can't understand the explanations". Such occasional intrapersonal comments, however, cannot really be considered as communication and shed little light on the learners' reactions to the game.

For the second mode, competitive face-to-face pairs, the learners did talk to each other while playing the game. Extract 1 below is a typical example of such communication between two users, A and B, with translations from Thai indicated by italics and reading aloud from the computer screen in double quotation marks.

*Extract 1: Communication in the competitive face-to-face pairs mode*

- A: "I think I'm bad ... English." Bad on, bad for, bad to, bad at. *I'm sure I'll get this wrong. "Incorrect" really. "Bad is usually followed by at". I said I'd get it wrong.*
- B: "The train leaves ... ten minutes". I don't know. *Must be* leave in.
- A: "I got a new computer ... my birthday". *Choose* on. "Correct".
- B: *I've already answered this one. Got it wrong again.*
- A: "Tom: What did you do last night? Jane: ... your own business." Keep *surely*.  
"Incorrect. You can say *Mind* your own business when you don't want to answer a personal question." *Wrong like normal.*

In extract 1, two worrying points are noticeable. Firstly, the two learners do not appear to be communicating with each other much. Secondly, the vast majority of their utterances are either in their first language or simply read aloud from the computer screen. The extract would therefore seem to confirm the early research into CALL pairwork, which found that pair interaction produced little language and that which was produced was impoverished.

Let us now turn to the third mode, competitive networked pairs. In this mode, learners used a chat facility to communicate with each other while playing. Extract 2 shows the chat-based communication between two learners, C and D.

*Extract 2: Communication in the competitive networked pairs mode*

- C: Who are you?
- D: Hello.
- C: OK.
- D: D [types own name]
- C: He he he.
- C: Ah!
- C: You turn.
- C: Now.
- C: You got easy one.
- D: Oh oh!
- C: No my turn.
- C: Oh!
- C: Ah!!!
- D: I think may be in this we can't find the winner.
- C: Ha!
- C: Yes, I can do it.
- C: OK.
- C: You turn first.
- C: Ahhhhhhh!!!

As in extract 1, the language in extract 2, although in English given that the chat facility did not accept Thai characters, is clearly impoverished. Only one learner turn is longer than five words and most are simply exclamations.

The overall picture of communication is not promising. In all three modes, learner-learner communication is limited and impoverished. Arguments in favour of using

paired CALL because of the opportunities for learner-learner communication would therefore seem not to apply to programs similar to the one used here.

### **Process of using the competitive networked pairs mode**

Somewhat unexpectedly, one of the learners recorded while using the competitive networked pairs mode (learner D in extract 2) spoke a lot while playing the game. Examining the recording, the learner's talk appears to be a concurrent think-aloud protocol (see Ericsson & Simon, 1993) while playing the game, despite the lack of training concerning introspection in this study. Although such introspection was not an aim of this study, the learner's think-aloud protocol may shed some light on the program and part of it is shown in extract 3 (using the same conventions as in extract 1).

#### *Extract 3: Think-aloud protocol for the competitive networked pairs mode*

D: *Start now "version 3" it says type in "Box A chat with your friend" and put in a "username". Not really sure what's happening. There's a square with nine boxes for putting in crosses. I'll need to choose a box but I don't know which one I want. It says I need to put in an "IP Address" and "Please wait for your friend to respond" Who's that? "Click connect to server. OK Your turn. Did you look?" OK, after means take care of. OK. Click "Next". "You should try to ... a positive effect on society in your life". Bloody difficult and so bad. I need to guess. I need to try or else I'll lose points. Too bad. "Incorrect. We use have before effect." OK Not good, D [own name]. "Jane: I won my race. Tom: Good ... you." Bad news, very bad news. What should I go for? This is hurting me. I'll have to guess. Ow, the answer gives you knowledge too. Hey, I got it right. He's going to win now, bad news, don't answer "on" please. We'll get some points. Bad, bad, he's answered correctly again.*

Although the think-aloud protocol in extract 3 does not explicitly state the learner's reactions to the program, it does show how immersed and involved he was in the game, especially how the competitive element against a peer motivated him. This provides support for the earlier finding that the competitive pairs modes may be preferable to the one-to-one learner-computer mode.

### **Conclusion**

There are two possible rationales for using paired CALL modes. Firstly, it could be argued that paired CALL encourages learner-learner interaction while using CALL software. On the basis of the present study, this rationale does not hold water, as the language produced in the paired CALL modes was minimal and impoverished. If we want CALL software to encourage learner-learner interaction, we will need to consider assigning student roles and the other options available to classroom teachers wanting to stimulate interaction (James, 1996). Simply adding the opportunity to interact to a CALL activity is not enough.

The second possible rationale for paired CALL is that the learners may prefer it, and this appears to be the case in this study. The learners' reactions to the paired CALL modes were more positive than to the learner-computer mode, and knowing that you are competing against another person may lead to more learner involvement than competing against a machine. If one reason for using CALL is that it can be interesting and motivating (Mirescu, 1997), then the greater potential interest in

paired CALL suggests that multimedia software programs should utilise paired modes of CALL communication in addition to the default learner-computer mode.

Note: Thanks are due to Sukhanitta Poomdaeng for her help with the programming.

## References

- Bader, M. J. (2000) Choosing CALL software: beginning the evaluation process. *TESOL Journal* 9:2:18-22.
- Clark, R. E. (1983) Reconsidering research on learning from media. In Anderson, L. W. (ed.) *The Effective Teacher*, pp. 232-241. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Coulthard, M. (1977) *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman.
- Ericsson, K. A. & Simon, H. A. (1993) *Protocol Analysis: Verbal Reports as Data*, revised edition. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Harrington, M. & Levy, M. (2001) CALL begins with a “C”: interaction in computer-mediated language learning. *System* 29:1:15-26.
- Hemard, D. P. (1997) Design principles and guidelines for authoring hypermedia language learning applications. *System* 25:1: 9-27.
- Hymes, D. (1974) Ways of speaking. In Bauman, R. & Sherzer, J. (eds.) *Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking*, pp. 433-452. London: Arnold.
- James, R. (1996) CALL and the speaking skill. *System* 24:1:15-21.
- Mirescu, S. (1997) Computer assisted instruction in language teaching. *English Teaching Forum* 35:1:53-55.
- Mohan, B. (1992) Models of the role of the computer in second language development. In Pennington, M. C. & Stevens, V. (eds.) *Computers in Applied Linguistics*, pp. 110-126. Avon: Multilingual Matters.
- Munby, J. (1978) *Communicative Syllabus Design*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Murray, L. & Barnes, A. (1998) Beyond the “wow” factor – evaluating multimedia language learning software from a pedagogical viewpoint. *System* 26:2:249-259.
- Otto, F. (1988) Using the computer. In Berko Gleason, J. (ed.) *You Can Take It with You*, pp. 71-92. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.
- Piper, A. (1986) Conversation and the computer: a study of the conversational spin-off generated among learners of English as a foreign language working in groups. *System* 14:2:187-198.
- Roe, P. (1985) Making IT available. In Quirk, R. & Widdowson, H. G. (eds.) *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures*, pp. 68-81. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press in association with the British Council.
- Warschauer, M. (1996) Computer-assisted language learning: an introduction. In Fotos, S. (ed.) *Multimedia Language Teaching*, pp. 3-20. Tokyo: Logos International.
- Warschauer, M. (2000) The death of cyberspace and the rebirth of CALL. *English Teachers' Journal* 53: 61-67.
- Watson Todd, R. (1999) ELIZA the psychiatrist and self-access learning. Selected Proceedings of the 4<sup>th</sup> CULI International Conference, ELT Collaboration: Towards Excellence in the New Millennium, pp. 133-145. Bangkok, Thailand, 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> December 1999.
- Watts, N. (1997) A learner-based design model for interactive multimedia language learning packages. *System* 25:1:1-8.

Windeatt, S. (1986) Observing CALL in action. In Leech, G. & Candlin, C. (eds.) *Computers in English Language Teaching and Research*, pp. 79-87. London: Longman.

*Richard Watson Todd has been working at KMUTT for over 10 years. His research interests are wide-ranging.*

# Surveying students' recreational use of English with computers

**Lakkana Chaisaklert**

*Rajamangala University of Technology Bangkok*

**Richard Watson Todd**

*King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi*

## **Abstract**

Students' recreational use of computers may provide important opportunities for them to learn English incidentally. This paper investigates student's exposure to English while using computers recreationally in two ways. Firstly, a questionnaire was distributed to 80 students at a Thai university to elicit how students use computers. Secondly, the English encountered by four students while using computers for one hour was recorded. The findings show that English is quite important when students use computers recreationally. The English encountered by students consisted primarily of nouns, each encountered only once. Suggestions for how to help students to deal with such exposure to a wide range of vocabulary items are given.

## **Computers in daily life**

It is generally accepted that computers play a key role in daily life. People all over the world use them for many purposes such as education, business, and hobbies. For education, teachers can use computers to teach through Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). Alternatively, computers can help learners create, analyze, and produce information and ideas easily and efficiently. They can assist people in business to search for the latest information and to hold on-line conferences; moreover, they can help office workers work more efficiently. For leisure, people often use computers for chatting with people around the world, shopping on-line, playing games, and watching movies on CD-ROM. This shows that, because they serve our needs in many ways, computers seem to be very important in contemporary life.

## **Computers for recreation**

Using computers outside the classroom may be for recreational purposes. Computers for recreation allow students to search for information they are interested in and to spend their time creatively and enjoyably. There are many ways to access computers for recreational purposes.

First, there is the Internet, which provides opportunities for such recreational activities as chatting on-line, playing computer games or interactive games, downloading games and music, shopping on-line, reading the news, gambling, and creating personal websites (McKenzie, 2002). Students can access a variety of recreational digital resources through searching on-line networks.

Second, there is stand-alone computing. When we use a computer without using an Internet connection, we can use it in many ways, such as for watching movies, playing games, and listening to music by using CD-ROM. Users may write personal diaries, letters or journals through computers.

Third, computer-mediated communication (CMC) can be used for recreation. CMC now plays an important role in this era of e-mail, synchronous computer conferencing, the World Wide Web, and globalization in general (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). It can be used to support interaction anytime and anywhere. Besides, it allows users in remote locations to interact via computer at their own convenience. We may say that CMC is reactive (two-way) communication in which users respond to the other side.

In sum, on-line networks can promote students' independent learning and relaxation; stand-alone computing assists users to do activities they are interested in; and CMC allows users to develop interactive communication skills for such activities as sharing ideas and discussing issues with others.

### **English in communicating by computer**

The English language is widely used in communicating by computer; indeed, it could be said that exposure to English comes with computers. Thus, computer users have a chance to absorb English easily. People can learn English from recreational computer use because it is the most commonly used language on the Internet. Statistics show that English is the main information language (70%) on the Internet (Grey, 1999).

Students can get the benefits of exposure to English while using computers for recreational purposes. The literature mentions that the use of English on computer:

- provides authentic communication with native speakers of the target language;
- enhances students' communicative abilities both by individualizing practice and by tapping into a global community of other learners (Nunan, 1988);
- is effective for empowering second-language learners (Warschauer, Turbee & Roberts, 1996).

### **Incidental learning**

While many computer users may have low levels of English, the very process of using computers may enhance their language proficiency. Such learning is incidental in the sense that it is not intended or planned (Marsick & Watkins, 1986, cited in Mealman, 1993). Incidental learning includes:

- learning without assistance or support (Tudor, 2001);
- learning from mistakes;
- learning by exploring the environment;
- uncontrolled learning and undirected language use (Johnson, 1982, cited in Tudor, 2001);
- learning without an intent to learn (Hulstijn, 2001);
- learning by doing (Tudor, 2001);
- learning through networks.

These approaches involve learning naturally; learning will take place incidentally when students are doing something fun. It is hoped that recreational computer use is one enjoyable situation in which incidental learning can occur.

Unfortunately, Thai society has not recognized the importance of incidental learning. Since such learning takes place outside classrooms, it can occur in both informal and non-formal educational settings. It can give learners opportunities to search for information in order to support their own interest; for example, searching for

information from using the Internet, listening to Internet radio, chatting with people all over the world. Non-formal education is less accepted than formal education, but learners in the former have the opportunity to learn on their own incidentally, especially if they are aware of how they learn (Department of Non-formal Education, 2004).

The benefits of incidental learning include promoting students' learning of how to learn, increasing self-knowledge and self-awareness, coming to value life-long learning, exposure to language, improving competence, and changing attitudes and self-confidence (Brown, 2001). Thus, students can unintentionally enhance their learning of English.

### **Motivation**

Motivation is one of the most important factors in language learning (Bowen & Marks, 1994; Lightbown & Spada, 1993; Willis, 1996). Learning English through computers is one language learning activity that helps students' enjoyment and also supports learning experiences. Many students seem to prefer doing computer activities (chatting on the Net, playing games, searching for information, watching movies, etc.) to more conventional ones. Computers provide activities that suit students' needs and can also help motivate their learning. In addition, there are many ways in which computer use can motivate learning, such as the sense of promoting success and achievement in second language learning (Dornyei, 1994; Hulstijn, 2001) and through on-line group discussions (Cahoon, 1995).

From my experience, many students dislike learning English because some Thai teachers emphasize grammatical corrections, which can cause students to lack confidence. However, computer activities can encourage students' intrinsic motivation; that is, students may be motivated by their innate drives to explore something based on their own needs (Brown, 2001).

In conclusion, even if students are not motivated to learn English, they still use computers because many computer activities may motivate them. Then, they encounter English, and, from such encounters, incidental learning is likely to occur. Therefore, motivation can assist students to learn incidentally by learning from their environment (e.g. from computers).

From this brief review of the literature, we can conclude that students' use of computers for recreational purposes may be important for language learning. Thus, it would be very interesting to find out how they use computers recreationally. This study is a survey designed to find out what aspects of English students encounter when using computers for recreational purposes, and it aims to answer the following question: *What English do students encounter when using computers for recreational purposes?*

### **Research methodology**

This section provides an overview of how the research was conducted by describing the subjects, instruments, procedures and data analysis.

### ***Subjects***

There were two groups of subjects in this study: those who completed a questionnaire and those who filled in a record sheet.

