# A Task-based Approach to Preparing EFL Students for the Use of Web Resources in Language Learning

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## Abstract

This paper reports on a study in which a task-based approach was employed to prepare non-English major freshman students for the use of web resources for English learning. Students' engagement and perception of confidence in using web resources were investigated through both quantitative and qualitative research design and data analysis. Findings suggested that the students fostered a level of confidence in using the English-learning websites for different needs and found those sites to be valuable in terms of offering interesting, interactive, and fun web-based learning activities and materials. As the sessions progressed, it was also found that the level of student participation and engagement remained fairly constant and positive. Drawing from the findings, a number of pedagogical suggestions are provided, and future studies are recommended to enhance our understanding on the impact of English-learning websites on the outcomes of student learning.

**Keywords:** web-based language learning, task-based teaching approach, student perceptions, self efficacy

## Introduction

In the technology-driven world, the Web has not only become indispensible in various arrays of life but has also opened up new opportunities for language teaching and learning. Pedagogically, the Web provides language teachers with rich audio and video resources to make language teaching materials more diverse and attractive to students. Unsurprisingly, it has become an intuitive practice for many language teachers to survey, select, and adapt web-based materials for classroom use when they feel language input from textbooks is insufficient. In addition, language classrooms tend to be more engaging and interactive when online communication tools and resources are utilized to promote authentic communicative activities.For many students, the Web has become their vital "academic toolkit" (Gibbsons, 2007), and web-based materials open up various potentials for learning experiences. Through surfing the Web, language learners have easy access to unlimited resources for information searching, language practice activities, obtaining authentic language input, audio and video entertainment in the target language, and interactive encounters with speakers of the target language, to name a few. Literature has indicated that the variety of hyperlinked multimedia document and computer-mediated communication tools can help language teachers enrich teaching materials in classroom (Son, 2007; Warschauer, 2001). For example, English learning websites serve to offer an easily-accessible learning medium and unlimited opportunities for English learners to practice and learn English. Besides, research shows that web-based language learning is beneficial for the development of learner motivation and engagement of learners in authentic and cultural environments of communication (Chun & Plass, 2000; Gruber-Miller & Benton, 2001; Kung & Chuo, 2002; Mosquera, 2001; Osuna & Meskill, 1998; Rico & Vinagre, 2000). Given what the Web can offer, the need to explore the ways to use the tool effectively and efficiently in language classrooms is thus on the rise. However, some CALL researchers have acknowledged that the gap between the technology knowledge/skills that language learners possess and their ability to use those tools to optimize learning experience might compromise the benefits that Web sources can

bring to language learners (Kennedy, Judd, Churchward, Gray & Krause, 2008; Kirkwood & Price, 2005). This motivates a call for new approaches to prepare students for the use of web resources to enhance language proficiency (Lai & Morrison, 2013).

With the dual purposes of cultivating the skills English learners need in order to utilize web sources for language learning, and getting insight from the process of student engagement as well as their perceptions, this study explores web-based language learning activities on English learning websites through the use of Facebook discussions in an EFL context. More specifically, it follows a task-based approach to an integration of web-based language learning activities into a general English course at a private university in northern Taiwan and looks into the students' engagement in the online discussion activities as well as their self-efficacy in using web resources to help them improve their English proficiency.

## Review of the Literature

Along with the development of computer technology, the well-documented advantages that the Web can bring to language students in the literature (Benson, 2006; Greenhow, Robelia, & Hughes, 2009; Sefton-Green, 2006; Thorne et al., 2009; Zhao & Lai, 2007) are in line with the research interests in learners' experiences in using web resources to improve language ability in recent years. First, the researchers are interested in student perceptions of the use of technology. For example, Yang (2001) investigated EFL students subjective responses to the use of the web in the context of a research project on American states. She found that the students generally had positive responses to the project despite that some students encountered difficulties in technology, which caused negative impact on the students' perceptions. In a study conducted by Son (2007), a group of students was guided to use the web to complete two types of web activities. Research findings suggested that the students held positive attitudes toward the experience and considered the web is a useful tool and a supplementary resource for learning. In Kassim Hashim, and Radzuan's research (2005), research findings suggested that 60% of the students found reported going outside of course material to seek

information on the Web useful and that their interests in language learning were increased due the authenticity of online materials.

