

Exploring ELT Teacher's Role within E-Learning from Students' Perceptions

Janette Custodio Yuvienco & Shiuan-ying Huang*

ABSTRACT

This paper reports the result of a study aimed to empirically determine the effects of technology, specifically the integration of e-learning within English language teaching, on students' perception of teacher's role. In this study administered during the school year 2002-2003, there were 396 participants enrolled as freshman students at Takming College. Participants were divided into experimental (e-learning) E-group and controlled (traditional) T-group. The former received *e-learning training*, an integral component of English teaching that employs digitalized materials and Information & Communication Technology (ICT)-based support oriented towards fostering autonomy and self-regulated foreign language learning; while the latter, the traditional paper-based materials without ICT-based support. The results of the study show that the students' perception of the teacher's role remains unchanged. Such findings reveal that the role of ELT teacher within e-elearning is, analogous to an interactive teacher of the earlier conventions, a multifaceted one with strategy-oriented tasks ranging from Facilitation, Advising, Conducting experiments, Engineering activities, and Supporting divergent learning styles, pathways and creative productions (FACES). As tasks complementing each other to effectively achieve autonomy as an education goal within foreign language education, they are completed flexibly and accordingly, certainly not singly nor independently of each other.

Key words: foreign language teaching & methodology, teaching strategies, teacher's role, e-learning

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Introduction

The influence of technology in education is a widespread phenomenon. Within English Language Teaching, the rapid development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) prompts changes in the ways and methods of teaching and preparing students for continuous learning and effective use of the language to communicate with people from various parts of the globe. Providing various types and forms of information-- from sound, video, images and animation-- technology *quadruples* the possibility of language learning.

Gathering data from students, the present study intends to gather quantitative information about the teacher's role within e-learning, in order to fully understand how to synchronize and *synergize* the power of ICT tools within language learning and the learners' positive perception of these tools. Specifically, the study gathers students' perception about the teacher's strategies within e-learning and investigates whether technology changes forms of teaching and consequently, the teacher's role. Students' perceptions have repeatedly been shown to be acceptable and reliable. Stallings, Needels and Stayrock (1979) show agreement between ratings of teacher behavior by experienced observers and students. Marsh (1984) uses the similarity of students' perceptions and observational data as his criterion for the validity of students' perceptions.

With the use of e-learning, a component of the e+c framework of teaching English that employs digitalized materials and ICT-based support inside and outside the classroom, in order to enhance and practise autonomy among foreign language learners,

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the present study seeks to gather information to the following query: (1) Does e-learning change students' perception of teacher's role? (2) What teaching strategies are acceptable within e-learning?

Teaching Strategies: From Facilitation to Support

In an effort to explore a set of teaching strategies that enhance learner autonomy within e-learning, this study adopts autonomy (Littlewood, 1996) as the framework around which English Language Teaching is built, developed and assessed. As a learner-centered pedagogy, where the choice of instructional activities are geared towards learners' holistic preparation, the autonomy framework entails encouraging learners to have a proactive attitude towards learning, by primarily taking responsibility for their learning, that is, to "take the initiative in learning ...[to] enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation" (Knowles, 1975, p.14), enabling them to make connections between the classroom lesson and their own lives through active communication, and consequently to "participate in real world events" (Wilkins, 1976, p.79). Taken as a goal, autonomy prompts learners to tread a pathway of absorbing knowledge, discovering new knowledge and establishing relationships between forms of knowledge, in order to be shared with others; as a principle, it provides students opportunity to reflect on contents and learning procedures in relation to the set objectives, to engage in conscious learning and effort to *connect and interact* with the language. Hinging upon an individual's capacity for meta-cognition, which involves monitoring and regulation of information, autonomy leads learners to have insights into one's learning styles and strategies (Wenden, 1998), raising their awareness of essential learning actions that contribute to development of positive attitude towards foreign language learning.

Within the autonomy framework, this study attempts to establish empirically the types of teaching within e-learning, herein referred to as teaching strategies. Strategies refer to a series of manoeuvres for obtaining a specific goal or result (Random House Dictionary, 1968). Within the context of foreign language teaching, they are the set of methods teachers use to reach an educational goal within a specific period of time. For instance, aiming at providing a methodology that fosters learner autonomy (Yuvienco,

2003a), teachers employ strategy-based instruction (Cotteral & Crabbe, 1999; Oxford, 1990), task-based learning (Willis, 1996), and computer-mediated communication (Warshauer, 1997, 2000) based on Feuerstein's theory of mediation (Feuerstein, et. al., 1980 cited in Williams and Burden, 1997). Their tasks are primarily focused on providing facilitation and constant guidance and support through active interaction with the students, subsequent to regular modification of the syllabus (Breen, 1987) based on information about learner's wants needs and learning outcome, as gathered from assessments conducted at various stages of learning, that is, from the beginning, middle and final phase.