The first group consisted of first-year students from the Faculties of Mechanical and Electrical Engineering at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT). There were eighty students, both male and female, who took the course LNG101 Fundamental English I. They were asked to answer the questionnaire. The reason for choosing these students was that the researcher needed an overview of students' computer use outside the classroom. The second group were first-year students from the Faculty of Computer Engineering at KMUTT. Four female students were chosen randomly from a group of 35 who were enrolled in LNG 102 Fundamental English II. These four students were named, respectively, Subjects A, B, C, and D. They had adequate computer skills.

Although both groups of subjects were different in terms of field of study and their compulsory courses, practical concerns (timetabling, etc.) made it necessary to use two separate groups.

### ***Instruments***

There were two instruments in this study: a questionnaire and a record sheet.

#### Questionnaire

The aim of this instrument was to survey how students use computers recreationally outside the classroom. There were eight closed-ended questions. Each item used a five-point Likert scale, with frequencies ranging from very often (5) to never (1). The survey covered the following:

- how students spent their free time, e.g. using computers, watching movies, listening to songs;
- at what time they used computers;
- what language they used while accessing computers;
- where they used computers;
- which kind of programs (such as *Microsoft Word* and *Excel*) and websites (including bulletin boards) they used;
- what problems they encountered working on computer and how they solved them.

This questionnaire was in Thai. The researcher decided to use Thai because it could help the subjects answer the questions easily, and the research did not focus much on how good they were at English.

#### Record sheet

The aim of this instrument (see Appendix) was to collect data covering what English words were encountered while subjects worked through programs or websites that they used outside the classroom. The instrument consisted of a table in which the subjects wrote the programs or websites they used and the English words that they encountered when they used a computer for one hour.

### ***Procedures***

#### Questionnaire

- Stage 1: The subjects were chosen (N=80).

- Stage 2: The questionnaire was distributed to the subjects, who were asked to answer the questions inside the classroom. Although the time to work on the questionnaire was not limited, most subjects finished it in 10 to 15 minutes.
- Stage 3: The data were collected and interpreted.

#### Record Sheet

- Stage 1: The subjects were chosen (N=4).
- Stage 2: The record sheet was given to the subjects, who were asked to record, while working on computers for one hour outside the classroom, the programs, websites and English words they encountered.
- Stage 3: The data were collected and interpreted.

#### **Data Analysis**

All data obtained from each research instrument were analyzed and interpreted to answer the research question, as follows.

#### Data from questionnaire

The data from all rating statements of the questionnaire were calculated for arithmetic means ( $\bar{X}$ ). The criteria of interpretation are as follows:

1.00-1.80	=	Never
1.81-2.60	=	Rarely
2.61-3.40	=	Sometimes
3.41-4.20	=	Often
4.21-5.00	=	Very often

The data from the questionnaire were categorized into four parts: when the subjects used computers, where they used them, what language they used, and the programs they used while accessing computers.

#### Data from record sheet

The data from this instrument were analyzed as follows:

- Word occurrence: Each occurrence of a word was counted in order to find the number of words encountered and the number of occurrences of each word. Where words occurred together, they were counted as a single phrase. These occurrences were calculated as frequencies and percentages.
- Parts of speech: The words occurring were categorized according to part of speech (e.g. nouns, noun phrases, verbs, verb phrases, adjectives) and calculated as frequencies and percentages.
- Corpus frequency: This was based on frequency indicated in the *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary*, which has five frequency bands. The most frequent words have five black diamonds, the next most frequent words have four black diamonds, and so on; words occurring less frequently but still deserving an entry in this dictionary have no black diamonds. The words in these five frequency bands were calculated as frequencies and percentages; for phrases, the frequency of the keyword in the phrase was counted as the frequency for the whole phrase.

From these data, there were three kinds of frequency that needed to be analyzed: words occurring in the record sheet, parts of speech, and corpus frequency.

## Data presentation and interpretation

The main purpose of this section is to describe the results of the study gathered from the questionnaire and the record sheet.

### Data from questionnaire

To answer the research question, first, we need to identify three main themes of data in the questionnaire: general use of computers (i.e. when and where subjects use computers), language used when accessing computers, and programs used.

The data in Table 1 show that, when the subjects are free, they most often listen to songs ( $\bar{X} = 3.96$ ) and they sometimes use computers ( $\bar{X} = 3.22$ ). In terms of time, the subjects most often use computers at weekends ( $\bar{X} = 3.78$ ); in terms of place, they most often use them at their residence ( $\bar{X} = 3.64$ ); and they most often use them alone ( $\bar{X} = 4.08$ ) rather than with others.

**Table 1: General use of computers**

Questions	$\bar{X}$	Interpretation
What do you do in your spare time? - use computers - watch movies - listen to songs - read books	3.22 3.06 3.96 3.02	Sometimes Sometimes Often Sometimes
Which time do you use computers? - day time - night time - after class - weekend	2.55 3.42 3.26 3.78	Rarely Often Sometimes Often
Where can you use computers? - in your institution - at your residence - in an internet café	3.16 3.64 2.62	Sometimes Often Sometimes
Who do you use computers with? - Alone - Friends - Family	4.08 3.26 2.29	Often Sometimes Sometimes

Table 2 shows the language students used while accessing computers as well as the problems they encountered and how they solved them. The table shows that the subjects most often used Thai ( $\bar{X} = 4.06$ ) but English also seemed to be important ( $\bar{X} = 3.00$ ). Furthermore, the most frequent problem they encountered was that they did not understand English ( $\bar{X} = 3.51$ ). However, they did not attempt to solve these language problems; rather, they simply continued with whatever program they were using ( $\bar{X} = 3.67$ ).

**Table 2: Language when using computers**

Questions	$\bar{X}$	Interpretation
What language do you use?		
- Thai	4.06	Often
- English	3.00	Sometimes
What problems do you encounter while using computers?		
- I do not have much ability in computers.	3.06	Sometimes
- I do not understand English language.	3.51	Often
If you use a computer and face a problem with English, how can you solve it?		
- I find out in electronic dictionary on computer.	3.01	Sometimes
- I ask a friend.	2.87	Sometimes
- I continue using the program.	3.67	Often

Table 3 shows that, of all the computer programs and services accessed during the research, the subjects most commonly used the World Wide Web and *Microsoft Word*; in contrast, they never went shopping or made use of e-commerce.

**Table 3: Programs and services accessed while using computers**

Programs and services accessed	$\bar{X}$	Interpretation
World Wide Web	3.93	Often
<i>Microsoft Word</i>	3.55	Often
Computer games, such as on CD ROM	3.38	Sometimes
E-mail	3.27	Sometimes
Internet games	3.22	Sometimes
<i>Real player</i>	3.11	Sometimes
Electronic bulletin boards	2.95	Sometimes
Internet Radio	2.69	Sometimes
Short messages such as <i>ICQ, MSN, Yahoo Messenger</i>	2.67	Sometimes
Usenet Newsgroup	2.33	Rarely
Programs with spreadsheets, databases etc.	2.25	Rarely
Shopping/e-commerce	1.45	Never

***Data from record sheet***

This section will show what kind of English students encounter when using computers for one hour. The analysis of words encountered is divided into three main sections: words occurring in the record sheet, part of speech frequency, and corpus frequency.

Table 4 shows the findings for word occurrence. It can be seen that most of the words students encountered only occurred once (88.11%) (e.g. about com, account, action, hot track); on the other hand, three words, Sign in, search, and news, occurred, respectively, 8, 6, and 5 times.

**Table 4: Word occurrences**

Number of times word encountered	Number of words (328)	Percentage	Examples of words/phrases
8	1	0.30	Sign in
6	1	0.30	Search
5	1	0.30	News
4	4	1.22	Article, chat, the web, My KMUTT
3	6	1.83	Compose, inbox, folder, top ten, video, On line
2	26	7.93	Bulletin board, English, media, mail, Cool link, Quick link
1	289	88.11	About com, account, action, hot track, information, click here

Table 5 shows that the data for part of speech were classified into five categories (nouns, noun phrases, verbs and verb phrases, adjectives, and others). It is clear that nouns, representing two thirds (67.07%) of the total, were by far the most frequent part of speech students reported encountering.

**Table 5: Part of speech frequency**

Part of speech	Number of occurrences (N=328)	Percentage
Nouns	220	67.07
Verbs, Verb phrases	49	14.94
Others	30	9.15
Adjectives	16	4.88
Noun phrases	13	3.96

Table 6 presents the findings on corpus frequency. These are based on the *Collins Cobuild English Dictionary*, in which the words in the top two bands (Bands 4 and 5) account for approximately 75% of all English usage (page xiii). We may say that the words in the top two bands in this research occurred frequently (totalling 54.27%), but not as frequently as we might expect.

**Table 6: Corpus frequency**

Corpus frequency band	Number of occurrences (328)	Percentage
5	96	29.27
4	82	25.00
3	60	18.29
2	32	9.76
1	27	8.23
0	31	9.45

## **Discussion and implications**

This discussion is divided into two main topics, word occurrence frequency and nouns.

### ***Word occurrence frequency***

In this study, the vast majority of the words encountered occurred only once. This suggests that students continually encounter different words when using computers; in other words, there appears to be no common core of words while using computers. In an interesting contrast to this finding, Nation (2001) found that 80% of the running words in text are high frequency words; however, it should be stressed that these words occur throughout texts, which is distinct from the words reported through computer use in this study. Therefore, it seems likely that the language encountered when using computers contrasts with the language in other kinds of language use in terms of the very high proportion of words occurring only once when using computers.

Furthermore, it can be said that the words learners reported encountering while using computers were isolated phrases or individual words rather than syntactically complete sentences. Thus, isolated phrases or individual words may be important for learners.

Unfamiliar words may have been a problem for these learners even though the data showed that most of them ignored unfamiliar words and continued using their computers. One way to solve this problem might be to heed Laufer & Hulstijn (2001), who found that greater involvement with unfamiliar words led to better retention. Involvement was defined as a combination of three factors: need (i.e. the need to understand the word for comprehension); search (trying to figure out the word); and evaluation (comparing one word with other words, and using it in communication). In order to promote greater involvement with unfamiliar words and to help students deal with such words, the researcher needs to know how students can understand a lot of new words by looking at relevant strategies.

Since most words the students reported occurred only once, the researchers recommend training learners in strategies for dealing with new words. There are many strategies to help learners deal with new words, three of which will now be discussed. The first one is guessing the meanings of unknown words; for example, Nation (2001) mentioned that incidental learning via guessing unknown words from context was the most important of all sources of vocabulary learning. A second possible strategy is using dictionaries, which, according to Nation (1989), can also aid learning. It is assumed that learners may be uncomfortable referring to traditional dictionaries while using computers; however, new technology offers ways of overcoming the problem. Current computer programs can provide dictionaries online, which means that learners reading a text on the screen can click on an unknown word and a definition appears. To support this idea, Knight (1994) confirmed that learners with access to computerized dictionaries demonstrated more vocabulary knowledge after reading than those who did not. A third strategy, suggested by Gairns & Redman (1986), is asking for help. It seems probable that the strategies mentioned above, among others, may assist learners in dealing with new words encountered while using computers.

## **Nouns**

The findings indicate that these students encountered nouns rather than other parts of speech. It can be said that nouns seem to be the easiest parts of speech to remember, since they represent the names of specific persons, places or things. In one study, nouns were better learned than verbs or adjectives (Phillip, 1981, cited in Schmitt & McCarthy, 1997). This suggests that nouns may be more easily remembered than verbs, adverbs or adjectives; nevertheless, the high frequency of nouns encountered means that students will need to understand and remember a large number of them. This means that, in helping learners to understand new words, the focus may need to be on nouns rather than on other parts of speech.

## **Conclusion**

This research study has attempted to find out what aspects of English students encounter when using computers. The findings highlight the importance both of isolated phrases or individual words encountered only once and of nouns. Since some of the new words may not be familiar to students, this study provides some strategies to deal with them. It is hoped that this study has helped teachers of English gain some useful ideas about how to deal with the language that students encounter while using computers outside class.

## **References**

- Bowen, T. & Marks, J. (1994) *Inside Teaching*. Oxford: Macmillan Heinemann.
- Brown, H. D. (2001) *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Longman.
- Cahoon, B. B. (1995) *Computer Skill Learning in the Workplace: A Comparative Case Study*. Available: <http://www.arches.uga.edu/~cahoonb/dissertation.html> [accessed 25<sup>th</sup> September 2003].
- Department of Non-formal Education (2004) หลักสูตรและการเรียนการสอนของการศึกษานอกโรงเรียน [Curriculum and Learning in Non-formal Education], pp. 1-5. Available: <http://www.go.th/en.htm> [accessed 1<sup>st</sup> October 2004].
- Dornyei, Z. (1994) Motivation and motivating in the foreign language classroom. *Modern Language Journal* 78:1: 273-284.
- Gairns, R. & Redman, S. (1986) *Working with Words: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Vocabulary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Grey, D. (1999) *The Internet in School*. London: Cassell.
- Hulstijn, J. H. (2001) Intentional and incidental second-language vocabulary learning: a reappraisal of elaboration, rehearsal and automaticity. In Robinson, P. (ed.) *Cognition and Second Language Instruction*, pp. 113-125. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, K. (1982) *Communicative Syllabus Design and Methodology*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Knight, S. M. (1994) Dictionary use while reading: the effects on comprehension and vocabulary acquisition for students of different verbal abilities. *Modern Language Journal* 78: 1: 285-299.
- Laufer, B. & Hulstijn, J. (2001) Incidental vocabulary acquisition in a second language: the construct of task-induced involvement. *Applied Linguistics* 22: 1: 1-26.
- Lightbown, P. M. & Spada, N. (1993) *How Languages are Learned*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Marsick, V. J. & Watkins, K. E. (1986) Envisioning new organizations for learning. In Bould, D. & Garrick, J. (eds) *Understanding Learning at Work*, pp. 199-214. London: Routledge.
- McKenzie, M. (2002) Letting lexis come from the learner: a word in the hand is worth two in the bush. *English Teaching Forum* 28:1:13-16.
- Mealman, C. A. (1993) *Incidental Learning by Adults in a Nontraditional Degree Program*. Proceedings of the 12<sup>th</sup> Annual Midwest Research-to-Practice Conference, edited by Freer, K. & Dean, G. Columbus: Ohio State University. Available: <http://www.nl.edu/ace/Resources/Documents/Incidental.html> [accessed 15<sup>th</sup> September 2003].
- Nation, I. S. P. (1989) Dictionaries and language learning. In Tickoo, M. L. (ed.) *Learners' Dictionaries: State of the Art*, pp. 65-71. RELC Anthology Series, 23, Singapore: Regional English Language Centre.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001) *Learning Vocabulary in Another Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1988) *The Learner-Centered Curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Phillip, T. A. (1981) *Difficulty in Foreign Language Vocabulary Learning and a Study of Some of the Factors Thought to be Influential*. London: University of London.
- Schmitt, N. & McCarthy, M. (1997) *Vocabulary Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tudor, I. (2001) *The Dynamics of the Language Classroom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Warschauer, M. & Healey, D. (1998) Computers and language learning: an overview. *Language Learning* 31: 2: 57-71.
- Warschauer, M., Turbee, L. & Roberts, B. (1996) Computer learning networks and student empowerment. *System* 24:1: 1-11.
- Willis, J. (1996) *A Framework for Task-Based Learning*. London: Longman.

