

FACEBOOK-PHOTOVOICE INTERFACE: EMPOWERING NON-NATIVE PRE-SERVICE ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS

Jessie Grace U. Rubrico, UCSI University

Fatimah Hashim, University of Malaya

Engaging non-native pre-service English teachers who are still learning the language themselves requires two tasks: facilitating their language teaching skills and scaffolding their language learning. This action research interfaced Facebook and Photovoice technologies in order to empower participants to be proactive in their language learning and teaching skills. Using pedagogy of empowerment and collaboration, the researchers tracked the participants' impressions regarding the interface's role in strategizing their language learning and teaching skills enhancement. Data for this study are the participants' mid- and post-semester feedback, reflection papers, and engagement matrix from the class Facebook page. Results suggest that the instructional design of blending technology (i.e., Facebook and Photovoice), pedagogy of empowerment, and collaboration was effective in empowering participants to take responsibility for their own learning, thereby improving their language learning and teaching skills.

Keywords: Collaborative Learning, Language Learning Strategies, Teaching Methodology, Social Networking

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INTRODUCTION

Non-native pre-service English teachers (NNPET), who still have to acquire communicative competence in English, may lack the confidence to interact with their (NNPET's) peers. They are often beleaguered with the anxiety of using English and further stressed by perceptions of inadequacy regarding their own language skills (Gan, 2013; Mousavi, 2007; Siew-Lian Wong, 2012; Yoon, 2012). They therefore need a pedagogy that can empower them (Bernat, 2008; Hayati, 2010).

Pedagogy of empowerment, according to Brantmeier (n. d.), is a co-learning relationship between students and their teacher in an environment where power is shared when constructing collective and individual knowledge in authentic engagements. In this relationship, students are the knowledge explorers while the teacher is the facilitator of knowledge, scaffolding-builder, and critical reflection enhancer (Brantmeier, n. d.). This environment can promote students' responsibility for their learning (Panitz & Panitz, 2004) and effectively shifts the responsibility of learning from teachers to the learners, resulting in learners being involved, informed, and heard (Jones & Duckett, 2007). Empowering learners enables them to develop the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to exert some control over their learning (Harvey, 2004; Shrader, 2003).

This action research has adopted the pedagogy of empowerment to address the issue of passivity or non-engagement by NNPET students who lack communicative competence in English. Getting the NNPET participants actively involved in their learning started with a negotiation about the manner in which class sessions would proceed. The participants agreed to collaboratively explore authentic tasks in the classroom and online through Facebook, and also through a Photovoice project towards the semester's

end. Thus, Facebook and Photovoice technologies were interfaced in order to empower the NNPET participants to be proactive in their language learning and improvement of their teaching skills and, consequently, to explore the participants' perspective on this collaborative and technology-driven instructional design.

Facebook Technology: A Learning Interface

Facebook is a social network cited for its academic engagement potential, a likely environment for students' involvement in constructive learning (de Villiers, 2010; Petrović, Petrović, Jeremić, Milenković, & Ćirović, 2012; Roblyer, McDaniel, Webb, Herman & Witty, 2010; Susilo, 2008). Notwithstanding concerns over invasion of privacy and self-disclosure issues, thereby arguing against using Facebook as an academic tool (Grossecka, Branb, & Tiruc, 2011; Madge, Meek, Wellens, & Hooley, 2009; Rubrico 2011), this academic engagement potential has been explored by educators who find Facebook a convenient interface facilitating interactive exchanges which lead to deeper conceptual understanding (Godwin-Jones, 2008; Harwood & Blackstone, 2012; Hurt et al., 2012; Pellizzari, 2012; Rice, 2010;).

Language learners and teachers have discovered a new learning platform in Facebook, and, in its applications, innovative ways and resources which can hone language learning skills, (Blattner & Lomicka, 2012; Kabilan, Ahmad, & Abidin, 2010), provide cognitive scaffolding (Rambe, 2012), promote socio-pragmatic competence (Blattner & Fiori, 2009), and sharpen critical thinking, grammar, and writing skills of students (Hatane & Wijaya, 2010; Rubrico, 2012). Hence, Davies (2012) considers what individuals do on Facebook to be social literacy and language praxes. Furthermore, Facebook is regarded by some as the "new classroom commons" where people stay connected (Schwartz, 2009, p. 1); and as a community model which fosters learner engagement, interactions, and collaborations (Hurt et al. 2012; Muñoz & Towner, 2009; Riley, Domizi, & Camus, 2012).

