PERCEIVED AFFORDANCES AND LEARNING STRATEGIES OF MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN WEB 2.0-BASED INFORMAL LEARNING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

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Perceived affordances and learning strategies of Malaysian university students in Web 2.0 - based informal learning of english as a second language : a mixed methods study / Che Wan Ida Rahimah Che Wan Ibrahim.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	**v**
LIST OF TABLES	**vii**
LIST OF ACRONYMS	**ix**
DEFINITIONS OF TERMS	**x**
ABSTRACT	**xii**
STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP	**xiii**
DEDICATION	**xiv**
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	**xv**
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	**1**
1.0 Introduction	**1**
1.1 Research questions:	**3**
1.2 Background of the research	**4**
1.3 Theoretical framework	**7**
1.4 Potential significance of the study	**8**
1.5 Structure of the dissertation	**10**
1.6 Summary	**12**
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	**13**
2.0 Introduction	**13**
2.1 An overview of educational theories	**14**
2.1.1 Behaviourism	15
2.1.2 Constructivism	17
2.1.3 Social constructivism	18
2.1.4 Technology and learning: the influence of the sociocultural Approach	21
2.2 Web 2.0: The millennial learners	**25**
2.2.1 Web 2.0: What to learn?	28
2.2.2 Web 2.0: How to learn?	31
2.3 The notion of affordances	**33**
2.3.1 Web technologies and learning affordances	36
2.3.2 Web technologies and learning limitations	55
2.4 Learning strategies	**61**
2.4.1 Web-based language learning strategies	64
2.4.2 Web tools as learning strategies practice platforms	69

2.5 Summary	**83**
CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	**85**
3.0 Introduction	**85**
3.1 Vygotskian sociocultural theory	**87**
3.1.1 Mediation in sociocultural theory	88
3.2 Activity theory: Leontiev and Engeström	**93**
3.2.1 Leontiev's activity theory: motive, goal and conditions	93
3.2.2 Engeström's activity theory: mediating resources	97
3.2.3 Re-conceptualizing the activity of perceiving ESL learning affordances and strategy research from a sociocultural perspective	100
3.3 Situated learning and communities of practice (CoP) theory	**105**
3.4 Web 2.0 activities considered from the ecological perspective	**107**
3.5 Conclusion	**112**
CHAPTER FOUR: METHODOLOGY	**115**
4.0 Introduction	**115**
4.1 Purpose of the study	**116**
4.2 Research questions and instrumentation	**117**
4.3 Research methods	**119**
4.3.1 Definition of mixed methods research	120
4.3.2 Advantages and justification for mixed methods	121
4.4 Design of the study	**123**
4.4.1 Mixed method research design	123
4.4.2 Case study design	127
4.4.3 Research phases, tasks and outcomes	129
4.5 Data collection procedures	**132**
4.5.1 Quantitative phase: online survey	133
4.5.2 Qualitative phase: focus group interviews	143
4.6 Pilot study	**148**
4.6.1 Pilot study of questionnaire	148
4.6.2 Pilot study of interview guide	148
4.7 Validity and reliability of the study	**149**
4.8 Methods of analysis	**151**
4.8.1 Quantitative data analysis	152
4.8.2 Qualitative data analysis	154
4.9 Research ethics	**158**
4.10 Summary	**159**

CHAPTER FIVE: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS		**161**
5.0	**Introduction**	**161**
5.1	**Testing Reliability**	**163**
5.2	**Demographic information**	**164**
5.3	**Students' engagement with and evaluation of the Web 2.0 for their informal ESL learning**	**165**
5.3.1	Patterns of Web 2.0 engagement	165
5.3.2	Places	167
5.3.3	Tools	168
5.4	**Students' evaluation and perceived affordances of Web 2.0 tools for informal ESL learning**	**170**
5.5	**The perceived learning strategies adopted by students for ESL learning beyond the classroom**	**177**
5.6	**Summary**	**185**
CHAPTER SIX: QUALITATIVE RESULTS		**189**
6.0	**Introduction**	**189**
6.1	**Section One: Participants' perceived Web 2.0 affordances for informal ESL learning**	**192**
6.1.1	Theme 1: "Social Transformation"	193
6.1.2	Theme 2: "Personal learning"	209
6.2	**The limitations of the Web 2.0 tools for learning**	**223**
6.2.1	Technical limitations	224
6.2.2	Cost constraints	227
6.2.3	Motivational factors	227
6.3	**Section Two: Participants' perceived ESL learning strategies**	**231**
6.3.1	Research Questions	232
6.3.2	Web 2.0 tool-mediated strategy use	234
6.3.3	Community-mediated strategy	261
6.3.4	Role-mediated strategies	268
6.4	**Summary**	**274**
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS		**276**
7.0	**Introduction**	**276**
7.1	**The research aims and the key findings summary**	**276**
7.2	**The research findings**	**280**
7.2.1	**RQ1:** What are the trends and patterns of participants' engagement with the Web 2.0 tools in terms of usage frequency, usefulness for their informal daily English learning, places of access, and perceived most used tool?	280
7.2.2:	**RQ2:** What are the perceived affordances and limitations for learner-users in Web 2.0-based informal ESL learning?	281
7.2.3	**RQ3:** What are the perceived learning strategies used by these learner-users in the informal environment in question 2?	288