### Appendix: Example of a completed record sheet

**Instruction:** While using computers for one hour, please write words, phrases in space given.

Program used	Words encounters while using computer
<a href="http://www.kmutt.ac.th">www.kmutt.ac.th</a>	Sign in, search, news, article, chat, the web, My KMUTT, compose, inbox, folder top ten, online, home, limit, review,
<a href="http://www.yahoo.com">www.yahoo.com</a>	trash, Bulletin board, contact Dutch, emotion, English version, media, subject, unread, vote book, list, mail, mark,
<a href="http://www.hotmail.com">www.hotmail.com</a>	automatically, draft, Cool links, quest, Quick link, about com, account, action, add, games, general, get, government,
<a href="http://www.sanook.com">www.sanook.com</a>	group health culture customer, daily, diet, help, hot track, information, jobs, live long market, military, money, to lunch,
<a href="http://www.Google.com">www.Google.com</a>	town, view, woman, your music, smstoday, appear, back, benefit business, can, click here, complete, on the phone, page,

www.min4.com	forward, plans, play now, release, create direct events, family, films food, full, cancel, categories, cheese, classical, result,
<a href="http://www.coolvoice.com">www.coolvoice.com</a>	Sell, short, show, society, sound, special, staff, stars, start, state, story, talk, talking, taste, taxes, addition, guides, holiday,
<a href="http://www.eotoday.com">www.eotoday.com</a>	Hotmail, interview, invite, items, kids, message, mission, movies, titles, travel, type, address, albums, arrives, artist,
ww.songtoday.com	Attachment, block, camera, camp, cartridges, comment community, network, option, personalized, plus, profession,
<a href="http://www.bangpost.com">www.bangpost.com</a>	Project, records regional, directory, E-learning, feedback, fitness, document done, education, extra, fashion, favorite,
www.thaitumbon.com	Feature, file, finance, fit, flight, freshy, resources, restaurant, right, save, screen saver, secure, seed, sex, shop,
<a href="http://www.m-web.co.th">www.m-web.co.th</a>	Solution, song, sport, status, stores, summer, Thai song, gift, guide, hide, highlight, index, instant, mobile, boards, autos,
Windows messenger	download, organized, profile, register, credit, delivered, ring tone, junk mail, authentic, recreation, digital, rentals, scan,
Windows	Messenger, Web, wireless, briefcase, delete, reset, M-web, netfix, notepad, offline, password, DVD, e-card, Spam, etc.

*Lakkana Chaisaklert has an MA in Applied Linguistics from King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. She teaches English at diploma and undergraduate levels at the Department of Foreign Languages, Rajamangala University of Technology Bangkok.*

*Richard Watson Todd has been working at KMUTT for over ten years. His research interests are wide-ranging.*

# **Training teachers to use the Web in ELT**

**Pongpet Pongsart**

*Chanpradittaram Wittayakom School, Bangkok*

## **Abstract**

This study aimed to provide support for secondary school teachers learning how to make effective use of Web-based CALL (WBC). With this in mind, the researcher created a CD designed to help train teachers in useful aspects of WBC. Using questionnaires and interviews, the CD was trialled with teachers from government secondary schools throughout Thailand. This study looks at the results of this trial. The key findings are that teachers had positive attitudes towards WBC and that some of the pages on the CD were visited far more frequently than others. These findings were used to generate guidelines for designing CDs to support training in the future.

## **Background**

“Educational computing is now established and computers will continue to find their ways into schools in ever-increasing numbers” (Maddux et al., 2001: 5). That is, computers are playing a significant role in education nowadays. In Thailand, having taught English both in Bangkok and upcountry, I have noticed that computers are rapidly finding their way into secondary schools. Indeed, the government strongly supports the idea of equipping schools with computers (Watson Todd, 2001a). It also demands that teachers be capable of using the Internet to serve the National Education Act of 1999. This act seeks to make learners independent through the use of technology in education and conforms to a government policy of fostering child-centeredness (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999). The act has thus signaled that traditional classroom learning and teaching in Thai secondary schools are now facing changes and that, to answer the forceful call of globalization in the twenty-first century, networked computing will be a tool to open classrooms to the world.

For English Language Teaching (ELT), Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), especially Web-based CALL (WBC), seems to be prominent because teachers and students can use the Web for language learning as a potential source of knowledge and as an effective tool for international communication. Consequently, if teachers and students know how to make use of the Web, there are alternatives to enhance their learning of English beyond the classroom.

## **Why train teachers?**

Computers can assist language learning in numerous ways, e.g. provide drills and practice, simulation of learning environments, online information and communication. Learners learn and practice language skills repeatedly and maximize experiences of success as well as gaining knowledge in a more motivating environment. A number of studies have revealed that WBC can increase learner motivation and improve learner attitudes (Banditvilai, 2000; Gabriel, 2003; Liu & Reed, 1995; Samuel, 2001; Savenye et al., 1996; Skinner & Austin, 1999). WBC can

also help to lighten the teachers' workload, enriching language pedagogy, and fulfill professional development (Mallikamas, 1999; Tuck, 2001; Warschauer & Kern, 2000; Watson Todd, 1999, 2001b, 2003). In addition, via ELT websites, e.g. <http://www.tesol.org>, teachers can reach experts and native speakers worldwide on their computer terminals.

### **Teachers' attitudes towards WBC**

In this study, using questionnaires, teachers reported positive attitudes towards WBC, though a few teachers expressed concerns about limitations in implementing it. Such concerns involved poor and inadequate school facilities, slow access to the Internet, affordability for students, the presence of unscreened information on the Web, and teachers' low computer literacy. The teachers' positive attitudes were as follows:

- They believed that WBC could benefit students' learning and teacher development. Teachers who used the CD (described below) saw that the Web provided information and communication globally that students and teachers could use in language learning and teaching. Moreover, for teacher development, teachers could use the Web to develop their skills and knowledge in English Language Teaching (ELT) by joining forums on ELT websites, seeking help from experts and native speakers, and improving their English proficiency.
- Implementing WBC would help teachers meet the school and government requirements. The National Education Act of 1999 requires technology in education and demands teaching that helps students learn to serve their individual needs, interests, pace and potential. With the government technology-enhanced policy, teachers were encouraged to use the Web in ELT.
- Teachers realized the call of globalization in the computer age. Like mobile phones, computers are everywhere nowadays. The Internet and the Web are driving the world. Computers have already come into homes, schools, and offices. Teachers will soon need computers in their work and daily lives.

In spite of teachers' positive attitudes and a potential promise of the Web for Thai teachers to integrate WBC into English Language Teaching (ELT), there is evidence that it is crucial to familiarize teachers with computers and the Internet (Maneekhao, 2001). That is, to use WBC effectively, teachers need training.

### **How to train teachers?**

There are various modes of teacher training, such as seminars and workshops, short and long-term courses, and self-study. Each mode has advantages and disadvantages to be considered to select the most suitable one to use in training Thai ELT teachers in Web use. In order to make training successful, we need to consider the characteristics of effective training that should match the conditions of training and actual use (Roberts, 1998). Time constraints make it very hard for groups of teachers to work together simultaneously and yet teachers need to be trained how to use WBC in their teaching, the only practical solution is self-study materials that have many characteristics of WBC.

### **Web-based training versus CD-ROMs**

To train teachers to use the Web, the self-study materials should have many characteristics of WBC; thus, Web-based training and CDs (in the form of CD-ROMs) should provide key Web features. However, taking into account the expense

involved in investment in computers and access to the Internet and especially the poor quality of the networks available at many schools, we need to consider putting self-study materials on CD instead of the Web because CDs can replicate many Web features and can store WebPages. CDs can also provide text, audio, video, and animations and they are a standard storage device for multimedia that can be stored and used directly on the Internet (Hanson-Smith, 2001). CDs are cost effective to purchase and keep; they are also easy to use and take anywhere (Riley, 1997).

### **The CD design principle**

In designing such a CD, we need to consider the characteristics of good CALL software, which is related to the principles of CALL: providing interaction, options, flexibility, high legibility, readability, consistency, and authenticity (Kessler & Plakans, 2001; Otto, 1988; Schreck & Schreck, 1991; Spratt, 2002).

### **Procedures**

Three questionnaires were used. The first investigated school facilities, the teachers' computer backgrounds, and their attitudes and needs towards WBC; it was completed by eighty-four teachers, from whom the sixteen teachers used as subjects in this research were selected. The second questionnaire surveyed the subjects' need for training and was completed by the sixteen subjects, all of whom were given the CD for trial for approximately two and a half months. The third questionnaire, completed by twelve of these sixteen teachers, reported the hours they spent on the CD, the place and the time they used it, the person they used it with, and their favourite content. Finally, three of these teachers were randomly selected to be interviewed.

### **The CD content**

The first questionnaire found that, while some teachers knew nothing about the Internet and just knew how to open and close the CD, others knew a lot about the Internet (e.g. how to set *Net Watch*). Three groups of teachers were identified in terms of level of familiarity with the Web, those who were:

- not confident in using the Web;
- slightly confident in using the Web;
- confident in using the Web.

Reflecting these three groups and based on the findings of the second questionnaire (on teachers' perceived needs for content of training), the CD was divided into three levels of WBC difficulty, as follows:

- Section 1: How to access the Internet and recommended websites; Simple and advanced searching; E-mail; Bulletin board; Key pals; Chat; Safe Net; and Netiquette;
- Section 2: Types of websites; Selecting websites; Tips for using the Web for language classroom;
- Section 3: Web content for language learning: news, jobs, travel and holidays, music, games, weather forecasts, advertisements; Web communication for language learning: e-mail, newsgroups, e-cards, bulletin boards for online discussion; WebQuests; Online classroom with *NiceNet*; Concordancing; Writing interactive tests with *Hot Potatoes*, *Microsoft Word*; Activities to use the Web in the classroom.

After that, the CD was designed and there were three main programs used in designing the CD: *Microsoft FrontPage*, *SnagIt*, and *HotPotatoes*.

### **Teachers' use of the CD**

The ways the various teachers used the CD were quite similar; normally, they used the CD at school when they were not working, and they used the CD with colleagues. Most teachers used the CD only once, for two hours, from which it can be assumed that they studied under time constraints. Most teachers seemed to have little exposure to computers and the Web. Teachers reported that the most useful content on the CD was in Section 1, which was for those who had little familiarity with the Web. Teachers selected Section 1, *games* and *search*. The difficulties the teachers experienced using the CD were based on their familiarity (or lack thereof) with computers and the Web. Nonetheless, these difficulties are unlikely to impede the teachers' use of WBC in the future because they said that, in spite of obstacles and limitations concerning computer literacy and accessibility, they hoped to implement WBC in ELT.

### **How teachers learned with the self-study CD**

There were factors that made these volunteer teachers suitable for this study. For instance, they were willing to use the CD, which was free of charge; they were working in schools that were suitable for implementing WBC (their schools had several computers with Internet connections available and the teachers had some skills with computers, etc.). However, these factors did not drive them to use the CD as much as might have been anticipated. The way teachers used the CD can be discussed as follows:

- **Openness of feelings:** Openness is essential to the success of self-study (Barnes, 1998). From teachers' low usage of the CD in this study, we can see that there was a mismatch between the attitudes revealed in the questionnaire data and their actual performance. The mismatch might come from teachers in that they did not report their attitudes openly. Thus, teachers' openness of feelings might derive from the perspectives of teachers' cultural background and their relationship with the researcher.
- **Time constraints:** "Schoolteachers in Thailand have to work very hard. They not only teach over 15 hours a week (to over 100 students), but also do administrative work and manage student activities" (Maneekhao, 2001). The subjects in this study were Thai ELT teachers who had a heavy workload in secondary schools, which meant they had to do both teaching and administrative work to fulfill the school requirements. In addition, currently in Thailand, early retirement projects are resulting in teacher shortages, and those remaining face an increasing workload. As a result, heavy workloads made it difficult for these teachers to find time for self-study.
- **Priority:** There might be three factors for teachers not prioritizing using the CD: time constraints; voluntary study; and institutional value. As a result of teachers' heavy workload and the increasing demands on their time, teachers needed to prioritize their jobs to fulfill the school requirements. For that reason, teachers might not have prioritized the CD and might have postponed using it until the final questionnaire was distributed to them and then they spent only sufficient time on the CD to provide answers to the questionnaire. Another factor for teachers not prioritizing using the CD might be because this study was voluntary; thus, teachers

would use the CD in accordance with their preferences. The last factor might concern institutional value. Cole & Knowles (1998) found that, although self-study is a powerful vehicle for teacher education for professional development in teaching, teachers doubted whether self-study had a high exchange value in the eyes of institutional evaluations and assessments. Therefore, they might not have prioritized using the CD and thus used it very little.