Facilitation primarily entails directing learners to learning objectives in order to make possible (to facilitate) the first and sustainable learning action. It also involves adjustment and regulation of interaction (Zimmerman and Evans, 1993), as a means of offering guidance and support, which results from regular deliberation of learners' ways and means of learning based on their reported wants and needs. Throughout the various stages of completing learner's tasks, that is, at the beginning, middle and final phase of learning, the teacher designs tasks and assesses their impact on learner's learning, as a way of offering continuous guidance and support. These tasks that are "usually bigger than their ultimate ends than techniques" (Brown, 1994, p.83) lead learners to actively interact with the materials, to effectively store new information in their memory, and use these information to experience and responsibly regulate their learning of the foreign language.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in this study are 396 freshmen students enrolled at the 4-year college and 2-year junior college at Takming College from whom data were collected during the 2002-2003 school year. Six (6) classes registered in the 2-year junior college programs were distributed into two learning groups namely, traditional control class (t-class) and experimental e-learning class (e-class); and three (3) classes in the 4-year program of the College were also randomly assigned to the e-class. These

participants are assumed to represent a group of students in Taiwan who have had approximately ten years of formal English learning English, receiving training and education for technically-oriented jobs (cf. Appendix 2).

Instrument

The Assessment of Teacher's Role within E-Learning (ATREL=18 items) is a specially designed instrument (cf. Appendix 1) to measure learners' perception of the teacher's role within e-learning. It contains items that reveal teacher's actions that are highly observable and thus, measurable. The instrument includes questions that gather demographic information such as their age, family background, learning experience.

Taking into account the tendency of Chinese respondents to choose the middle point of the scale, the scoring is based on the 4-point Likert scale that employs the following degrees of frequency: *always* (4), *often* (3), *seldom* (2), *never* (1), where the number corresponds to the points attached to it. The higher the number, the more frequent the recurrence of the teacher's actions.

The conceptual framework that guided the development of the 18 items of the assessment is derived from the principles of task-based learning (Breen, 1987; Willis, 1996) that foments the directive role that teachers may assume to create effective learning opportunities "even within a predominantly learner-centered classroom" (Brown, 1994, p.115). Specifically, drawing from the notion of facilitation that states that it is a method of guiding and aiding through adjustment and regulation of interaction (Zimmerman and Evans, 1993), one understands the importance of pointing to an objective in order for the first move from the student to be possible. From this standpoint, the instrument includes items that assess teacher's facilitative acts such as, explaining the rationale of activities, inclusive of e-learning, and the teacher's role as a guide in completing learning tasks (ATREL items 3,16,17).

Task-based learning is compatible with autonomy within foreign language learning (Littlewood, 1996) and inherently stipulates teacher's facilitation from the beginning to the final stage of a learning task. In line with this, the instrument assesses teacher's counselling acts such as, attending to individual needs (ATREL item 8), relating to students in a friendly manner (ATREL item 10), giving praises to learning achievements (ATREL item 12), which facilitate dialoguing and continuous flow of

advice. Also, it assesses the teacher's role of an engineer of activities and conductor of assessments who gather information about learners' learning processes and outcome, subsequent to constructing activities based on the principles of fun and interesting learning (ATREL item 5), interactive and cooperative learning (items 7, 9).

Finally, in consideration of the demands of task-based learning, the instrument assesses teacher's acts of support using encouragement (ATREL item 6) and continuous feedback (ATREL item 15).

The instrument yielded reliable and valid scores in the validation study, which included a pilot study among 27 participants and experts' review. In order to determine the reliability of the instrument, the analysis employs Cronbach's α reliability coefficient, which yielded the following results:

Table 1 Reliability & Validity of Instrument

	Reliability	Validity
No. of valid responses	27	27
Cronbach α	0.9178	
Factorial Validity Evidence (%)		76.369

Data Collection & Analysis

The Assessment of Teacher's Role within E-Learning (ATREL) is completed to gather data about the participants' personal information and their perception of teacher's position within e-learning, that is, the role they play in the learners' task to manage their own learning and consequently be supported in various stages of active, autonomous learning.

In order to determine the students' perception of teacher's role within e-learning, analysis of means, t-test, paired t-test and ANOVA using SPSS 8.10 were employed. The final analysis gathered during the midterm (five months after the intervention) and the final term (12 months after the intervention), is summarized in the following sections.