7.3 Analysis of the value of theoretical approaches	**292**
7.4 Analysis of the value of methodological approaches	**296**
7.5 Limitations of the research	**297**
7.6 Recommendations	**300**
7.7 Recommendations for future research	**302**
7.8 Concluding remarks	**306**
REFERENCES	**308**
APPENDICES	**325**
APPENDIX A: Research ethics approval	325
APPENDIX B: Participant information sheet	326
APPENDIX C: Online survey guide and consent form for participants	330
APPENDIX D: Focus group interview guide and consent form for participants	333
APPENDIX E: Participant self-report questionnaire	336
APPENDIX F: Approval from the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education	342
APPENDIX G: Approval from the Malaysian Economic Planning Unit	343
APPENDIX H: Approvals from the participating universities	344

Universiti Malaysia Terengganu.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 2.1	*The functional and non-functional requirements of Web 2.0 tools for language learning (Boruta et al., 2011, p. 83)*	41
Table 2.2	*The importance of motivational game-play elements and their language learning applications (Hoy, 2011, pp. 105-106)*	81
Table 4.3	*Concurrent mixed methods design with merged results*	132
Table 4.4	*University based on location and course*	135
Table 4.5	*Five point likert scale of the study*	136
Table 4.6	*Constructs and measurement scales for participants' demographic information (Section 1-Part A)*	137
Table 4.7	*Constructs and measurement scales for participants' patterns of Web 2.0-based learning outside class (Section 1-Part B)*	138
Table 4.8	*Constructs and measurement scales for participants' perceived affordances of Web 2.0 for informal ESL learning*	139
Table 4.9	*Constructs and measurement scales for participants' learning strategies for Web 2.0-based informal ESL learning*	142
Table 4.10	*Focus group topic guide*	146
Table 4.11	*Significant codes for focus group interviews (Theme 1)*	155
Table 4.12	*Significant codes for focus group interviews (Theme 2)*	156
Table 5.1	*The means and standard deviations for questionnaire no 8 item (Statement number =16)*	171
Table 5.2	*The means and standard deviations for questionnaire no 9 items*	178

Table 5.3	*Representation of perceived learning strategies of student-participants*	188
Table 6.1	*Themes and subthemes of perceived affordances of Web 2.0 tools*	193
Table 6.2	*Subthemes of perceived limitations of Web 2.0 tools*	224

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1	*Conceptual and research framework of the study*	10
Figure 2.1	*The four literature elements of informal ESL learning in Web 2.0-based language learning for higher education, namely: 1- History of educational technologies, 2- the millennial learners, 3- Web 2.0 affordances & limitations and 4- online learning strategies*	14
Figure 3.1	*Theoretical framework of the current study*	86
Figure 3.2	*Graphic representation of Vygotsky's concept of mediation adapted from Engeström, 1987)*	91
Figure 3.3	*The hierarchical structure of Leontiev's activity theory (Leontiev, 1978, p. 62)*	94
Figure 3.4	*Activity system (based on Engeström, 1987, 1999)*	97
Figure 3.5	*Triangle illustrating Web 2.0-based, informal ESL learning activity system*	101
Figure 4.1	*Research questions and phases*	119
Figure 4.2	*Concurrent mixed methods research design with merged results*	125
Figure 5.1	*Participants' usage levels of the Web 2.0 tools*	165
Figure 5.2	*Students' interest level in Web 2.0 tools for their informal daily English learning*	167
Figure 5.3	*Places for ESL learning beyond classroom via Web 2.0 tools*	168
Figure 5.4	*The main Web 2.0 tools that Malaysian university students used most for their informal ESL learning.*	169

Figure 5.5	*Students' agreement level with the Web 2.0 affordances for informal ESL learning*	173
Figure 5.6	*Students' agreement level with the online learning strategies*	180
Figure 5.7	*The summary of Web 2.0 affordances for informal ESL learning*	186
Figure 6.1	*Themes and subthemes of perceived language learning strategies of participants*	233
Figure 7.1	*Themes of motivational affordances*	282
Figure 7.2	*Themes of language learning strategies*	289
Figure 7.3	*Triangle illustrating Web 2.0-based, informal ESL learning activity system*	293

LIST OF ACRONYMS

COP	Communities of Practice
L2	Second language
Edu	Educational
ESL	English as a Second Language
NCREL	North Central Regional Educational Laboratory
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
FL	Foreign Language
O/L	Online
Qual	Qualitative
Quan	Quantitative
RQ	Research Question
RSS	Really Simple Syndication
SMS	Short Message Service
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
Wi-Fi	Wireless Fidelity
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The following terms are used repeatedly in this study.

