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Model-based Approach and English Language Learning Enhancement in English as a Foreign Language

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#### Abstract

At the present time, education needs to meet the needs of Generation Z learners, who prefer intrapersonal and independent learning, and who extensively make use of technology and social media for this purpose. In order to cater this fast changing global learning demand, the education system may need to adapt to self-access digital learning, allowing digital native learners to obtain the latest information and knowledge beyond the regular classes. This study investigates how online models facilitate learners' achievements in respect to pronunciation, retention and self-efficacy in English as a foreign language class. Twenty undergraduate students at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University in Thailand participated in the study while attending an English for Airline Business class. The teaching method applied in this study was a model-based learning with assigned tasks. Data were obtained through students' task performances and interviews. The findings illustrated that comprehensible input of online models and peers' task performances enhanced students' pronunciation. Furthermore, the results of the study revealed that the task simulation may lead to students' self-efficacy and higher retention.

Keywords: model-based learning, pronunciation, self-efficacy, learning retention

# 1. Introduction

The world today is much different compared to the past due to globalization and changes in technology. The technological revolution has affected almost all aspects of life. Utilization of online information and communication technologies are globally widespread. Information technology bears innovation, which is the path to business success. There is no doubt that technology has rapidly changed the way companies do business. Organizations now run their businesses in an information and technology context and conduct their trade and communicate via cyber space. Moreover, automation technologies play an increasingly significant role in everyday life, and machine and robotics are more and more replacing humans in the workplace. According to Autor, Levy and Murnane (2003), tasks that concern complicated thinking and those require complex communication skills have fast evolved worldwide. ,and those tasks demand rich communication and self-directed learning. Thus, workers in the 21st century must have the required technical skills, solid communication capabilities and problem-solving capabilities. Those skills can support 21st century workers for the uncertainties of a rapidly changing labor market. (OECD, 2013; Griffin & Care, 2015).

The state of technology in the workplace is consistent with learning styles of Generation Z students, who are teenagers and now entering college. They have been raised with mobile devices and the Internet. They prefer to access abundance of online information, and their brains are well adapted to visual tools. Thus, visual and video materials are often the norm for this group. Generation Z students also learn more effectively when they are challenged to solve problems and find solutions. They gain more self-efficacy and inspiration when they can solve problems. (Seemiller, & Grace, 2016). This generation expect to be in a learning environment that enhances their capacity and motivation. Accessing the latest knowledge and information, and other essential 21st century skills can therefore help them survive in this digital era. Consequently, all levels of education should shift from traditional teaching methods to ones, which cater technology trends and which satisfy the needs of the Generation Z. As a result, today's classroom learning practices should provide knowledge and skills that can prepare students to survive in this ever-changing environment (Marshall, 1996).

The success of students' learning depends greatly on teaching methods and activities offered. One of the effective teaching methods, learner-centered, is a task-based approach combined with task simulations. It creates a reality of rich communication where learners take roles (Nunan, 1998). The benefits of tasks and simulations include providing students with real-life scenarios and the opportunity to control their goals within the simulation in order to raise students' motivation and to provide necessary capabilities other than language skills (McArthur, 1983; Jones, 1982; Stern, 1980; Sharrock & Watson, 1985)

Nowadays, communication in between non-native speaker is far more common than native

speakers to non- native speakers. As a result, English used as "World Englishes" is by far the most common form of English in the world today (Jenkins, 2007; Graddol, 2006). "World Englishes" inevitably comes with local linguistic and cultural influences affecting the way such English is spoken in a particular location (Jenkins, 2007). However, many researchers claim that some aspects of pronunciation are far more consequential to maintaining mutual intelligibility in English as a Foreign language (Jenkins, 2007; Walker, 2010). This qualitative study investigates how online models facilitate learning in respect to pronunciation challenges, learning retention and self-efficacy in English as a foreign language learners.