- ***Self-discipline***: Harmer (1983) states that discipline refers to a code of conduct, and learning can be more effective with discipline. Therefore, in using the CD for self-study, teachers needed to have self-discipline to perform the study effectively in spite of their time constraints and heavy workload. However, given that the study was voluntary and teachers had freedom of choice despite the time constraints, teachers might not have been self-disciplined or managed their self-study time effectively.
- ***Self-confidence***: Loughran & Northfield (1998) found that self-confidence is a most intriguing aspect of self-study because it can increase the ability to work autonomously. In this study, self-study concerns teachers' autonomy in learning, which is important for a professionally rewarding learning experience. Most teachers used the CD with colleagues, so it is possible that teachers were not autonomous learners and lacked self-confidence in using the CD individually. Moreover, they may have used the CD very little since studying the CD with colleagues at school was difficult because of their heavy workload and time constraints.
- ***Seeing the CD was not helpful***: Teachers have considerable personal baggage (Trappes-Lomax & McGrath, 1999). Teachers who had skills and existing knowledge in computers and the Web might regard the CD as unhelpful for their teaching and professional development. Teachers were given the CD and a manual explaining how to use the CD. As already noted, the CD contains three parts to suit teachers' different familiarity with the Web. If teachers did not read the CD manual, or did not read its introduction page, they may have used the sections that did not match their level of computer familiarity and thus might have deemed the CD to be of no use to them.
- ***Judging the CD from its cover***: The CD did not have a commercial look. Its cover and packaging were made in-house, in black ink on white paper. Seeing that the CD was not attractively packaged, teachers might have judged it to be unprofessional. This, combined with the fact that it was free, may have led teachers to underestimate its value and content.

### **Guidelines for producing teacher-training material on CD**

Teachers chose to use the topics from the perspectives of design and use; and we saw that they did not visit pages due to unfamiliar terms and placement on pages. Consequently, the suggested guidelines for producing teacher-training material on CD might include:

- ***Organizing lists of links***

Given that the organization of links affects teachers' use of the CD and teachers chose to click on the topics that were on the upper part of the page, we should consider organizing lists of links in alternative ways:

- Prioritize the topics that sound useful and familiar to teachers by putting things they want to know on the top, or in the most salient region on the page;
- Place the topics differently from a vertical system of organization;
- Give fewer choices and add more steps in the hierarchy of links.

- ***Simplifying terms used in headings***

It seems that teachers would click on the topics that sound useful and familiar to them, such as *search, games, grammar, songs, activities* and *exercises*. Teachers were likely not to click on the topics that were unfamiliar to them even though the topics were what they had reported they wanted to know. Therefore, the CD needs terms that are simplified; for example, *WebQuests* could be replaced by the term *Project-work on the Net*.

- ***Providing a glossary page for ELT and Internet terms***

Teachers might need help to understand ELT and Internet terms so that they can choose to use the pages directly related to their needs and interests. The CD therefore should provide glossary pages with definitions in simplified English that help teachers to understand the terms. The definitions can be on separate pages or be within the same pages but in additional columns or on pop-up links.

- ***Providing an L1 manual***

There should be a detailed Thai manual describing the content in each section. This may help teachers who have time constraints to see what exactly they want to look for and go directly to the topics they want when they operate the CD.

- ***Providing Thai explanations***

Thai explanations may help teachers who have difficulties in comprehending pages where the entire explanation is in English. This concerns Thai ELT teachers' insufficient English language skills (Baiyaem, 1997 cited in Wiriyaichitra, 2002). Therefore, links to pages containing Thai explanations may be added where it seems likely that teachers may have problems comprehending the English.

- ***Using Auto-Run to start the CD***

Teachers with low computer proficiency may have difficulty in operating the CD. Seeing that teachers are not likely to contact the CD designer when they experience difficulties in using the CD, auto-run should be implemented to allow teachers to start using the CD without problems.

### **Recommendations for using the CD for self-study**

- The Ministry of Education and schools need to value teacher development and encourage teachers to keep learning. Schools should provide a rich environment and sufficient time for them to do self-study, and those who are self-motivated to keep learning should be praised and should obtain credits and promotion as a reward from their schools. If the ministry and schools sincerely care about teachers' learning and teacher development and are able to make teachers believe that they value teachers' learning, barriers such as time constraints, priorities, and self-discipline for teachers doing self-study might be diminished.
- Schools should arrange study-groups, which could consist of teachers who are interested in WBC and want to do the self-study together. These study-groups could arrange time for self-study and have a key person to demonstrate to participants how to use the CD for self-study and how it can enhance their professional development. This would help teachers share expertise both in computer technology and pedagogy.
- Schools should help teachers to access the CD easily at their convenience by placing the CD in easy-to-use locations such as in the offices, libraries, self-access corners; alternatively, saving the CD content on computers in teachers' offices might encourage teachers to use the material for self-study.

- The CD should require teachers' engagement, commitment and responsibility in learning. Providing interactive tasks or problem-solving tasks may make teachers take more interest in monitoring their learning. There should be questionnaires or other follow-up assessments to see how the CD benefits teachers' learning and also help teachers see their progress.

### **Conclusion**

We can say that Thai ELT teachers were enthusiastic to use WBC because of the impact of ministry directives, the computer age, and teachers' interest to improve their teaching. However, training teachers with a self-study CD needs more support from schools in order to diminish time constraints, increase accessibility to the Internet, and increase motivation for teachers to learn and become sufficiently confident to develop professionally. The ministry could exploit teachers' attitudes to meet their policy of improving the quality of education in Thailand by giving a larger proportion of top-down solutions and putting more concrete and consistent efforts to help teachers learn to use WBC effectively. Acquiring skills for dealing with basic computer configurations cannot happen overnight; rather, it can be done by allowing teachers to have extended exposure to computers. In addition, the ministry and schools should value teachers' learning, and promote and facilitate it by supporting effective facilities and providing appropriate training to suit the teachers' working schedule.

With more support from the Ministry of Education, hopefully there can be a shift in education reform whereby teachers become computer literate and willing to upgrade their skills. However, from teachers' low use of the CD developed for this study, it can be seen that a self-study CD may not be the most appropriate format to provide training and we might think of other modes of training such as workshops.

### **References**

- Baiyaem, S. (1997) *Learner Training: Changing Roles for a Changing World*. Paper presented at 3<sup>rd</sup> UNESCO-ACEID International conference on educational innovation for sustainable development, Bangkok.
- Banditvilai, C. (2000) Utilizing the Internet as an integral part of teaching reading. *rEFLECTIONS 2*: 47-55.
- Barnes, D. (1998) Looking forward: the concluding remarks at the Castle conference, In Hamilton, M. L. (ed.) *Reconceptualizing Teaching Practice: Self-study in Teacher Practice*, pp. ix-xii. London: Falmer Press.
- Cole, A. L. & Knowles, J. G. (1998) The self-study of teacher education practices and the reform of teacher education. In Hamilton, M. L. (ed.) *Reconceptualizing Teaching Practice: Self-study in Teacher Practice*, pp. xii, 224-233. London: Falmer Press.
- Gabriel, S. (2003) *How Will Daily Computer Use Affect a Student's Motivation in the Classroom?* Available: <http://www.learningfrompractice.org/palpin/monosoi/sgabriel.htm> [accessed 31st March 2003].
- Hanson-Smith, E. (2001) Computer-assisted language learning. In Carter, R. & Nunan, D. (eds.) *The Cambridge Guide to Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages*, pp. 107-113. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harmer, J. (1983) *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. London: Longman.

- Kessler, G. & Plakans, L. (2001) Incorporating ESOL learners' feedback and usability testing into instructor-developed CALL materials. *TESOL Journal* 10:1:15-19.
- Liu, M. & Reed, W. M. (1995) The effect of hypermedia assisted instruction on second language learning. *Journal of Educational Computing Research* 112:2: 159-173. Available: <http://www.edb.utexas.edu/mmresearch/Students96/Doolittle/language.html> [accessed 17<sup>th</sup> July 2004].
- Loughran, J. & Northfield, J. (1998) A framework for the development of self-study practice. In Hamilton, M.L. (ed.) *Reconceptualizing Teaching Practice: Self-Study in Teacher Education*, pp. 7-15. London: Falmer Press.
- Maddux, C. D., Johnson, D. L. & Willis, J. W. (2001) *Educational Computing: Learning with Tomorrow's Technologies*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, p. 5. Needham Heights: MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Mallikamas, P. (1999) Applications of corpora in language teaching. *Thai TESOL Bulletin* 12:1:1-13.
- Maneekhao, K. (2001) Familiarizing non-computer-literate teachers with the Internet. *IT-Links* 1:2. Available: <http://www.itlinks.org/v1i2/v1i2-a1.htm> [accessed 18<sup>th</sup> July 2004].
- Office of the National Education Commission (1999) The National Education Act of 1999, Bangkok, Office of the National Education Commission.
- Otto, F. (1988) Using the computer. In Gleason, J. B. (ed) *You Can Take It with You*, pp. 71-88. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Riley, P. C. (1997) *Designing, Developing and Implementing WWW-Based Distance Learning*. Proceedings from the 19<sup>th</sup> Interservice/Industry Simulation and Education Conference (I/ITSEC), Orlando, FL.
- Roberts, J. (1998) *Language Teacher Education*. London: Arnold.
- Samuel, C. (2001) Computer-mediated communication: a motivator in the foreign language classroom. *Korea TESOL Journal* 4:1:119-132. Available: [http://www.kotesol.org/pubs/journal/2001/korjrl\\_4\\_119-132.pdf](http://www.kotesol.org/pubs/journal/2001/korjrl_4_119-132.pdf) [accessed 16<sup>th</sup> July 2004].
- Savenye, W. C., Leader, L., Schnackenberg, H. L., Jones, E. E. K., Dwyer, H. & Jiang, B. (1996) *Learner Navigation Patterns and Incentive on Achievement and Attitudes in Hypermedia-Based CAI*. Paper presented at the 18<sup>th</sup> National Convention of the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, Indianapolis.
- Schreck, S. & Schreck, J. (1991) Computer-assisted language learning. In Celce-Murcia, M. (ed.) *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, pp. 472, 482. Boston: Heinle & Heinle.
- Skinner, B. & Austin, R. (1999) Computer conferencing – Does it motivate EFL students? *ELT Journal* 53: 4: 270-279.
- Spratt, M. (2002) Authenticity and IT materials for ELT. *ThaiTESOL Bulletin* 15:2. Available: <http://www.tesol.org/pubs/author/serials/tjguides.html> [accessed 19<sup>th</sup> July 2004].
- Trappes-Lomax, H. & McGrath, I. (1999) *Theory in Language Teacher Education*, pp. 1-7. London: Longman.
- Tuck, J. R. (2001) Partially On-Line Learning (POLL): Optimizing the best of traditional face-to-face learning with the best computer mediated learning. *IT-Links* 1:3. Available: <http://www.britishcouncil.org.sg/it-links/v1i3/v1i3-a1.htm> [accessed 17<sup>th</sup> July 2004].

- Warschauer, M. & Kern, R. (2000) *Network-Based Language Teaching: Concepts and Practice*, pp. 1-17. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Watson Todd, R. (1999) *ELIZA the Psychiatrist and Self-Access Learning*. Paper presented at 4<sup>th</sup> CULI International Conference on ELT Collaboration, December 1999.
- Watson Todd, R. (2001a) Building and using your own corpus and concordances. *ThaiTESOL Bulletin* 14: 2: 67-74.
- Watson Todd, R. (2001b) Teaching out of the box. *Bangkok Post*, p. 4, 6<sup>th</sup> May 2001.
- Watson Todd, R. (2003) Students' interaction through bulletin boards and discussion lists. *IT-Links* 2:2. Available: <http://www.britishcouncil.org.sg/it-links/v2i2/v2i2-a1.htm> [18<sup>th</sup> July 2004].
- Wiriyachitra, A. (2002) English language teaching and learning in Thailand in this decade. *ThaiTESOL Focus* 15:1: 4-9.

*Pongpet Pongsart obtained her MA in Applied Linguistics (ELT) from KMUTT after she had attended the pre-course for the Masters Program at the School of Information Technology. She produced a CD-ROM entitled Introduction to the Internet in the World Bank Funded Secondary Education Quality Improvement Project Provision of Self-Access Materials for SEAR (Student English Access Room). Her areas of interest are teacher development and Web use in ELT.*

# **Factors affecting the use of the Self Learning Centre at the Bank of Thailand**

**Wantana Chullawatchanatana  
Wilaksana Srimavin**

*King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi*

## **Abstract**

The aim of the research was to find out factors affecting the use of the Self Learning Centre (SLC) at Bank of Thailand (BOT). The findings will be contemplated as a guideline for establishing future self-access centres that will open to the general public. The subjects were 50 personnel who used the SLC. The study was undertaken from 22<sup>nd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> August 2004. Their attitudes on factors influencing the use of the SLC were analysed from a questionnaire and informal talk. The results showed that the factors affecting the use of the centre were the provision of atmosphere, services, and learning materials. The bank personnel came to the SLC because they were satisfied with these facilities. Therefore, in establishing a self-access language centre for a community, factors that could foster a learning environment, such as quietness, light quality, the decoration of the rooms and service hours, should be considered. In order to give good services, librarians might help the users to set their goals, learning plans and so on. Moreover, learning materials should be up-to-date in content, and the centre should provide a variety of materials, i.e. those that are paper-based and computer-based as well as audio-visuals.

As we know, Thailand has always been a country with one official language, which is Thai; however, English is demanded in many institutions. The English language has become popular since we have to communicate with foreigners.

## **How important is English to Thai society?**

According to Raksaphet (1991), knowledge in almost every field is available in English and many well-paid jobs in both public and private sectors look for people who have a good command of it. English has become essential for carrying out international business and strengthening the economy. For this reason, English courses have become compulsory for children from elementary level and above. Wongsothorn et al. (1996) report that about 99% of Thai students begin studying English at elementary level. English is a required language subject in annual national entrance examinations. Ultimately, this reflects the fact that the role of English in Thailand is quite important, as it is in many other developing countries.

Mountford (1986) points out some serious problems are hindering the success of English language teaching in Thailand. The problems include the lack of proper curricula, dry teaching styles that are overly concerned with grammatical details, inappropriate texts that are not related to learners' real interests, and a lack of opportunity for students to interact with one another in class.