Although positive perceptions toward the use of web resources held by language learners were demonstrated in the literature, researchers pointed out a contradictory situation in that learners' use of technology and web resources for language learning outside of classroom is limited. For instance, Winke and Goertler (2008) surveyed 911 beginner-level foreign language students at an American university and found that despite having frequent use of technologies for entertainment and information searching, the students had insufficient literacy ability and limited use of technologies for language learning purposes. Furthermore, only a few students in their study were aware of the learning potentials and benefit of the various technologies in their daily lives. Similarly, Zhang (2010) researched Chinese EFL learners' adoption of technology in language learning and discovered that the learners in her study did use web resources in language learning but mostly through listening to songs and watching moves. Other web tools such as online chatting, blogs, and online forums were used less than 20 minutes each week.

In light of these research findings, Lai and Morrison (2013) posited a conclusion made by researchers Benson and Voller (1997), Lai and Gu (2011), and Sheerin (1997): "the accessibility of a large range of technology-mediated learning sources and tools does not mean that active, extensive use of technology for language learning will necessarily take place, nor does it guarantee effective use of the technologies" (p. 154). In the same vein, Figura and Jarvis (2007) pointed out technologies "can only be effective if they are in the hands of students who know what to do with them" (p. 457). To summarize, in order to support the best use of the technology and engage learners in active and effective use of web resources for language learning, it is suggested that it is vital for language teachers to offer appropriate learner training for development of correct attitudes as well as necessary knowledge, strategies, and skills (Cohen & White, 2008; Hauk & Hampel, 2008; Hubbard & Romeo, 2012; Levy, 2009) and incorporate them into language classrooms. In the next session, research design and findings of this study on a task-based approach to preparing EFL students for the use of web resources in language learning

is reported.

## Methodology

### *Research Participants*

The participants in this study were 121 EFL studentsat a private university in Taiwan enrolled in two compulsory general English classes taught by the author, a non-native English speaker, in the spring semester of 2012. The population of the participants consisted of students with two different majors which divided them into two different classesal most equally. Due to the nature of their majors, i.e., educational science and library information, the ratio of male and female students in these two classes was one to three. The self-reported English proficiency of the students varied to a great extent. Though most of the students had studied English since elementary school, they considered themselves as English learners with low to intermediate language ability.

### *The Course*

The context of the research was a general English course which consisted of eighteen weeks in a semester. Although separated into two classes, the students used the same textbook and followed the same curriculum with a focus on developing English reading ability and relevant language skills. The courses the students had to attend included a two-hour course meeting with the author and a two-hour lab course with their teaching assistants on a weekly basis. In addition to the textbook, the students were provided with extra handouts and learning materials when necessary. In general, the students were satisfied with the course load and were able to complete the assignment and learning projects.

### *Learner Tasks*

The integration of the web resources into the general English classroom to prepare the students for using web-based resources to enhance English proficiency involved a series of activities for eleven weeks, consisting of 10% of the course grade. First, an introduction of

English-learning websites was delivered by means of a mini lecture. In the first part of the mini lecture, the students were shown several key English-learning websites pre-selected by the teacher, such as *BBC Learning English*: (http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/), *Randall's Cyber ESL Listening Lab*: (http://www.esl-lab.com/), Purdue University Online Writing Lab: (https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/), and *CNN Student News:* (http://edition.cnn.com/studentnews/), to name a few. The students were instructed how to make use of these sites to satisfy different needs of English learning. As the students' knowledge about web resources for English learning was limited, the mini lecture emphasized the value of English-learning websites as a source of authentic English input as well as a collection of interactive, intriguing, and entertaining English-learning activities, as opposed to mechanical vocabulary and grammatical drills. In the second part of the lecture, a project presentation of an English-learning website project was announced, and a guideline on the task including the time limit, language use, and procedures was provided. To that end, the students were given a list of fifty teacher-selected English learning websites covering four English language skills with authentic English as well as attractive and interactive English learning activities.