Activity Theory – In Activity Theory people act with technology; technologies are both designed and used in the context of people with intentions and desires. "People act as subjects in the world, constructing and instantiating their intentions and desires as objects. Activity Theory casts the relationship between people and tools as one of mediation; tools mediate between people and the world". (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006, p. 10)

Blog – "A system that allows a single author (or sometimes, but less often, a group of authors) to write and publicly display time-ordered articles". (Franklin & Harmelen, 2007, p. 5)

Informal Learning – Learning which occurs independently of a formal curriculum and formal contexts, and includes in this study all forms of web 2.0 technology-supported learning through self-guidance, virtual communities of practice and collaborative problem-solving. Often, learning takes place without an explicit planned or enacted content, with no set time or place of learning and no explicit assessment of learning outcomes.

Language Learning Strategies – "Strategies are the conscious actions that learners take to improve their language learning... Because strategies are conscious, there is active involvement of the L2 learner in their selection and use. Strategies are not an isolated action, but rather a process of orchestrating more than one action to accomplish an L2 task. Although we can identify individual strategies, rarely will one strategy be used in isolation". (Anderson, 2003, p. 3)

Learning Manager – The learner is responsible for her/his own planning, directing and completing learning experiences especially through social networking. Therefore, the learner gains initial confidence and critical thinking skills to learn in collaborative virtual spaces, while adopting contributing roles in learning activities online for self and others.

Perceived Affordance – The awareness of the actionable properties (functions and usability) of resources in the environment by an actor. When perceived, an affordance allows actors to take actions that may satisfy certain needs and a user can imagine what the object can allow them to do. In this study, the educational affordance of the technological tool is available and perceived by learner-users, enabling them to accomplish particular goals. Specifically, the perceived affordance refers to the detection of functions of the resources in Web 2.0 tools for achieving the informal learning for ESL purposes.

Perception – An integral part of human interaction with the world. It plays a key role in both carrying out actions and determining what the action capabilities of a particular individual are (Kaptelinin & Nardi, 2006, p. 81).

Situated Learning Theory – According to this theory, people share significant experiences and where learning takes place through increasing levels of engagement through Community of Practice (CoPs). In this study, learners believed that they gained awareness of learning objectives through conversations and social interactions and consequently improve their personality developments in terms of perceptions, reflections and valuable learning activities within everyday practice.

Social Networking Sites – Social networking sites are Web 2.0 based tools that allow users share a lot of private information including photos and personal details. Users get to know a lot about the private lives of others which poses major security and privacy risks. Examples of these sites are Facebook.com and MySpace.com (Franklin & Harmelen, 2007, p. 6).

Web 1.0 – refers to the early stages of the World Wide Web. Web 1.0 is an internet server that supports formatted documents in hypertext markup language (O'Reilly, 2005).

Web 2.0 – refers to "wisdom Web, people-centric Web, participative Web, and read/write Web. Web 2.0 harnesses the Web in a more interactive and collaborative manner, emphasizing peers' social interaction and collective intelligence, and presents new opportunities for leveraging the Web and engaging its users more effectively... It's a collection of technologies, business strategies, and social trends". (Murugesan 2007, p. 34)

Wiki – "a system that allows one or more people to build up a corpus of knowledge in a set of interlinked web pages, using a process of creating and editing pages". (Franklin & Van Harmelen, 2007, p. 5)

Zone of proximal development - refers to the idea by Vygotsky (1977) of the distance between what a learner can learn independently and what the learner can do with assistance.

PERCEIVED AFFORDANCES AND LEARNING STRATEGY OF MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN WEB 2.0-BASED ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE INFORMAL LEARNING: A MIXED METHODS STUDY

ABSTRACT

Recent advances in Web 2.0 technology offer an emerging social networking practice, authentic materials and contexts to promote learner independence and active engagement in informal ESL acquisition. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of Web 2.0 technologies on Malaysian university students' informal ESL learning practice. It focuses on specific aspects of the data that relate to the concept of the "perceived affordances of Web 2.0 tools and learning strategies for informal ESL learning". The researcher applies a mixed-methods approach combining multiple data sources (i.e., on-line self-reported surveys and focus group interviews) and analysis methods. Questionnaires are used to generate quantitative data from the university student population (N= 400) through the on-line self-reported survey. Five in-depth focus group interviews comprising 20 students are conducted. This stage aims to contribute further insights into these issues. Finally, the analysis integrates the results of the two methods during the interpretation stage. A majority of the participants find their virtual sociocultural interactions mediated by Web 2.0 tools to be useful for motivating informal ESL learning and strategies. This study makes the case for Web 2.0 tools as familiar generative and expressive resources for informal learning processes by discovering the patterns of voluntary and spontaneous engagement. The research indicates that context-sensitive, Web 2.0 tools are preferred by learner-users especially for their online identities formation, their repeated practice and rehearsal of informal learning affordances, in relation to the development of both social and personal learning of ESL.

Keywords: Web 2.0, affordances, ESL, informal learning, learning strategies