## **Self-study**

According to the National Education Act of Thailand (Office of the National Education Commission, 1999), the education system is based on the principle that all learners are capable of learning and self-development, and are regarded as the most important element in the process of teaching and learning. The goal of education should be to enable learners

to develop at their own pace and to the best of their potential. To meet these aspirations, self-study can be a good way forward.

Self-study is a kind of study where individuals learn on their own without any attention from an educational institution or tutor. Self-study promotes autonomous learning. All teachers wish for their students to become independent learners; however, helping them to do so can be difficult. On this point, Ellis & Sinclair (1989) state clearly that students can become autonomous when they take charge of their own learning. Providing self-access learning is one way of increasing responsibility in learning, thus encouraging learner autonomy. In addition, self-study supports the notion of life-long learning; for example, learning a language in class, even taking four or five courses at a university, may not be enough to make the students master the language. It is partly the teacher's duty to help them realize that they have to continue developing their language skills. Finally, no conclusion is better than Confucius's (551-479 BC) statement about the importance of self-study: "if you give a man a fish, you feed him for one day but, if you teach him to fish, you feed him for a lifetime".

### **Self-access language learning**

In order to help learners to do self-study, it is interesting to understand Self-Access Language Learning (SALL). Gardner & Miller (1999) observe that the term 'self-access' is sometimes seen as a collection of materials and sometimes seen as a system for organising resources. It is an umbrella term involving an integration of a number of elements to provide a supportive learning environment; these elements include resources, people, management, individualisation, needs and wants analyses, learner reflection, counseling, learner training, staff training, assessment, evaluation, and materials development.

Sheerin (1991) argues that self-access is a way of describing learning materials that are designed and organized in such a way that learners can choose and work on tasks on their own, and obtain feedback on their performance, for example, by comparing their answers to a key which accompanies the material. Dickinson (1987), on the other hand, identifies self-access as being learners' ability to decide on what to do, what objectives to work on, what particular skill to work on and so on. Learners can find appropriate materials, know how to do particular activities, what to do first, and next, as well as how to self-assess.

The considerations above identify SALL in several ways, according to each writer's views; yet, in this study, SALL is seen as the systems that promote students' independent learning when that learning is done in accordance with their wants and needs. Students know their goal and how to achieve it step-by-step, as well as whether they have reached it yet. Furthermore, SALL needs to integrate various elements (helpers, resources, management, needs analyses, counseling, development of materials, etc.) in order to build a supportive learning environment.

### **Self-access centres**

SALL is one approach to learning a language which takes place in a Self-Access Centre (SAC) (Cotterall & Reinders, 2001). A SAC consists of a number of resources in the form of materials, activities and support, usually located in one place. It is designed to accommodate learners of different levels, styles, goals and interests. The aim is to develop learner autonomy among its users (Gardner & Miller, 1999).

According to Gardner & Miller (*ibid*), SACs have the potential to promote learner autonomy in a number of ways. First, they provide facilities which allow learners to pursue their own goals and interests while accommodating individual differences in learning style,

level and pace of learning. Second, the resources have the potential to raise learners' awareness of the learning process by highlighting aspects of the management of learning, such as goal setting and monitoring progress. Third, SACs can act as a bridge between the teacher-directed learning situation, where the target language is studied and practised, and the 'real world', where the target language is used as a means of communication. Finally, SACs can promote the autonomy of learners who prefer, or are obliged to learn, without a teacher, by supporting their learning in the absence of an organised language course.

Therefore, SACs are set up in order to allow learners to do what they like in whatever manner they prefer with whatever materials they select, for a period they themselves specify.

### **Development of self-access learning in Thailand**

In South East Asia, Thailand is one of many countries where SALL has grown rapidly over the past ten years. The idea of SALL is spreading to various schools, universities and language institutes. A large number of educational institutions have established a SAC and self-access corner in their institutes. Bank of Thailand (BOT) is one of many institutions that has realized the usefulness of SALL. So the governors of BOT decided to set up a SAC in order to encourage their staff members to develop themselves.

### **Self Learning Centre at Bank of Thailand**

Since its establishment in 1994, BOT's Self Learning Centre (SLC) has been operating for staff members in order to serve three purposes (from a SLC report, 2004). The first one is the policy of the bank which aims at promoting and encouraging the bank personnel to self-develop their language learning according to the requirement of each department of the bank. The second reason is the personnel's own interest. They come for their own sake, such as preparing for TOEFL or IELTS in order to get a higher education. The last reason is for enjoyment or entertainment, for example, watching foreign films while waiting to collect their children from school.

The SLC is located on the third floor of the Union Building. The opening hours are Monday to Friday (7:30-18:30) and Saturday to Sunday (9:00-16:00). To run the SLC, there are five librarians on duty as helpers. Their role is to help the users who have problems using the centre. Moreover, they also give some advice to the users about language learning materials as well as orientate them to the resources and facilities. The users can ask for assistance from the helpers any time even though they are in their office rather than at the front desk.

The SLC consists of a computer lab, a sound lab, a multimedia room, a seminar room and an office. The computer lab is also provided for computer training. A sound lab is provided for the users to practise their listening skills and for testing the bank personnel's listening proficiency. The multimedia room houses nine computers for internet use and language learning. Another computer is used for registration, which requires the users, before entering the centre, to sign in by keying in their staff number through a registration program. In this room, 15 satellite televisions with video players are provided for watching films, videos and so on. There are also materials for language learning, such as grammar books, in-house materials that are the summaries of foreign films, and exercises for language practice after watching films; other materials are for specific purposes: English for Receptionists, Traveling, etc. The types of these materials are computer-based, paper-based, and audio-visuals such as cassette tapes, videos, VCDs and DVDs. The materials that the personnel can borrow from the centre are books, videos, VCDs and DVDs.

The seminar room is for training the users about the C.A.T.S. program, which is provided for BOT personnel who want to improve their language proficiency on the internet. To promote SALL to potential users, the bank has to pay some money for a C.A.T.S. license, which is calculated for each user and which must be renewed each year. For this reason, it is necessary to test SLC users in order to identify their language proficiency and determine whether they are suitable to take this program or not. The seminar room is also used for English language learning activities, such as ‘Speaking on Weekends’, ‘English for You’, ‘English Revisited’, ‘Learning English through Films’ and ‘Hello America’. These activities are run by a native teacher who comes from an educational institution.

### **Purposes of the study**

As it is clear that self-access learning centres are important to help learners develop their language learning, it is interesting to study the factors affecting the use of such centres, so the results will be helpful for establishing any community centre. The SLC at BOT was chosen as the site of this survey since it seemed to be representative of other community centres. The centre will be for the general public who are workers/officers or others who want to learn by themselves.

### **Research methodology**

The research was carried out during the week 22<sup>nd</sup> to 30<sup>th</sup> August 2004. The subjects of this research were 50 bank personnel who use the SLC at BOT. A questionnaire was distributed to 50 subjects while visiting the SLC. The time to work on it was about 10 to 15 minutes. The questionnaire was devised in Thai under the consultation of a supervisor and the librarians of the SLC at BOT. Then it was piloted by five MA participants at King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT) in order to adjust any unclear points. The questionnaire contained three parts: part 1 was about the personal information of the subjects; part 2 was about the subjects’ attitudes towards SLC; and, whereas parts 1 and 2 were subject-oriented, part 3 asked about suggestions and recommendations for the improvement of the resources and facilities provided at the SLC.

The quantitative data from the subjects were studied and calculated as percentages, arithmetic means ( $\bar{X}$ ) and grouping under the same theme, as shown in the following table.

**Table: Overview of instrumentation**

<b>Research question</b>	<b>Instrument</b>	<b>Data analysis</b>
What are the factors affecting the use of the Self Learning Centre at the Bank of Thailand?	Questionnaire	- Percentages - Means - Grouping under the same theme

The data from rating-scale statements in the questionnaire were interpreted according to the criteria, from 0 to 5. The criterion for identifying the mean values of the responses was that, if mean scores were higher than 2.5, subjects were deemed to agree with the questions; conversely, if scores were less than 2.5, they were deemed to show their disagreement.

### **Results**

This study investigated four aspects of using the SLC: frequency of use, reasons for use, atmosphere, and services. Reference is made to items in the questionnaire (see Appendix).

### ***Frequency of use***

The data (from part 1, item 2, of the questionnaire) about frequency of use indicates that 50% of the users visited the SLC usually once or twice a week, 34% have used it only a few times since it has been in service, and 16% visited it usually more than twice a week. The open-ended part of the questionnaire (part 1, item 5) reveals that 50% of the users complained that there was some inconvenience due to limited time (i.e. lunchtime) and the location of SLC (on the third floor); so they did not come to the SLC again.

### ***Reasons for use***

Part 1 of the questionnaire (item 3), which is about the reasons for using the SLC, reveals that 80% of the users utilized the centre according to their own goals. This means that they had purposes before coming to the SLC (e.g. to pass language tests, such as TOEFL or IELTS, both of which aim at development and higher education). In contrast, 9.09% of the users reported that they had to go to the centre because of the bank's policy of asking the staff to develop themselves according to their current job requirements. Finally, a similar number of the users (10.91%) visited the centre for the purpose of enjoyment or entertainment (i.e. watching foreign films and waiting for their children).

### ***Atmosphere***

The majority (84%) of the bank personnel thought the atmosphere of the centre was pleasant; they pointed out that the atmosphere could promote self-access learning and motivate them to come to the centre. Nevertheless, 16% of them disagreed with this comment; they thought it was rather stressful to work in the centre and they wished to see a more relaxed atmosphere (e.g. by having trees and pictures in the centre).

It can be interpreted from the mean scores of the bank personnel's responses about the layout and design of the SLC (from part 2, items 1.2-1.4 and 1.6-1.8 of the questionnaire), all of which were higher than 2.5, that they have positive attitudes about these factors.

SLC users were satisfied with the quietness of the centre ( $\bar{X} = 3.94$ ) and they agreed that the light in the centre was bright enough ( $\bar{X} = 3.74$ ). The decoration of each room was attractive ( $\bar{X} = 3.24$ ). Locating the computers next to the VCD/video players and TVs was appropriate ( $\bar{X} = 3.14$ ). They also thought that the way the books were displayed was attractive ( $\bar{X} = 3.12$ ). It can be concluded that the centre's atmosphere engages the users to come and utilize the centre.

### ***Services***

This section will present the services of the SLC and is divided into seven categories (a-g), as follows: number of staff, signing-in computer system, clear instructions, opening hours, circulation system, native-speaker consultation, and learning materials.

#### **a) Number of staff**

The data about services of the centre (from part 2, item 2.9) reveals that almost all the SLC users (98%) thought the number of librarians in the centre was adequate for giving services; only 2% thought that there were insufficient librarians.

#### **b) Signing-in computer system**

With regard to the signing-in computer, the data (from part 2, item 1.5) reveals that it is quite convenient for the users when visiting the centre; almost all the users (98%) agreed that it was useful. They said that it is very time-saving, especially during lunchtime. However, 2% of them did not like using it.

c) Clear instructions

Concerning the instructions provided in the materials and elsewhere, the respondents stated that the instructions were sufficient ( $\bar{X} = 3.20$ ) and they were clear about the steps of how to use the materials ( $\bar{X} = 3.26$ ). Consequently, they could access the materials easily ( $\bar{X} = 3.16$ ).

d) Opening hours

The opening hours of the SLC ( $\bar{X} = 3.62$ ) were appropriate for them; that is, they could go to the centre before or after work.

e) Circulation system

The SLC users thought that the procedure for borrowing equipment from the centre ( $\bar{X} = 3.72$ ) was convenient.

f) Native-speaker consultant

They also thought that having a native-speaker consultant for suggestions about how to learn English successfully ( $\bar{X} = 3.26$ ) was helpful. The data from part 3 of the questionnaire shows that the bank personnel were also happy with guidance gained from an experienced teacher of English, who is not a native speaker.

g) Learning materials

Several points pertain to learning materials: accessibility, location, learning activities and equipment.

- *Accessibility*

It was found from the mean scores that the trend of SLC users' attitudes was positive. They agreed it was convenient to find materials ( $\bar{X} = 3.5$ ) and that the materials were interesting ( $\bar{X} = 3.7$ ). They also stated that the content of materials provided was useful ( $\bar{X} = 3.6$ ) and could serve their needs.

- *Location*

Although the centre has generally provided clear instructions and good places to locate the shelves of materials, there are some materials that have been placed in inappropriate corners. For example, newspapers and magazines were not placed in an attractive corner; they were behind the signing-in computer and, consequently, 70% of the SLC users did not know where the newspapers were kept. They thought there were no newspapers in the centre. Moreover 78% did not know where the magazines were. Nevertheless, the data (from part 2, items 4.8-4.9) indicates that the users who knew where to get the newspapers (30%) found that they were out of date; further, 22% of SLC users said there were magazines that were also out of date.

- *Learning activities*

The bank personnel were satisfied with the learning activities provided. They reported using 'Speaking on Weekends', 'English Revisited', 'English for You', 'Learning English through Films', and 'Hello America'. The trend of the SLC users' opinions was positive. The activity they liked most was 'Speaking on Weekends' ( $\bar{X} = 4.13$ ); they said it provided an opportunity for them to practise listening and speaking with foreign teachers. 'English Revisited' was the second most popular activity ( $\bar{X} = 4.04$ ) as it was deemed to be particularly useful for the users who are managers. The third activity was 'English for You'; the SLC users said it was useful ( $\bar{X} = 3.98$ ). The fourth activity was 'Learning English through Films' ( $\bar{X} = 3.96$ ). The last activity was 'Hello America', which they

thought was useful because it could support them to learn English by themselves ( $\bar{X} = 3.88$ ); however, according to the data (from part 3, item 3), the users commented that the materials for 'Hello America' needed to be updated where possible.

- *Equipment*

The data (from part 2, items 3.6-3.9) reveal that the SLC users accepted that the number of computers in the centre was adequate for the services ( $\bar{X} = 3.34$ ) and they also felt that the quality of the computers was good ( $\bar{X} = 3.38$ ). They commented that there were sufficient videos and televisions ( $\bar{X} = 3.20$ ) and that they were modern ( $\bar{X} = 3.36$ ).

