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E-behaviors and E-community Formation: An Investigation on Vietnamese EFL Students

Dang Tan Tin & Margaret Robertson

Bio Data

Dang Tan Tin is an ESL teacher/lecturer in Vietnam. After returning from the University of Queensland in mid-2005, he started to work as an academic manager in SEAMEO Regional Training Center and was involved in different projects and initiatives regarding ICT in education. He is currently working toward his PhD at La Trobe University. His research interests include learner autonomy and CALL.

Margaret Robertson is a professor in education at La Trobe University. She is widely published in books and journals, with extensive international expertise in teaching and research project management. Her career-long interests in quality learning environments are linked with an enduring passion for geographical and sustainable education and knowing more about visual and spatial literacies.

Abstract

Online communications have been widely researched in different education contexts during the last two decades. Together with the development of emerging technology, educational applications have received a huge change in e-communication modes, from unidirectional to interactive websites, asynchronous to synchronous exchanges, and stand alone to networked real-time simulations. These have constituted a platform for the development of online social life and communities. To take advantage of this environment for educational benefits, this study particularly attempts to investigate the habitual behaviors of undergraduates in Vietnam who study English as a Foreign Language when they interact with a Moodle site during an English course. It specifically focuses on students' expectations and awareness of online communication, their preferences related to instant messenger and blogging, and influential impacts on the formation of the online communities. Qualitative data from individual interviews and document analyses have shown that students prefer to use synchronous communication modes and look for instant responses regardless of how often they go online. In addition, the shaping of the online educational communities needs a lot of support, reinforcement, and nurture from the facilitators and real life connections. Finally, the discussion suggests a possible analytical framework for online learning community investigation.

1. Introduction

With the non-stop advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) during the last decades, humans have been provided with numerous educational platforms such as CD/DVD players, projectors, and software applications and different means of e-communication such as email, discussion board, chatting, blogging, messaging, and social networking. A lot of attempts to take advantage of ICT for educational purposes have therefore been documented. However, its applications are still limited in the area of second language (L2) training in developing countries such as Vietnam where technology infrastructure in education has not been well-developed, and L2 students have not properly grasped necessary skills to involve themselves effectively in the technology provided.

Therefore, this exploratory study attempts to document the awareness and behaviors of Vietnamese students in higher education when they participate in a virtual learning environment. It also investigates the formation of this environment and mediated factors. The documentation can then be used to inform pedagogical practices, facilitating students' engagement and increasing their learning outcomes. Using a sample of L2 students and employing an interpretive paradigm, this paper begins with a brief discussion on the development of ICT infrastructure in Vietnam and the reason for online technology adopted for investigation. It then continues with a critical review of the literature in online communication and computer assisted language learning (CALL) to set out the significance of the current study. After presenting the research design and reporting the results, it highlights several issues in the discussion section and puts forward important considerations for future research in the conclusion.

2. Context

With a centralized mechanism and recent efforts in education investment, Vietnam makes the scene of its technology availability and usage in educational settings generally different from that in other countries. Since the popular arrival of cassette players at schools long time ago, technological equipment such as CD player, video player, and overhead projector has not been found to follow as in many developed countries. Only a few PCs were installed for administrative work. Therefore, the ICT infrastructure in schools even at the higher education level was poorly equipped up to late 2005. In contrast, many families started to afford a personal computer (PC) for

their children at home in early 2000, when numerous educational software applications were developed. More recently, the popular presence of the internet in the country and the very affordable broadband offers from local providers have made PCs or even laptops and portable devices become part of children's life in many families, particularly in big cities. Consequently, there was a big gap between students' use of computer technology at home and at school except for those majoring in information technology-related areas. A general comparison is presented in Figu
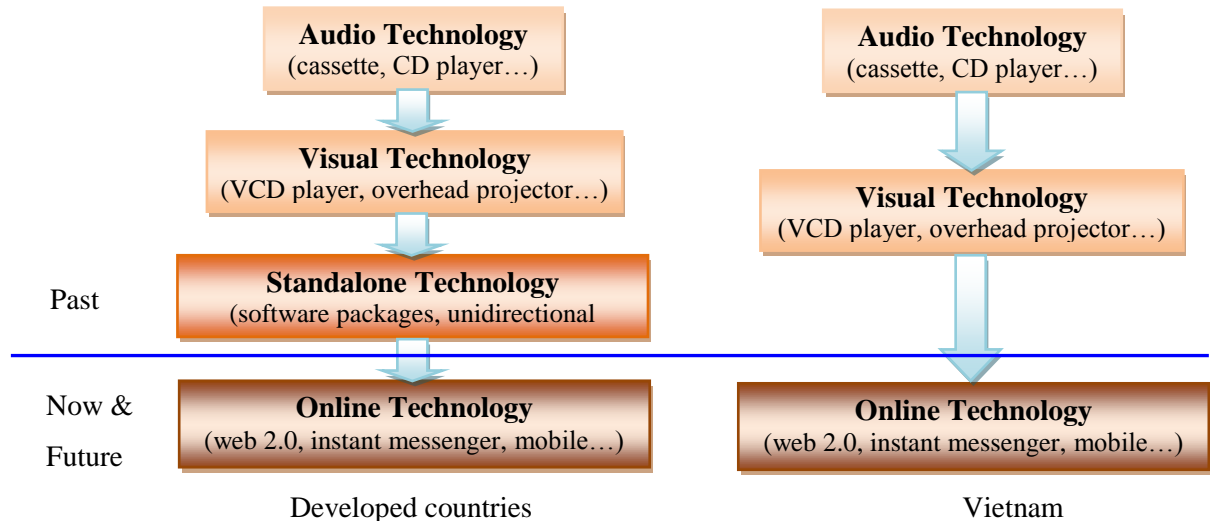

Figure 1: The arrival of emerging technology

The ICT investment in private and public schools reflected a competitive race between these two school sectors. The private school sector began setting up its own ICT infrastructure in mid 2000s while this investment in the public school sector started in late 2008. As the private sector was self-funded, it was more flexible in using its budget to compete with the public sector. A few years later, acknowledging the advantages of ICT in education, preparing strategic development plans, and being approved by the government, the national education authority commenced setting up the ICT system across school levels with a stronger emphasis on tertiary education. This was marked by the decree No 55/2008/CT- BGDĐT, which provided directives on the establishment and usage of ICT in education. It was expected that most educational institutions would be fully equipped by 2012.

Being lately constructed, the ICT system in education in Vietnam inherited most of the modern technology. It moved from a very poor technology-equipped situation to a modern one with networked computers and fiber optic cable internet connection. Although the software management system has not been properly

designed, the hardware infrastructure and internet connection are expected to be exemplary. Therefore, the technology that is and will be adopted by local educators is the online one which features the e-communication modes, web 2.0, social networking, and mobile technology. This is reinforced by students' current usages of computers at home such as taking part in discussion boards of interests, instant messaging, and blogging. The selection of online technology was also pedagogically based as online technology would facilitate personalized learning (Robertson, Webb, & Fluck, 2007) and provide students a collaborative environment to construct knowledge through self-projection (Garrison & Anderson, 2003), active participation, and negotiation (Oliver, 2001; Vygotsky & Kozulin, 1986). Taking these social and educational factors into consideration, this study focused on the online technology and L2 students' behaviors in that virtual world.

3. Literature Review

3. 1. Networked Communication

Human networked communication, the process of transferring or exchanging ideas via ICT tools, has been widely researched from different disciplines. In L2 education particularly, the integration of local networked communication into school programs has been indicated to give students more opportunities to express ideas (Kern, 1995) with richer linguistic production (Beauvois, 1992), increase their course engagement (Sullivan & Pratt, 1996), and enhance their oral proficiency (Payne & Whitney, 2002). Recently, the employment of different communication channels via internet such as blog, wiki, instant messenger (IM), massively multiplayer online game (MMOG) and social network, has been identified to provide students with vocabulary resources embedded in rich simulated contexts (Purushotma, 2005), increase their confidence, help them recognize language genres (Lam, 2004), and enable them to use L2 more successfully (Hanna & de Nooy, 2003).

3. 2. Cybercommunity Investigations

As communication is always associated with interlocutors' context, interpretation and error (Marshall, 2008), a number of recent studies have attempted to inform educators by historically describing the establishment and operation of cybercommunity such as weblog or blog (e. g., Downes, 2004; Mortensen, 2008; Mortensen & Walker, 2002), discussion forum (e. g., Bhappu, Ebner, Kaufman, & Welsh, 2009), social network (e.

g., Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007), IM (e.g., Baron, Squires, Tench & Thompson, 2005; Jacobs, 2008; Lewis & Fabos, 2005), and MMOG (e. g., Ducheneaut, Moore, & Nickell, 2004; Steinkuehler, 2008). Emerging from studies of this new genre of computer mediated communication (CMC) was the inquiry of socio-cultural investigations and related networked-mediated attributes for a better understanding of this non-physically existent community (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1990; Thomas, 2008).

