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## Japanese high school EFL learners' perceptions of strategies for preventing demotivation

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### Abstract

In recent decades, academic work has examined motivation to learn English among speakers of foreign languages, reasons for demotivation that might exist among them, and strategies for motivating them; however, concrete strategies for avoiding demotivation among English as a foreign language (EFL) students have not yet been considered in detail. To rectify this, the present study addresses the following question: Which strategies do EFL learners believe are more and less effective in preventing demotivation? The participants in this study were 336 Japanese high school students, each of whom completed 41 questions on their beliefs regarding the effectiveness of various strategies for preventing demotivation on a six-point Likert-type scale. Factor analysis of responses identified five primary factors (teachers' sensitivity, students' feelings, English usage, traditional teaching style, and goal orientation) in preventing demotivation.

**Key words:** demotivation, motivational strategies, prevention, high school students, Japanese

## **Introduction**

Researchers on language learning have long focused on learner motivation; however, it is becoming increasingly understood that demotivation requires equal attention, and the study of demotivation in language learning contexts has consequently expanded in recent years. Japanese scholars in particular have been leading demotivation research, from theoretical perspectives rooted in the work of Dörnyei (e.g., 1998, as cited in Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011), and the quantity of Japanese research into demotivation has continued to steadily increase. Although empirical data on second language (L2) demotivation remains limited, the past decade has produced several significant findings regarding its causes (Arai, 2004; Falout & Maruyama, 2004; Tsuchiya, 2004a, 2004b; Falout et al., 2009; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), and it is important to explore how these findings might potentially be applied to the development of practical strategies for classroom teaching. With this goal in mind, the present study aims to examine learners' perceptions of strategies to prevent demotivation.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Demotivation and demotivators***

Is demotivation the opposite of motivation? Demotivation has been said to be the “dark side” of motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p.138). A learner who has lost enthusiasm for learning English because of, for example, a teacher's incompetence, a common demotivator (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009), may still continue studying the language due to the high demand for English language skills in society. In such cases, the learner suffers from a demotivating effect caused by the teacher but still remains motivated to study.

This study defines demotivators as factors—both internal and external—that reduce learners' motivation to study (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). These factors are likely to be interrelated.

### ***Types of research on demotivation***

Research on demotivation in the L2 context started with Dörnyei (1998), who explored demotivation among 50 secondary school students in Budapest. The topic has captured attention in Asia as well, where several studies have been conducted in various countries (Tran & Richard, 2007; Zhang, 2007; Rahman, Jumani, & Basit, 2010); studies on demotivation have flourished in Japan in particular. They generally fall into four categories: (1) exploration of demotivating factors (Kikuchi, 2009; Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009); (2) examination of how

demotivating factors are related to other learning variables (Falout, Elwood, & Hood, 2009); (3) investigation of differences between demotivators affecting learners with greater and lesser proficiency, respectively (Tsuchiya, 2006); and (4) comparison of demotivators between high school and university contexts (Hamada, 2011). Recent findings on the causes of demotivation in Japanese contexts are summarized in Table 1. Each of the studies referred to has used different information-collection instruments, because no highly reliable and widely recognized set of questions for collecting data on this topic yet exists in the field of research on demotivation, as opposed to motivation, and also because the participants' backgrounds are different from study to study. Thus, at this point, an important task for acquiring more reliable results is creating questions that fit the situation of the participants in a given study.

Table 1

*Primary Studies on Demotivators Affecting Japanese Students from 2004-2009*

Research	Participants	Methods	Demotivating factors
Arai (2004)	33 proficient University English majors	Open-ended questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers</li> <li>• Class content</li> <li>• Classmates</li> </ul>
Falout and Maruyama (2004)	164 not high proficient university science majors	49-item questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher proficiency learners: self-confidence</li> <li>• Lower proficiency learners: negative attitudes towards English</li> </ul>
Tsuchiya (2004a, 2004b)	204 not proficient university engineering majors	26-item questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of English uselessness</li> <li>• Sense of incompetence</li> <li>• Little admiration</li> <li>• Inconsistent studying way</li> <li>• Sense of discouragement.</li> </ul>
Falout, et al. (2009)	253 mixed proficient university English majors and International relations 900 university students	52-item questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of acceptance</li> <li>• Teacher immediacy</li> <li>• Grammar-translation</li> <li>• Avoidance</li> <li>• Self-denigration</li> <li>• Value</li> <li>• Course level</li> <li>• Self-confidence</li> </ul>
Kikuchi and Sakai (2009)	112 motivated and proficient university freshmen	35-item questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course books</li> <li>• Inadequate school facilities</li> <li>• Test scores</li> <li>• Non-communicative methods</li> <li>• Teacher's competence and teaching style</li> </ul>
Sakai and Kikuchi (2009)	565 high school students	35-item questionnaire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning content and materials</li> <li>• Teachers' competence and teaching styles</li> <li>• Inadequate school facilities</li> <li>• Lack of intrinsic motivation</li> <li>• Test scores</li> </ul>

***Motivational strategies***

Practical strategies for preventing demotivation have been less often examined than demotivational factors; however, some studies in the field of motivation have investigated how the findings can be applied to classroom teaching practice.

Dörnyei (2001) first proposed the concept of motivational strategies, “techniques that promote the individual’s goal-related behavior” (p.28). He insisted on a framework for motivational teaching practice that encompasses the following processes: creating the basic motivational conditions, generating initial motivation, maintaining and protecting motivation, and encouraging positive retrospective self-evaluation. He then categorized motivational strategies on the basis of four characteristics: internal structure, trouble-shooting guide, motivational concepts, and the main types of teacher behavior.