### **Discussion and implications of the findings**

From the surveying of BOT personnel's attitudes towards the SLC, it could be inferred that the setting up of a SAC centre either for staff or the public, which is a community centre, needs consideration of several factors influencing its use. They are as follows:

#### ***Atmosphere***

According to the results of surveying the bank personnel's attitudes towards the atmosphere of the centre, 84% of the users agreed that the SLC's atmosphere was supportive. This can imply that the quietness in a centre, the light, the decoration of the rooms and the way books are displayed can promote an atmosphere for learning; that is, the quietness in a centre can help its users concentrate. The brightness of the light can help the readers read or do any activities happily. The rooms should be attractive. For this reason, hanging plants, trees and pictures should be considered. Books also need to be displayed in an attractive corner and the shelves of books and materials should be easy to access.

The service hours should be long enough, as at the Bank of Thailand, where the users can use the centre for 10 to 12 hours a day from Mondays to Fridays and for 7 to 8 hours on Saturdays and Sundays. They should be able to use the centre before and after work or whenever they are free, which helps them spend their free time in a useful way. Also, they are likely to feel at ease doing activities there because they need not feel hurried.

#### ***Personnel preparation***

At the bank's SLC, the librarians are very helpful and friendly, particularly in orientating the users to the centre, and helping them find materials and equipment and explaining how to use them. According to the results, it is clear that the majority (80%) of bank personnel have their own goal before going to the centre, so the SLC librarians do not need to help them setting goals or planning for language learning. Also, the librarians do not need to be keen on using English because there is a native speaker in the centre to give consultations.

However, the organizers of a SAC in the community should keep in mind that, unlike the bank personnel, users might not have any goals. For this reason, the librarians may have to assist them setting goals and plans. The librarians also have to prepare the users in their approach to language learning, learning strategies, etc. In addition, they should be service-minded and friendly. Further, they should know well about where the materials are kept and what kinds of materials are appropriate for practising language skills. For this reason, the librarians should be good at English in order to give some advice on what the users want and/or need; however, if they are not keen on speaking English, the centre should provide a native speaker or an English teacher to help the users in this matter.

### ***Choice of materials***

It is clear that the SLC provides a wide choice of materials that are useful for the bank staff's work and daily life (i.e. books and materials for specific purposes, audio-visuals, and the C.A.T.S. program). To expand the users' knowledge of English, the SLC organizers have provided a variety of materials (e.g. paper-based, computer-based and audio-visual). In corners of the centre, instructions are provided that explain pretty clearly the steps of how to use the materials. The materials (the CALL program, films, etc.) are always updated every month although there are some materials that are out-of-date and not placed in an attractive corner, such as magazines and newspapers.

Thus, SAC organizers should realize that, in terms of materials, centres should provide a variety of types, content, topics and levels of difficulty. As far as types are concerned, they should have materials that are paper-based, computer-based, and audio-visual. The content for language learning should be updated and have a variety of topics (such as news, sports, food, music, culture). The materials should be identified by their level of difficulty (i.e. simplified, abridged, or original), so that users can choose materials that suit them best. Instructions in the materials should be clear, especially for what the users have to do, and why and how they should use them. The instructions should be for every part or section of the materials; besides this, the language of all the instructions should be simple and/or have some examples for clarification.

In addition, to promote the materials, the organizers of the centres should announce to their users the arrival of new materials such as books, films and CALL programs. The organizers can use noticeboards, posters or signboards to introduce and/or announce materials, and such materials should be placed in an attractive corner.

### **Conclusion**

This research study has attempted to find out what factors affect the use of the Self Learning Centre by personnel at the Bank of Thailand. The findings highlight the fact that the atmosphere of the centre, personnel preparation, and choices of materials have an effect on its use. An atmosphere in the centre should be provided to build a friendly learning environment. The factors that could build learning environments are the quietness of the centre, its light quality, the decoration of the rooms, the books displayed, the shelves of books and materials, and service hours. The organizers should consider a location for the centre that would be most convenient, such as the first floor. Related to personnel preparation, the librarians have to give suggestions about what and why the users have to learn by themselves, enabling them to set out their goal, learning plan and so on. Also, they should know about the centre. Moreover, they should have reasonable proficiency in English and, if they are not good at English, the centre should, from time to time, hire a native speaker or a teacher of English as an advisor of language. Materials selected should be designed for working and for daily life. They should be up to date and have variety in both type and content. Also, the instructions in materials have to be clear and sufficient to ensure the users understand what they have to do. Finally, it is expected that the implications of this study will be useful for other institutions that plan to have a self-access centre for their personnel or other people who are interested in establishing one; the information could also be applied in terms of adjustment to current or future centres.

### **References**

Cotterall, S. & Reinders, H. (2001) Fortress or bridge? Learners' perceptions and practice in self access language learning. *Tesolanz* 8:23-38.

- Dickinson, L. (1987) *Self-instruction in Language Learning*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Ellis, G. & Sinclair, B. (1989) *Learning to Learn English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gardner, D. & Miller, L. (1999) *Establishing Self-Access: From Theory to Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mountford, A. (1986) Teaching and learning English in Thailand: some problems and remedies. *PASAA* 16:1-9.
- Office of the National Education Commission (1999) The National Education Act of 1999, Bangkok.
- Raksaphet, P. (1991) *Study of English Loanwords in Thai Newspapers*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Indiana University, Bloomington.
- Sheerin, S. (1991) Self-access. *Language Teaching* 24:3:143-157.
- Wongsothorn, A., Sukamolsum, S., Chinthammit, P., Ratanathayamonth, P., & Noparumpa, P. (1996) National profiles of language education: Thailand. *PASAA* 26:89-103.

## Appendix: Questionnaire

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

This is a survey research of an MA participant of King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi. This questionnaire aims to investigate your attitudes towards Self-Learning Centre (SLA) at Bank of Thailand. The data obtained would be useful to establish Self-Learning Centre which will be opened for public in the future. There are no negative consequences for you. Please be sincere to answer the items accordingly. All information you give will be kept confidential.

### Part 1: Please put ticks (✓) into the box.

1. You are an official in the department of \_\_\_\_\_  
 Sex  Male Age \_\_\_\_\_ years  
 Female
2. How often did you use the Self Learning Centre?  
 Usually more than twice a week  
 Usually once or twice a week  
 Only a few times (since the beginning of Centre until now)  
 Never
3. What is the reason that you come to use the Self-Learning Centre? (You can answer more than one)  
 Your own interests  Policy of Bank  
 Others (please mention) \_\_\_\_\_
4. What are the methods you used most to find the materials you want? (you can tick more than one method)  
 Ask a librarian  
 Check from the instructions  
 Walk straight to the shelf which displays the activities  
 Get suggestions from colleague  
 Other (please mention) \_\_\_\_\_
5. If you have never (or rarely) used the Self Learning Centre, could you tell us why?  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**Part 2: Please put a tick ✓ into the box or circle ○ the number you need according to the questions and the expression at each end of the scale.**

**1. Layout & the design of the centre**

- 1.1 The atmosphere of the Centre is pleasant while using.  
 Yes  No
- 1.2 The light in the centre is bright enough  
light 5 4 3 2 1 dim
- 1.3 The centre is quiet.  
quiet 5 4 3 2 1 loud
- 1.4 The decoration of every room in the Centre is attractive.  
attractive 5 4 3 2 1 unattractive
- 1.5 It is convenient in using computer to sign in.  
 Yes  No
- 1.6 The sound lab is well designed.  
well 5 4 3 2 1 badly
- 1.7 It is appropriate to locate the computers next to video and television.  
appropriate 5 4 3 2 1 inappropriate
- 1.8 Book display is attractive.  
attractive 5 4 3 2 1 unattractive

**2. Service of the centre**

- 2.1 There are instructions everywhere or in every corner in the centre.  
much 5 4 3 2 1 none
- 2.2 The instructions explain clearly and sufficiently.  
clear 5 4 3 2 1 unclear  
sufficient 5 4 3 2 1 insufficient
- 2.3 The shelves of materials are easy to find and easy to access.  
agree 5 4 3 2 1 disagree
- 2.4 The number of study desks and seating are enough for service.  
sufficient 5 4 3 2 1 insufficient
- 2.5 The study desks and seating are comfortable when sitting.  
comfortable 5 4 3 2 1 uncomfortable
- 2.6 The service hours (7.30 a.m.- 6.30 p.m.) suitable for your needs.  
suitable 5 4 3 2 1 unsuitable
- 2.7 When are the best service hours for you? (Chose only one answer).  
 Monday-Friday 7.30 a.m. - 6.30 p.m.  
 Monday-Friday 8.30 a.m. - 6.30 p.m.  
 Saturday 8.30 a.m. - 6.30 p.m.  
 Sunday 8.30 a.m. - 6.30 p.m.  
 Everyday 8.30 a.m. - 6.30 p.m.  
 Everyday 8.30 a.m. - 7.30 p.m.  
 Other (Please mention) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2.8 The stages to borrow equipment (e.g. cassettes, head-phone) convenient.  
convenient 5 4 3 2 1 inconvenient
- 2.9 There are enough librarians to help you in the Centre when you have problem.  
 Yes  No
- 2.10 Is it necessary to have an English teacher to give advice in the Centre?  
necessary 5 4 3 2 1 unnecessary

### 3. Equipment of the centre

- 3.1 You are satisfied while using sound lab.  
satisfied 5 4 3 2 1 unsatisfied
- 3.2 Materials in the sound lab are up-to-dated.  
agree 5 4 3 2 1 disagree
- 3.3 The amount of materials in sound lab is enough for service.  
sufficient 5 4 3 2 1 insufficient
- 3.4 The quality of materials of the sound lab is good.  
 Yes  No
- 3.5 You can access to sound lab very easily.  
easy 5 4 3 2 1 hard
- 3.6 The amount of computers in the centre is enough for service.  
sufficient 5 4 3 2 1 insufficient
- 3.7 The quality of computers in the centre is good.  
 Yes  No
- 3.8 The amount of video and television in the centre is enough for service.  
sufficient 5 4 3 2 1 insufficient
- 3.9 Video and television are up-to-dated.  
agree 5 4 3 2 1 disagree
- 3.10 The quality of video and television in the centre are good.  
 Yes  No

### 4. Materials in the centre

- 4.1 Book display is convenient to find.  
convenient 5 4 3 2 1 inconvenient
- 4.2 The amount of books in the centre is enough for service.  
sufficient 5 4 3 2 1 insufficient
- 4.3 Books are provided in the centre are interesting and useful.  
interesting 5 4 3 2 1 uninteresting  
useful 5 4 3 2 1 useless
- 4.4 Books are provided in the centre could serve your needs/purposes.  
agree 5 4 3 2 1 disagree
- 4.5 Audio and videotapes are convenient to find.  
convenient 5 4 3 2 1 inconvenient
- 4.6 The amount of audio and videotapes are enough for service.  
sufficient 5 4 3 2 1 insufficient
- 4.7 The quality of audio and videotapes are good  
 Yes  No
- 4.8 There are newspapers in the centre.  
 Yes  No
- 4.9 There are magazines in the centre.  
 Yes  No
- 4.10 It is convenient to find newspapers and magazines.  
convenient 5 4 3 2 1 inconvenient
- 4.11 There are authentic materials to convenient people.  
 Yes  No

### 5. Activities of the centre

According to your attitudes the following activities of projects are interesting and useful.

5.1 Practicing Listening and Speaking with foreign teachers project are:

“Speaking on weekends”

agree 5 4 3 2 1 disagree

useful	5	4	3	2	1	useless
“English 4 U”						
agree	5	4	3	2	1	disagree
useful	5	4	3	2	1	useless
“English revisited”						
agree	5	4	3	2	1	disagree
useful	5	4	3	2	1	useless
5.2 “Promoting self-learning by using series of “Hello America project”						
agree	5	4	3	2	1	disagree
useful	5	4	3	2	1	useless
5.3 “Learning English through watching foreign film project”						
agree	5	4	3	2	1	disagree
useful	5	4	3	2	1	useless

**Part 3: Please answer following questions.**

1. What other materials would you like the Self-Learning Centre to provide? (e.g. CALL program for practicing language ability through computer etc.)

---



---



---



---

2. What materials in this centre would you like to have more copies of?

---



---



---



---

3. If you have an opportunity to develop the Self-Learning Centre which aspects you want to recommend e.g. layout, service, equipment, materials, or activity of project. (Please mention.)

---



---



---



---

Thank you very much for your cooperation  
Miss Wantana Chullawatchanatana  
Researcher

*Wantana Chullawatchanatana has an MA in Applied Linguistics (Resource Based Learning) from King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi. She has worked at the Self-Access Learning Centre (SALC) at the same university as a Teaching Assistant; she has also worked there as a Research Assistant.*

*Assistant Professor Wilaksana Srimavin has worked in the Department of Language Studies, School of Liberal Arts, King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi for over twenty years. She works as a teacher of English to undergraduate and graduate students in all faculties for both compulsory and elective courses. Although her expertise is in Teaching Techniques, she also has an interest in Self-Assessment in the Resource-Based Learning MA Program that her department has run for more than ten years.*

## Examining the ‘self’ in self-access materials

Hayo Reinders and Marilyn Lewis

*University of Auckland, New Zealand*

### Abstract

Self-access centres (SACs\*) are an increasingly common form of support for language learners. Self-access learning, by its nature, is heavily dependent on the availability of sufficient and relevant materials of a high quality, since students often have little or no access to further support from a teacher. The materials thus have to be very clear, comprehensive, and easy to use. Although more and more publishers now include comments such as ‘suitable for self-access’ in their catalogues, it is not always clear on what basis such comments are made. The majority of purchasing decisions are made by SAC staff without even such basic comments. This article presents the results of an evaluation of a random selection of materials in the SAC at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, using an evaluative checklist developed by the authors. Results from a quantitative analysis show that many materials do not include the types of support needed in a self-access context. Results from a qualitative analysis of the evaluators’ comments show that the features most commented on by teachers (either for their absence or their presence) are ease of access and support for the wider development of students’ language learning strategies.