Secondly, the students in each of the classes grouped themselves into groups of six to seven. Each group had to choose two to three English-learning websites from the list provided by the teacher and deliver a fifteen-minute presentation in English on the websites chosen. In the presentation, the students were required to explain the reasons for choosing the websites, introduce key features of the sites, and demonstrate how to use the sites to enhance English ability. Finally, it was required that they give suggestions and advice on browsing the sites, followed by a short question-and-answer session where the students were encouraged to express their opinions on the usefulness of the websites that were just introduced and whether or not they liked them.

The third task involved two parts, 1) the students' actual use of the web sources and 2) message posting and responding on Facebook. After exploring and searching for features that would best suit the students' needs from the chosen sites, the teacher, on a weekly basis, gave one to

two tasks which were posted to the Facebook group for each class (based on the websites introduced by the presenting group), and all the students in class were asked to visit the website and complete the assigned task. The form of the tasks was as follows:

Please learn TWO phrases or words from the website: http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/language/. Please tell the class which two words/phrases you've learned, and try to make a sentence. For example, I learned "bubble over." I think it is interesting. Sometimes we are so happy, and we don't know how to say it in "real English." So I can say, "I won the lottery yesterday. I was bubbling over!"

After they had completed the activities, they were required to post reflective messages on Facebook, where a class group was established at the beginning of the semester. Here is one example of a message posted on Facebook.

I learned one phrase is "fall back on." It was a little difficult to understand. We can use this phrase to make a sentence like "Though my career was failed, I always have my family to fall back on." I also learned a new word "unhygienic." It means unsanitary. And we can use it to make a sentence like "This restaurant is so unhygienic!"

In total, there were twenty-one tasks assigned to the students over a span of eleven weeks covering tasks in reading, writing, listening, and learning grammar, idioms, and collocations. Table 1 depicts the tasks assigned to the students in the Department of Educational Science. In addition to language development activities, some other tasks provided the students with opportunities to enjoy audio and visual materials online through listening to English songs and watching news and movies. Finally, the students were encouraged to read and comment on the Facebook messages posted by their classmates. In order to facilitate the online interaction on Facebook, the teacher highlighted interesting

Facebook postings and comments in class and gave extra points to those students who read others' comments and made responses.

**Table 1**  **Learner tasks on English learning websites**

| Time | Websites | Tasks | Language skill |
|------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Week 1 | Time Magazine: www.time.com | Choose one topic of top news in 2012, and read a piece of news that you feel most interested in. Post a comment on the news and new words that you learned. | Reading and vocabulary |
| Week 2 | Learn English through Movies: http://cinema.clubefl.gr/ | Choose one movie you would like to watch and complete the three exercises provided on the site. Share with us which movie you watched. | Listening |
| Week 3 | Multimedia English Videos: www.multimedia-English.com | Choose one song from this site. On the right hand side, read the transcript, and learn the meaning of this song. Share with us the song you chose and the new words you learned. | Listening and vocabulary |
| Week 4 | Learn English Today: www.learn-English-today.com | This week I would like you to learn some "phrasal verbs" from the page on phrasal verbs. First, read the instruction on the page.  Second, at the bottom of this page, there are several quizzes. Please choose two and tell us what you learned. | Vocabulary and collocation |

| Time | Websites | Tasks | Language skill |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Week 5 | Learn English Online: www.learnEnglishonline. org | Read the lesson (55) on this site and complete the vocabulary test on food words. Share with us what interesting things you learned. | Vocabulary |
| Week 6 | English, baby!: www.Englishbaby.com | Please go to this page on traveling. Choose an English lesson. For example, I chose the lesson "safari." From this lesson, I learned a new type of traveling which is new to me, and I hope I can do it someday. After you finish the lesson, tell us what you learned from the lesson. What are the most interesting things in the lesson? | Reading |
| Week 7 | English Central www.Englishcentral.com | We learned from a great English learning website this week. On this site, you can watch a video and learn a lot from it. Use your Facebook account and log into the site. Click on one video, and it will start loading. Then finish the three tasks provided: Watch --> Learn --> Speak. Tell us what you chose and learned. | Listening and speaking |