In all, Dörnyei (2001) provided 102 motivational strategies; Sugita and Takeuchi (2010) designed an experiment to examine their effectiveness in the Japanese EFL context. These 102 strategies were evaluated for appropriateness for lower secondary school use by 124 EFL teachers, and the top 15 were selected for the study. Sugita and Takeuchi found that only four of the 15 motivational strategies were positively correlated with student motivation, and that the effectiveness of some strategies varied by the English proficiency of the student. This study shows the difficulty of applying theory into practice.

Cheng and Dörnyei (2007), also based on Dörnyei (2001), investigated the degree of importance attached by teachers in Taiwan to various motivational strategies and how often they implemented such strategies in their teaching practice. The authors administered a 48-item questionnaire to 387 English language teachers of various backgrounds and identified 10 motivational macro strategies as follows: (1) set a personal example with your own behavior; (2) recognize students’ efforts and celebrate their success; (3) promote learners’ self-confidence; (4) create a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom; (5) present tasks properly; (6) increase learners’ goal-orientation; (7) make learning tasks stimulating; (8) familiarize learners with L2-related values; (9) promote group cohesiveness and set group norms; and (10) promote learner autonomy.

Shinohara (2009) revised Dörnyei (2001) and Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) to identify the degree of importance of various motivational strategies for Japanese high school teachers, and the relationships between the teachers’ perception of the importance of the strategies and their actual strategy use. Shinohara administered a 61-item questionnaire to 762 English language teachers in junior and senior high schools across Japan. The strategy teachers considered most important was appropriate behaviors, followed by appropriate demonstration of activities, enhancement of learners’ self-confidence, interestingness of activities, and support to help learners formulate an individual learning style. The teachers most frequently engaged in appropriate behavior, followed

by support to help learning formulate an individual learning style, enhancement of learners' self-confidence, appropriate demonstration of activities, and admiration of learners' efforts.

As Cheng and Dörnyei (2007) claimed, mainstream research on motivation is concerned with identifying and analyzing motives and validating motivational theories. The accumulated studies on motivation over years have not satisfactorily engaged with the question of practical application. When it comes to demotivation, the empirical study to prevent demotivation has not started, to the author's knowledge.

### ***Limitations and the purpose of this study***

Although demotivation has been researched extensively, previous studies have been subject to certain limitations; and clear, practical suggestions for applying the research findings toward preventing demotivation have not been provided. Since teachers can be demotivators (Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham & Christophel, 1995; Tsuchiya, 2006; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009), paying special attention to teachers' behaviors and teaching styles is a step toward preventing demotivation.

In practice, strategies aimed at learner motivation and those aimed at preventing demotivation probably overlap in many ways. For example, reduced self-confidence is perceived as a demotivator (Dörnyei, 2001), and promoting self-confidence is listed as a motivational strategy (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). Thus, promoting self-confidence will both prevent demotivation and actively motivate learners.

However, a distinction still does need to be made difference between motivating learners and preventing their demotivation. In Figure 1, arrow (1) represents the further motivation of motivated learners, (2) the motivation of demotivated learners, (3) the demotivation of motivated learners, and (4) further demotivation of demotivated learners. As an example of (1) and (2), a motivating strategy that promotes learners' self-confidence (Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007) will motivate both these groups, but is not guaranteed to prevent their demotivation. As an example of (3) and (4), reducing the prevalence of some demotivators, for instance one-way teaching style (Kikuchi, 2009), will prevent demotivation, but motivating active motivation is not assured. In other words, the use of motivational strategies may motivate learners but not necessarily prevent demotivation: the vectors of the two phenomena are not always the same.



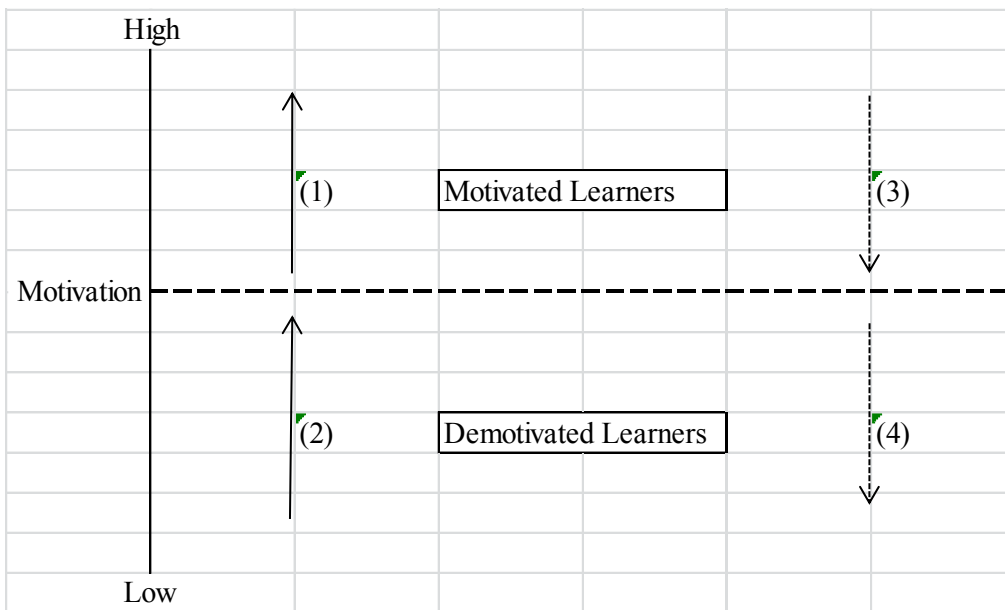


Figure 1. Motivation and demotivation in learners

Rather than assuming the two types of strategies are similar, an exclusive focus on preventing demotivation, such as the cases represented by (3) and (4), can help us to directly explore preventing demotivation. Further, it is important to explore learners' perceptions of ways to prevent demotivation. Research on language learning beliefs suggests a gap can exist between teachers and learners' beliefs (Nakayama, Ochiai, Inada, Mori, & Kuramoto, 2005). Better understanding of learners' ideas on preventing demotivation can provide practical insights into doing so for teachers. Thus, this study aims to identify which strategies learners believe are more and less effective in preventing demotivation. A secondary goal of helping teachers realize these strategies in the classroom will also be addressed with practical solutions and reference to further reading.