Instrument Validity employs exploratory factor analysis, a statistical technique used to identify a relatively small number of factors that can be used to represent relationships among sets of many interrelated variables. In this study, variables include

a linear combination of factors that represent actions of teachers, and student ratings of these actions can be expressed as a function of factors that have impact on e-learning. Factor analysis helps identify the underlying, not-directly-observable constructs such as teachers' facilitation, mediation, and support.

In order to increase the content validity of the study, the teacher-researchers involved in the study went through the test design and study twice. They took part in the survey process twice—from the brainstorming sessions for the design of the test, which was completed by 30 respondents for pilot test, to further revision, to testing for reliability and validity.

Teaching Methodology: Dovetailing Methodology (e+ c teaching framework)

This study concerns understanding the students' perception of the teacher's role within e-learning, thus, it takes into consideration two distinct teaching settings such as the computer classroom (with Internet access) and the traditional classroom (non-computer classroom). Referred to here as the *dovetailing methodology* within the e+c foreign language education framework, according to site of instruction, participants received two forms of teaching which is namely, (1) e-classroom teaching (e-learning), and (2) classroom instruction (communicative instruction).

Employing the dovetailing methodology, the sites of instruction are arranged alternately within the e+c framework during a period of 16 weeks, in order that *e-learning*, that is, the (e) component of the framework that encourages outside-the-classroom self-study is held during the first session; and the *c-teaching*, that is, the (c) component of the framework that fosters active communication and interaction in the classroom using the target language is held in the succeeding session.

Results & Discussions

The present study assumes that the implementation of e-learning within English instruction changes teacher's role. Investigating on the correlation between teacher's strategies and the learning groups divided into traditional (T group) and e-learning (E group), results yield positive correlation ($p\text{-value} < 0.001$) and the means of each groups are different, and is thus, significant and require further investigation. In comparing the

results gathered over time, that is, during the mid-term and the final term, results yield the following data:

Table 2 Midterm (N= 304 valid cases)

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig (2-tailed)
Pearson chi-square	467.750 ^a	392	.005
Likelihood ratio	412.480	392	.229
Linear-by-linear Association	9.427	1	.002

a. 447 cells (99.30%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .07.

Table 3 Final Term (N= 304 valid cases)

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig (2-tailed)
Pearson chi-square	783.717 ^a	624	.000
Likelihood ratio	683.959	624	.048
Linear-by-linear Association	.005	1	.943

a. 711 cells (100.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .07.

From the above data, the study gathers that the means of perception of teacher's strategies between and among learning groups (Midterm *p-value*=0.005; Final term *p-value*< 0.001) in the midterm and the final term are different and thus, significant. Employing Scheffe's post-hoc comparison to decipher where the difference lies, the study yields the following data:

Table 4 Scheffe's post-hoc Midterm Comparison

Group		Class	N		Subset for alpha=.05
				1	2
T	1	2-year Banking	46	3.8247	
E	2	2-year Class C	21	3.9043	
E	3	4-year Class C	38	3.9401	
E	4	4-year Class B	37	4.0015	4.0015
T	5	2-year Accounting	35	4.0619	4.0619
T	6	2-year Finance	41	4.0767	4.0767
E	7	2-year Class B	34	4.2199	4.2199
E	8	4-year Class A	29	4.3171	4.3171
E	9	2-year Class A	23		4.4575
		Sig.		.056	.110

Means for groups in homogenous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 31.798.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

Table 5 Scheffe's post-hoc Final term Comparison

Group	ROW	Class	N		Subset for alpha=.05
				1	2
T	1	2-year Finance	41	1.9423	
T	2	2 year Accounting	35	2.0476	
T	3	2-year Banking	46	2.0662	
T	4	4-year Class C	38		3.8481
E	5	4-year Class B	37		3.8990
E	6	4-year Class A	29		4.0560
E	7	2-year Class C	21		4.0671
E	8	2-year Class B	34		4.1203
E	9	2-year Class A	23		4.1708
		Sig.		.999	.653

Means for groups in homogenous subsets are displayed.

a. Uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 31.378.

b. The group sizes are unequal. The harmonic mean of the group sizes is used. Type I error levels are not guaranteed.

The above data reveal the mean of learner's perception of teacher's strategies within homogenous sub-groups distributed in two learning groups. To distinguish the two groups involved in this study, (T) represents the traditional group and (E) represents the e-learning group.