As a result, different theoretical traditions have been drawn on to help researchers elicit insights of the cybercommunity and its communicative transactions. These included broad discussions such as the revisited tension between humanist and behaviorist approach in online situations (Shedletsky & Aiken, 2004), feminist theory (as discussed in Rosser, 2006), Vigotsky-derived theory (Hull & Saxon, 2009), the community of practice (Wenger, 1999) as employed in Thomas (2005), and the flow experience of Csikszentmihalyi (2000) (as discussed in Voiskounsky, 2008). On a more operationalized level was the development of different frameworks such as the three spatial dimensions of online community, namely ontological, social and metaphorical spaces (Gotved, 2002), the integrated cyberconflict framework which was derived from social movement theory, conflict theory and media theory (Karatzogianni, 2006), and the online community framework (Souza & Preece, 2004) developed from semiotic theory (Eco, 1976) to name a few. These indicated that the topic has been examined from various perspectives, ranging from philosophy, media, and critical sociology to ethnography, discursiveness, psychology, socio-cultural perspective, and education (Thomas, 2008).

3. 3. Cyber Communication in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Despite being substantially researched in various disciplines, cyber communication in L2 education has not been empirically investigated. Depicted in contemporary CALL research were several critical issues. Substantial reviews have shown that there was a quite weak judgment on the choice of a technology in relation to the course objectives (Stockwell, 2007). In addition, the selection of variables to be examined was often inappropriately located in the research design; and the results reported were very ambiguous (Felix, 2005). Furthermore, inadequate attention was paid to learners' level of ICT capability although most of them were novices to CALL (Hubbard, 2005).

Given the immaturity of CMC research in L2 education, the complicated diversity of theory employed in research, and cultural differences, it is necessary to document more research focusing on L2 students' expectation of and behaviors in cybercommunication. In addition, any possible relationship between students' online activities with their daily offline practices needs to be taken into account. This means the socio-cultural richness of local contexts can be employed to understand the ICT usage pattern because of its central roles in online communicative exchanges (Bakhtin & Holquist, 1990; Thomas, 2008). It even becomes more important for Asian contexts due to its diversified culture and the increasing number of online users but small number of investigations.

4. The Present Study

4. 1. Research Questions

The study aimed to investigate the habitual behaviors of undergraduate students in Vietnam who studied English as a Foreign Language (EFL) when they interacted with a Moodle 1.9 site during an English course. It attempted to address (i) students' expectations and awareness when communicating online; (ii) their favorite communication modes in online technology; and (iii) possible mediating factors for the formation of their cybercommunities. The research design also allowed other learning variables to be examined, but they are not reported in this paper.

4. 2. Subjects

The subjects of the study were 247 EFL undergraduate students in a public university in Vietnam. Most of them were from 18 to 19 years old and in the second semester of their candidature. All of them enrolled in the Listening – Speaking course and were divided into five groups which were taught by three lecturers. Their classes met once a week during 16 weeks and each meeting lasted for four hours. They had not worked with any Learning or Course Management System (LMS or CMS) as part of their school activity prior to this study.

4. 3. Measurements

The study employed a mixed method design, including a short demographic survey, documents derived from the LMS reports and email exchanges during the course, and semi-structured individual interviews by the end of the course. The survey consists of

items to describe the sample such as gender, age range, and self-rated level of computer proficiency. The reports generated from LMS include login error details, global forum statistics, and course activities statistics. Relevant communication with the webmaster via email and IM regarding technical supports were documented. The interview comprises three groups of guided questions to elicit students' expectations when taking part in the virtual space, their preferences on using certain modes of online communication and factors associated with their cybercommunities. The assessment of each variable is indicated in the following sections.

As the study attempted to document local students' expectation and behaviors as they worked with the LMS, the data process was designed to accommodate different responses from the subjects. Therefore, the semi-structured interview was selected to gain access to the participants' mind and extract their thoughts and preferences (Tuckman, 1999). The interview questions were piloted with two students from the same cohort before the main interview data was collected for content validation. All of the interviews were conducted by the same researcher. The interviewees were also advised to possibly use any English words or phrases that they thought more convenient to express themselves although the interview language was their mother tongue. In addition, the interviewer paid serious attention to the local socio-cultural characteristics during every interview such as relationship maintenance, cheerful atmosphere, and appropriate motivating stimuli. All of these data were then located in a situation which was profiled by the data from the demographic survey and LMS reports.

4. 3. 1. Awareness and expectation investigations
Students' awareness of taking part in the LMS was initially examined by analyzing the login error report and their selection of using a communication mode to achieve a purpose. It was also addressed by students' interview responses, concerning their decision on posting either a text message or a voice message in a thread. Their expectation in the pre- ,while- and post-phases of the online participation processes was elicited by the first group of interview questions such as "*How often do you access the LMS, and what do you often want to see or get from it?*" and "*What do you hope for after completing a task or posting a message on LMS?*"

4. 3. 2. Communication mode preference investigations

Students' favorite modes of online communication were described by retrospective descriptions of their online daily habits. They were asked to re-tell a normal process of their going online by responding to the second group of interview questions such as *"When you would like to go online, you turn on your computer and what do you often do next? What do you often do after that and what for?"* and *"If you have something interesting or sad and would like to share with the others, how would you do that?"* All modes of online communication identified in each conversation such as IM, email, blog, forum were noted, and the reasons for using each of them in a certain order were explored. The communication modes that students often used to seek technical support were also documented to include in the analysis.

4. 3. 3. Cybercommunity formation investigations

The formation of online communities was investigated from both the LMS and other anticipated social networks. First, observation was done on the community development within each class and across the classes of the same course. Participation in each community was analyzed in consideration with the roles of lecturers in charge. Second, in the last section of the interview, the interviewees were asked to name some of the online communities that they had ever been involved with as a member, why they joined, and how they built up and maintained their connections with other members. The main questions were *"Do you participate in any social network? What do you often do with that and what for?"* If they did not have any social network, they were also asked why they did not. The relationship between their real life contacts and online contacts was also addressed in the interview session.

4. 4. Procedures

The Vietnamese version of the demographic survey which had undergone a back-translation process was distributed to the participants at the beginning of the course. After that, students' email addresses were collected and students' LMS accounts were generated from a Moodle site which had been set up and trialed for six months. They were told to expect an email which provided their own account information and general details about how to access, navigate the site and seek support by the end of the first week. A demo tutorial about all the functions of the site was conducted in each class in the second week. A question and answer section was followed and

technical support was provided to both students and lecturers during the course to minimize technical barriers.

The LMS site was hosted in the same city where the participants were staying to facilitate loading speed. Players for the Voice of America (VOA) and British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) radio channels were integrated. A randomly shown clip box from Youtube was also added to the home page of the site. In addition, the default blog module of Moodle was replaced by the OU blog, giving students more flexible options such as allowing comment and setting visibility level for each entry. A function for posting voice messages, using NanoGong technology, was also included in the site. This module allowed students to record their talk in an audio file, replay it and embed it in their posting with a few clicks, instead of typing in the message.

The site was password-protected and structured into three main sections, namely personal section, class section, and public section. The first one allowed each student to update a number of personal details such as nickname, favorites, IM username, blog url. The second section could be accessed by only members of each respective class. It featured a number of activities facilitated by the class lecturers and was the place for students to perform their learning. The public section included a *notice board*, a *technical support forum*, a *general discussion forum*, a *chat room*, and a *global blog*. A separate section for lecturers was also created to maintain the discussions among lecturers and the webmaster. In addition, every site member could always track the login records of the others with a simple click.

The activities from LMS started in the third week and prolonged to the end of the course. It weighted 15 percent in the course score for the first four classes and was totally optional for students in the fifth class. By the end of the course, students were invited to take part in an individual interview and several responded, except for the fifth class. The interview conversations were transcribed and translated into English. Reported in this study were the four cases from the first four classes. The selection of these cases was based on the richness of the data produced by the subjects.

5. Results

There was a total of 247 students enrolled in five classes, but only 147 students (118 females and 29 males) responded to the survey. This balance between males and females corresponded to the normal gender distribution in an EFL major in Vietnam generally. These students rated their level of computer proficiency (general skills such as MS Office, web, chat, email, blog…) as a little above average (M=3.12, given $M_{average}$=3). Most of them thought that their computer skills were average (63.3 percent); others thought that their skills were either good (21.1 percent) or very good (3.4 percent). Only 19 students rated their computer skills as bad and very bad, taking 8.2 percent and 4.1 percent of the total sample respectively.