| Time | Websites | Tasks | Language skill |
|------|----------|-------|----------------|
| Week 8 | Fun Easy English www.funeasyEnglish.com | Please learn at least THREE pieces of slang from this page of American slang. Tell us what you learned and why it is interesting to you. Also, try to make a sentence. | Slang |
| Week 9 | ELC Study Zone: Level 410 Grammar Topics: http://web2.uvcs.uvic. ca /elc studyzone /410/ grammar/ | Choose "One" grammar exercise from the intermediate level from "ELC Study Zone". After completing the exercise, share with us new grammatical knowledge you learned from this site. | Grammar |
| Week 10 | Randall's Cyber ESL Listening Lab: http:// www.esl-lab.com/ | Please go to Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab and do one listening activity in each level (1 in easy level, 1 in medium level, and 1 in difficult level). Tell us what words or interesting things you learned. | Listening and vocabulary |
| Week 11 | Manythings.org: http://www.manythings. org /voa/classroom/ | Choose one lesson from Activities from VOA's "The Classroom" and complete the activity. Share with us what you have learned.For example, I read an article on Steve Jobs, and learned new vocabulary from the article such as drop out, step down, etc. And I also know Steve Jobs himself better in addition to his Apple Company. Try to give more examples and details of what you learned. | Reading, vocabulary, and writing |

### *Data Collection Procedures and Analyses*

Design of this study was guided by three major research questions: (1) How do the students explore web sources to enhance English proficiency through sharing English websites in the form of presentation and classroom discussion? (2) How do the students engage in task-based activities in exploring English-learning websites through online interactions on Facebook? (3) What are the students' perceptions of confidence in using web sources to enhance English proficiency after completing the tasks? To answer these research questions, five types of data were collected, including notes from the teacher's classroom observation, audio recordings of group presentations and class discussions on English-learning websites, student postings on Facebook, and pre- and post-task questionnaires. Student interviews were analyzed in qualitative and quantitative approaches depending on the different orientations used in the  investigation. Qualitative research data consisted of three major types. The first is the teacher's observation notes and class recordings. The second is Facebook postings. The third type is transcripts of student interviews with those who volunteered to discuss their experiences in participating in group work and task-based online activities. The entire collection of data was first organized in a folder of the tasks assigned weekly and then coded and categorized in order to identify salient themes that emerged. Through repeatedly reviewing different data sets, the themes generated from the analysis process were developed into initial findings, which were later validated and tested through triangulating different data sources of information.

Quantitative data included student responses on both pre- and post-task questionnaires. Before they were given the mini lecture on web-based English-learning resources, the students were invited to complete a pre-task questionnaire with a consent form. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions which asked the students' age, gender, self-perceived English proficiency, experiences in English learning and taking standardized tests and scores, and hours of using the Web per week. They were then asked to complete details about their previous experience in using web resources to help them improve English proficiency. Another

5-point Likert scale questionnaire was completed immediately following completion of all the tasks. This questionnaire asked the students for information about their perception of confidence in knowing how to use English-learning websites for the purposes of learning, their willingness to continue exploring English websites, usefulness of the tasks and activities in preparing them for using sites, attitudes toward the use of Facebook, and general comments on the learning experience. The data collected from the post-task questionnaire were analyzed through SPSS descriptive statistics. Findings are presented in the following section.

## Results

### Student Engagement in the Form of Group Presentation and Class Discussion

The first task the students were asked to complete was to present two to three English-learning websites in class as a group. Throughout the eleven weeks, a total of twenty-eight English-learning websites were introduced by the students of the two classes. As searching for websites suitable for EFL learners could be time-consuming, the students were encouraged, but not restricted, to go through the list provided by the teacher and choose the websites they were interested in presenting. Before presenting, some groups consulted with the teacher to ensure the features they would like to share in class were appropriate. Those groups who found websites other than the ones provided by the teacher also made some inquiries on relevancy issues. According to student interviews, the students worked together, exploring the sites and searching for the links they felt like sharing and deciding how those links could be used for purposes of English learning. Sometimes debates among students on which parts to present took place in group work. Generally speaking, the students followed the guideline of the presentation very well. They selected and presented to the class those sites and links that they found useful, interesting, and even exciting. Furthermore, they discovered links with intriguing English-learning opportunities that were buried in the website, showing a desire to impress the class with some "cool" features.