## **Generation Z**

Generation Z is part of population who was born between 1995 and 2014 (McCrindle Research Centre, 2015). They are teenagers who are currently in college and those who are going to join the workforce soon. Generation Z learners seem to favor intrapersonal and independent learning through group work, but still prefer the opportunity to do their individual work when studying. This new breed of experiential learners desire to discover things rather than being instructed so they prefer functional and hands-on learning rather than lectures. Generation Z needs challenging experiences and engagement while learning. This group has a short attention span and prefers real-time content on line in order to access relevant information, which they can then apply on-demand. Furthermore, they prefer to make their own choices and expect technology to play a material role in their educational experience. The Generation Z learners are visual learners and therefore are more comfortable with image-rich learning context rather than with text. Thus, technology solutions of any kinds are desired for their ability in order to keep them engaged while learning.

Learning styles of Generation Z differ from those of millennials, the previous generation. Recent studies reveal that the new generation of learners, the so-called Generation Z, is the cohort group that has strong opinions and preferences in their method of learning as well as in their expectation in terms of educational experience (Merriman, 2015). They are independent learners and are able to teach themselves with guidance. They enjoy independent learning by using tools and by gathering information from different sources. They prefer web content with study materials. Thus, they desire to be online. They are responsive to others' ideas and welcome immediate feedback. Moreover, they favor being guided and are happy to apply the knowledge they have gathered from a variety of sources (Seemiller, 2016). They are eager to take on different roles in the process of learning even as facilitators. Furthermore, they expect to be able to carry out their learning from wherever they are and whenever it best suits them (Alderson,

2015). Cook (2015) states that today's learners expect learning that can prepare them for their future tasks so they perceive access to online information as necessary since it provides them with valuable and practical exercise for their future careers. The recent related studies claim that the "Net Gen's" enjoy doing things, not just thinking or talking about them. These unique learning preferences with the ability to self-educate in this digital era, require the learning environment to incorporate better approaches with enhanced digital opportunities. Accordingly, classroom management including teaching methods, teaching materials and objectives must be relevant and engaging to this generation of learners.

#### Web 2.0 and language learning

Web 2.0 includes social networking and social media. Web 2.0 functions as the channel for worldwide connection and communication on the web (O'Reilly, 2005). The World Wide Web offers worldwide databases and authentic information and materials which can foster language learning and teaching. YouTube, which is a video sharing site, is definitely a major part of Web 2.0 materials. YouTube has been utilized in language classrooms in a variety of applications. Video clips from YouTube are often used as supplementary learning resources. Moreover, students make use of it as a sharing platform of their learning tasks they created. YouTube has been empirically researched to be a tool that facilitates language learning and used as a tool to enhance confidence (Siegle, 2009). Furthermore, YouTube is utilized to foster authentic exposure to learning with real world-related tasks and situations, which in turn provides learners with real-life scenarios. YouTube has also been found to foster motivation and classroom interaction, as well as to enhance oral, aural and writing skills (Warschauer & Grimes, 2007; Hazzard, 2006; Mayora, 2009; Alm, 2009).

YouTube, as a video sharing, commenting and viewing platform may cater the generation Z's needs and desires. YouTube facilitates effective learning so instructors often make use of YouTube to promote a second or foreign language with an attention to specific skills, ideas or social perspectives (Sherman,2003). The authenticity of YouTube matters as it provides genuine situations and language used in a variety of contexts, with different people, in different places, and at different times. Learner's autonomy can be achieved by allowing students to choose the topics that they would like to through websites, and language learning relies upon how closely activities approximate real-world tasks or real-world related tasks (Nunan, as cited in Mayora, 2009) Thus, the importance of Web 2.0 tools such as YouTube is immense (Brook, 2011).