## Method

### *Participants*

A questionnaire was administered to 336 Japanese high school students. Table 2 summarizes the characteristics of the participants' schools. In order to eliminate regional bias, attention was given to including students from different regions (Tohoku, a northern region; Kanto, around Tokyo; Kansai, around Osaka and Kyoto). Since the data were obtained on condition of anonymity and the primary focus of this survey is not on language proficiency, more details about each school are not provided. To avoid collecting a majority of the data from less- proficient and less-motivated

students, this study targeted participants whose proficiency was higher than the average Japanese students. Higher proficient learners presumably have more varieties of motivated and less-motivated learners.

Table 2  
*Descriptions of Participants*

Type of school/ Region	Number	Proficiency of school based on <i>the national standard ranking system (Hensachi)</i>
Public /Tohoku (Northern Japan)	106	Average
Public/ Kanto (Eastern Japan)	64	Average
Public/ Kanto	75	Over average
Private/ Kansai (Western Japan)	91	Over average

### ***Materials***

Forty-one questions (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .95$ ) in Japanese were used to assess learners' perceptions of the degree of effectiveness of each strategy for preventing demotivation. The questions were developed according to the following four steps: (1) The initial draft was modeled on the 61 items used in Shinohara (2009), which revised techniques presented in previous studies (Dörnyei & Csizer, 1998; Cheng & Dörnyei, 2007). The motivational strategies provided by Shinohara were thus considered to be fairly reliable and appropriate for examining the Japanese educational context. (2) Based on the findings and suggestions of previous research on demotivation (Kikuchi & Sakai, 2009, Hamada, 2010), the author inserted additional items and eliminated those that teachers might find difficult to apply, because of either the curriculum or the abstract nature of the items themselves, given the practical purpose of this study. (3) Three demotivated and three motivated university students (self-defined), representing the two extremes of the range, were interviewed in Japanese as part of the process of developing the questionnaire. To confirm the interviewees' motivation level, the interview began with a question: "Are you highly motivated / demotivated?" (4) The 41 items were assessed by two university teachers specializing in education and four university undergraduate students majoring in English education or international communication.

A six-point Likert scale was adopted to avoid the common problem of the majority of participants choosing "3" on a five-point scale. For each item, the participants were asked, "How applicable is this each statement for preventing demotivation?" They selected an answer from 1 "least applicable" to 6 "most applicable." (Questions are presented in Appendix)

### ***Procedure***

The questionnaire, written in Japanese, was administered in class during fall in 2011. The participants completed it in approximately 10 minutes.

### ***Analysis***

The data were analyzed in the following manner: (1) Descriptive statistics were used to identify the main features of the responses to the 41 items, and (2) SPSS 16.0 was used to perform exploratory factor analysis (EFA) (factoring extraction with promax rotation) of the responses to the 41 items on the collected data on the assumption that there would be correlations among the factors. An eigen value of less than 1.0 was adopted as the threshold of significance, and items whose factor loading was greater than .40 were considered meaningful for that factor. To compare the strength of each factor, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted.

### **Results**

#### ***Practical strategies for preventing demotivation***

Table 3 and Figure 2 present the descriptive statistics for each factor. The mean scores of all factors except *traditional teaching style* (Factor 4) exceeded 3.50, which is the median of possible scores on the six-point Likert scale. EFA identified five factors, as described in Table 4. The participants generally appear to favor factors 1, 2, 3, and 5.

During the process, 11 items were eliminated from the original 41 items based on the *alpha* level already set ( $\alpha > .40$ ). The item grouping and naming of each factor was conducted as follows. Factor 1 is teachers' *sensitivity*; it incorporates items that deal with the sensitivity of the teachers' approaches. Factor 2 is *students' feelings*; because the items related to this factor suggest how to reduce learners' stress, creating a motivating environment can enhance student motivation. Factor 3 is *English usage*; it contains items relating to the uses the students will be able to put their English to outside class and in the future. Factor 4 is *traditional teaching style*; it includes items such as one-way teaching style, grammar-centered teaching, and putting pressure on students. Factor 5 is *goal orientation*; it encompasses two items that suggest the establishment of short- or long-term goals. The Cronbach *alpha* of each factor ranges from .75 to .90, which is within a reliable level (Dörnyei & Csizer, 2008).

Table 3

*Descriptive statistics for each factor*

Factor	N	M	SD
Teachers' Sensitiveness	336	4.25	0.85
Students' feelings	336	3.94	0.84
English usage	336	3.76	0.99
Traditional teaching style	336	3.01	0.85
Goal orientation	336	3.82	1.14