As the constructivist view of learning sees knowledge as constructed by cooperative interactions among peers, the presenting students, while engaging in the group work, not only acquired knowledge about web-based English-learning resources but also internalized the knowledge in the collaborative dialogues.

In addition to showing and demonstrating how to use the sites, in the presentation the students gave suggestions on how a particular site could help them learn particular English skills. For example, one group reported, "We think this exercise is helpful when we want to learn English tenses. For Taiwanese students, it is always difficult to learn tenses." Another group said, "The site provides lyrics of the songs and exercises. When we want to improve our vocabulary ability, we can use this site to listen to music and learn new words. It is fun and not boring." Evaluative comments from their own perspective with regard to the level of language difficulty were also provided in the presentation. Based on their judgment, they gave comments such as, "We think the game is a little bit too easy. But we still found some words that we don't know. So, we think it is still helpful," and "We choose to use the intermediate level because it is more suitable for our English ability." Overall, the presenting students engaged in the task through exploring web-based materials, exercises, and interactive activities in the websites they regarded as useful for English learning while also making reflective efforts to provide the class with suggestions and advice on employing the English-learning websites. While listening to the presentation, the rest of the class participated in the exploration process through giving feedback and asking questions such as "How to switch to another level?" "How to search for specific songs or movies?" Or "Is it required to have membership in order to submit writing pieces?" Though not playing the leading role, the class benefited from the group presentations which familiarized students with English-learning websites and later supported them to complete the tasks requiring actual tryouts.

### *Student Engagement on Web-based Tasks by Using Facebook*

Facebook in this study was employed as a platform where the teacher posted tasks assigned to the class and the students "submitted"

their homework. The decision to use Facebook was due to its immediacy and popularity among the students as social networking software. While doing these tasks, the students were told that their postings would not be evaluated for accuracy of grammar and vocabulary but rather for the substantial and reflective comments they made based on experiences in exploring English-learning websites. Though the exact number of student postings varied each week, on average the percentage of Educational Science majors who posted learning experiences using the assigned English-learning websites was 79, and there were 81% of Library Information majors consistently completing the Facebook assignments. The high participation rate might be due to the teacher's encouragement in class by showing interesting postings to the class and giving rewarding comments to the students who had made extraordinary effort. As shown in the following remark in the results of the post-task questionnaire, another possible reason contributing to the high percentage rate might be the students' positive perceptions about non-traditional ways to learn English as well as their preference for using Facebook as a medium for online social interactions. Lastly, 10% of the final grade being based on completion of the tasks provided an incentive for the students' engagement.

While the tasks were proceeding, content of the Facebook postings varied depending on the different tasks assigned each week. As the students tended to follow the task instruction posted by the teacher, when the task orientation was to enhance grammar or vocabulary proficiency, the students posted messages to demonstrate that they had completed the web-based language exercises. In comparison, when the students were open to choose exercises or materials attractive to them, messages posted on Facebook were much more individualized, with more personal reflections and preferences for learning experience. For example, after watching a video on *EnglishCentral* (http://www.Englishcentral.com), one student posted:

> I chose the video "Fast Food." When I was in elementary school, I liked to eat fast food very much, but my mom thought that was not good for me, so she seldom let me eat fast food. I

envy those who can eat fast food at that time. But now I know fast food isn't healthy, so I will not envy those people anymore.

Another student posted this message after he went through the site *Fun Easy English* (http://funeasyenglish.com)

I learned "flashback," "French kiss," and "fender-bender." The point I appreciate is its "Usage". When I chat with somebody, I can use the slang to express something. Sometimes I can reach up to humor. And everybody can laugh with it. I really want to understand more!!!