# **Task simulation**

The demanding current situation of technology revolution forces changes in classroom activities. A student-centered approach has been echoed worldwide to enhance students' learning achievement and engagement. Experiential learning, including task simulation, has been said to be one of the most effective methods applied in foreign language learning. Through the use of simulations, students use the language in real-life context, where notions and functions of the language and its practical use occur together. By task simulations, students have the opportunity to use the target language with real communication tools in real situations. García-Carbonell's research using simulations for advance English course indicates positive results. (García-Carbonell, 1998). Moreover, collaboration also occurs on the grounds that teaching materials and assignment are created in tandem and in light of abilities to perform tasks (Nunan, 1989). The simulation allows students to do tasks within a safe environment and to address 21st century required skills and knowledge. Simulations can also improve students' skills and allow them to learn from errors (Moorthy, Vincent, & Darzi, 2005; Brooks, Moriarty, & Welyczko, 2010)

# 2. The study

This qualitative study explored how online models facilitate learners' achievements regarding pronunciation, learning retention and self-efficacy in English as a foreign language. The EFL participants, who are the generation Z of the digital interconnected world, were expected to provide valuable insight into their academic achievement, their learning retention and self-efficacy. The result of this study may be used as a guideline for educators or teachers for future instructions to enhance the effective learning process that caters the needs and learning styles of next generations.

#### 3. Research questions

The study takes a new look at whether or not online related models foster learners' achievements and retention together with their self-efficacy. The study aims to answer the following three main questions.

1. To what extent does online related models foster EFL learners' achievement in respect to English pronunciation?

- 2. What is the degree of students' learning retention?
- 3. To what extent do the task simulations nurture students' self- efficacy?

## 4. Methodology

#### 4.1. Participants

Participants in this study were 20 undergraduate Business English majors at Chiang Mai Rajabhat University in Thailand. All participants were non-native speakers of English and were enrolled in a course in "English for Airline Business" at the time this study was conducted. They did not use English in their daily communication and had been exposed to the traditional way of teaching and learning. Participant's English proficiency level was not satisfactory.

# 4.2. Research instruments

The research instrument used in thus study was a recording of the students' task performances along with an interview. The students' task performance recordings were aimed to provide information about students' pronunciation, self-efficacy and retention, while the semi-structured interview was aimed to obtain in-depth qualitative data concerning students' self-efficacy.

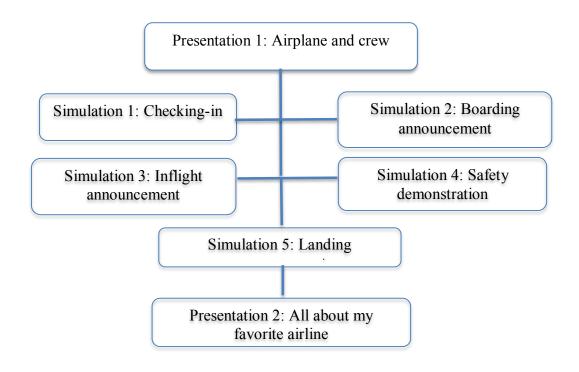
# 4.3. Procedure

There were 20 students enrolled in the course. The course orientation was provided without the students' knowledge of the innovative teaching method. The course goals were further discussed. The teaching and learning activities were based on oral presentations and simulations where the learning topics were assigned. Subsequently, the students did the research for the topics and delivered their presentations and simulations in class. Each student was required to finish 2 presentations and 5 simulations throughout the semester. The students received immediate feedback after their presentations and simulations. Some useful related websites and YouTube clips were recommended by the instructor.

For data collection, the students' presentation performances of presentation 2 (All about my favorite airline) and simulations of announcement 2 (Boarding announcement) and announcement 5 (Landing announcement) were recorded. The average presentation time was 10 minutes, while the average simulation time was around 5 minutes. Each student in the first focus group of 10 students was asked to do a "to-be- recalled simulations" of announcement 2 (10 idea units) and announcement 5 (11 idea units) six weeks after the actual announcements in class, for the purpose of data collection regarding students'

retention (See Figure 1: Learning model). Then, students in the second focus group of 10 were interviewed. The focus group for the interview was the group of students who had a chance to take a flight to somewhere after the course had ended. The data were then qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed for students' pronunciation, self-efficacy and retention. The following figure illustrates the learning model.