Although the LMS outline for every class was almost similar, students' participation in each class was varied. The virtual class outline was structured into six categories, namely *course administration, sharing learning experience, improving listening skills, improving speaking skills, group presentations* and *short tests and quizzes*. Each category included subcategories, depending on the lecturers. Students in the first four classes regularly took part in the LMS activities, but only 14 out of 36 students in the fifth group (whose participation was totally nonobligatory) accessed the LMS. Their level of access was also very limited in both public and class sections. Their postings were found in the public section only, not in their own class page.

5. 1. Awareness and Expectation

5. 1. 1. Technological awareness

Log file analyses indicated that many students were not aware of their login accounts. There were 221 login attempts using *odd* username patterns by 80 student turns. These usernames included full email address, part of email address, full name with blanks, and username or nickname from somewhere else. In several cases, up to seven or eight consecutive attempts of an odd username were identified. Some students used their own email accounts, instead of their LMS accounts, to log in the LMS and had to seek technical support after several failures. One student even forwarded her account details to another person and asked him to communicate with the webmaster although she did not have any problem. She was not aware of revealing her personal details and violating the course requirements when doing that.

Examining the communication between the webmaster and students via email and IM also brought the issue of technological awareness into account. Several

students insisted that their email addresses did not include *.vn* at the end although this was clearly indicated in their mailboxes. Many others who failed to seek technical support via IM due to the unavailability of the service at certain times did not use the alternative communication mode. They did not leave any details that enabled the webmaster to track their account details later to provide support either. Therefore, many technical conversations were unintentionally divided into different pieces, carried out time by time. These examples indicated that a group of students encountered even basic technical problems, while the majority of them did not.

5. 1. 2. Content awareness

The qualitative differences between thread starting postings and thread replying postings were clearly presented across virtual classes. While the thread starting messages were often seen in the form of a paragraph or two and rich in contents, most of the replies were short, normally in the form of a phrase, a sentence or two. Some students also reported that they often came to the site to post their messages, read comments from the others on their previous messages and reply if necessary. They were not quite interested in reading their classmates' postings. Some others were relatively selective in clicking on a thread to read or joining an activity.

No voice message was posted across the five classes during the course with different reasons, indicating different levels of participation awareness. Some students reported that they did not know about the availability of the voice message facility. Some reported that they knew about the facility but did not have necessary equipment such as microphone and speakers to be able to record their talks. Some others recorded their talks but did not post the files due to insufficient confidence or potential criticism from their peers. Two of the responses to the question "*Why didn't you post any voice message?*" are included below.
Student D:

> "*First, it is fine to type my messages. Second, other people may not understand what I say* [if I post my voice message]. *Third, I do not like to listen to my voice. Online text messages are just the same for everyone, no personality can be revealed.*"

Student Th:

> *"After recording my talk, I feel that it is very different from my real voice or not as good as my real voice. And the main reason is that I am not confident enough with my pronunciation. […If] I become the first person posting voice messages, others will think that I am too arrogant because my voice is not sweet enough, and my pronunciation is not totally accurate."*

5. 1. 3. Expectation

Students' level of expectation about the LMS was very different, resulting from seeing it as a compulsory uninteresting course component to a joyful and useful playground to engage in. Further investigations on this variable showed that the feeling of having to work with the LMS did not always produce the feeling that the site was uninteresting and useless. Similarly, the feeling of enjoying the site did not always come from the eye-catching interface or the interesting contents. Students' expressions of attitude toward the LMS and their behaviors are presented below to frame their mixed expectations.

Student T indicated that because regular participation in virtual class activities was required, LMS became the first site that he came to every time he went online. However, that did not prevent him from enjoying surfing the LMS, posting messages, sharing video clips, and commenting on his peers' postings. This experience was similar to that of student H, who often went to the site for the lecturer's postings and took part in those discussion threads. These reflected a move from an outsider to an insider of the community, gradually establishing relationships and controlling the situation (as presented in Bhappu et al., 2009). On the contrary, student Th said that she did not care much about the LMS and "always came to it at last" every time she went online. She sometimes shut down the computer without logging into the LMS even though it was her plan to check what was going on in her virtual class initially.

Similar to the blogging students of Burgess (2006), the level of LMS access in this study was different from one student to another. Some did not go to the site regularly because they considered it as an out-of-plan or leisure activity (student H and Th respectively). Meanwhile, two other students (student T and D) saved more time for the course than usual. They also prepared something before coming to the site. These differences basically reflected the availability of facilities to students and

their level of expectation about the LMS. If they expected to enrich their knowledge from the site, exchange ideas with friends, and contribute to the virtual class resources, they came to the site more regularly and even more frequently in some cases. However, if they did not expect to get much from the site, they did not get there often regardless of how often they went online.

The students' expectation about the LMS activities while taking part in the online activities was also dissimilar. While student D and T only paid attention to the ideas presented in the postings, students H and Th often attempted to evaluate their friends' postings and referred to their friends' performance in face-to-face class. Similarly, student D, T and Th indicated that they would leave comments on the postings that were interesting to them. However, student H seemed to be very resistant to giving comments. She sometimes typed her comments down but did not post them. Students' reaction to a new and interesting topic was also different. Student H reported that she thought about it and planned to revisit it for further details, meanwhile student T said that he would look for additional details about the topic in other resources.

Students' expectations after completing an online task were also various. Although most of them agreed that they often looked for comments on their work, their perspectives on getting feedback were very different. Student D thought that the number of comments on her work indicated the degree of its quality, but student Th disagreed with that. Student T would read his postings again if they received any feedback, but student H rarely read her postings again in any situation. Student T expected comments from the lecturer while student D did not. Student D preferred to have a relaxing communicative environment which was not monitored and controlled by strict rules and regulations.

5. 2. Preference on Communication Mode

All students reported that they were involved in using IM, email and social networking although the facilities for these activities were not available at school, and they were not formally trained to take part in that social domain. Yahoo services were most favored by this group of students, reflecting the convenient and suitable applications that this provider offered to the local market. Their habitual behavior of logging in to Yahoo Messenger (YM) when starting their online activities seemingly indicated the importance of this communication channel to them. It was reported to be

used for maintaining connections with friends by three students. However, student H only used it to send very short and reminding messages to some friends although she always had access to YM.

Students' selection of email and social network channels for communication reflected the type of information and communicative objectives. All students agreed that blogging was used to share emotions, diaries and personal stories. However student H used it very little in comparison to the others who accessed their blogs on a daily basis. She spent more time on reading and responding to emails. In contrast, student Th rarely used email, and student T only used it to receive notifications from his social networks. It was also noted that students H and T said that they maintained different social networks at the same time because their current network was about to close or they would like to be connected all the time.

Examining over 200 email threads and YM dialogues regarding technical issues during the course indicated that students' selection of a communication mode also depended on the convenience of the technology and their immediate expectations in a communicative session. Many of them did not want to log in their webmail account and looked for the support email; it was easier and faster to contact the webmaster with a few clicks, using YM which was currently running. This also happened with those who stayed online more frequently and needed instant responses. In contrast, those using email were more careful in addressing the problems that they encountered and included more details to facilitate processing their request. These indicated that if the students put great importance on the requests and sincerely expected a satisfactory answer, they would use email with careful descriptions of the problems. Otherwise, IM was adopted.

5. 3. Cybercommunity Formation

5. 3. 1. LMS community

The LMS community development reflected a moving trend toward the bigger group where more active participants with more postings were found. All students and lecturers made a very limited number of postings (10 threads and 23 replies) in the *reflective learning* section in their five virtual classes. On the contrary, a huge number of postings were found in *global forum* (21 threads and 12 replies) and *global blog* (113 threads and 114 replies) where everyone in the cohort could access although postings in this public section did not count for the course score. A student even asked

if she could move to another class to take part in the active discussion that she knew of from her friends because her virtual class was very quiet.

The lecturers' participation played a crucial role in facilitating the development of the LMS community. Most students in the fifth class did not go to their virtual classroom probably because the lecturer went there once or twice at the beginning of the course only. She may not have mentioned the online component during her class meetings either. In addition, the online participation was totally optional for this class, i.e., the virtual class did not have any weighting on the course score. In contrast, the lecturers of other classes frequently came to the site and facilitated several activities. The online component was compulsory for their students, and they even brought some online conversations to the class for further discussions sometimes. Therefore, it could be seen that all of their students had certain levels of participation in the virtual class.