### Features of self-access materials

A university SAC usually includes a mixture of published and locally produced resources, the latter often based on authentic materials used by all students, such as lecture handouts and audio- or video-clips of lectures. Purchasing published self-access materials is said to be a “quick and convenient” solution (Gardner & Miller, 1999: 113) for setting up a suitable stock of resources, such as would typically be found in a SAC, some of which might be labeled ‘self-access’ while others would be generic ESL materials. The reality is that self-access materials really do need to stand alone, even when some advisor support is available in SACs. By definition, users who are new speakers of English may not be able to follow complex instructions in English. Therefore the ‘access’ part of the definition would seem to be the first point for evaluating materials.

Knowing how good your materials are is said to be the first step in stocking a SAC. Gardner & Miller (1999:113) believe these materials “should be constantly open to evaluation”. The question then arises, on what basis this evaluation should be done. What distinguishes generic ESL materials from those which claim to be suitable for self-access? Tomlinson (1998:322-3) lists 11 features of successful self-study materials. In summary, these are:

- authenticity of language
- reading to include listening

- responses include both global responses which develop high level skills and focused, specific tasks
- production tasks situationally based and in the target language
- learning choices should cater for a variety of language levels, learning styles and time available
- some activities involve other students
- feedback through commentaries rather than answer keys
- emphasis on learner training
- suggestions for individual follow-up activities

Despite being listed in a self-access context, many of these are in fact also characteristics of good classroom learning materials.

The Gardner & Miller list (1999:114) has seven imperatives, the first of which is “people power”, meaning the ability of SAC staff to conduct an evaluation. This point brings attention to evaluative tools. The authors (Reinders & Lewis, forthcoming) have reviewed six previously published evaluative checklists for self-access and general (i.e. not language-specific) self-study materials and found that 1) some included only closed questions ‘Do the materials provide evaluation options?’, 2) some were very general ‘Contains meaningful language input’, or 3) were subjective ‘Has an attractive presentation’, or 4) did not leave room for additional comments by the evaluators. As a result, an alternative practical checklist was developed to allow self-access staff to evaluate a resource quickly while still leaving room for personal comments. (See Appendix for the evaluative checklist; the categories are shown in the left-hand column, alongside the results.)

Gardner (1999) suggests that a SAC’s effectiveness (the extent to which it meets its goals) and its efficiency (the relationship between the cost and the outcomes) are largely dependent on the quality of its resources. Resources take up a large part of the budget and, if they are not carefully chosen and are inappropriate for the student body (e.g. they are not suitable for self-access or the level is wrong), then they should be identified and replaced. Reinders & Cotterall (2001) investigated the borrowing and use of materials within one SAC in New Zealand. They found that especially listening materials were popular and also certain computer programmes, but only those that were easy to understand. ‘Learning to learn’ type resources were the least favourite. Interestingly, many students said that, although they were generally satisfied with the range and quality of the resources, they had difficulty locating items which were appropriate for their level and needs.

### **Evaluating self-access materials**

Our study investigated 25 randomly chosen examples of materials which had been purchased for the university’s SAC. The materials included both books (several including audio materials) and CD-ROMs. They also included generic as well as ‘self-access’ labeled resources. The analysis was carried out by three staff members (all of whom were language consultants in the SAC) using the evaluative checklist designed by the authors (see Appendix).

The checklist included 1) yes/no/unsure questions, 2) room for additional notes, and 3) open questions about the best and most difficult aspects of the resource.

## **Results**

The results from the evaluations are first presented quantitatively; next, a qualitative analysis presents common themes in the evaluators' comments.

### **Quantitative analysis**

The quantitative results are presented by category as they appeared on the evaluative checklist (see Appendix for a summary) and consist of counts of the number of responses to each question.

#### ***Selecting the resource***

The first category on the checklist was labelled 'selecting the resource', and included three questions related to the initial selection (or rejection) of a resource by self-access staff. The first of these asked whether the materials had been classified as suitable for self-access by the publisher. This could be determined either from the cover of the book/CD-ROM or from the introduction. Out of 25 materials, a total of 13, or just over half, made claims to this effect. For four others, it was not possible to tell; in these cases, the words 'self-access' were not used but comments about their usefulness for individual students were included.

The second question asked whether there was a clear description of the student level the material was aimed at. This turned out to be the case for most of the samples (19 out of 25). In reply to the third question, only five resources had to be used sequentially; the others could be 'dipped into' by the students, depending on their needs.

#### ***Accessing the parts of the resource***

The second category was to do with finding and accessing specific information. Arguably, this is an important feature of self-access materials, where the topics and order are not determined by a teacher.

Almost all materials included a table of contents (23) but only just over half (13) had an index of some sort. Additional 'tools', in the form of detailed 'maps' (3), glossaries (6), and chapter previews or summaries (7), were provided by fewer materials.

#### ***The learning process***

Where no teacher is present, self-access materials need to be more comprehensive. Therefore this category contained four questions about support for the learners' learning process. The first of these asked whether information was routinely summarised. This turned out not to be the case in 16 out of the 25 materials. Most materials included examples for tasks, but a fair number (9) did not. Two-thirds of the materials (15) did not provide guidance for the learners by providing objectives for tasks. Surprisingly, nine materials did not include answer keys or criteria for tasks.

### ***Learning to learn***

The final category was to do with learning skills. The majority of the materials (16) included notes on the learning process, but only two provided information on goal-setting.

### ***Interim summary: quantitative results***

Some features were very common, being shared by the majority of materials – most publishers now include clear information about the intended student level. Most of the sampled materials had a table of contents, and many included notes on how to improve one's learning. At the same time, many aspects particularly useful for self-access materials were not equally present. Many books and CD-ROMS did not include (chapter) previews, or summaries, objectives, or even answer keys. It appears evaluations such as those carried out here are useful to identify which materials may either have to be rejected or enhanced in some way.

### ***Materials labelled self-access***

In order to find out if materials labelled as suitable for self-access included more of these types of support, a separate analysis was carried out. All except one of the 13 resources clearly described intended student level. However, only five resources included chapter previews or summaries, and only six summarised key information within chapters. Despite being labelled as self-access resources, four of these did not include examples for tasks and seven did not include objectives. Interestingly, and perhaps worryingly, five did not even include answers keys or criteria for evaluation. Eight out of 13 included notes on the learning process but none gave information on how to set goals.

It appears that the 'self-access' materials were not very different from the regular materials, lacking some important features.

### **Qualitative analysis**

Next, we turn our attention to the comments made by the evaluators in response to each question as well as their overall comments on the resources. These were in the form of additional notes in the right-hand column of the checklist or as sentence completion statements reported below. Three features were mentioned repeatedly: authenticity, learner training, and the 'stand-alone' nature of the materials. In addition, one of the three evaluators mentioned the chance for group learning.

### ***Authenticity***

Authenticity has been listed by many, including Tomlinson (1998), as an important feature of ESL materials. One teacher commented favourably on materials with this feature:

*The best aspect of the resource was the naturalness of the activities because it helps the students feel that they are in real life situations and gives practice in listening to native speech.*

However, this same feature could be viewed negatively:

*The most difficult aspect was (sometimes) the speed of the recordings, because though they are naturally varied in real life, it becomes difficult for the students to understand the words and comprehend the situation without the help of a teacher.*

*The most difficult parts were the exercises towards the end of the book because students may not be able to speak fast enough when they practise the 'relaxed (fast) pronunciation' exercises which are more complex than those at the beginning of the book.*

*The most difficult parts were those parts that a student needs to pronounce long sentences because he/she may find it challenging to speak a long sentence as 'fast' as the narrator does.*

### ***Learner training***

Another important feature of self-access materials is learner training. Again, this was mentioned both positively and negatively. Two features which would assist learners were:

*'Notes on the learning process' (mentioned twice)*

*'Learning Strategies' because students can think through their learning process and modify it prior to or after doing their work.*

However, these notes were also criticized:

*The most difficult part was also 'Notes on the learning process' because sometimes it is difficult to apply a strategy, without being given an example or the chance to practise it with an opportunity to get feedback from someone more experienced. E.g. on page 51 under 'Listening Strategy', students are recommended: "...you need to be aware of a logical, implicit cause-effect relationship" but are not given tips on identifying this 'implicit relationship'.*

*The most difficult parts were also Notes on the learning process because sometimes it is difficult to apply a strategy even if a student understands how to do so. E.g. page 51, 'Listening Strategy'—It states that "...you need to be aware of a logical, implicit cause-effect relationship". It may be difficult for a student to find out the cause-effect relationship which is implicit.*

### ***Opportunities for group learning***

Self-access does not mean learning only on one's own. One teacher supported Tomlinson's point about practice in groups:

*Recommends group discussion based on topics relevant to listening activity*

### ***Independence from teacher***

To be truly self-accessible, materials must be able to be used without a teacher. One evaluator noted a weakness in the teaching of oral language:

*The least satisfactory aspect were the parts about 'stress', 'Intonation' etc. (e.g. page 198) because students may not get the right or accurate message from the author if there is no teacher to explain to them the parts that they are not clear about.*

Others noted poor or missing explanations and examples:

*The least satisfactory aspect was the absence of explanation of grammar rules, which are taught through examples only. The student may not understand why and just understands how the rule works.*

*Examples are provided for some tasks only.*

*The most difficult parts were the 'Consolidation Exercises' because unless a student understands very thoroughly the vocabulary items taught in a chapter, these exercises can be difficult for him/her.*

In contrast, some materials had positive comments for the explanations, including feedback:

*The best aspect ... was clear instructions because it makes it easier for students learning on their own. Also the diagrammatic representations of intonations.*

*The best aspect of the framework was the additional exercises - the feedback glossary and recording option because they make it a complete self-access tool.*

Other comments praised the stand-alone nature of the explanations in some materials; specifically, they listed:

- the letter of explanation unit after each exercise title because it makes it easier for students to go back if they make mistakes (mentioned twice);
- the speaking practice because a student can practise speaking after listening to a sentence and the narrator repeats the sentence (for the student to check);
- 'Progress' because students can plan and check their progress (e.g. there are sub-topics called "All exercises up to now", "Progress graph") (mentioned twice);
- the table of contents because each unit is subcategorised into subtopics like listening, vocabulary, etc. The setting is clear and it is convenient for students to choose the ones they want to practice;
- 'Information summarised' because students know clearly the focus of learning at the beginning of each chapter (in fact, there are about 12 vocabulary items to be learned in each chapter, so one's learning can be really focused but essential);
- chapter previews and summaries because, by doing these parts, students can be actively engaged in the listening tasks before and after doing them.

## Discussion

The books available for this study had already been purchased. Therefore the exercise was to survey materials in general, rather than to make pre-purchasing decisions. Our results suggest that purchasing books for self-access purposes involves more than reading the publishers' publicity. Materials that may be perfectly suitable for use in a classroom environment may not be in a self-access context. Not all materials we surveyed included the support learners in a SAC are likely to need. While it was not surprising to find that this applied to general materials, interestingly, it was also a feature of some materials labelled as suitable for self-access. It is then up to staff to decide whether to keep the materials or make adaptations.

How realistic is it to expect staff, employed for their advisory role, to take the time needed for such a survey? The time investment needed for an evaluation such as the one presented here is relatively small and probably well worth it in ensuring learners have the most appropriate resources available to them, and to increase overall efficiency of the SAC, as suggested by Gardner (1999).

We look forward to reading of any other evaluative checklists which have been developed for the same purpose as ours and also the outcome of any evaluations of self-access materials that have been carried out.

## References

- Gardner, D. (1999) The evaluation of self-access centres. In Morrison, B. (ed.) *Experiments and Evaluation in Self-access Language Learning*, pp. 111-122. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Association for Self-Access Learning & Development.
- Gardner, D. & Miller, L. (1999) *Establishing Self-access: From Theory to Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Reinders, H. & Cotterall, S. (2001) Language learners learning independently: how autonomous are they? *TTWiA*. 65: 85-97.
- Reinders, H. & Lewis, M. (forthcoming) The development of an evaluative checklist for self-access materials. *ELT Journal*.
- Tomlinson, B. (1998) (ed) *Materials Development in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

\* Different terms are used in the field, such as Independent Learning Centre (ILC), Language Support Centre (LSC), self-study centre, etc. Sometimes, Self-Access Centres are part of the Learning Support or Student Learning Centre. Here, we will use the term Self-Access Centre, abbreviated to SAC.

## Appendix: Evaluative checklist

Categories	Yes/No/Unsure
<b>Selecting the resource</b>	
Claims to be suitable for self-access	Yes 13 No 8 Unsure 4
Clearly describes student level	Yes 19 No 6
Needs to be used sequentially	Yes 5 No 19 Unsure 1
<b>Accessing the parts of the resource</b>	
An index	Yes 13 No 12
A table of contents	Yes 23 No 2
A detailed 'map'	Yes 3 No 22
A glossary	Yes 6 No 19
Chapter previews or summaries	Yes 7 No 18
<b>The learning process</b>	
Information summarised	Yes 9 No 16
Examples provided for tasks	Yes 16 No 9
Objectives provided for tasks	Yes 10 No 15
Keys/answers/criteria for tasks	Yes 16 No 9
<b>Learning to learn</b>	
Notes on the learning process	Yes 16 No 9
Shows how to set goals	Yes 2 No 23

*Hayo Reinders is the director of the English Language Self-Access Centre at the University of Auckland. He is co-editor of PacCALL Journal and manages the learner autonomy project inventory. His interests are in learner autonomy, self-access, and computer language learning. (See [www.hayo.nl](http://www.hayo.nl).)*

*Marilyn Lewis has recently retired as senior lecturer at the Department of Applied Language Studies and Linguistics at the University of Auckland, where she taught teaching methodology and academic writing. Previously, she worked in staff development for New Zealand tertiary teachers from a range of disciplines and also taught in Asia.*

# The use of students' name cards in large classes

**Phanitphim Sojisirikul**

*King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi*

## **Abstract**

In teaching classes of 80-120 learners, teachers may be worried about controlling and managing classrooms, communicating with students, and attracting their motivation and interest. One idea to address these problems is for students to wear cards during classes; such cards contain information including students' names. This article reports on a questionnaire survey that investigates students' attitudes towards the use of name cards to examine whether they can facilitate classroom management. The subjects were in four large classes: Classes A and B, with name cards, and Classes C and D, without name cards. In the two former classes, based on the information on their cards, the students had to sit in the same place throughout the semester. The findings show that, at the end of the semester, the students with name cards, to some extent, felt that the use of such cards had made them more alert in class and had facilitated classroom activities, including the formation of groups; moreover, they reported that the cards had helped them make new friends.