Table 4

*Factor loadings and communalities for the factor analysis with promax rotation*

Item number	Items	F1 $\alpha = .90$	F2 .84	F3 .85	F4 .75	F5 .88	Communalities
2	Teach English enthusiastically	.918	-.203	-.039	.057	-.020	.628
4	Respect and care about each student	.846	.179	-.053	-.039	-.231	.676
3	Improve English and try to be a good role model for his/her students	.772	-.184	.150	.075	-.041	.556
6	Use activities and give assignments, considering students' situation	.625	.000	.104	-.071	.035	.474
5	Explain the importance and purpose of each activity and assignment	.602	.078	-.064	.212	-.037	.455
15	Evaluate efforts to assignments and activities	.563	.087	.020	.070	.045	.462
1	Build rapport with students	.534	.216	.033	-.078	.016	.493
13	Welcome students' questions and voluntary comments	.510	.076	.002	-.058	.168	.437
9	Notice and praise students' positive attitudes and improvement	.480	.397	-.101	-.157	.102	.609
12	Teach based on each student's proficiency	.466	.277	-.041	-.161	.072	.456
33	Remove anxiety that occurs in the process of learning	-.024	.777	-.051	.047	.059	.610
32	Give confidence by praising	.109	.751	-.053	-.020	-.014	.615
37	Use activities in which students can experience success and feel satisfied in class	.068	.734	.058	.059	-.113	.593
34	Show how English learning is connected to daily life	.038	.604	.196	.090	-.032	.582
39	Increase activities not to compete but to cooperate	-.043	.521	.099	.113	-.063	.314
41	Explain what makes English difficult for Japanese people	-.145	.508	-.034	.327	.051	.367
18	Use a short and fun activity first and create humorous atmosphere	.032	.489	.030	-.225	.159	.358
24	Invite English speaking people	-.019	.012	.849	-.066	-.093	.624
25	Introduce information about study tours and short-term study abroad programs	-.041	.079	.838	-.089	-.019	.679
23	Tell how English is useful for future job and studying abroad	-.026	.064	.715	.035	.119	.661
22	Speak English in class	.203	-.155	.571	.158	-.003	.463
21	Introduce different cultures	.030	.199	.498	.013	.059	.463
29	Give one-way explanation	-.159	.033	-.002	.689	-.066	.441
27	Emphasize grammatically correct English usage	.183	.020	-.057	.628	.109	.534
38	Give pressure by calling on suddenly	.115	.038	-.031	.608	-.023	.401

26	Give grammar based lessons	.153	.095	-.015	.586	.061	.493
30	Laugh at students' mistakes	-.302	.158	.000	.477	-.083	.253
17	Compare with other students	.084	-.228	.061	.424	.184	.269
19	Create opportunities to plan a realistic short-term goal	.000	.028	-.017	.001	.896	.817
20	Create opportunities to plan a realistic long-term goal	-.046	.013	.001	.079	.830	.710
Factor intercorrelations		1	2	3	4	5	
Factor 2		.62					
Factor 3		.49	.52				
Factor 4		.21	.24	.36			
Factor 5		.57	.52	.45	.35		

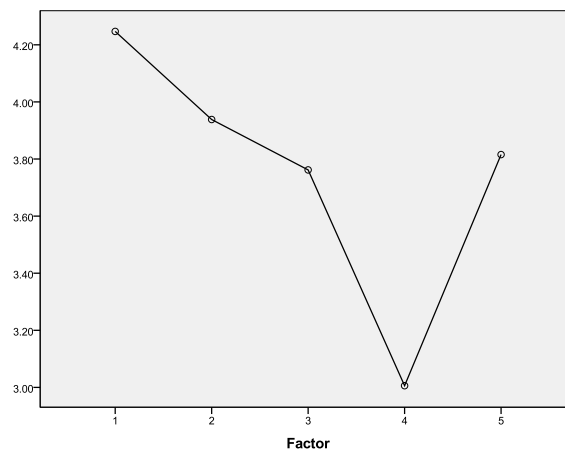


Figure 2. Strength of each factor

Analysis of the factor intercorrelations indicates that factors 1 and 2 are the most strongly correlated, while factors 1 and 4 and factors 2 and 4 are only weakly correlated. The correlations between factors 1 and 3, 1 and 5, 2 and 3, and 2 and 5 are somewhat stronger. These results imply that most of the factors are interrelated.

To identify differences in strength between the factors, a repeated-measures one-way ANOVA was employed. The results show a statistically significant difference  $F(3.47, 1163.17) = 139.11, p < .001$ , partial eta-squared = .29). Finally, the post-hoc analysis shows that all combinations, except factors 2 and 5 and factors 3 and 5, are statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ).

## Discussion

### *Practical strategies for preventing demotivation*

EFA extracted five categories of strategies to prevent demotivation: teachers' sensitivity, student's feelings, English usage, traditional teaching style, and goal orientation. Factor 1 (teachers' sensitivity) is the strongest technique for preventing demotivation, while Factor 4 (traditional

teaching style) is the weakest. The effectiveness of the other three factors is almost equal, but Factor 2 is more effective than Factor 3.

Factor 1 contains items concerned with respecting learners' individuality, noticing and praising improvement (item 9), and welcoming active engagement (item 13). Interestingly, these items are not directly related to techniques for teaching English but rather concern teachers' general attitudes toward students. Respecting learners' individuality and learning situation is strongly emphasized in the national teaching guidelines, the course of study (Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sport, Science, and Technology, 2009). As shown by scholarship in the field of applied linguistics, learner differences constitute one of the most profound issues in language teaching (Schmitt, 2001; Gass & Selinker, 2008), and a special focus on this matter is necessary in order to effectively prevent demotivation. Furthermore, the course of study clearly indicates the importance of nurturing learners' attitudes toward learning English, as well as their English ability, and thus of evaluating their efforts on assignments and activities should be evaluated (item 15). Finally, the most practical implication of this factor is suggested by item 5: Teachers should explain the purpose and importance of each activity and assignment. For example, although most students have experienced "chorus reading," in which the group reads passages aloud after listening to them first on a CD; few understand why this practice is beneficial. Teachers need to explain the effectiveness of the mechanism of reading aloud to encourage students to invest effort in the activity.