In addition to reflective comments, the students discovered and recommended new links or features not assigned by the teacher but buried in the sites. For example, below is a message posted by one student who recommended a different kind of video than the one the teacher assigned after watching one video on National Geographic (http://www.nationalgeographic.com):

I watch the video "Lions vs. Zebra". In the video, it mentioned about the lion's abilities and habits. For example, they can see six times better than humans, hearing things from a mile away. And when they are eating, male always the first. And others such as they can run fast, but only for few seconds. By the way, the videos on news are awesome too. You can watch them to learn more news English.

As can be seen in the messages, language use in the postings was not perfectly correct; however, the students not only made an effort to relate what they had learned to personal experiences but also appreciated the opportunity to acquire new knowledge through browsing the sites. By writing and posting messages on Facebook, the students engaged in the tasks interactively and reflectively, and the process of doing some diated their English learning and triggered the dynamics of knowledge internalization.

Regarding peer responses to the Facebook postings, not many of the students responded to the messages posted by their classmates despite the fact that fifty-seven percent of the students reported in the post-task questionnaire that they were interested in reading and responding to posts. In general, less than ten students responded to their classmates' messages in written form while many of them showed their appreciation by clicking "like" at the bottom of the post. This result might be due to the fact that the students were reluctant to do extra writing in addition to what the teacher requested, but the interest in giving feedback on their classmates' messages by clicking "like" plays a part in the task engagement.

### *Post-task Questionnaire*

The18-item post-task questionnaire aimed to elicit the students' perception of confidence in knowing how to use English-learning websites for the purposes of learning, their willingness to use English learning websites after completing the tasks, usefulness of the tasks and activities preparing them for using the sites, attitudes toward the use of Facebook, and general comments on the learning experience. The total number of the students who responded to the questionnaire is 91. Table 2 shows the results of students' responses to the questionnaire.

Questions 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 15, and 16 investigated the students' perception of confidence in knowing how to use English websites for the purposes of English learning after the tasks had been completed. The results for Questions 2, 4, and 9 showed that more than half of the students felt confident in using the web-based resources. For example, responses of 59 students (65%) to Question 2 and 57 students (62%) to Question 4 indicated that the students believed they had acquired the capacity to use English learning websites to improve English ability. Similarly, 59 students (65%) reported in Question 15 that they could recall at least three English websites even after the tasks had been completed. With regard to the student perceptions about the benefits that English-learning sites can bring to the students' learning, 74 students (81%) who responded to Question 16 believed that as long as they used English websites strategically, their English ability would be enhanced. To ensure the accuracy of the students' responses regarding their perceptions of

confidence, Questions 7, 8, and 9 eliciting the students' responses took the form of negative questions. According the results, the majority of the students did not agree that learning how to use English-learning websites was difficult and useless. In other words, they regarded English-learning websites as useful tools for learning.

Though the students showed their confidence and positive attitudes toward English-learning websites and the usefulness of the tool, when asked whether they would like to use English-learning websites after the course was completed, the students responded to Question 14 less positively than those questions just discussed. Only 43 students (47%) reported their willingness to use English-learning websites after finishing the tasks, while 38 students (42%) said they would not continue to use them. The reason behind the responses might be due to the students' professional discipline and academic needs. Unlike English majors who have stronger motivation to sharpen their English ability, the students in these two classes felt less incentive to continuously use English-learning websites.

In relation to the implementation of the tasks, 67 students (74%) did not agree that they were overloaded by the tasks assigned by the teacher (Question 10); 45 students (50%) gave positive responses to the websites presented by their classmates (Question 11); 77 students (85%) appreciated the mini lecture and the list of websites provided by the teacher (Question 17); and 69 students (75.9%) found group presentation was helpful to familiarize them with the English-learning websites (Question 18). Overall, the students were satisfied with the tasks designed to scaffold them in the experience of learning and using English-learning websites during this semester and confirmed the usefulness brought by the task implementation.