Data gathered during the midterm show that there is no significant difference. The highest mean of perception of teacher's strategies is recorded at 2-year Class A (E group, 4.4575), and the lowest mean is at 2-year Banking (T group, 3.8247). In the final term, however, the highest mean of perception of teacher's strategies is recorded at 2-year Class A (E group, 4.1708), and the lowest mean is at Finance class (T-group, 1.9423), showing no statistical difference. At this point, employing Scheffe's post-hoc comparison, the study yields the following results:

Table 6 ANOVA

		Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Midterm	Between Groups	10.149	8	1.269	5.069	.000
	Within Groups	73.824	295	.250		
	TOTAL	83.972	303			
Final Term	Between groups	291.991	8	36.499	131.124	.000
	Within Groups	82.114	295	.278		
	TOTAL	374.106	303			

The data reveal that the mean gathered from the six e-learning groups is higher than the traditional groups, yielding results that show significant difference. Similarly, the mean of perception of teacher's strategies gathered from the three traditional groups show a significant difference. Further analysis of data reveals that the mean of perception of teacher's strategies gathered from the e-learning groups decreased, but not distinctly (from 4.6 to 4.2) (cf. Table 4, Row 9 & Table 5, Row 9). On the other hand, from the traditional groups, there is a clear and evident drop (from 3.8 to 2.0) (cf. Table 4, Row 1 & Table 5, Row 1).

Aiming to explore the ELT teacher's role within e-learning, the present study examines the perception of both the controlled traditional group (T-group) and the experimental e-learning group (E-group) during a period of 10 months. At the start of the study, the records show that both groups' perception is contiguous to each other. Both T-group and E-group perceive the teacher positively. At the end of the study, the positive perception of both groups declined. However, there is a marked difference in the degree of reduction between the two groups. The e-learning group's positive perception did not drop as much as the T-groups'. Corroborating the claims of Warshauer and Healy (1998), this fact is attributable to what students perceive as the *continuous presence of the teacher* who facilitates learning, gives advice, and offers educational and technological support at all times and all places through the use of e-learning, a component of English language learning that provides constant facilitation and support to students through computer mediation.

Conclusion & Implications

Various eloquent articles describe the features and interactive capabilities of multimedia that lend itself to integrating technology within language pedagogy (Singhal, 1997; Sperling, 1997; Warschauer, 1995; Warschauer, Schetzer & Meloni, 2000), to enhancing positive perceptions of EFL/ESL websites (Kung & Chuo, 2002). The present study however, shows that the students' perception of the teacher's role remains the same within e-learning, and this role of ELT teacher within e-learning is analogous to an interactive foreign language teacher in the *non e-learning* classrooms

of the earlier period (Flanders, 1970; Yuvienco, 2003b), who assumes a complex set of strategies such as, Facilitation, Advising, Conducting experiments, Engineering activities, and Supporting divergent learners' productions. Evoking a multifaceted role of an interactive English teacher, these may be easily referred to as the FACES teaching strategies within e-learning. As strategies complementing each other to effectively achieve autonomy as an educational goal, they are completed freely and accordingly, not singly, nor independently of each other. These functions and competencies that constitute the complex role of an ELT within e-learning are parallel with the five roles that Simon (2002) identified within distance education, which include the roles of technologist, process facilitator, content expert, instructional design, and manager. They also corroborate the teaching strategies that are helpful and necessary in guiding students in the use of Internet resources (Kung & Chuo, 2002; Fox, 1991; Paulsen, 2001).

The results and findings of the study clearly suggest the need for materials designed to facilitate, maintain and enhance multi-faceted teaching strategies within E-learning. They also warrant the accessibility of courses related to the fields of Psychology, Research, and Educational Technology for pre-service and in-service teachers to ensure constant development among teachers. These may include, for instance, Psychology-related courses that offer a general understanding of the design, use and interpretation of results of Tests of Attitude and Personality allows teachers to be aware of the way the mind works, how it influences behaviour, or the influence of foreign language learners' character on their behaviour. Similarly, they may also consist of Research-related courses that provide training in the use of methods and instruments for sociological researches assists teachers to design and perform investigations in their own classrooms; also, courses on Technological Education that present teachers the opportunity to examine Information and Communication Technology-based tools for enhancing foreign language learning. These types of courses, which need to be continuously accessible and regularly improved, offer present and future teachers a know-how of applying knowledge and resources in the aforementioned fields, allowing them to effectively perform the complex roles of a facilitator, advisor, researcher, and technological and educational support. They function as a support for foreign language teachers who intend to provide training in

the language as well as in learner autonomy and responsibility for one's own learning (Boud, 1988).