As an online community then, can Facebook empower learners? Bryer and Seigler (2012) suggest that teachers design courses to empower students using technology and propose a conceptual framework for empowering students using social and Web-based technologies via synchronous, asynchronous, and automated pre-scripted communication tools with a six-point student- and instructor-based rationale for empowerment: development of (a) "ethical reasoning judgment in complex contexts," (b) "leadership and management skills in complex contexts," (c) "ownership in the learning process;" (d) providing space for "teachers to show passion and engage that passion with students;" (e) ensuring "buy-in to course objectives," and (f) "buy-in to course content delivery methods" (p. 429). This conceptual framework is relevant to this action research in three ways. First, the core argument of this framework is empowering students through social technologies, furthermore, the thrust is teacher-student collaboration toward students' skills development; and finally, the avenue to this development is the teacher-student partnership in achieving learning outcomes through participatory modes of content delivery. All these are interwoven in this action research.

Photovoice technology: A medium for meaning making

"Photovoice is a participatory action research strategy" (Wang, 1999, p. 185), "by which people can identify, represent, and enhance their community" through photography (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). Photovoice empowers people by giving them cameras to document images that express their perspectives on personal experiences as stakeholders in a community. Each self-generated photograph that is contextualized and shared with the community serves as a catalyst for personal, community, and institutional change (Wang & Burris, 1994).

Photovoice empowers people whose plight in need of transformation, like the women of Wang's study, "to control the photographic process in order to express, reflect and communicate their everyday lives" (Wang, 1999, p. 185). These photographs undergo phases (Wang & Burris, 1997) corresponding to an action research cycle (Reil, 2010), which includes elements such as orientation (studying and planning),

taking pictures (taking action), group discussion and analysis (collecting and analyzing evidence), reflection and dialogue (reflecting), and documenting stories (sharing action research results). Photovoice is action research that moves toward “real and material changes in: what people do; how they interact with the world and with others; what they mean and what they value; the discourses in which they understand and interpret their world” (Atweh, Kemmis, & Weeks, 1998, p. 25). Photovoice represents a distinctive feature of participatory action research: “those affected by planned changes have the primary responsibility for deciding on courses of critically informed action which seem likely to lead to improvement and for evaluating the results of strategies tried out in practice” (McTaggart, 1997, p. 28).

Widely used in community development (Bell, 2008; Hergenrath, Rhodes, & Bardhoshi, 2010; Wang, Cash, & Powers, 2000) and in public health promotion and education (Baker & Wang, 2006; Catalani & Minkler, 2010; Snow, 2007), Photovoice has also been adopted by educators as a research methodology for teaching and learning (Nelson & Christensen, 2009; Nimmon & Begoray, 2008). Studies depicted Photovoice as a research tool fostering critical thinking among students, “a new medium to create knowledge” (Schell, Ferguson, Hamoline, Shea, & Thomas-Maclean, 2009, p. 340), a classroom dialogues trigger, and a tool that “empowers and gives voice to students and teachers in classrooms and schools” (Meyer & Kroeger, 2005, p. 186). As a pedagogical tool, Photovoice was likewise found effective in engaging students in the classroom (Cosgrove, 2004; Graziano, 2011; Whitfield, 2005) and online (Edwards, Perry, Janzen, & Menzies, 2012; Perry & Edwards, 2012;).

This study has adopted Photovoice for three reasons: it promotes learner engagement in ethnically diverse classrooms (Chio & Fandt, 2007); it empowers and motivates learners to actively participate in their learning process (Cook & Buck, 2010); and it is effective in connecting teachers and students (Whitfield & Meyer, 2005). Similarly, Facebook, to which all participants were subscribed prior to this study, was interfaced “to enrich students’ educational experiences, to increase the relevance of the content, and to encourage students to collaborate effectively with their peers” (Phillips, Baird & Fogg, 2011, p. 13).

Can the Facebook-Photovoice interface empower NNPET participants to be proactive in their language learning and improvement of their teaching skills? How do NNPET participants view this interface as a strategy for improving their language learning teaching skills? These are the questions that motivated this research.

Conceptual Framework

Constructivism is the view that language learning is at the interplay of linguistic, psychological, and sociological paradigms in knowledge construction (Brown, 2007, p. 12). Constructivists emphasize the learner’s active role in making meaning of linguistic information as well as the role of social interaction in crafting a new linguistic structure (Brown, 2007, p. 13). Underpinning the Facebook interface is Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of social constructivism, which posits that language learning is mediated by social interaction (i.e., Social Development Theory, SDT), brought to the next level through scaffolding by a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), who helps learners cross the distance between what they can do and that which they can potentially do. According to Vygotsky, this distance is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD): the zone of learning.