5. 3. 2. Other online communities

The students' online communities other than the one from the school LMS were indicated to form from the connections in real life. All of the four interviewee students reported that more than 65 percent of their friendlist contacts were the people that they had seen and talked to in real life. Their behaviors of new contact establishment showed that they had different levels of openness, varying from relatively open to very reserved. Student Th and T had never seen around 30-35% of their contact lists. They got connected with new people from friends' introductions, special interest forums, and blog entries. They could start adding new contacts if they felt interested and ready to confirm adding requests from the others. This was completely different from student D and H who had not met only 1-5 percent of people in their contact list. These two students were also very selective in accepting friend requests and never actively added new contacts. Pairing these numbers with 9% of strangers in American teenagers' friendlist (Lenhart & Madden, 2007) would suggest a rather similar pattern across cultures.

6. Discussion

The number of students' failed login records and their awareness of their own email address form indicated that several of them were relatively technologically naïve. While a majority of students were aware that different systems were unlikely to use the same login account, many others were not. As they normally used only one favorite system for online communication, they automatically keyed in the same account whenever being asked for one. Similarly, they were not fully aware of their complete email addresses as they often checked their mailbox from the IM program. Meanwhile, their self-rated level of computer proficiency was a little over average. These data seemed to indicate a discrepancy between students' behaviors of using technology and their self-rated level of technology skills. They tended to think that they knew how to use it because they used it very often. However, they might not understand the concepts behind it. The main reason for this may originate from the local situation where most of students achieved internet skills through informal learning. In other words, the internet technology was popularly available at home and in internet cafés, but it was not used in their learning activities at school. As a result, it was suggested that basic technical knowledge was not necessarily acquired even when frequent self-access to internet and cyber communication were achieved. It was also suggested that these students may not need a training period to be familiar with the technology adopted as presented in Xei (2002), for example. However, a set of critical sessions on technology use with explicit explanations of the concepts behind would be more useful for them.

In contrast to students' inappropriate attention to technical issues, they gave careful consideration to the message content that they put online. They fully understood that the personality and capability demonstrated in their postings would probably be evaluated by some audience. Therefore, they tried to minimize their mistakes, demonstrate their skills and maintain a friendly community atmosphere to promote their face. They wanted to be recognized by the community, and that was not different from what Mortensen (2008) acknowledged in her blogging experience. These indicated that the local students considered the online learning space as formal as their traditional offline class. In addition, they used the anonymity feature of the cyberspace to conform themselves to the culture of the online community rather than taking advantage of that for rebellion or destructive purposes. In other words, students tended to construct a positive and unique identity or netizenship (as in Burgess, 2006)

that potentially distinguished them from the others without damaging the community.

Relating students' engagement in the LMS class section and LMS public section with other free social networks suggested a complex pattern of behaviors and communicative purposes. In principle, the virtual class participation was basically to fulfill the course requirements while the LMS public section and other social communities were more about sharing feelings and demonstrating personalities. However, some students became interested in their virtual class during the course and engaged more intensively in that small community. They found it easier and had more confidence to express themselves (c.f., Kern, 1995; Lam, 2004) academically and socially. These participation differences in the virtual environment indicate that larger and informal communities often gained students' preference, but the level of engagement is also associated with participants' sense of belonging which can gradually be built up. It is also suggested that the local students were attempting to include informal content in their online learning space, and that increased their online engagement. These results challenge the learning engagement in the traditional offline class where only formal content is allowed.

Connectedness, instance, and convenience were the most prominent attributes for students' preference of online communication. Although mutual visibility was not gained in the online communication modalities investigated in this study, interlocutors often expected prompt responses once starting an online conversation. If their expectation was not met, the communication process was broken down and an alternative means was unlikely to be sought for compensation. This breakdown in communication transactions should be expected to happen regularly as many people were reported to prefer being connected only. They did not want to respond promptly even when they could (Baron et al., 2005; Jacobs, 2008). Therefore, the students in this study often targeted other interlocutors or references, instead. In addition, technical difficulties may result in hesitating in using certain types of technology even though the demand for being connected was always preferred.

Various levels of virtual community participation, ranging from marginal, partial to complete, reflect the nature of communication regardless of modalities. First, attracting other interlocutors' attention to a discussion thread or blog entry was not always the expectation of the starter as he/she would like to keep a memory (Mortensen, 2008), exercise his/her online freedom of speech or reduce stress. The latter two reflect a cultural issue of the local situation where the virtual environment

was used to compensate for the disadvantages of the offline environment. Second, requesting group changes to be able to participate in a more active community presents an intention of improving personal knowledge, getting to know more about the others, strengthening current connections, and possibly establishing new relationships. Third, lurking, surfing around cyber communities in free time or even ignoring them suggest students' cautiousness of, resistance to, or avoidance of the virtual world.

Examining the formation of LMS cybercommunities from the beginning and those currently participated in by students in the study demonstrates the diversity of influential factors resulting from the real social situation. At first, imposing an instrument to draw attention of the target audience to a cybercommunity such as compulsory participation could quickly trigger enthusiasm and curiosity. Once expectation was positive toward the community, and technical issue was not a barrier, the facilitating role of lecturers or mentors became necessary. This role might be shifted from a regular and central position to an irregular and peripheral one as connectedness was established. It seems that the LMS community formation required pre-existing offline connections and the "latent ties" (Haythornthwaite, 2005) which were developed through the participants' navigation in the virtual environment. Meanwhile, participating in a social network, which had been constructed for a long time, tended to be independent from offline ties (Nip, 2004). This suggests further comparative investigations on the formation and development of these two kinds of cybercommunities.

It was the scope of the study that limited its observations on certain aspects of the situation and put forward ideas for further research. First, the almost silence of the fifth virtual class was not thoroughly examined due to ethical issues although it would be a useful example for the failure of a cybercommunity. Second, the individual communicative competence was not investigated to understand if there was any relationship between online and offline communication performance. Although online space was supposed to create a situation of equal opportunity for all, this study noticed that some silent students in offline class became very active in online class (c.f., Burgess, 2006). Third, the power relation among individuals in offline class was not significantly observed although it might have a certain level of influence on their selection of threads to read and activities to engage in, contributing to shape the virtual power. Fourth, the number of interview subjects included in the analysis was

limited; therefore, it is necessary to document more empirical evidence to strengthen the results.

7. Pedagogical implications

The data presented in the study suggest several pedagogical implications for the local context. First, the realities of local students' technology competence showed a mixed result, urging a critical training program and/or sessions on technological concepts for students to effectively benefit from the technology used in a course. Second, employing ICT in education successfully might lead to a different pedagogy which both teachers and students are unfamiliar with. Students are given more power and control in their learning processes, and teachers are expected to be ubiquitous and prompt facilitators. Therefore, students need to be informed in order to expose themselves more confidently into this environment; and teachers need to be prepared to facilitate a friendly space, trigger necessary incentives, and regularly monitor the activities to increase learning engagement.

In addition, students' e-behaviors illustrated in the study propose different suggestions for academic cybercommunity construction. First, local students had various purposes for online community participation such as demonstrating their abilities, exploiting their freedom, and communicating with others. These purposes shaped their e-behaviors and engagement level. Therefore, the social dimension of the academic cybercommunity needs to be fostered because it is the supporting driver for engagement behind the task interaction process. Second, while some students concurrently maintained more than one social network; some others were not interested in this social dimension very much. This difference was probably due to students' levels of experience with ICT and learning styles. Thus, using course requirements and offline social ties would give them an opportunity to develop their ICT competence and experience the benefits of that learning space.

8. Conclusion

This exploratory study provides an initial overview of Vietnamese EFL students' online communication in both academic and social environments. Analytical examination on the four cases in the study generally yielded two major patterns. Those with higher expectations toward the LMS visited the site more frequently, paid more attention to the main ideas of postings, expected more comments on their

postings, and used those comments to evaluate the quality of their postings. Meanwhile, those with low expectations toward the LMS came to the site less often, attempted to evaluate their peers' postings, and did not expect comments on their postings. The amount of time staying online, availability of online facilities, and psychological openness did not contribute to the structure of these two patterns of cybercommunity engagement. It is expected that other patterns of the relationship between expectation and behaviors would probably be recognized if more data were generated to include in the analysis.

The results also suggest that although the construction of cybercommunity was essentially shaped by peer interlocutors (similar to Thomas, 2005), the lecturers and course requirements played an extremely important role. In other words, although negotiations between novice (students) and expert others (lecturers) on a certain type of content (course requirements) were vital for cybercommunity establishment and maintenance, dialogues among novices were significantly richer and should be the central place for learning to happen. Therefore, a combination of Vygotsky's novice-expert emphasis and Wenger's apprenticeship among peers would make a complete framework for online learning community analysis.