The keywords in Factor 2 (students' feelings) are anxiety (items 33 and 41), self-confidence (item 32), satisfaction (item 37), and learning conditions (items 18). First, foreign language anxiety has proved to be such a powerful negative factor in language learning that special attention to this issue would greatly contribute to preventing demotivation. Oxford (1990) offers 13 practical suggestions to ease learners' anxiety such as explaining to learners that anxiety will not last, how anxiety can occur, and that perfection is not required. For Japanese high school learners, explaining the reasons that English is difficult for Japanese learners appears to be effective (item 41), for example, by teaching the concept of 'language distance' between English and Japanese. Second, self-confidence and satisfaction have been recognized as important in motivating learners as well. Bandura (1977) places importance on performance accomplishments in enhancing self-efficacy: creating activities in which learners can succeed and then praising their performance may appear overly simple, but is favored by students as strategies to prevent demotivation. Significantly, lower-proficiency learners, having experienced less success and less praise, may particularly appreciate

teachers' careful encouragement of their self-confidence.

Factor 3, *English usage*, is rooted in the concept of instrumental motivation (Gardner, 1985). As mentioned in Falout and Maruyama (2004), some students express a dislike of English as early as junior high school, and thus, the percentage of those who have negative attitudes toward English possibly increases by senior high school. The most powerful reason to study English may be tests and, ultimately, the university entrance examination. Item 23 reflects the necessity for demonstrating to high school learners how English is useful outside the classroom and in the future. While it is true that high school teachers struggle with the amount of material they are required to teach, discussing the purposes and usefulness of speaking English carries an important, long-term value.

Factor 4, *traditional teaching style*, is interesting in the sense that only this factor was ranked below the mean score of 3.50, the median of the 6-point Likert scale. In fact, the features of the traditional teaching style have been listed as demotivator by researchers such as Kikuchi and Sakai (2009). Indeed, one of the motivational strategies proposed by Dörnyei (2001) recommends avoiding social comparison (item 17). Other non-recommended strategies are 'give one-way lessons' (item 29), 'emphasize grammatically correct English usage' (item 27), 'pressure students by calling on them suddenly' (item 38), 'give grammar-based lessons' (item 26), and 'ridicule students' mistakes' (item 30).

Factor 5, *goal-orientation*, implies that one of the famous motivation theories, *goal-setting theory* (Locke & Latham, 1990), is applicable to preventing demotivation. Examples of how this strategy works can be explained as follows. By utilizing obligatory classroom-based and national tests, teachers can provide students with the opportunity to set individual goals such as a target score. Many high school teachers have already attempted this strategy; however, and not always to the best effect. The five principles Locke (1996) proposed should enhance the effectiveness of the strategy of goal-orientation: (1) The more difficult the goal is, the better; (2) the more specific the goal is, the more precisely students accomplish targets; (3) goals that are specific and difficult are better; (4) commitment to goals is most important, so the goals should not be easy or vague; (5) and high commitment to goals is attained when students understand that the goal is both important and within reach (as cited in Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011, p.20). These principles can be applied to almost all learning situations, including daily lessons, pop-quizzes, and English conversations.

## Conclusion

This study identified five categories of strategies to prevent learner demotivation. In general, teachers' *sensitivity* (Factor 1) appears to be the most effective, while the other three factors, with the exception of *traditional teaching style* (Factor 4), also appear to be generally effective, according to learners. Unfortunately, the traditional teaching style still prevails in Japan (Izumi, 2009). However, with the strategies described in this study, teachers can guard against student demotivation.

As discussed above, an enlightening perspective on the obtained data can be developed based on the assumption that strategies for preventing demotivation can be explained with reference to motivational theories. It is plausible to suggest that the prevention of demotivation is included as part of some strategies for motivation, while it is the exclusive focus of other strategies.

Future studies should analyze this topic with a larger sample that includes learners of various proficiency and motivation levels. Further, to examine each of these components more specifically, it is necessary to conduct experiments to assess how effective each strategy is in preventing demotivation. As the importance of Factor 1 (*teachers' sensitivity*) suggests, some techniques for preventing demotivation require teachers to model appropriate general attitudes for their students. Thus, finding support and ideas from other fields, and not necessarily the field of English teaching may also be helpful. It is hoped that further development of this type of study will enable teachers to prevent demotivation among a wide range of learners.

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## **Appendix. Questionnaire items (English translation)**

1. Build a good rapport with students
2. Teach English enthusiastically
3. Improve his/her English to be a good role model
4. Respect individuals and care about them
5. Explain the value and importance of activities and assignments
6. Make activities and give assignments, with the students' situation in mind
7. Give everyone opportunities to experience success on tests
8. Tell students mistakes are unavoidable to improve English
9. Notice and praise students' activeness and improvements
10. Use raw materials such as the internet and newspapers
11. Teach students how to study
12. Teach based on each student's proficiency
13. Welcome students' questions and active class participation
14. Create opportunities for students to self-evaluate
15. Evaluate students' efforts on assignments and activities
16. Praise students' efforts
17. Compare with peers
18. Create a humorous atmosphere by starting classes with brief and fun activities
19. Create opportunities to set short-term and realistic goals
20. Create opportunities to set long-term and realistic goals
21. Introduce different cultures
22. Speak English in lessons
23. Explain practical usage of English for future jobs and for studying abroad
24. Invite English speaking foreigners to class
25. Introduce information about study tours and short-term study abroad programs
26. Conduct grammar based lessons
27. Emphasis using grammatically correct English
28. Have good English pronunciation
29. Give one-way explanations
30. Laugh at students' mistakes

31. Use audio devices such as videos, DVDs, and the internet
32. Give confidence to students through praise
33. Remove anxiety that occurs through learning
34. Show the relevance between English study and daily life
35. Set assignments at appropriately difficult levels
36. Give feedback regularly for progress
37. Create activities to experience success and satisfaction in classes
38. Give pressure mentally, calling on students suddenly
39. Increase activities that focus on cooperation rather than competition
40. Explain what matters in failures is not low proficiency but lack of efforts or bad learning methods
41. Explain what makes Japanese peoples' English learning difficult.