## **Background**

Due to the increasing number of students each year, many institutes including King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Thailand, face increasing class sizes. The increased class sizes are likely to affect classroom management. According to the policy of the university, however, teaching quality needs to be maintained despite the increased class sizes. Hitherto in language classes, there have normally been 35-40 students; however, to serve universities' needs and with the limited resources, larger classes are becoming the reality; for instance, at KMUTT, English-language teaching is moving towards class sizes of 80-120 students.

It is generally assumed that "learning occurs in proportion to class size: the smaller the class, the more students learn" (Tripod, n.d.: 1). Research shows that "small classes provide more opportunities for feedback and discussion than large classes, as well as greater student satisfaction" (ibid.: 1). However, it does not suggest that there is any correlation between student learning and class size; rather, "the key to effective instruction and student learning, regardless of class size, is engaging students in active learning" (ibid.).

Although it is worth trying to teach large classes, it is known that they cause some problems. These include the neglect of students' needs as individuals, the loss of class discipline, time-consumption and the lack of students' motivation and interest (Nolasco & Arthur, 1988). Since large class teaching is unavoidable, techniques for delivering good quality education in such settings need to be devised. To reduce the above

problems, students' name cards are implemented. Therefore, the research question of this study is 'What are the students' perceptions towards the use of name cards?'

### **Literature review**

To Nolasco & Arthur (1988: 10), it is always very important for a teacher with a large class to find a way in which to get to know, or at least be able easily to identify, the students, and the first step in this process is learning names. Observation has shown that "a teacher's inaccurate use of students' names has a direct correlation with inattention and discipline problems." Nolasco & Arthur (ibid.) state that "knowing students' names allows a teacher to nominate them with confidence as well as to identify troublemakers."

A possible way to personalize the class and to learn students' names is to use name cards.

"This serves to enable the teacher to respond to the students as individuals and to personalize the class to a much greater degree than one would normally be able to do with a standard roll book." (Duppenthaler, 1991: 65)

Therefore, it could be said that using name cards is "the initial step in showing students that teachers care about them as individuals" (Hayes, 1997: 106).

Conant (2004: 1) puts forward the idea that using name cards not only allows teachers to learn many more of the students' names, but also, when students know that teachers know who they are, "they are often more motivated to be well-prepared." Name learning also indicates that a teacher cares about what students are doing and this helps to contribute to a positive learning environment (Nolasco & Arthur, 1988). In other words, name cards "keep student motivation high and place, to a greater or lesser degree, some of the responsibility for the class where it belongs – with them" (Duppenthaler, 1991: 65). This increases enthusiasm and participation.

Moreover, to Nolasco & Arthur (1988), if teachers make a seating plan where students sit in the same places, they can constantly refer to students during the lesson. Hayes (1997) also states that grouping and simple activities can be arranged from seating plans with name cards. "There should be little movement or noise" (Heath, 1982: 20). It seems that using name cards can help reduce time and facilitate classroom management.

Some of the issues in the use of name cards mentioned above were used as items in the questionnaire developed for this study (see Appendix). It is hoped that some of the problems of large class management will be solvable by using students' name cards.

### **Methodology**

This section aims to give an overview of the research methodology: subjects, implementation of name cards, instruments and data analysis.

#### ***Subjects***

The study was conducted with 295 first-year undergraduate students who enrolled in LNG 101, Fundamental English I, in the academic year 2004. The subjects were four classes of mixed-ability students. There were 79, 79, 69, and 68 students in, respectively,

Classes A, B, C, and D. The former two classes used name cards (details are given below) whereas the latter two did not. The teachers of Classes C and D, for instance, called students' names when checking attendance.

***Implementation of name cards***

The information on the name cards was card number, students' code, first and last names; moreover, there were four colors of card: pink, blue, yellow and green. In the class, the students were arranged according to the number and color of their cards. Starting with pink, student numbers 1-10 sat in order in the first row and numbers 11-20 in the second row. Then it was blue with student numbers 1-10 in the third row and numbers 11-20 in the fourth row. Yellow and green were arranged similarly. The students had to sit in the same positions as given by their color and number throughout the course.

It was the students who kept the cards. They had to stick their own card on their chest whenever they came into the class. The teacher checked students' attendance regarding their position. If a certain seat was empty, it was obvious to the teacher. The teacher also handled classroom activities using name cards.

***Instruments***

A questionnaire was administered at the end of the semester (see Appendix). It consisted of two parts. Part I was a rating-scale and was administered to collect the students' attitudes towards issues related to the use of name cards. Each item consisted of a four-point rating-scale: 4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Neither agree nor disagree and 1 = Disagree. Part II was open-ended and called for additional comments; it was used only with the two classes using name cards (Classes A and B).

***Data analysis***

Each part of the questionnaire was analyzed. Part I contained questions on how students felt towards different issues connected with using name cards. The data was calculated as arithmetic means ( $\bar{X}$ ) and interpreted as follows:

**Criteria for rating-scale interpretation**

Mean ( $\bar{X}$ )	Interpretation
1.00-1.75	Disagree
1.76-2.50	Neither agree nor disagree
2.51-3.25	Agree
3.26-4.00	Strongly agree

Part II of the questionnaire was open-ended. The subjects could answer with any suggestions or comments. The responses obtained were collected and grouped into main themes relevant to the research question. The number of students who had the same ideas was also counted.

## Findings

It was the purpose of this study to find out students' attitudes towards the use of name cards and whether their use facilitates classroom management. The data from the questionnaire were used to yield that finding.

### *Rating-scale questions*

The rating-scale part of the questionnaire aimed to collect students' attitudes on issues related to the use of name cards. The data obtained were calculated for arithmetic means, and the findings are presented in Table 1. While we might have expected the means for Classes A and B to be higher than they are, the data obtained from the rating-scale questions can be divided into three major areas. The first concerns the helpfulness of name cards. From the differences in mean scores in Table 1, it can be said that name cards may help to increase the alertness of students, especially for answering questions (item 5). The other helpful aspect of name cards is that they help students form groups easily when doing activities in the class (item 6). The students will group themselves according to the color and number of their cards. Therefore, they spend a short time forming groups.

**Table 1: Comparison of mean scores between classes with and without name cards**

Attitudes towards issues related to the use of name cards	Classes A and B with name cards ( $\bar{X}$ )	Classes C and D without name cards ( $\bar{X}$ )	The differences of mean scores of two types of classes
1. The teacher knows my name.	2.83	2.87	-0.04
2. The teacher spends a few minutes checking students' names.	3.10	3.10	0.00
3. My friends know my name.	2.99	3.13	-0.14
4. I learn to work with new friends.	2.98	2.95	0.03
5. I am always alert when learning, especially when the teacher asks me questions.	3.03	2.75	0.28
6. It is easy to form groups.	3.08	2.95	0.13

The second area is the points where the use of name cards does not seem to have much effect. From Table 1, the data show that seeing students' names does not mean the teacher is able to remember their names (item 1), makes no difference in the amount of time the teacher spends in checking students' names (item 2), and does not facilitate students to work with new friends (item 4). Finally, the data from Table 1 suggest that using name cards does not help students get to know their friends' names even though they can see their friends' names by the cards on their chests (item 3). This finding is in direct contrast to our expectations. Comparison of Classes A & B and C & D is in the discussion section below.

### *Open-ended questions*

The open-ended part of the questionnaire was completed by Classes A and B only and aimed to gather students' comments towards the use of name cards. Relevant ideas were grouped together and the number of students who gave those comments was counted. The data are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2: Students’ attitudes towards the use of name cards**

Students’ comments concerning name cards	Number of students
1. reduce time for checking attendance	40
2. facilitate classroom activities	32
3. help students get to know each other	24
4. increase students’ participation	8
5. help the teacher know students	7
6. help the teacher remember students	6
7. increase students’ sense of responsibility	6
8. motivate students to learn	3
9. create sense of self-discipline	2

From the students’ open-ended comments, we can see that the students identify three strong points concerning the use of name cards: reducing time for the teacher in checking students’ attendance (mentioned by 40 students), forming groups easily when doing activities in class (32 students), and knowing each other well (24 students).

### **Discussion**

Regarding the purposes of the study, the expectations concerning the use of name cards are the facilitation of the six following problematic areas: knowing students’ names, reducing time for checking attendance, increasing students’ motivation and participation, managing classroom activities, getting students to know each other, and getting students to work together. From the findings in Table 1, there are only two areas in which name cards may help while, from Table 2, there are three.

Concerning Table 1, name cards help increase students’ motivation and participation and also facilitate classroom management. In Table 2, they help reduce time for checking attendance, facilitate classroom management and increase the acquaintance among students. The main way in which name cards may help teachers, therefore, is in classroom management.

The findings in Table 1 also show that students do not know their friends’ names despite using name cards. This may be because students could be familiar with their friends’ nicknames. Remembering their friends’ full first names and last names might make them feel uneasy. Therefore, if students’ nicknames are added in the cards, students might know their friends’ names more.

When the two sets of data are compared, there are two contrasts highlighted. Following the use of name cards, Table 1 shows no difference in the amount of time for checking attendance between Classes A & B and Classes C & D. Students also argue that name cards do not help them know their friends’ names. In contrast, these two points are the highlights of Table 2. These differences between the findings in the two tables need explanation.

If two or more research instruments are involved in data collection or comparison, the methodology is known as triangulation: “demonstrating the same findings through different sources” (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989: 105). The standard use of triangulation is

the support a particular instrument provides to others to place validity and reliability on the findings. In this research, however, this is not the case. Triangulation is for a different use: the comparison of different findings (Watson Todd, 2003). “Focusing on the differences between multiple perspectives could shed light on the validity of the analysis” (ibid: 167). What do the conflicting findings show?

Are the findings from the open-ended part likely to differ from those of the rating-scale questions? It seems unlikely. One possible reason for the difference observed in this study is that the statements in the rating-scale questions suggested answers for students in the open-ended part. Aspects that are most important for both class types (A & B and C & D) are still identified in the open-ended part. Regarding students’ attitudes, the use of name cards really helps reduce time for checking attendance. The majority of students said cards were very convenient and saved time for teachers to check attendance. When the data of Table 1 is compared across the two class types, although there is no difference of mean scores in checking attendance between two types of classes, the actual means are quite high (3.10). For Classes A and B, students agree that the use of name cards helps reduce the time consumption of checking attendance; for Classes C and D, it may be that the students were chatting while attendance was checked and so were unaware of the time taken for that trivial activity.

### **Conclusion**

This study has given some perspectives from students in large classes on the use of name cards. It has provided evidence that, among other things, they believe name cards have a tendency to facilitate class management in such matters as group formation while at the same time making them, as students, more alert during classes. Introducing students’ name cards is something that is very easy to implement. For teachers who are worried about managing increasingly large classes, name cards may be a solution to some associated problems, especially regarding class management.

### **References**

- Conant, J. (2004) *Discussion Teaching in Large Class Settings*. Available: <http://www.learning.com/marketing/gitm/gitm4e08-17.html> [accessed 17<sup>th</sup> June 2004].
- Duppenthaler, P. (1991) Suggestions for large classes. *Guidelines* 13:1: 64-71.
- George, H. V. (1991) Language learning in large classes. *Guidelines* 13:1:585-63.
- Hayes, D. (1997) Helping teachers to cope with large classes. *ELT Journal* 51:2:106-116.
- Heath, R. (1982) Organizing groupwork in large English classes. *Guidelines* 4:2:19-25.
- Nolasco, R. & Arthur, A. (1988) *Large Classes*. London: Macmillan.
- Safnil (1991) Techniques of dealing with large English classes. *Guidelines* 13:1:82-86.
- Seliger, H. W. & Shohamy, E. (1989) *Second Language Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Tripod (n.d.) *Effective Teaching and Learning in Large Classes* (Module 3). Available: <http://breda-guide.tripod.com/New-5htm> [accessed 17<sup>th</sup> June 2004].
- Watson Todd, R. (2003) *Three Purposes of Triangulation in Language Teaching Research*. Selected Proceedings of the International Conference: Research in ELT, 9-11<sup>th</sup> April 2003, King Mongkut’s University of Technology Thonburi (KMUTT), Bangkok.

**Appendix: Questionnaire**

**‘Does using students’ name cards help facilitate large class management?’**

There are two parts to the questionnaire. The aim is to investigate students’ attitudes towards the use of name cards and whether it helps facilitate the management of large classes. Please cooperate in answering the following questions. The data obtained will be very useful to the development of course curricula. The responses will be kept secret and have no effect on your educational requirements.

**Part I**

**Instructions:** Put a tick (√) in the boxes which best match with your opinions.

Opinions towards the use of name cards	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree
1. The teacher knows my name.				
2. The teacher spends a few minutes checking students’ names.				
3. My friends know my name.				
4. I learn to work with new friends.				
5. I am always alert when learning, especially when the teacher asks me questions.				
6. It is easy to form groups.				

**Part II**

**Instructions:** Express your attitudes and feelings towards the use of name cards in large classes.

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

**ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION**  
(One issue per year)

**Inside Thailand:** 50 baht  
**Outside Thailand:** US\$10 (including postage and registration)

Please send me one issue of rEFlections annually, beginning with  
Volume No.....Year.....

**Name & title:**.....

**Position:**.....

**Institute:**.....

**Mailing address:**.....  
.....  
.....

**Payment enclosed (please tick):**

Bank cheque..... Money order..... Postal order.....

Please make cheques/orders payable to:  
Khun Wacharin Sukvirat

Mail this subscription form and your payment to:

**The Editors, rEFlections,  
Department of Language Studies  
KMUTT  
Bangmod  
Tung Khru  
Bangkok 10140  
Thailand**