Acknowledgements

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Religious background and language learning:
Practical suggestions for deriving best practice in ELT

Indika Liyanage, Brendan Bartlett & Peter Grimbeek
Griffith University

Bio Data

Dr Liyanage is a lecturer in applied linguistics in the Faculty of Education, Griffith University where he is involved in research and training of second language teachers. His research interests include language learning strategies, professional development of second language teachers, and metacognitive awareness of language teachers in lesson planning. He teaches in the areas of psycholinguistics and curriculum development in TESOL and also works as an international consultant on TESOL in the Pacific.

Prof. Bartlett assisted in the reconstruction of Education in Kosovo, chaired UNESCO's Expert Meetings in establishing democracy, peace and human rights guidelines for educational materials worldwide, and is a professor in the Faculty of Education and Griffith Institute of Educational Research at Griffith University. He teaches graduate and undergraduate programs in teacher education.

Dr Grimbeek is a consultant psychologist, psychological counsellor, and specialist research methodologist whose clients include the Griffith University faculties of education and health. His research interests include perception and imagery, language and culture, and the nature of meaning of human response data. He also lectures in research method.

ABSTRACT

Liyanage (2004) established a significant association between the ethnoreligious affiliations of high school students in Sri Lanka and their learning strategies in practicing English as a Second Language (ESL). The complex nature of affiliations contributing to this association warranted further investigation. Liyanage, Bryer, and Grimbeek (2010, Asian EFL Journal, Vol 12) examined the role of ethnicity and religion in determining the Language Learning Strategy (LLS) choices of ESL students, indicating a significantly stronger prediction from the latter. Here, we suggest implications of these findings for English Language Teaching (ELT) in localised contexts, and use the specific example of Sri Lanka to highlight the importance of accommodating ethnoreligious affiliations in instructional design.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalised world, primordial connections of people (Appadurai, 1996; Levine, Reves, & Leaver, 1996) based on race, language, ethnicity, and religion, and their ties to their communities, have been downplayed and neglected. The influence of first language (L1) in combination with religion and ethnicity on learning a second language (L2) has been overlooked. Modes of thinking and learning vary according to social practices and cultural traditions of different communities (Canagarajah, 1999), and in Sri Lanka these practices and traditions echo an ethos polished by the indigenous educational systems of its people (Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage & Bartlett, forthcoming). However, the effect of these primordial connections on ways in which learners process knowledge has largely remained obscure in the literature.

ELT teachers work for a very diverse student clientele from many cultures around the world. In any instructional setting or location, a teacher may be working with students from one culture or from several different cultures. For example, in Australia or the USA, students form multicultural classrooms, while in Sri Lanka or Japan, language classes comprise monocultural settings. However, this distinction is rarely simple because what seems to be a monocultural class of students is really not. The students' ethnoreligious backgrounds may involve sets of quite different experiences, reflecting various subcultures within the broader cultural context of a country. For example, in Sri Lanka, the student clientele typically comprises three main ethnic groups: Sinhalese, Tamil, and Sri Lankan Muslim, with Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam as their respective religious denominations. Minority denominations (e.g., Christians) also exist, however for purposes of our address here, the distinctive practices and values conditioned by the main ethnoreligious affiliations make for three subcultures within a Sri Lankan ELT setting.

Researchers and practitioners need to acknowledge the contribution of such affiliations to learners' development of communicative competence in English language and to accommodate them within the global professional awareness of goals shared across the diversity of learners in English language classrooms. Language teachers may be disinclined to contemplate potential influences of ethnoreligious affiliations on learning; they may be unaware of learners' preferences associated with their ethnoreligious affiliations; they may be captured by the hegemony of English language teaching as a global trend. Studies (Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage, Grimbeek, &

Bryer, 2010) have shown that even in the same national background, students may have different subaffiliations, and, if so, will approach language learning differently.

Sri Lanka has a diverse ethnic composition with three ethnic groups – Sinhala[i], Tamil, and Muslim [ii] – that constitutes 99% of the population. According to government statistics (Sri Lanka Government, 2008) the majority community, Sinhala, comprises almost three quarters (74%) of the people. Tamils comprise two groups – Sri Lankan Tamils, who are long-settled descendents from south-east India, and Indian Tamils, most of whom are migrant workers brought to Sri Lanka under British colonial rule (Somasegaram, 1969). Together, the two groups comprise 18% of the population. Muslims, who arrived in the country with Arab traders in the seventh and eighth centuries (Azeez, 1969; De Silva, 1977), comprise 8% of the country's population. The minor ethnic groups include Burghers, a community of mixed European descent, and Veddas, who are regarded as the aboriginal inhabitants of the country. These groups account for less than 1% of the population.

Language and religion are pointers of identity among the main ethnic groups. They pervade many aspects of life and constitute a basic element of diversity. Sinhalese use Sinhala as their mother tongue and more than 90% of them are Buddhists. Tamils speak Tamil and overwhelmingly are Hindus. Muslims usually prefer to speak in Tamil and are all adherents of Islam. Christians number about 7% of the population and they are from the Sinhalese, Tamil and Burgher communities. The indigenous educational practices of the Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims are intertwined with the religious practices of Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.

Limited consideration of Language Learning Strategy (LLS) preferences based on students' indigenous educational philosophies/practices highlights potential for educationists to do more to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of ELT (Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage & Bartlett, 2008). Given that a strong relationship between ethnoreligious affiliations and preferences for language learning strategies has already been established (see Liyanage, et al., 2010), our purpose in this paper is to highlight ways in which LLS preferences based on socio-educational values associated with learners' ethno-religious affiliations might be accommodated in ELT. We aim to achieve this purpose in a three-step process: First, we discuss teaching-learning practices inherent in Sri Lanka's three indigenous educational systems. Second, we discuss findings of two empirical studies (Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage, et al., 2010) that explored the relationship between Sri Lankan ESL learners' ethnoreligious

backgrounds as demarcated by their indigenous educational heritage and their preferred language learning strategy choices. Third, we suggest a metacognitive strategy framework for ESL lesson planning that we propose to help teachers to accommodate these preferences.

INDIGENOUS EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES

Buddhism and its associated cultural practices were introduced to Sri Lanka 250 years after the death of the Buddha. With the introduction of Buddhism, religious beliefs formed the background of Sri Lankan society, permeating the lives of the people of the day (Ariyapala, 1969). Temples were constructed in every village. These became the nucleus of culture and learning, and social practices of the laity were built around those of the Buddhist monks. Buddhist temples were never aloof from the society; they had strong mutual relationships with Buddhist communities within which they were situated. In fact, temples became the centres of Buddhist village life. The Buddhist temple was the exclusive place for formal education for both monks and laymen alike and a number of general themes characterised Buddhist educational practices. For example, instruction was primarily oral, and basic literacy was also provided. Memorisation of texts and debate were key elements of the teaching and learning processes (Hevawasam, 1969; Reagan, 2000).

Along with Buddhist philosophy and Pali, the language through which the doctrine had to be taught at the time, related subjects like grammar, prosody, and rhetoric were also taught. Methods of teaching were identical across; classes were conducted through lecture and discussion methods, and the chief mode of learning was listening. Tremendous importance was placed on students' abilities to memorise, as Hevawasam (1969) has noted;

> *"The frequent repetitions in the texts which irritate the modern reader had been purposely introduced to facilitate memorising. They had often to memorise long texts, and were quite equal to it."* (p. 1120)

HINDU EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

The beginnings of a separate Hindu cultural tradition in Sri Lanka can be traced to the increasing migrations of Indian nationals from South India to the northern part of Sri Lanka during the 9th and 10th centuries AD (Somasegaram, 1969). These migrants brought Hinduism, together with its culture and educational practices, to Sri Lanka.

Given the long history of Hinduism, traditional Hindu educational practice has taken various forms and has numerous sects. However, there are important commonalities (Reagan, 2000). As outlined in the *Upanishads*[iii]*,* the process of learning in Hindu educational practice is based on three important acts that follow in sequential order. These are *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana* (Mookerji, 1951). *Shravana* is listening, that is, listening to the teacher with the purpose of committing content to memory; an oral tradition of developing command of the content knowledge of a subject. *Shravana* leads to the second act, *manana*, through which learners reflect upon what they have heard in *shravana*. *Manana* leads to the last step, *nididhyasana*, through which learners realise self and truth, and which opens avenues for such ends. Together, the principles of *shravana*, *manana,* and *nididhyasana* are the basis for every different form of Hindu educational practice (Reagan, 2000). Hindu temples are the nucleus of cultural activity and a prominent part of Hindu life in all parts of Sri Lanka.