## Digital residents: Practices and perceptions of non-native speakers

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### Abstract

This paper reports on a Thai-based study which documents the practices and perceptions of non-native speakers (NNS) of English, the vast majority of whom reside in cyberspace in their everyday lives beyond formal learning contexts in both their L1 and L2. Questionnaire and focus group data was collected to identify what participants do with which digital devices and why. The role of the English language in relation to social networking is explored in more detail. The paper then briefly considers some of the implications for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) in terms of equipping learners to function as connected digital citizens in English as an L2. It is suggested that in order to do this we need to recognise that the Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) acronym is no longer adequate for investigating and describing practice and that in many contexts we are now in a 'post-CALL era' of Mobile Assisted Language Use (MALU) with digital literacy skills a defining characteristic.

**Keywords:** Digital residents, CALL, Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL), Mobile Assisted Language Use (MALU), Digital literacy

## **Introduction**

A ‘digital resident’ (White & Cornu, 2011) can be defined as someone who spends a significant amount of time online, usually using a range of programs or apps. not only on established devices such as computer desktops and laptops, but typically also with mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. Digital residents in contrast to ‘digital visitors’ tend to live out at least part of their daily lives as connected citizens with social media often being central to their activities. For digital residents, being connected has become a part of who and what they are. ‘Self’ and social networks have become mutually constitutive as ‘networked selves’ in which “... individual and collective identities are simultaneously presented and promoted” (Papacharissi, 2010, p. 305). Such a phenomenon has led Pegrum (2010) to coin the term “I link therefore I am”. Critically, for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) the vast majority of digital residents globally are non-native speakers (NNS) of English who, as a consequence of English being the lingua franca (ELF) of the internet find themselves living out a part of their lives in both their first language (L1) and at times in English as their second language (L2). This provides new challenges and opportunities for TESOL if it is to address a newly emerging remit of equipping students to function as globalized digital citizens in English as an L2. However, in order to adequately address such issues we need to better understand what NNS students do with digital devices as users and the role of English as an L2, especially in their native home country contexts where most learners and users are located. The practices and perceptions of such NNS have only recently begun to be considered; Sockett (2013, pp. 48-49) for example identifies how French learners “... become involved in informal target language practices such as chatting or social networking ...” with informal learning being incidental and “...the intention of their activities being communication and enjoyment rather than language learning’. Evidence from Malaysia suggests that adolescents “... spent a significant amount of time online, with English as the medium or vehicle that enabled 77.06% of their activities ...” (Tan, Ng & Saw, 2010, p. 557). Stockwell (2013) identifies the potential motivational impact of social technology on students, as they have access to authentic resources with which they interact using ELF. Despite such studies this area remains underexplored, particularly in relation to the use of different devices for a range of purposes and the arising implications on TESOL’s remit to adequately equip learners. This small-scale study contributes to addressing such a shortfall by identifying NNS practices and

perceptions and proposing a post-CALL era of Mobile Assisted Language Use (MALU) in which digital literacy in an L2 is at the forefront.

### **The study and its methodology**

The study is grounded in Kern's (2006, p. 189) assertion that it is important to "... understand the effectiveness of technology in terms of the specifics of what people do ..., how they do it, and what it means to them". A mixed methods approach was used with a paper-based questionnaire generating statistical data in order to make statements which it is felt can be applied to more general contexts, and qualitative data coming from focus groups. This gave participants "some power and control" (Nunan, 2005, p. 150) and allowed for discussion and elaboration of questionnaire responses as well as opening up possibilities for discovering new and important realities by accident (Adler & Adler, 1998). Convenience sampling "... of individuals who happen to be available for study ..." (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p.122) was used to gather both data sets with participants selected based on a willingness of their English teacher to administer the questionnaires at the end of their class. The focus group participants were selected from those who in the completed questionnaire had indicated a willingness to participate and had availability to attend at a specified day and time. The questionnaire and the focus group sessions sought to address the following:

**With what frequency, with what devices, and for what purposes do NNS use digital technology in their everyday lives?**

**What is the significance of English as an L2?**

**What social media programs do participants use and in what language or languages?**

For space and convenience purposes the collated statistical data is embedded in the indicative questionnaire which is included as an appendix. The focus groups comprised a total of 12 male and 6 female participants who for anonymity purposes have had their comments coded as Male A (MA), Female A (FA), Male B (MB) etcetera. The focus groups were transcribed and then coded line by line in order for common themes and concepts to emerge. The study was conducted in line with institutional guidelines on research ethics which included informed consent.

### *The participants*

The participants were second year Thai undergraduate students aged 19 or 20 studying at King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi in Bangkok, Thailand. They were reading various science subjects as their major, all were studying an English module as part of their degree with levels ranging from lower to upper intermediate. Students completed the questionnaire in their English class with teacher assistance, as required. The limitations of such sampling techniques are acknowledged, but arguably this small scale study provides data sets which nevertheless go beyond relevance to the immediate context. It is fair to assert that the vast majority of digital residents globally are based in countries where English is not the L1 and that Bangkok, like many large cities in Asia and elsewhere, has a young, well-educated and digitally well-connected demographic. On buses; on trains; in shopping malls; in restaurants and cafes; in schools, colleges and universities evidence of the digitally connected citizens living out at least a part of their life with and through mobile devices is everywhere to be seen.