Proposed MKOs for this study are the course facilitator, the more knowledgeable peers, and technology such as Internet resources and the Facebook interface, which serves as a collaborative ZPD and classroom learning zone. The class was divided into 13 groups of NNPET participants who were each assigned to peer teach on theories of second language acquisition of their choice and then present the application of these theories through microteaching. Group presentations were peer reviewed based on flexible evaluation rubrics agreed upon by the class (please refer to [Appendix A](#)). Presenters also evaluated their own presentations. Peer reviews and self-evaluations were posted on the class Facebook page. Through these constructive and candid evaluations, participants were empowered to collaborate toward their learning and skills development. This framework assumes that transparent evaluation breeds a culture of

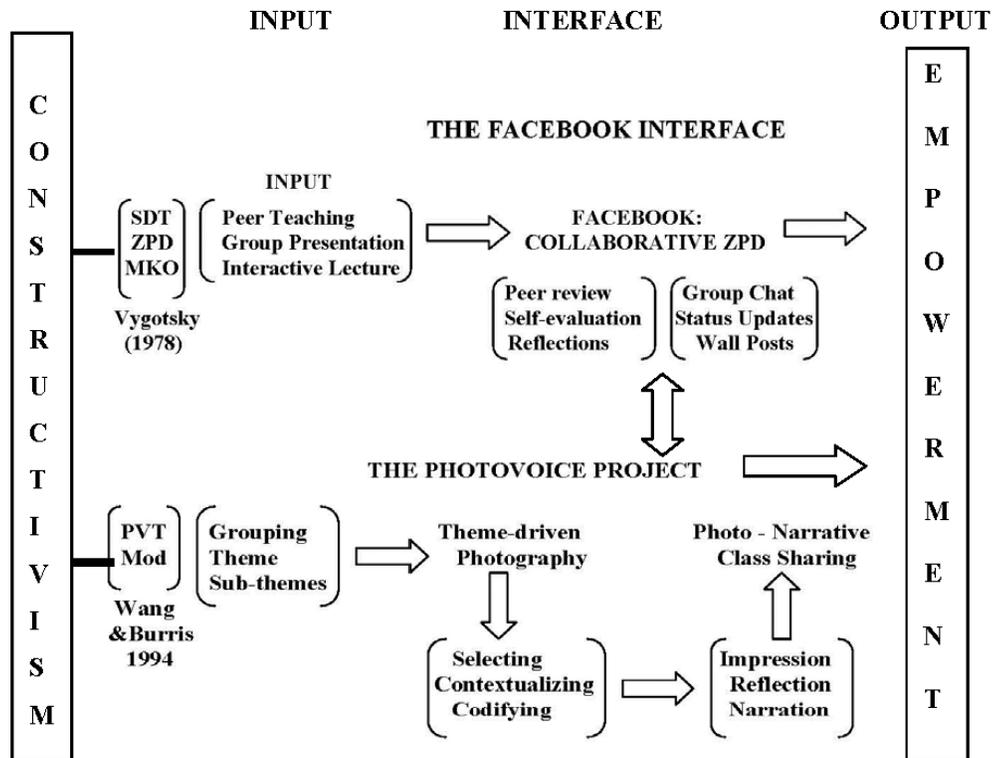
responsibility, maturity, and collaboration where students regard each other as co-constructors of the competencies and the skills they are working towards acquiring.

Furthermore, Facebook connected participants to each other through group chat, status updates, and wall postings; this allowed for immediate resolution of issues and questions. The Facebook page is, therefore, conceptualized as a zone of proximal development where participants collaborated toward their learning in a non-threatening environment.

Photovoice was modified (PTV Mod) and adopted as the second element of this social network-documentary photography empowerment interface. Firstly, modification consisted in the photographs being more of their choice rather than something taken to improve the plight of the participants. Some researchers have modified Photovoice in this manner for classroom research (Graziano, 2011; Schell et al,2009; Whitfield & Meyer, 2005;). Secondly, in this modified version of Photovoice, participants grouped themselves by fours, agreed on themes for their documentary photography, and were each given a disposable camera. Photographs undergo a three-stage analysis process: selecting, choosing the photos most relevant to the theme; contextualizing, making meaning of the photos from the photographers’ perspective; and codifying, identifying emerging issues, theme or theories (Wang, & Burris, 1997). After analysis, members share their picture narratives and reflections with the class.

The outcome of the interface is learner empowerment, which this study argues is the key to NNPET participants’ active involvement in their knowledge construction and meaning making of the course content. [Figure 1](#) visually maps out this conceptual framework.

The Conceptual Framework



[Figure 1.](#) The Conceptual Framework.

METHODOLOGY

The interface was put in place during the second week of a 14-week core course for NNPETs enrolled in the Teaching of English as Second Language (TESL) program at a state university in Malaysia. The course introduces participants to the key concepts and theories of language learning and language use and their application to classroom practice while also honing in on participants' communicative competence, teamwork, and research skills.