The majority of Hindus in Sri Lanka today belong to the Siddhanta school of Saivism, which is dominant in South India (De Silva, 1977). Although Hindus generally consider Vedas as the source of all religious knowledge, the Tamil Saivites consider *thirumurais* [iv] the sacred body of religious literature (Flood, 2002). Usually every Saivite is taught selections from this collection at home.

ISLAMIC EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

The holy Qur'an occupies a place in Islam that finds no parallel in other religions of the world because to Muslims, the holy Qur'an is not only a book of religious maxims or a collection of devotional hymns, but also a code of life laying down the correct pattern of conduct (Kysilka & Qadri, 1997). For followers of Islam, education may bear no significant meaning if it is placed outside their religious context. In Islam, religious and secular education cannot be differentiated; they are inseparable and neither should be emphasised at the expense of the other. The ultimate goal of Islamic education is the inculcation of the concept of Allah in the minds and souls of Muslims (Reagan, 2000).

Although different forms of traditional Islamic educational systems can be found in different times and geographic locations, there is a common core of such practices that allows us to talk about the Qur'anic education in general. The basis of traditional Islamic education is the *kuttab*, or Qur'anic school, which developed after

the Prophet and became widespread by the 8th century AD (Reagan, 2000). Primary schools were called *maktab*[v] and secondary schools were called *madrasa*[vi]. The curriculum of *madrasa* comprised grammar, literature, logic, Islamic law, principles of Islamic law, Qur'anic commentary, mysticism, and religious philosophy. The teacher in traditional education is a figure looked upon as a model to be imitated. For this reason, in Islam he is required not only to be a man of learning but also to be pious (Husain & Ashraf, 1979).

ETHNORELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS AND LLS CHOICES

A group of almost 1000 students learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in six government schools in Sri Lanka were the participants for the study. These schools are operated by the Ministry of Education in the Sri Lankan Government. The participants comprised approximately an equal number of males and females from the three dominant subcultures. The Language Learning Strategy Inventory (LLSI) of Chamot, Kupper, and Impink-Hernandez (1987) was translated into Sinhala and Tamil (Liyanage, 2004). The instrument gathers information about strategies in five learning contexts: speaking in class, listening in class, speaking and listening outside class, reading, and writing. A detailed description of its reliability statistics and statistical analyses that established association between ethnoreligious background and choice of LLS is provided elsewhere (see Liyanage, 2004). It is important to note here that, if the government education system, as opposed to the traditional and religious educational practices, had greatest influence on students' strategy choices, the strategies of students who receive a similar English language education in the school should be the same irrespective of their ethnoreligious affiliations. Liyanage et al. (2010) have shown that to some extent, they were. But to a greater extent they were different – and in quite telling ways in relation to informing teachers of ESL students.

Findings indicated significant association between students' ethnoreligious backgrounds and metacognitive, cognitive, and social-affective strategy types. All three subcultural groups had greatest preferences for metacognitive strategies; their patterns of preference were parallel, with decreasing association from metacognitive through cognitive to social-affective strategies. Variation across the groups indicated three preferred ways of learning. Estimated marginal means for metacognitive,

cognitive, and social-affective strategies indicate that Muslim participants prefer to use all three strategy types more so than Tamil and Sinhalese participants, and Tamil subjects report using all three strategy types more than Sinhalese subjects. The marginal means for ethnicity and language learning strategy types are shown in Figure 1, and the viability of this difference is shown in the highly significant results of an ANOVA, with score on strategy type as dependent variable and ethnicity as predictor (Table 1).
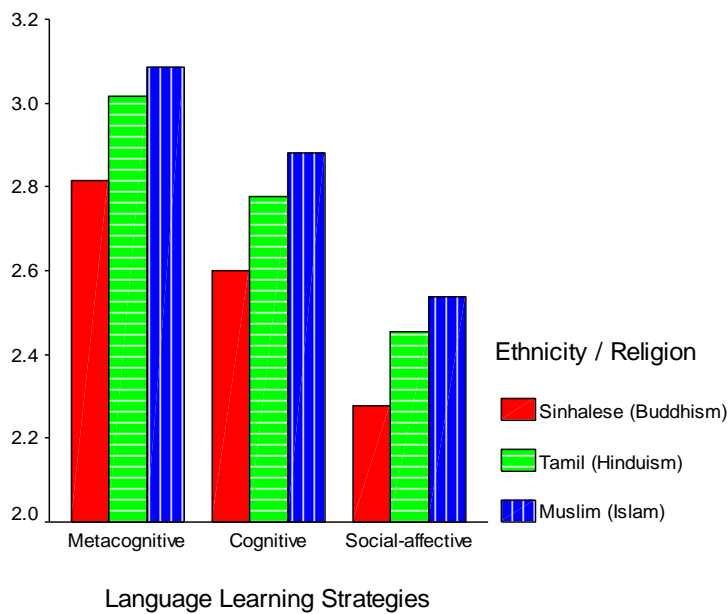
Figure 1: Relationship between ethnicity & language learning strategy (av) scores

Learning strategy	Ethnicity	Mean	Std error	95% Lower Bound	95% Upper Bound
Metacognitive (av)	Sinhalese	2.823	.024	2.776	2.870
	Tamil	3.007	.026	2.956	3.059
	Muslim	3.051	.024	3.005	3.098
Cognitive (av)	Sinhalese	2.608	.026	2.558	2.658
	Tamil	2.775	.028	2.720	2.830
	Muslim	2.856	.025	2.806	2.905
Social-affective (av)	Sinhalese	2.271	.027	2.217	2.325
	Tamil	2.438	.030	2.379	2.497
	Muslim	2.520	.027	2.466	2.573

Table 1: Estimated marginal means for ethnicity & LLS

When individual strategies that form the three strategy types were investigated in relation to ethnoreligion, *metacognitive* strategies were preferred strongly by members of each ethnoreligion in four of the five learning contexts, indicating participants have decided strategic preferences when *speaking in class*, *reading, writing*, and *listening and speaking outside the class* (See Table 2). Nothing of significance was found for *listening in class*. Paradoxically, this absence was a very interesting result, perhaps indicating that strategies either were weak or non-existent – or so automatised that their description in the LLSI's probes failed to evoke a consciousness sufficient for participants to respond.

To exemplify how the data on metacognitive strategies operating within a learning context might align with ethnoreligious background, let us briefly examine the case of Advance Organisation, shown in Table 2 as a highly preferred strategy in the learning context, *reading*. It is described in the LLSI as a metacognitive strategy for "previewing the main idea and concepts of the material to be learned, often by skimming the text for the organising principle" (Chamot, et al., 1987, pp. 136-138).

This form of strategic function gels with teaching practices in the indigenous educational systems. Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam each has a religious text: *Tripitaka, Vedas*, and *Qur'an*. Up until the government school system was introduced, it was believed by followers of the three religious faiths that all there was to learn was written in these sacred books. Then and now, it was and is a mark of great social distinction and demonstration of one's knowledge to be able to recite the sacred text of one's religion, appropriately, accurately, and fully. Contents of these sacred texts are arranged in a predictable sequence, and learning the content follows this sequence. In our study, participants' strong preferences for advance organisation indicate their need and willingness to learn text-based content sequentially and systematically - orientations very possibly conditioned by the purpose, method, process, and rewards of mastering their sacred text so similar for each of the three subgroups. This finding is consistent with other studies (Canagarajah, 1999) where Sri Lankan students' comfort with organised, structured, teacher-directed lessons and transmission models of learning has been observed.

As shown in Table 2, significant associations were demonstrated also in four of the five learning contexts for ethnoreligion and both cognitive strategies and socio-affective strategies. In the former, it was *listening and speaking outside the classroom* where there was a low preference, whereas in the latter, it was *reading*. It may well be that respondents believed that taking a preferential view about cognitive strategies is relatively unimportant for *out-of-class listening and speaking*, and that much of the reading they did was solitary work somewhat firewalled from socio-affective involvement − further research may better position our reasoning on such exceptions.

All three groups show a preference for note-taking as a cognitive strategy while *listening in class*. The strategy involves writing down key concepts during a listening or reading activity. As mentioned earlier, in traditional Buddhist, Hindu, and Islam educational practices listening has an important place. Both Buddhist and Hindu religions and their educational practices were passed down through the oral tradition. Knowledge was passed on primarily through teacher talk. Students were expected to listen and remember. For example, one of the mottos of Buddhist educational practice is "Suna`tha, Dha`retha, Chara`tha." In translation, this means "listen, remember and put into practice." The sequence and its elements underscore an emphasis on transmission in Buddhist education. In Hindu educational practice, emphasis on *shravana*, *manana*, and *nididhyasana* reflects a similar transmission model. Note-taking is a strategy that education students select to help them memorise information, particularly within transmission systems of acquisition (Wegner & Bartlett, 2008). To select such a strategy, as so many of our participants did, indicates a sense that memory-building is critical and supportable, a sense that all three religious traditions represented in the present study promote in their learning.