Figure 1: Learning model



## 4.4. Data analysis

In order to assess the results of the study, the recordings of the students' performances of Presentation 2 (All about my favorite airline) were transcribed, coded and analyzed for pronunciation problem and self-efficacy. The obtained data was then analyzed by means of content analysis using Hyper Research Computer Program. The 10 recall tests were rated and scored. The recordings of the "to-be- recalled simulations" of announcement 2 (10 idea units), and 5 (11 idea units), were scored by assigning 1 point for each correctly recalled idea unit (out of 21 idea units). Moreover, the semi-structure interviews were translated, coded and qualitatively analyzed using Hyper Research Computer Program for an in-depth

assessment of students' self-efficacy.

#### 5. Findings

The findings show improvement in students' pronunciation. The pronunciation enhancement in this study was achieved by using online models with enriched visual and aural inputs. The students observed the language and pronunciation from online models and utilized them in their later tasks. The analysis revealed that during their presentations, the students made use of the target language and pronunciation, which they had been exposed to, using online models including related websites and YouTube clips, while searching for information for the assignments and simulations. Moreover, there was the evidence that they also imitated the pronunciation used by their peers during presentations. In addition, the real world-related tasks with simulations resulted in students' retention of learning and self-efficacy.

1. Online models and peer' performances facilitate learners' achievement regarding pronunciation.

The result of students' pronunciation analysis showed that the students' pronunciation was clearly improved. It was found that words, phrases and sentences in the simulations influenced and enhanced their pronunciation while being used again in later tasks. The study showed improvement in linguistic features concerning the initial, medial and final consonant cluster [r] and [l]. Moreover, the results of the study indicated further improvement in linguistic features concerning the pronunciation of some problematic consonant digraphs such as [th- and -th] and [sch-]. The analysis also showed that online models enhanced the students' pronunciation of the final sounds of the regular passive verbs ending with [-ed] and [-d], and the plural nouns with [-s] and [-es]. In addition, the pronunciation of some problematic numbers such as 5,7,8 was observed to be pronounced correctly. Interestingly, the results of the study showed that the students imitated the accents of the online models of related websites and YouTube clips, which they had been exposed to, and some also imitated the pronunciation and accents of their peers while presenting their second presentation task. Aspects of language features that have been observed are illustrated in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Aspects of language features that have been used

Language features	Pronunciation	
	More competent students	Less competent students
Consonant Clusters [r] and [l]		
Initial cluster	Х	Х
[Ex: crew, process, cloth, tray, place, arrive, spray, plastic, flight, drink, ground, travel, crowded, prohibited, place]		
Medial cluster	Х	Х
[Ex: electronic, complicated, complete, approximately, children, aircraft, compliance]		
Final cluster	X	
[Ex: fast, airport, seatbelt, ask, board, last]		9
Consonant Digraphs	1	
[th-] and [-th]	X	X
[Ex: through, anything, underneath, weather]		
Final sounds of verbs ending in the voiced sounds		
Final sounds of the regular passive verbs ending with [-ed] and [-d]	Х	X
[Ex: seated, parked, shifted, prohibited, asked, completed, crowded, required, closed]		
Other related language features		
Plural noun with [-s], [-es]	Х	X
[Ex: travellers, devices, coins, belongings, substances, passengers, items, ladies, wings, cups, glasses, computers, overhead bins, articles		
Number	Х	-
[5, 7, 8]		
Link of consonant and vowel	Х	-
[Ex: ladie <u>s and, turned off, trays are, pick up, flight attendants are]</u>		
Accent	1	<b>I</b>

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Language features	Pronuncia	Pronunciation	
	More competent students	Less competent students	
Clip model accent	Х	Х	
Peers' accent	-	Х	

Table 1 indicates that more competent students noticed and correctly produced the pronunciation regarding the initial, medial and final clusters of [r] and [l], while less competent students only noticed and correctly produced the pronunciation regarding the initial and medial clusters of [r] and [l] but not the final ones. The examples of the initial clusters are crew, process, cloth, tray, place, arrive, spray, plastic, flight, drink, ground, travel, crowded, prohibited and place. The examples of the middle clusters are electronic, complicated, complete, approximately, children, aircraft and compliance. The final clusters include fast, airport, seatbelt, ask, board and last.