Participants

Fifty-nine NNPETs (48 female; 11 male) of different nationalities registered for the course: 33 Malaysians (21 Malays, 8 Tamils, and 4 Chinese) and 26 international students (22 from mainland China, 2 from Nigeria, and 1 each from Poland and Brunei). Falling within 19 to 27 years of age, most of them were undergraduate sophomores in the Bachelor of Education in TESL Program. Twenty-five participants were of intermediate English proficiency level, while 34 were beginners. The proficiency levels were assessed using the [Transparent Language English Proficiency Test](#) administered during the second session of the course. This online instrument tested NNPET participants' English grammatical knowledge, ability to identify errors in phrases, as well as vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Notwithstanding their proficiency level on this test, all participants had previously passed the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) for university admission.

Procedure and Timeline of the study

Reil's (2010) action research cycle of "study and plan - take action - collect and analyze evidence-reflect" was used in this study. Phases of the Photovoice project were adapted from Wang & Burris (1997): *Orientation, taking pictures, facilitating group discussion, analysis, reflection and dialogue, and documenting the stories*; while the four-week time frame was modelled after The Innovation Center's *Keeping Healthy: Strategies for reflection and learning* (The Innovation Center, n.d.). The timetable of activities related to the interface is displayed in [Table 1](#).

[Table 1](#). *Timeline of the Study*

Phase 1	Weeks	Activities and Tasks
Study and plan	1	Course orientation, introduction, and strategic session planning
Take action	2 to 8	Activities: interactive lectures, peer teaching, presentations, peer reviews, self-evaluations
Collect and analyze evidence		Collaborative tasks: peer reviews, self-evaluations, reflections
Reflect	9	Discussion and reflection on Facebook Interface as a tool of empowerment
Phase 2	10 to 12	The Photovoice Project
Study and Re-plan		Orientation: the PV project, time frame, regrouping, group planning and discussion; giving out cameras to participants
Take action: Data collection		Taking pictures: theme-driven picture taking; developing films (disposable cameras), downloading images (digital cameras)

		Facilitating group discussions: selection of pictures relevant to the group narrative's theme
Analysis	13	Selecting, contextualizing, codifying
Reflection		Reflection and dialogue: submission of running commentaries, impressions, reflections
		Documenting the stories: photo-narratives
Class exhibit	14	Sharing of photo-narratives, impressions, reflections; discussion on participants perception on the PV project

Data collection and analysis

Data for this study were the participants' reflection journals and responses to the anonymously submitted mid- and post-semester feedback questionnaires. Although the mid- and post-semester feedback questionnaires were in English, participants did not have difficulty answering them because, hewing closely to the pedagogy of empowerment, all questions were discussed in class and formatting the questionnaires was a collaborative effort.) Some observational data of engagement were also sourced from the usage frequency of the class Facebook page, the quantity of group postings, and the type of postings covering the three-month period of the interface agenda.

Data analysis was done using constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), coding repeating reply items (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009) and grouping them into categories descriptive of the core themes emerging from participants' feedback and reflections. Adopting Strauss and Corbin's framework of analysis (1990), data from reflection journals and from the mid- and post-semester feedback were examined, compared, conceptualized, and categorized (p. 61). Connections between categories were established by "utilizing a coding paradigm involving conditions, context, action/interactional strategies and consequences" (p. 96); the core categories were then defined. Conversely, data from the class Facebook page were arrayed and coded for frequency according to the types of posting over the three-month period in order to establish measures of participants' engagement.

Instruments

The Mid-Semester (Phase 1) Feedback Questionnaire

1. Has the Facebook Interface empowered you to be proactive in your language learning and teaching skills improvement? How?
2. Reflection: What were the things you would have wanted changed in class?

The Post-Semester Feedback Questionnaire

3. Has the Photovoice Interface empowered you to be proactive in your language learning and teaching skills improvement? How?
4. Write your impressions on the approach of this class to strategizing your language learning and teaching skills.

RESULTS

All 13 groups in the class answered that both the Facebook Interface (Question 1) and the Photovoice Interface (Question 3) empowered them to be proactive in their language learning and improvement of their teaching skills. Four categories emerged from replies to Question 1: Facebook offered (a) an innovative, fun and non-threatening learning engagement venue; (b) an ideal platform for discussion and learning engagement; (c) a convenient and wider learning space unbounded by time; and (d) an efficient

medium of communication and bonding (see categorized feedback in [Appendix B](#)). The Phase 1 Reflection Trigger (Question 2) explored what components of the interface needed modification from the perspective of the participants. [Table 2](#) displays the categorized replies.

Table 2. *Categorized Replies to Reflection Trigger*

Categories	<i>n</i>	%	Participants' Feedback
The workload	5	8.5%	"Learners need time to internalize concepts discussed and more time for tasks completion."
Peer evaluation	6	10.0%	"Some groups are not fair in evaluating and some disagree with the evaluations."
Lecture frequency	5	8.5%	"We understood the lessons better through the lecturer's simple explanation."
Class grouping method	7	12.0%	"Random grouping so international students could work with local students."
No change	36	61.0%	"We don't want to change anything; we all learn from lectures to tasks. We hope it can be carried on to the next batch."