Repetition is another of the strategic modes associated with transmission models of learning and that is measured by the LLSI. It involves the exact imitation of a language model through oral or silent practice. Of the three groups, Muslim participants indicated the highest preference for repetition in the *reading* learning context. The Islamic expectation that students should memorise the Qur'an by reciting it over and over again to a rhythm (Khusro, 1981) may explain why the Muslim students prefer this strategy more than the other strategies in the study. In general, a higher preference for this strategy by all three groups may result from how students were educated in the religious texts before the government school education system was introduced to the country. The only way to measure one's learning was to

measure how much could be remembered. So, students studied religious manuscripts and other literary texts through various means that helped them remember. One of the favourite ways to remember is through constant repetition and it was constantly encouraged in the traditional educational practices. For example, in Dhammapadaya, repetition while reading is encouraged as "Asajjhya mala` mantha`," meaning that "one that is not repeated gathers rust."

More detailed discussion of how these and other strategies shown in Table 2 are preferred by students, and the likely connection with their ethnoreligious upbringing, is provided in the original study (Liyanage, 2004). However, what we have presented briefly here reminds us that pedagogical approaches not only should grow within the socio-cultural contexts of the learners incorporating aspects indigenous to the particular culture to which they belong, but also should recognise the socially situated modes of learning. The aim of such approaches would be to maximise and benefit the process of target language learning through strategies naturally preferred and sought by students. Pedagogical approaches may not be as effective as they are intended to be when they centre on strategies that are not naturally favoured by students.

Learning Context	Language Learning Strategy	Ethnicity		
		Sinhala	Tamil	Muslim
	Metacognitive			
	Organisational planning	70.0%	86.2%	86.05
Speaking in class	Self-monitoring	83.5%	79.5%	81.0%
	Self-management	73.6%	78.4%	88.7%
Listening in class		No significant associations found		
Listening and speaking outside class	Organisational planning	34.7%	70.7%	71.0%
	Self-evaluation	55.1%	71.0%	74.3%
Reading	Advance organisation	63.4%	76.3%	76.0%
	Self-management	69.0%	73.5%	84.3%
Writing	Self-evaluation	81.8%	85.9%	86.7%
	Organisational planning	42.6%	84.1%	88.0%
	Cognitive			
Listening in class	Note-taking	53.1%	54.1%	76.35
	Repetition	4.6%	30.0%	37.0%
	Transfer	17.2%	56.2%	51.7%
	Translation	40.6%	55.5%	61.0%
Speaking in class	Rehearsal	82.2%	67.1%	72.3%
	Translation	41.6%	55.8%	59.7%
Listening and speaking outside class		No significant associations found		
Reading	Repetition	53.1%	54.1%	76.3%
	Note-taking	59.4%	68.65	80.0%

Writing	Rehearsal	41.6%	55.8%	59.7%
	Translation	4.6%	30.0%	37.0%
	Deduction	82.2%	67.1%	72.3%
	Resourcing	38.9%	63.6%	65.7%
	Social-affective			
Listening in class	Questioning for clarification	39.3%	49.8%	61.3%
Speaking in class	Self-talk	34.7%	60.8%	65.0%
Listening and speaking outside class	Questioning for clarification	65.3%	44.5%	39.7%
Reading		No significant associations found		
Writing	Cooperation	34.7%	60.8%	65.0%

Table 2: Ethnicity/Religion & reported use of metacognitive, cognitive & social affective

Our data are suggestive about where Sri Lankan learners' strategic preferences lie. For example, when participants imagined *speaking in class* where ESL is involved, all three ethnoreligious groups gave high choice ratings for the three metacognitive strategies shown. In particular, Muslim students had very high preferences for self-management and organisational planning. ESL teachers aware and alert to such learner preferences are well placed to pinpoint where and how opportunities for producing these strategies might be recognised or created by students, and even planned and managed by them. Such features of teachers' forethought are metacognitive, and in order to make best use of suggestions from our data we offer a metacognitively oriented framework in an attempt to help teachers and others in professional practice to streamline the intentions, procedures, and evaluation under consideration when envisaging a lesson.

METACOGNITIVE STRATEGY FRAMEWORK

Lesson planning is about knowledge, anticipation, and readiness to attend to issues or concerns as and when they arise in a lesson. It draws on a planner's knowledge across concerns that others (Shulman, 1987; Shulman & Sparks, 1992) remind us include content, general pedagogy, and specific pedagogy for the content area/s being addressed. It includes also knowledge of learners and learning, of how to use language and action to access and promote thinking, of where to get appropriate resources and how to use them, and of how to recognise and capitalise on learning opportunities, including unanticipated ones. It draws also on strategies a planner might use to design effective lesson plans, strategies such as metacognitively

monitoring what declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge they have and can place into their creative action. Such metacognitive monitoring, identifying, and preparing is the big-picture of design. Its components need to become procedural knowledge (how do I use this) and to link with conditional knowledge (where and when do I use it – and with what support), if teachers' strategic action when planning is to be effective and efficient. It is a mega-view strategy and we include it in our framework as a strategy additional to the seven that Chamot et al. (1987) depicted as metacognitive - *advance organisation, organisational planning, directed attention, selective attention, self-monitoring, self-evaluation*, and *self-management*.

Planning an ESL lesson depends on decisions about such things as choice of sites and materials, activities, and methods, elements that are common to most content-area teaching (Brumfit & Rossner, 1982). Central to this decision-making process is an identification of and accounting for students' learning needs, including the need to build declarative, procedural, and conditional competence as learning strategies (Bartlett, 2008; Bartlett & Elliott, 2008), and development of a plan of action to fulfil those needs (Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Panasuk & Todd, 2005). The quality and effectiveness of decisions made regarding these aspects depend largely on a teacher's ability to draw on knowledge of English as the target second-language, students and their needs as strategic learners of ESL, teaching methods, and teaching style, and their ability to drawn on their experience.

Our adaptations of the original definitions of these strategies as they apply to lesson planning are shown in Table 2 (see Chamot et al., 1987, pp. 136-138 for original definitions of these strategies as they apply to language learning).

Metacognitive Strategies	Adapted Definition as Applied to Lesson Planning	Planning Instance
Meta-View	Recognising declarative, procedural, and conditional elements involved in the planning task	Throughout
Advance Organisation	Previewing students' needs, cultural backgrounds, learning preferences, proficiency levels, and available resources (time, infrastructure, texts), and delineating overall aim/s to achieve within these parameters	Planning the Lesson Content
Self-management	Understanding aspects such as one's own preferred teaching style, strengths, & weaknesses, knowledge of content covered within the planned lesson, and arranging for the presence and/or understanding of these	

Organisational Planning	Planning the parts (stages/steps within the lesson), delineating teaching (pedagogic) objectives for each stage/step, choosing TLAs (Teaching & Learning Activities) best conducive to achieving the pedagogic objectives and to see how these help achieve the overall aim/s of the lesson	
Directed Attention	Deciding in advance to attend to/spend more time on a particular step/TLA that is more relevant and crucial in attaining the overall aim/s, to weigh the relative importance of TLAs, and to ignore information that can be irrelevant and distracting	Planning the Content Implementation
Selective Attention	Deciding in advance to attend to a specific concept, morpho-syntactic structure, word - its spelling or meaning within a step, and how such items are relevant and important in achieving the pedagogic objectives and, in turn, the overall aim/s	
Self-monitoring	Checking and placing-in measures such as observation or questioning to monitor whether the used TLAs are working as they were intended, and if and how students are engaged during the lesson	Planning the Lesson Evaluation
Self-evaluation	Using appropriate measures to know how efficiently (a) both pedagogic and overall aims have been achieved with a view to improving future planning and teaching, and (b) the learning objective/ and, aim/s have been achieved	

Table 1: A Lesson-Planning Adaptation of Chamot et al.'s (1987) Classification of Metacognitive Language-Learning Strategies

The Lesson Plan

Various stages of the lesson, from the development of aims through to evaluation, are represented by numbers and letters in Figure 2. Aim/s (A) are followed by steps through which the overall aim/s is intended to be achieved (B). Each step has a teaching and learning activity (TLA) represented as (C) and the resources and materials used to support the step as (D). Where the step is associated with a specific pedagogic objective/s, we have used (E) measures to monitor whether TLAs are working as intended; and whether learning outcomes for a step are achieved is shown as (F). The step-specific pedagogic objectives will flow from one to the other, forming knowledge structures (G) that are simple to complex in nature while facilitating achievement of the overall lesson aim/s (A).