**Table 2** **Number of student responses and average ratings on the questionnaire**

| | Frequency of Response (*N*=91) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| | **n (%)** | **n (%)** | **n (%)** | **n (%)** | **n (%)** |
| I hope my teachers can introduce more English-learning websites. | 3(3.3) | 8(8.8) | 8(8.8) | 48(52.7) | 24(26.4) |
| I gained confidence in my ability to use English-learning websites to help me improve my English ability. | 2(2.2) | 19(20.9) | 11(12) | 45(49.4) | 14(15.3) |
| Browsing English-learning websites is interesting to me. | 4(4.4) | 14(15.4) | 17(18.6) | 49(53.8) | 7(7.7) |
| I believe I have sufficient knowledge to use English-learning websites to help me learn English. | 4(4.4) | 15(16.5) | 15(16.4) | 54(59.3) | 3(3.3) |
| I am interested in knowing how to use English-learning websites. | 5(5.5) | 14(15.4) | 15(16.4) | 40(44.0) | 17(18.7) |
| Generally speaking, I like the web-based tasks this semester. | 3(3.3) | 4(4.4) | 10(10.9) | 40(44.0) | 34(37.4) |
| I don't think web-based resources can help me learn English. | 16(17.6) | 59(64.8) | 8(8.8) | 4(4.4) | 4(4.4) |
| I am unfamiliar with English-learning websites. | 14(15.4) | 44(48.4) | 18(19.8) | 11(12.1) | 4(4.4) |
| Using the Web to learn English is difficult for me. | 14(15.4) | 52(57.1) | 16(17.6) | 5(5.5) | 4(4.4) |
| I think to complete the tasks my teacher assigned is a heavy workload. | 17(18.7) | 50(54.9) | 18(19.8) | 2(2.2) | 4(4.4) |
| Generally speaking, I think the websites my classmates presented in class are helpful for my English learning. | 9(9.9) | 27(30.0) | 10(11.0) | 35(38.5) | 10(11.0) |

| | Frequency of Response (N=91) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | SD | D | N | A | SA |
| | n (%) | n (%) | n (%) | n (%) | n (%) |
| I think using Facebook to post my English learning website assignment motivated me to browse thesites and complete the tasks. | 1(1.1) | 12(13.2) | 16(17.6) | 40(44.0) | 22(24.2) |
| I would like to read and respond to the messages posted by my classmates. | 4(4.4) | 21(23.1) | 14(15.4) | 30(33.0) | 22(24.2) |
| After all the tasks have been completed, I would like to continue using English-learning websites. | 5(5.5) | 33(36.3) | 10(11.0) | 34(37.4) | 9(9.9) |
| Now I can recall more than three English-learning websites. | 4(4.4) | 17(18.7) | 11(12.1) | 40(44.0) | 19(20.9) |
| I believe as long as I use English-learning websites strategically, I can learn English effectively and efficiently. | 3(3.3) | 3(3.3) | 11(12.1) | 49(53.8) | 25(27.5) |
| I think the mini lecture and the list of English-learning websites provided by my teacher is beneficial for my exploration and usage of the resources. | 2(2.2) | 2(2.2) | 10(11.0) | 52(57.1) | 25(27.5) |
| I think the group presentation in class is helpful for my use and usage of the resources. | 2(2.2) | 7(7.7) | 13(14.3) | 48(52.7) | 21(23.1) |

Note: N=91; SD=strongly disagree, D=disagree, N=neutral, A=agree, SA=strongly agree

Questions 12 and 13 are related to the usage of Facebook as a platform for student-teacher and student-student interactions. In response to Question 12, 62 students (68%) agreed or strongly agreed that Facebook served to motivate their completion of the tasks and sharing their experience. Moreover, responses to Question 13 indicated that 52 students (57%) were interested in reading and responding to the messages posted by the class, which shows that Facebook played a facilitating

role in implementation of the tasks when the students were engaging in exploration and learning of English-learning websites through interacting with their classmates online and making reflective comments.

Finally, the students were asked to evaluate their experience in undertaking the tasks by answering Questions 1, 3, 5, and 6. Question 1 asked whether the students would like to learn about more sites after the tasks were completed. 72 students (79%) expressed their intention to learn more. In response to Question 3, 56 students (62%) thought browsing English-learning websites was interesting, and in Question 5, 57 students agreed that learning how to use English websites appealed to them. Overall, 74 students (81%) liked web-based tasks implemented during the semester, which demonstrated that engaging in the learning and exploring English websites was a pleasing experience for these non-English major students (Question 6).