Replies to Question 3 yielded two major categories: Photovoice (a) ushered in an alternative approach to learning, and (b) triggered creativity. A third category highlighted the participants' disappointment over the inadequate time allotted for the project; time constraints cancelled the much-awaited photo-narratives class exhibit (see categorized feedback in [Appendix C](#)).

Participants' answers to Question 4 yielded five categories: (a) students' responsibility for learning strategy was engaging; (b) the freedom to choose strategies for task completion was liberating; (c) creativity, cooperation and teamwork propelled by the innovation were motivating; (d) co-learning through discussion and skills improvement was empowering; and (e) the lectures and handouts were inadequate (see categorized feedback in [Appendix D](#)).

Furthermore, additional data reflecting engagement sourced from the class Facebook page yielded a moderately high degree of participation. Over the three-month period, the following were observed:

- a) Frequency of usage (on a per-group, per-week basis) consisted of 337 postings (not counting the ensuing discussion threads). Thirteen groups posted tasks when they were due, at least twice a week. Although participants were given the option to submit hard copies of group assignments and tasks, all of them opted to post their tasks and assignments on Facebook, because (as one student stated) "it gave us more time."
- b) Quantity of postings: 479 (counting only initial entries) broken down into evaluation entries, peer/self evaluations (309); group reflections (52); issues: linguistic determinism (17); mathematics & science instruction medium shift from English to Bahasa Malaysia (13); language being a theory of competence or performance (13); and the ability of machines to learn language (13).
- c) Group comprehension feedback, a one-page summary of what each group's participants learned during the first half of the course (13).
- d) Sharing information and links of mutual interest, such as project reminders, due dates of group tasks, videos, links, and notes on tasks/lessons at hand (13).
- e) Facilitator's postings, not counting the ensuing exchanges (31).

- f) Extra-class activities, such as invitations to forums and birthday greetings (15).

The engagement arising from the interaction was observed to have intrinsically motivated students toward improving their language production skills. For instance, students with proficiency lower than the intermediate level, learned the correct usage of some expressions and grammar rules from their more proficient peers' postings on the class Facebook page, both in class and via online interactions. A case in point is Group XY.

Group XY was composed of four international students from the same country. All of them beginners in their proficiency level as shown by their group postings below, taken from the class Facebook page during the first month of the semester:

Today group 1 has given us very big surprised. They have enough confident to present. They using the color card attracts us let the entire active unusual interest and let students have interest to participate the group work. . . we are quite enjoy it. We really like to thanks our classmates.

An improvement was consequently noted on the post-semester course feedback submitted by each member of the group. Below are excerpts from their journals:

Group Member A: "This is very good communication platform, also very good learning platform; there are many study space, and many students put links to the video we study. Here the teacher and students are like good friends."

Group Member B: "Facebook is very useful and convenient way to improve our learning. Our classmates discuss there, and share their knowledge with us. . . Finally, photography group project is great way to enhance our learning. We understand how to make students learn second language their own way."

Group Member C: "Each group has one presentation using a teaching method. This is very interesting activity, we have different ideas and all of us enjoy the class. After that we get gifts. Not only we become teachers but we also improve our teaching and learning skills."

Group Member D: "Language learning and language use teach us many things. For example: how to discuss with your group members. In our country we never talk with our classmates in class because our lecturer needs us to finish assignment or homework by ourselves. . . The photography group project is the most interesting way of learning among all our tasks; it increase our interest in the language when we describe our photographs."

The reflection excerpts, demonstrate an improvement in the communication skills of Group XY members.

DISCUSSION

This action research has explored how the interfacing of two technologies, Facebook and Photovoice, while simultaneously employing a pedagogy of empowerment can engage NNPET students in their language learning and improvement of their teaching skills. Results suggest that the interface empowered the majority of the participants to be proactive in their learning. The participants found Facebook to be (a) an innovative, fun, and non-threatening venue for engagement, (b) a convenient and broader learning space unbounded by time, and (c) an efficient medium of communication and bonding. These findings are consistent with those of earlier studies, which considered Facebook a convenient interface for student engagement, facilitating interactive exchanges that bring about conceptual understanding and intellectual discourse (Godwin-Jones, 2008; Harwood & Blackstone, 2012; Hurt et al., 2012); thus fostering an enhancement in the learning process as a sense of classroom community is fostered (Blattner & Fiori,

2009; Riley et al., 2012). These findings also bring forward the assertion of Facebook's potential as a valuable resource for academic communications and collaborations (Roblyer et al., 2010).