A full explanation of the framework in action for planning lesson content, planning implementation of the designed lesson, and planning for evaluation of the effectiveness of learning and teaching is provided elsewhere (Liyanage & Bartlett,
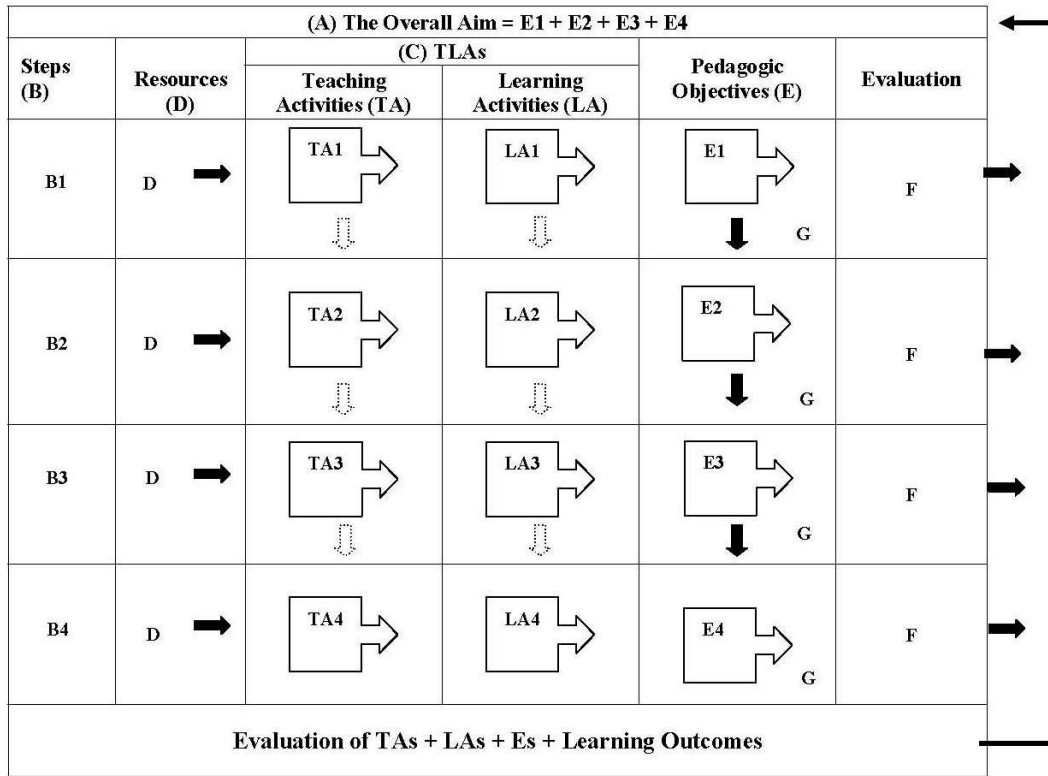
forthcoming).

(A) The Overall Aim = E1 + E2 + E3 + E4					
Steps (B)	Resources (D)	(C) TLAs		Pedagogic Objectives (E)	Evaluation
		Teaching Activities (TA)	Learning Activities (LA)		
B1	D →	TA1	LA1	E1 G	F
B2	D →	TA2	LA2	E2 G	F
B3	D →	TA3	LA3	E3 G	F
B4	D →	TA4	LA4	E4 G	F
Evaluation of TAs + LAs + Es + Learning Outcomes					

Table 2: Lesson Plan

Summary and Conclusion

Links reported between the ethnoreligious background and preferences Sri Lankan students expressed for strategies as ESL learners (Liyanage, 2004; Liyanage, et al., 2010), raise cautionary interest not only in relation to how the patterns of research results at national level might be interpreted where there is subgrouping on religious grounds, but also in relation to more proactive consideration of how education might accommodate similarities and differences associated with subgroups and their strategic preferences.

We have attempted a beginning in addressing the second of these interest areas by using a metacognitive framework for lesson planning (Liyanage & Bartlett, forthcoming) to indicate where teachers may give explicit and systematic attention to knowledge of strategies that students in multi-ethnoreligious classes prefer in various ESL learning contexts. Specifically, any such address is informed by three general principles inherent in the research, such that teachers

wishing to tailor an informed view of students' preferences are better placed to know:

-   Which strategy types and which specific strategies are preferred by Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim students for ESL learning *when speaking in class, when reading, when writing*, and *when listening and speaking outside class.*

-   Where preferences are strong but different for the three ethnoreligious groups, such as with the metacognitive strategy of organisational planning for students working in an ESL *writing* context where the preference is twice as strong with Tamil and Muslim students as it is with Sinhalese students.

-   Where there are no clear patterns of choice, such as with metacognitive strategies useful for *listening in class*.

Our suggestions that have arisen from the students' data may assist teachers with lesson planning. Teachers who are aware not only of students' knowledge of strategies, but also of their predilections to calling them into play when in ESL learning contexts, seemingly are well placed to optimise teaching moments through students' intelligently strategic learning. Using lesson planning as the basis for keeping such awareness at the forefront of teachers' work is a start. The framework we have presented may help to extend this "start" somewhat because we have conceptualised awareness of students' strategic preferences into planning broadly, and teachers-as-planners will be preparing across the task base from aims and objectives through evaluation of students' learning and their own teaching.

However, our attempt may or may not be effective and efficient. Research is needed to monitor, improve, and extend this application, and an action research model, where action in planning and positive change are built into cycles of improvement, would be an ideal means of progressing what we know about the utility of what has been reported and suggested here.

The recognition and inclusion of metacognition in theorising what teachers do in lesson planning allows educators to more comprehensively explain and predict

critical points in the planning process, as we have identified, with content, implementation, and evaluation. Further, it permits us, through such constructs as a teacher's mega-view, to take a step beyond describing what a teacher knows of planning to conceptualise his or her acumen in the procedural and conditional know-how of best organising the declarative knowledge.

Clearly, lesson planning involves teachers in conceptualising how a lesson will unfold and in making decisions, prior to the lesson, about content, implementation, and evaluation of how what they do works and with what outcomes. A systematic framing of these decisions will help the teacher not only prepare the plan but also to master it. We have suggested that a mega-view provides metacognitive involvement and a mental omnipresence for a teacher in envisaging the lesson as a real event and in decisions taken in planning for that reality. Such a framework remains exploratory at this stage, and close observations need to be carried out on lessons prepared using it, if it is to be systematically validated in teaching practice.

In anticipation of such validation, we conclude with a three-part position statement that will form the basis of testing:

1. Teachers who have a metacognitive twist to their planning are likely to have better alignment across intentions, procedures, and outcomes in application and, therefore,

2. Their teaching will be both effective and efficient.
3. It is better to be systematic than reactive; it is better still to be both.

CONCLUSION

These findings once again remind us that pedagogical approaches should not only grow within the socio-cultural contexts of the learners, incorporating aspects indigenous to the particular culture to which they belong, but also recognise the socially situated modes of learning. The aim of such approaches would be to benefit the process of target language learning through strategies naturally preferred and sought by the students, as pedagogical approaches may not be as effective as they are intended to be when they centre on strategies that are not naturally favoured by students.

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[i] In literature, the words 'Sinhala' and 'Sinhalese' are used interchangeably to refer to the language group and ethnicity.

[ii] Sri Lankan Muslims' ethnicity is Moor. However, in Sri Lanka their ethnic and religious identities are essentially the same and are interchangeably used. In this chapter the word 'Muslim' is used to refer to their ethnicity.

[iii] The Upanishads (in Sanskrit, *upa* means "near", *ni* is "down", and *sad* is "sit"-"to sit down near to," that is, to sit at the feet of the guru) comprise the final portion of the revealed part of the Vedas (Stepaniants & Behuniak, 2002, p. 107).

[iv] "The *Thirumurais* consist of the *Thevaram*, and *Thiruvacakam* and the philosophical texts. The *Thevaram* and *Thiruvacakam* are collections of hymns of the Saivite saints of the sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth centuries A.D written in simple, easily understood language" (De Silva, 1977, p. 390)

[v] "… a primary school often attached to a mosque, the chief business of which is to instruct boys (and girls) in those portions of the Koran" (Azeez, 1969, p. 1147).

[vi] State supported secondary schools (Azeez, 1969))