### **Results and discussion**

Sections B and C of the questionnaire data show that most participants were digital residents who owned and made frequent use of both computers and smartphones. When asked how many hours per day were spent on computers, smartphones and tablets (hereafter when used in combination referred to as digital devices) there is a clear cluster of 44% reporting 5-6 hours with the second largest cluster of 28% in the 3-4 hours banding. Eighty percent owned a laptop, 75% a smartphone and 70% a desktop, but considerably fewer (35%) an i-pad or tablet. Owners of smartphones are almost by definition digital residents in that their devices are highly mobile and tend to be online 24/7 and in this study 79% reported using such a device daily, a figure which is significantly higher than the 54% for computers.

The qualitative data provided some insights into what is understood by online with FA saying '... yes I am online all the time, but I am not using it all the time ...' this comment clarifies the difference between residents and visitors - it is not that residents are necessarily always using their digital devices, rather it is that they are more or less online all the time in order to do so as and when required. There is a clear correlation of digital visitors with participants who did not own a smartphone (21%) and never made use of one (12%). Not surprisingly, the responses from this group also clustered in the "disagree" statements about smartphones in section D and in two



of the ✖ boxes in section E - messaging was not used by those who did not have a smartphone and of the 21% who make use of Twitter all owned a smartphone.

The first four statements in section D differentiate the use of digital devices for formal academic study compared to a mix of uses outside the university (i.e. social and/or personal and/or academic). The significance of computer desktops and laptops at the institution is clear with 100% of respondents recognizing this and their importance outside the institution at 79% remains high, albeit slightly lower. There is less certainty amongst participants about the role of smartphones and tablets for academic study with 48% agreeing that they are important, 41% expressing less certainty (not sure) and 11% disagreeing. In contrast 78% considered them important outside of their studies. There was a clear preference for accessing digital-based information over and above paper-based books and articles with 70% agreeing that getting information from digital devices is easier and only 5% disagreeing.

These statistics, combined with the qualitative data, suggest that many participants see smartphones as occupying primarily a social aspect of their lives with desktops and laptops having a more academic role, ‘... I use computer for study, smartphone for social’ (MA). The student generated responses for ‘chatting’ and ‘the internet’ (usually ‘internet searching’) in section C provide some further evidence of this: every participant (100%) listed the internet as a main use on a desktop or laptop compared to 55% for smartphones or tablets, whereas with chatting the figure was 10% higher for such devices (72% compared to 62%) ‘... it’s easy to chat with a smartphone’ (MB). Furthermore from section D almost half the participants (49%) felt a need to have their smartphone with them wherever they went ‘... I need it to contact, for telephone call or what’s ap’ (MC). We can conclude that smartphones are generally the preferred devices for residing in and expressing their ‘networked self’ – ‘It is with me all the time, when I need it. The only problem is weak battery’ (MD). There is perhaps nothing too surprising with such data, but when we consider the networked self being manifested in a language which is not the participant’s L1 clear implications for TESOL arise.

There is overwhelming evidence of the importance of English when using all digital devices; section E shows that in combination a massive 92% reported using mainly Thai and some English (61%) or mainly English with some Thai (31%), the figure for only Thai is 0%. In section D 48% agree that most of the information that participants get from the internet is in English with only 8% disagreeing and 45% expressing less certainty (not sure). Participants in

the focus groups elaborated typically with comments such as ‘... yes a lot of information, but not most’ (ME) or ‘... first I try Thai, if no good after I try English’ (ME). Eighty one percent reported that owning a digital device helped them to practise English and 83% reported that English is important when using digital devices.

In recent years there has been an increasing interest in the role of online gaming in the literature with a recognition of “... important affordances for language learning, not as an objective as such, but as means of nurturing social relationships and participating in collaborative problem-solving and networking among peers” (Kuree, 2011, p. 35). In this study a larger number of participants reported playing online games in English compared to Thai (65% and 57%). The affordances for English use are clear with comments like ‘...I play Warcraft, I use English ...’ (MF) and ‘It can help listening and vocabulary’ (MG). Forty one percent reported having online friends from other countries with themes such as football teams or pop stars forming typical topics for interactions ‘I have friends from everywhere – we chat about One Direction’ (FB).

The significance of English as an L2 when using digital devices is very clear from the responses to section D of the questionnaire and the comments from the focus groups. However, the role of traditional Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) which in its narrowest sense can be defined as using a computer desktop or laptop to consciously work on language exercises is much less important than other uses. Only 35% reporting making use of digital devices to do English language practice exercises and it is worth noting that all participants will have been shown how to access such online resources as part of their self-access centre orientations. It is not that participants did not know about how to access such exercises, rather it is that they prefer to use English with digital devices over and above using digital devices to learn English.

The final section of the questionnaire looks at social media and language in more detail. Facebook and YouTube were used in both their L1 and their L2 by every respondent with the role of English being highest of all for YouTube – its entertainment value was a recurring theme in the focus groups MF ‘... its fun ...’, FC ‘... for comedy ...’, FD ‘... for relax ...’, MH ‘... easy to understand good visual ...’. When asked what participants did when they did not understand the English either on YouTube or elsewhere they generally tried to make do ‘never mind if I cannot get 100%, I can understand enough’ (MH) or they used online translation programs. From the

focus groups it became apparent that the use of translation was an important part of being a digital resident in English as an L2. YouTube use was generally restricted to watching and translating, if required, in contrast, Facebook tended to involve more active use of language with 73% reporting using mainly Thai but also some English. Without exception the focus group participants were all positive about Facebook and using English with friends across the globe, but there was only limited ‘critical awareness’ of digital footprints and other social ethical issues, arguably this one of the main challenges that needs addressing. Other widely used social media were messaging (85%) and Games (84%), but with messaging exclusive use of L1 was, understandably perhaps, more widely reported at 33% compared to only 4% for Games. Discussion forums, Skype and Twitter at 40%, 42% and 21% were far less widely used.