It is noteworthy that the FACES teaching strategies that enable teachers to manage the complex process of teaching a foreign language within e-learning are analogous to the teaching strategies employed within Distance Education (White, 1995). This piece of information may prove useful for investigations that intend to explore or confirm the set of teaching strategies that are appropriate and effective within Distance Education.

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Appendix 1: Test of Teacher's Performance--English Version

This questionnaire seeks to understand your perception of the teacher's role within e-learning. There are four choices you can choose from (always, often, sometimes, never). Please indicate your answer putting a check mark beside the corresponding answer.

	Strategies	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
		4	3	2	1
1. The teacher gathers students' opinions.	C1				
2. The teacher gathers students' learning progress	C2				
3. The teacher gives an explanation of the activities.	F1				
4. The teacher takes note of the students' degree of understanding.	C3				
5. The teacher puts an effort to make learning fun and interesting.	E1				
6. The teacher encourages students to complete outside the classroom learning sessions.	S1				
7. The teacher uses an interactive discussion of the learning content.	E2				
8. The teacher attends to individual needs of the students.	A1				
9. The teacher employs cooperative learning.	E3				
10. The teacher relates to the students in a friendly manner.	A2				
11. The teacher is willing to gather suggestions to improve teaching and learning.	C4				
12. The teacher gives praises to learning achievements.	A3				
13. The teacher leaves a deep impression on the learning environment.	A4				
14. The teacher encourages students to give suggestions.	C5				
15. The teacher gives feedback to students' performance.	S2				
16. For elearning students only					
17. The teacher explains the concept and rationale behind e-learning.	F2				
18. The teacher gives an explanation of the role he/she performs in e-learning.	F3				
19. The teacher designs contents and activities that allow students to maximize the use of e-learning.	E3				

NOTE (For Teachers Only): The letters beside each item refer to the initial letter of the teacher's actions examined in this study, which include Facilitation, Advising, Conducting experiments, Engineering Activities, Supporting (FACES). These actions correspond with the multifaceted role of English teachers within e-learning.

Appendix 2: Participants' Personal Information Frequency Table

Variables	Options	No. of Respondents from First Survey (%)	First Survey: SD* (Midterm) (%)	First Survey: SD* (Final term) (%)
Sex	Male	65 (16.4)	48 (15.7)	48 (15.7)
	Female	331 (83.6)	257 (84.3)	257 (84.3)
Department	Accounting	40 (10.1)	35 (11.5)	35 (11.5)
	Finance & Taxation	44 (11.1)	41 (13.4)	41 (13.4)
	Int'l Trade	81 (20.5)	58 (19.0)	58 (19.0)
	Business. Admin.	90 (22.7)	59 (19.3)	59 (19.3)
	Banking & Insurance	46 (11.6)	46 (15.1)	46 (15.1)
	MIS	49 (12.4)	33 (10.8)	33 (10.8)
	Applied FL	46 (11.6)	33 (10.8)	33 (10.8)
Class Group	e-Class A	86 (21.7)	52 (17.0)	53 (17.4)
	e-Class B	89 (22.5)	71 (23.3)	71 (23.3)
	e-Class C	86 (21.7)	59 (19.3)	60 (19.7)
	Traditional	131 (33.1)	122 (40)	121 (39.7)
	Invalid	4 (1)	1 (0.3)	1 (0.3)
Total		396 (100)	305 (100)	305 (100)

從學生認知來探索英語教師在 E-Learning 教學中角色意涵之研究

俞燕妮、黃宣穎*

摘 要

這篇報告旨在從學生認知來探索英語教師運用電腦科技輔助教學中角色意涵之研究。本研究有 396 位德明技術學院的新生參與，依據他們的英文能力，參與者被分為實驗組（e-learning 學習者）和對照組（傳統方式學習者）。實驗組的學生接受 e-learning 教學，即老師運用數位教材和資訊傳播科技（Information & Communication Technology）之支援，來培養學生自主學習外語。對照組的學生則只接受傳統的書面教材，而未有 ICT 支援。

E 化教學研究結果顯示：學生對於老師在 e 化教學和傳統教學角色的認知是不變的。這項研究發現：外語老師在 e 化教學的角色和早期傳統互動式教學的角色是頗為類似的，是一種多元化的層面，涵蓋老師（FACES）所應運用的各種角色，促進（Facilitation）、指導（Advising）、實驗（Conducting experiments）、設計活動（Engineering Activities）與支援不同學習之型態與完成創作作品之過程（Supporting divergent learning styles, pathways and creative productions）。此五項相輔相成，彈性運用，才能培養學生自主學習並達成外語教學目標；非單一角色可以達成之。

關鍵詞：英語教學、教學策略、教師角色、e 化教學

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