We have also posited that Facebook is a collaborative ZPD, acting as scaffolding for learners. By engaging with this interface and its applications, participants have acknowledged it as a collaborative learning zone. Facebook acted as (a) a collaborative learning zone, "effectively engaged us through knowledge sharing, peer reviews, ideas exchange," said Amira; (b) a scaffolding mechanism, "provided access to instant answers from peers and lecturer. When I have problems and questions, I could ask for help through our Facebook Page," quipped Cassandra; and (c) communication access, "made available all class information and updates which made learning easier," remarked Fahmi (all names are pseudonyms). Moreover, some participants stated that they tried their best to come up with high quality postings because "we knew our peers would be reading them;" while one group's reflection chronicled a co-construction of learning: "we wanted to contribute to our peers' learning as much as they have contributed to ours."

The generally positive reflections and feedback from participants regarding the Facebook interface were supported by their active engagement on the class Facebook page. The quantity of postings totaled 494 initial entries (e.g., status or wall postings) without counting ensuing exchanges. The dynamic interaction on Facebook became a stepping-stone to active engagement, which, in the case of Group XY, led to an improvement of language skills.

This study strengthens Rambe's (2012) claim that Facebook and its applications are potential scaffolding that can lead to learners' meaningful learning and engagement. It also substantiates the Bryer and Seigler (2012) conceptual framework for empowering students using social and Web-based technologies. In sum, Facebook scaffolds and empowers.

The participants, likewise, acknowledged the value of the Photovoice Interface for English language learning and teaching. Photovoice ushered in an alternative approach to teaching and learning, which triggered the students' sense of ownership, autonomy, and creativity as they saw themselves in their photo-narratives. Using self-generated photographs to tell their stories motivated participants to learn the language even more. The international students, for instance, portrayed their moments of anxiety, desperation, and challenges in learning and using the English language.

This result supports previous findings that students become more engaged in "shaping what and how they were learning" (Meyer & Kroeger, 2005, p. 192) when their own experiences are integrated into the instructional design (Cosgrove, 2004; Graziano, 2011; Whitfield, 2005). Photovoice empowers students to transform their world (Cook & Buck, 2010), even as it has transformed teaching practice (Meyer, Hamilton, Kroeger, Stewart, & Brydon-Miller, 2004; Meyer & Kroeger, 2005; Whitfield & Meyer, 2005).

These findings also uphold the scaffolding role of collaboration. Besides technology, collaboration drove the interface used in this study. Participants saw the value of group tasks, which was expressed in their reflections: "doing tasks collaboratively is a strategy that marked the evolution of our learning process; as we discussed, we managed at the end of the task to 'fix' our weakness and enhance the quality of our work." Others cited that group tasks (a) fostered exchanges of ideas, knowledge and experiences, and (b) encouraged interactions and teamwork (see categorized reflections in [Appendix E](#)).

Collaboration values the contributions of group members toward task completion and builds a sense of autonomy, responsibility, and ownership of their output, paving the way to learning (Kessler, 2009; Kessler, Bikowski, & Boggs, 2012; Panitz & Panitz, 2004). As group members interact through assigned tasks, they scaffold each other's learning; scaffolding then transcends the group level and moves towards whole-class scaffolding (Foley, 1994).

The mid-semester reflections revealed (a) the 61% ($n=36$) overall approval rating for Phase 1 of the study, and (b) the dissatisfaction of a few participants over some components of the interface, such as task

overload, peer evaluation, and peer teaching (indicating a preference for more lectures). An unexpected issue was raised when international students called for a mixed local-international grouping for English language interactions. This could have been possible had the facilitator decided to group participants randomly or deliberately but then it would have defeated the participants' freedom to choose their group. This dissatisfaction toward the interface implies that (a) some students need more time to accept this innovation and, (b) the interface needs a review.

These mid-semester reflections guided the re-planning of the next research cycle. After discussion, the class agreed to drop peer evaluation for more interactive lectures and discussions while the participants were busy with the Photovoice project. These changes effectively lessened the next cycle's workload.

Moving on to the final item of the questionnaire, participants expressed that the interface empowered them to take an active role in their language learning and improvement of their teaching skills. The majority of the participants perceived the interface to be engaging, liberating, motivating, and empowering. There were a few students ($n=5$), however, who preferred more traditional instruction to collaborative knowledge construction and meaning making.

Dukes (2005) and DelliCarpini (2012) view technology as integral to achieving learning goals while simultaneously fulfilling best practices and standards in the teaching of English to speakers of other languages. Learning trends in the 21st century are empowering students to access borderless learning environments through technology. Technology engages, scaffolds, and empowers language learners (Baralt, Pennestri, & Selvandin, 2011; Langer de Ramirez, 2010; Peterson & Showalter, 2006; Yang & Chen, 2007).