## Discussion

To prepare non-English major freshman students for the use of web resources for English learning, this study investigated non-English major freshman students' engagement in web-based tasks as well as their perceptions of confidence in using English-learning websites when they participated in a general English course. For many EFL students in Taiwan, English learning is normally a practice containing plenty of mechanical grammar drills and vocabulary memorization. In spite of the fact that students are obsessed by using high-tech gadgets and are comfortable with technology-rich environments, taking advantage of web-based resources and interactive computer assisted language learning (CALL) sites seems to not occur to them. The lack of relevant knowledge and self-confidence in undertaking self-directed language learning can be the possible reasons causing the gap (Morgan, 2012).

In the study, the students were scaffolded up from a mini lecture, to group work of presentation, and to self-directed utilization, evaluation, and reflection on the English-learning websites as they were guided by the teacher's task-based approach and online activities. As shown in the students' responses to the post-task questionnaire, the students fostered

a level of confidence in using the English-learning websites for different needs and found those sites to be valuable in terms of offering interesting, interactive, and fun web-based learning activities and materials. They enjoyed exploring web resources and agreed that they would use them as part of extra English-learning practice outside of the classroom. As the sessions progressed, the author's observation and the Facebook postings suggested that the level of student participation and engagement remained fairly constant and positive. Not only did the group presentations become more attractive to the class due to introductions of some exciting sites, but the students' postings were getting more elaborative and reflective. In terms of analysis, there are several substantial elements facilitating the process. First, a step-by-step instruction and demonstration task implementation are essential to lower the anxiety of those students who lack prior knowledge about English-learning websites. In addition, teachers' encouraging comments and careful monitoring of student participation are important to motivate students and detect problems in order to work out immediate solutions. Second, the overarching design of the tasks has to be learner centered. It is vital to involve students in the decision-making process and provide them with freedom to choose what and how to present in class, to select which part of the English-learning websites to explore, and to reflect on their learning experiences depending on personal interests and preferences. By doing so, it is more likely that students feel the sense of ownership for the products generated from the engagement process.

Third, it is beneficial to choose a platform which students feel comfortable and are more than willing to use. In this study, the accessibility of Facebook to the students was one hundred percent, and checking and posting messages on Facebook are ritual activities for most of the students. Posting comments on Facebook, for the students, was more of a personal and casual daily practice rather than submitting an academic assignment for the teacher's evaluation. In turn, Facebook was used as a tool of mediation through which the students internalized their knowledge, reflected on learning, and interacted with the teacher and the classmates. In light of the process, the students' engagement in the preparation tasks for using web-based English-learning research

was enhanced. Finally, successful task implementation also requires teachers' carefully-planned curriculum as well as extra effort and investment of time. Given the huge size of general English classes, having students work in groups can lessen the teacher's workload and promote interactions among students. At the same time students can also benefit from individualized task design in that they gain more sense of self-achievement by producing English language on a platform accessible to the teacher and everyone in class. As the findings of the study indicate, both group and individualized task designs are advantageous in certain pedagogical aspects; therefore, it is suggested to apply a hybrid approach when similar tasks are being implemented.

## Conclusion

The findings of the present study suggest that the task-based approach to learner preparation on the use of web-based resources to improve English proficiency not only equips the students with knowledge but also develops the confidence needed to employ the tool strategically and efficiently. Today in technology-enhanced English environments where the Web can be used for a wide range of venues in English teaching and learning, there is a strong need to develop necessary attitudes and competency for exploring and utilizing such a valuable tool. Through proper preparation, language learners are no longer kept away from authentic materials as well as interactive learning activities that the Web offers. The study offers some insights into pedagogical concerns of a task-based approach to learner preparation for teachers who are interested in implementing similar tasks. It also encourages further studies on the impact of English-learning websites on the outcomes of student learning. For example, a follow-up study on students' language development can be conducted to determine if exposure to and usage of web resources can be translated into an actual learning effect. Such studies will contribute a further step to our understanding and knowledge in this area.

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