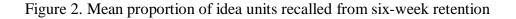
Moreover, the results of the study found that all students also noticed and correctly produced the pronunciation of the problematic consonant digraphs of [th-]and[-th]. Those consonant digraphs include through, anything, underneath and weather. Besides, all participants correctly pronounced the final sounds of the regular passive verbs ending with [-ed] and [-d] during their presentations. Those of seated, parked, shifted, prohibited, asked, completed, crowded, required, closed are hereby exemplified.

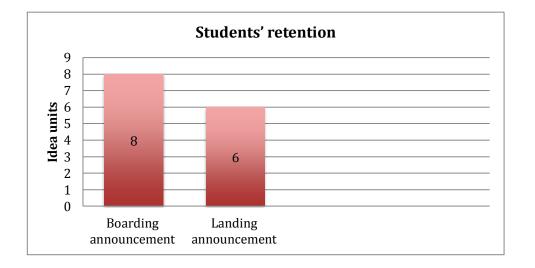
Regarding other related language features, three aspects were found. First, all students correctly pronounced plural nouns with [-s] and [-es] such as travelers, devices, coins, belongings, substances, passengers, items, ladies, wings, cups, glasses, computers, overhead bins and articles. Second, only the more competent students, but not the less competent ones pronounced the problematic pronunciation of numbers, three, five, seven and six correctly, and they linked the consonant and vowel (ladies and, turned off, trays are, pick up, flight attendants are) during their presentations. Lastly, the analysis revealed that all students imitated the accents found in the online models, but only the less competent students imitated their presenting their second presentation task.

2. Online models and task simulations enhance students' retention.

The result of students' retention was derived from the students' task performances and interviews. The

students in this study experienced the innovative teaching methodology, a model-based learning with online models including related websites and YouTube clips, by self-searching online sources. After six weeks, the 10 students from the first focus group were tested using the "to-be- recalled task simulation" of announcement 2 (Boarding announcement) and task simulation 5 (Landing announcement). Also, the other focus group of students was interviewed to investigate their retention. The analysis of the study revealed that the students' retention was quite high (Almost 70%) and they could remember a large portion of the language used for the announcement tasks.





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Figure 2 illustrates that the students recalled 8 out of 10 idea units for the "to-be- recalled simulations" of boarding announcement, while 6 out of 11 idea units of the landing announcement were recalled.

The interview of the focus group of 10 students, who had travelled by plane on both domestic and international flights, yield the similar result. The students said that they recalled 80 % of vocabulary of the airplane's parts both in and outside the plane as well as the airport structures, when being exposed to them. Moreover, they could predict the language that was going to be used at the check-in counter, while at the airport counter. They mentioned that they understood 100% of the domestic pre-flight and inflight announcements, while travelling. However, some of them added that they had a hard time to understand all the content of particular announcements on international flights as the non-native accents of some countries were hard to grasp such as Japanese and Finnish accents.

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 Online models and task simulations enhance students' self-efficacy, motivation and confidence to use English

The result of students' self-efficacy, motivation and confidence to use English was derived from the students' presentation performances and interviews. The results of the analysis indicated that the students gained more self-efficacy and confidence to use the language. During their second presentations, they approached their tasks in a more relaxed manner. They were at ease with the information they had prepared and consistently used direct eye contact with the audience. They demonstrated a strong and positive feeling about the topic during their presentations. They often asked for a laser pointer to use during their presentations despite the fact that they refused to use it when offered during their first presentations. They used a clear voice and correct pronunciation of terms. Most students used innovative presentation methods including videos from YouTube to reinforce their presentations. They also used nonverbal language features such as hand and body movements while presenting. During the interviews, they mentioned that they understood all announcements made both at the airport and during their flights. They added that they could make better announcements compared to those they had heard. Moreover, they claimed that they could recognize most of the airport structures when they were at the airport. Interestingly, they used a variety of check-in options for their flights. They also mentioned that it was challenging to listen to the model clips with varied accents, and that they were proud of themselves when they were able to transcribe what was being said in those rather difficult clips. The analysis of the interview revealed that the students made use of their favorite airlines to motivate their learning and gained more self-efficacy and confidence to use the English language. Bandura (1994) points out that a person with high efficacy is the one who approaches difficult tasks and aims to master them, and he perceives failure as challenging.