Limitations

A limitation of the study was the compulsory participation of students registered in the course. Initially three students had initial reservations regarding the instructional design. However, all the students agreed to participate after discussions on the merits of the instructional design. Another limitation was the Photovoice project time frame. The four-week time frame was too short for the NNPET participants, with some groups not finishing their photo-documentary in time for the exhibit. This was a big disappointment for the participants who looked forward to sharing their stories during the exhibit. Two more weeks would have given the participants adequate time to weave to their satisfaction the stories they wanted to share through their photographs. Thirdly, student acceptance of Facebook as an academic tool of engagement may not succeed in other classroom contexts, because some students might consider their lecturers' access to their Facebook pages as an invasion of their privacy. Conversely, some lecturers are reluctant to share their Facebook pages with students, lest they be restricted too much by self-disclosure concerns. Lecturers and students, however, can create a professional Facebook page for this exercise in order to avoid this self-disclosure issue.

Further studies exploring the academic use of Facebook using a larger sample size, or interfacing Facebook with other technologies, such as Instagram, iPods or Photoscape, should be pursued in order to corroborate or bring forward results of this action research.

CONCLUSION AND LESSONS LEARNED

This study proposes that empowerment is the key to student engagement. By exploring technology and collaboration as tools of learner engagement, scaffolding, and empowerment, this interface has paved the way for the participants' proactive engagement in their language learning and improvement of their teaching skills. In addition, Brantmeier's (n.d.) pedagogy of empowerment enabled the participants to become strategists, negotiators, teachers, peer reviewers, course design evaluators, and weavers of innovative and creative photo-narratives. With a 61% approval rate as shown in Table 2, this approach may be considered relatively successful in scaffolding participants' language learning and in facilitating

their language teaching skills. For the majority of the participants, the approach was a learning experience, especially due to the excitement of playing teacher, photographer, and, as indicated by some, journalists.

For the facilitator, the experience has been a learning adventure into vulnerability, flexibility, and diplomacy. Vulnerability existed because students were empowered to assess the facilitator's approach to their learning. When students are critical, the need "of decentering myself and learning to be other to the other" (McNiff, 2008, p. 14) helps in inquiring into one's practice. Vulnerability is intimidating, yet valuable in sparking the change that improves practice.

Flexibility and diplomacy are key players in dealing with the issues and concerns that students raise. Flexibility oftentimes connotes yielding to students' demands, while diplomacy denotes tactfully defining conflicting positions, especially when the facilitator seeks to push a course agenda while also relating with the students' challenges. Yet, yielding takes on a collaborative stance, as co-learners acknowledge the interdependency of teacher, students, and issues (Greenwood, 1999, p. 10) in achieving learning outcomes. Correspondingly, the diplomacy when addressing exigencies demonstrates that "crafting solutions to these dynamic and ever changing classroom issues can be an exciting undertaking, especially when one acknowledges that newer and better answers are evolving all the time" (Sagor, 2000, p. 23).

Vulnerability, flexibility, and diplomacy are valuable companions to a pedagogy that empowers and to action researchers who incessantly pursue new avenues to deeper understanding of their practice in an attempt to transform it for the better.

APPENDIX A. Microteaching Evaluation Rubrics

1. How has the microteaching enhanced your knowledge on the topic?
 2. Which part of the microteaching has the strongest impact on you?
 3. How can the microteaching be improved to further enhance you learning?
 4. In a range of 5-10, where 5 is the lowest and 10 the highest, what mark do you give the group? Why?
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APPENDIX B. Categorized feedback, Question 1 *How has the Facebook interface empowered you to be proactive in your language learning and teaching skills development?*

Categories	Participants' Comments (Representative)
a) Facebook provided an innovative, non-threatening, and fun way to engagement	"Using Facebook was innovative, more informal, and fun; there was no pressure as we expressed and exchanged our views; we were just friends discussing our learning."
b) Facebook served as ideal platform for discussion and learning engagement	"As a multiracial class, our opinions on issues differ according to our culture; we get new ideas and understand the topics under discussion very well through discussion on Facebook." "Facebook effectively engaged us through knowledge sharing, peer reviews, activity updates which were important elements in our learning strategy. Reading what others say on assigned topics also helped our learning process."
c) Facebook was convenient and time-saving interface	"Facebook made our life easier; an interesting tool for us to finish more tasks in shorter time; a convenient, practical, and economical way to submit our assigned tasks."

d) Facebook was an efficient medium of communication and bonding	<p>“An efficient communication and bonding media among the participants; all information and updates were accessible and this made learning easier. When I had problems and questions, I could ask for help through this website”</p>
e) A perfect blend of life inside and outside the classroom	<p>“Perfect! 90% of our time is spent on Facebook so we can study while updating on our social life outside the classroom and it really helps.”</p> <p>“People like me, who have lots of extra curricular activities, could get class updates and information anytime, anywhere on Facebook.”</p> <p>“Facebook made it easier to share points after class; afforded us more learning space.”</p>

APPENDIX C. Categorized feedback, Question 3: *How has the Photovoice interface empowered you to be proactive in your language learning and teaching skills development?*

Categories	Participants’ Comments (Representative)
a) Photovoice ushered in an alternative approach to learning for the participants	<p>“I discovered how pictures speak through the stories woven around them; how words come alive with stories behind them”</p> <p>“It taught me the skill to use pictures in language learning and teaching.”</p> <p>“I have never connected language learning and teaching to photography, especially to my own photographs as expression of choice of learning language my way and sharing it with my group and with the class through our photo-narratives. It is empowering.”</p> <p>“While I was shooting, I realized English is everywhere –in posters, advertisements, books, food, drinks, streets and so forth; we’re actually learning and making use of languages every day, seeing this perspective through the lens of a camera is a wonderful experience.”</p> <p>“Language learning through our own pictures encouraged us to speak in the target language.”</p>
b) Photovoice triggered creativity	<p>“This project required us to be creative from choosing our group’s theme to presenting the narratives; definitely enjoyable and not stressful.”</p> <p>“The feeling of owning a camera and the freedom of taking pictures to tell our stories motivated us to do our best since it was a rare opportunity for us to express our creativity innovatively.”</p> <p>“This task gave us a chance to be creative in expressing our ideas in the English language and in conveying meaningful messages through pictures.”</p>
c) The Challenge: Time constraint	<p>“Photography enhanced language learning, my only disappointment was that we did not have enough time to share it with the whole class.”</p>

APPENDIX D. Categorized feedback, Question 4: *Write your impression on the approach of this class to strategizing your language learning teaching skills.*

Categories	Participants' Comments (Representative)
a) Responsibility for learning strategy was engaging	<p>"I felt that the initiative for learning shifted to the students as we learn from our experiences—microteaching, completing tasks, listening and evaluating other groups' presentations; a good strategy to overcome students' passivity in the classroom."</p> <p>"I like this teaching strategy: students learned by themselves, shared what they have learned with their peers, and enhanced their knowledge through interactive lectures where misconceptions and misunderstandings on target concepts were straightened out. I liked this approach better than being spoon-fed."</p>
b) Freedom to choose strategies for tasks completion was liberating	<p>"The facilitator provided students with opportunities to express their views in class and online and to generate ideas on how to accomplish their tasks their way."</p>
Innovation encouraged creativity, cooperation and teamwork	<p>"Using technology, the Internet, Facebook, videos, camera, multimedia presentations made this class interesting; student experienced something new that triggered our creativity, spirit of cooperation, sharing, and teamwork."</p>
Co-learning through discussion and skills improvement was empowering	<p>"This class taught us how to communicate and exchange ideas with our peers and we improved; each time we presented in class empowered us and built up our confidence."</p> <p>"The technique involved student's participation, tasks that honed our teaching skills and class discussions which made students understand the subject well."</p>
e) More lectures	<p>"All activities have been a big help to me; but lectures helped me the most. Lecturer should play more active role in imparting the knowledge, like really drill us on the knowledge. It would have been even better if students were given notes or handouts for reference."</p>

APPENDIX E. Categorized reflections, Collaboration: *Doing group tasks is a good strategy in language learning and teaching.*

Categories	Participants' Comments (Representative)
a) Group work fostered exchanges of ideas, knowledge and experiences which are vital to learning	<p>"Group discussions: Different inputs were analyzed, argued, & understood resulting in brilliant output enriching our learning, deepening our knowledge of the topic, and improving our skills together."</p> <p>"This strategy marked our learning process evolution; as we discussed, we managed at the end of the task to 'fix' our weakness, enhancing the quality of our work."</p>
b) Group tasks promoted interaction	<p>"I prefer group work because individual work does not require interactions among peers; student working in groups can work and better communicate and study with each other."</p>

	“Students from different culture, speaking different languages, interacting in the English language learn a lot from each other in improving speaking skills.”
c) Collaboration encouraged teamwork and confidence building	<p>“Developed teamwork as each member listened to each other’s ideas and upon reaching an agreement, cooperated toward achieving the group’s goal.”</p> <p>“Effective because even though most of our tasks were group work, everyone did their equal share of work.”</p> <p>“Collaboration provided chances for leadership training and responsibility.”</p> <p>“Some students were shy in class but working with their groups encouraged and empowered them; they did very well in the group.”</p>

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jessie Grace U. Rubrico is affiliated with the School of Education, [UCSI University](#), Kuala Lumpur. A linguist by profession, she teaches linguistics for language teachers and research modules for TESOL. She has been conducting classroom action research since 2009.

E-mail: drrubrico@gmail.com

Fatimah Hashim specialises in Second Language Education and Curriculum Development. She teaches TESL and action research courses at the Faculty of Education, [University of Malaya](#) and does consultation in curriculum development and holistic education.

E-mail: fatim3377@yahoo.com

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