#### 6. Discussion

English is used as a tool for international communication purposes including trades. Currently, English is globally used in a variety of cultural backgrounds which influences the way it is spoken. However, many researchers claim that some aspects of pronunciation may lessen the effectiveness of mutual intelligibility, which enhances successful communication (Jenkins, 2007; Walker, 2010).

The results of the study show that despite the fact that the participants demonstrated the correct pronunciation of the problematic words of the cluster [l] and [r], and the [th-] and [-th], which do not exist in Thai language. However, there are still two groups of words that were pronounced incorrectly. The first group is loanwords, which include Airway (Airways), Kaptan (Captain), Singapo (Singapore),

Honggong (Hong Kong). These words are loanwords adopted from the English language and are incorporated into the Thai language without translation and are pronounced in a Thai style. The latter group, tee (three) peed (please), fom (form) wit (with), tank you (thank you), Dit (This), ting (think) have often been taught with an incorrect pronunciation in schools for ages. The problem may have been influenced and maintained by L1 interference. However, being exposed to online models with enriched visual and aural inputs may help solve such a deep-rooted problem found in the EFL classes.

Since Thai does not contain clusters at the end of words, consonants are sometimes dropped entirely. However, the results of the study show some interesting points about this issue. The result of the analysis shows that a few students imitated the YouTube clip models, pronouncing and applying some words with the native pronunciation. Those words include fast, belongings, seatbelts, coins and ask. The informal interview behind this learning revealed that the students noticed the pronunciation and accents from the clip models from related websites and YouTube clips. Blumenfeld et. al., (1991) state that learners learn best through scaffolding instruction, modeling and guiding, which in turn make tasks more feasible and manageable for them. According to Al-Hariri and Al-Hattami (2017), technology plays a significant role in enhancing learners' achievements in many aspects. Many learners are currently relying on technology for their academic purposes. They can immediately find anything they need in their own preferred style of learning. With the help of technology, learners can get immediate feedback, which makes learning more achievable and allow learners to be autonomous, self-directed and independent.

The other issue concerns students' intrinsic motivation to enhance learning achievements. The analysis of the interview revealed that the students made use of their favorite airline to motivate their learning. They stated that in the future, they might work for those preferred airlines, which in turn fostered their motivation and learning engagement. Ryan and Deci (2000) state that intrinsic motivation influences learners' achievement. Learners' freedom in choosing the content, methods and performance outcomes of learning can promote their autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Sjöberg (1997) pointed out that motivation is a crucial factor for learners' achievements. The lack of motivation in learners' education affects their academic results as well as their external and internal motivations. The learning environment with simulations may enhance students' external and internal motivation.

The results of this study confirm that the regular exposure to meaningful input and sufficient opportunities to use the target language, as well as the enhanced role of the teacher to guide and provide corrective feedback may reinforce learners' achievements. The findings of this study coincide with the

study of Eskenazi (1999) and Egbert (2004), who claimed that the use of computers and automatic speech processing bring new possibilities for practicing of foreign language pronunciation. If students can be guided to use the computer parallel to classroom instruction, the increased practice time could be valuable to help their learning goals.

# 7. Conclusion

The prevalence of search engine technology influences education and encourages a shift to personal digital learning, allowing the Generation Z, who are digital natives, to access limitless knowledge beyond regular classes. Autonomous learning with appropriate search engine technology can nurture digital native learners to have high academic achievements and to learn autonomously. The results of the study confirm that education in all sectors, no matter where they are, may need to be shifted toward more innovative teaching practices in order to meet the immediate state of learners' needs and desires. Today, the world is changing fast along with changing employment needs. Accordingly, 21st-century workers need to possess knowledge and skills that can cope with uncertainties of the technology era.

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