In summary, the data shows widespread and frequent uses of various digital devices and programs for a range of purposes. To varying degrees, and particularly in relation to social media and mobile devices, participants express their network selves as digital residents in both their L1 and their L2. The contention is that such practices have significant implications for TESOL and CALL.

### **Implications**

The data provides insights into what NNS of English do with digital devices in both their L1 and L2 outside the classroom and one response might be that as such it is of limited relevance for classroom practice. Such a response might attempt to separate language teaching in classroom contexts from its use in the real world and argue that our job in class is to teach specified items such as grammar, vocabulary and the four skills. Furthermore, the argument might go that if we choose to use computers or other mobile devices in our classroom practice then it is to assist in the delivery of these specified language items (i.e. traditional CALL) or perhaps Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL). The assumptions behind this line of reasoning being that learners will then take these inputs and make use of them as and when required in the real world. It is a view which might see data sets of this type as little more than an interesting academic exercise with marginal implications for practice; it is a view which we would seek to contest.

Much of English language use today is mediated through digital devices by participants who live out at least a part of their lives in English as an L2. Most such users are not located in English NS host county contexts, where they are surrounded by the target language wherever

they go beyond the classroom, they are in their home native country where digital devices now give them historically unprecedented access to and use of English as an L2 – and in some cases digital devices may be the only contact beyond the classroom that students have to English. This is a newly emerging phenomena and the question arises as to how TESOL might respond to such changes. For many years the profession has sought ways to bring authenticity into the classroom (see for example Widdowson, 1996). In language education TESOL has often been at the forefront of a pedagogy which stresses delivering ‘real world language’ and ‘meaningful interactions’. If TESOL is to adequately equip its learners then it needs to go beyond traditional CALL.

### *A post CALL era*

To date CALL remains the dominant framework for describing and investigation technology in language education and in the paragraph above we have ‘located’ its traditional role as assisting in the delivery of specified language items such as grammar or vocabulary. Its value tends to be discussed with reference to applications in controlled classroom contexts or as supplementary resource in self-access centres (Jarvis, 2013). However, when we look at less-controlled or informal learning contexts and the data on how students use a range of devices, for what purposes, and the role of English as an L2 in such practices, CALL arguably becomes too limited and limiting for describing and investigating practice. The focus on desktops or laptops computers (the “C”), being used by learners to consciously practise language skills (the “ALL”) is the least prevalent trend arising out of this study, and even if we replace the C with M for MALL we still have the ALL components. In practice, when participants used their L2 it was not to explicitly practise English at all, they were not going online to complete vocabulary or grammar exercises, rather they were using English as and when required because it was the means to an end; whether to enjoy a YouTube video, or to comment on a friend’s Facebook status, or to access information through a Google search et cetera. This was evident across a wide range of social media in this survey, but none more so than with online gaming. In the focus groups no student reported playing games in order to practise their English despite many ELT-based websites and apps. for such purposes. Rather, students were picking up the English that they needed it in order to play online games with others across the globe. These practices and perceptions provide further data for a suggested post-CALL era of MALU which Jarvis and Achilleos (2013, p. 9) define as

follows:

... as non-native speakers using of a variety of mobile devices in order to access and/or communicate information on an anywhere/anytime basis and for a range of social and/or academic purposes in an L2. Such a definition encompasses all the features of CALL and even MALL, in that it allows for conscious study purposes, but is not constrained by their limitations and also recognises social uses in the L2 in both formal and less formal learning situations. It recognises that devices can be used not only as a means to an end, where the end is language learning, but also where the end is accessing and posting information as globally networked citizens with English (as the L2) as well as L1 being the means to do so.

If TESOL is to rise to the challenge of adequately equipping its learners to operate in an L2 as globally networked citizens then developing the digital literacy skills of mobile assisted L2 users has to be a central concern. To be clear it is not that using digital devices to practise specified language items is redundant, rather it is that there is so much more to it than 'just' CALL or MALL – the data points to a bigger picture.

#### *Digital literacy in an TESOL*

Digital literacy in TESOL can be defined as the skills needed to operate efficiently, effectively and appropriately in an online environment in English as an L2. This includes not only accessing, evaluating and managing information as a recipient, but also engaging as a participant, together with a critical awareness of ethical issues. Thomas and Reinders (2010) provide a useful theoretical rationale for developing such skills within a task-based approach, which in its broadest sense concerns getting student to do things in an L2 with and through technology. Furthermore Dudeney, Hockly and Pegrum (2013) offer many practical suggestions for a range of contexts. One of the challenges for inside classroom activities and for homework projects is to develop our students' digital literacy skills so that they might reflect on and apply relevant insights in their everyday use of digital devices, beyond formal learning, as digital residents expressing a networked self in both their L1 and L2 outside the classroom.

A brief indicative discussion of tasks to develop such skills follows. Facebook was used by everyone in this study and the focus groups provided evidence of some useful student generated initiatives FE 'we discuss homework, we share ideas'. There was some awareness of internet security in relation to online bank accounts for example 'It's easy to steal important data' (MB)

but there was little critical awareness of their own digital footprint – the trail left by their interactions. Practitioners might usefully develop tasks around security settings and how the networked self can be used by others, for example potential employers. We might, for example, ask if our students really want potential employers to view their Facebook pictures when they apply for a job? The qualitative data shows widespread use of YouTube, but the focus groups indicated limited active engagement beyond a “like” click. To encourage more engagement in an L2, tasks could be devised which at the very least encourage sharing and comments. A more ambitious task might involve students making and posting a video clip. Another task might focus on finding, joining, sharing and commenting on a subscription channel.

Translation using Google Translate (or Bing on Facebook) was widely reported in the focus groups as a strategy for dealing with the domination of the English language on the internet and whilst there was some recognition of limitations with comments such as ‘about 70% is ok’ (FC) it is nevertheless clear that we need to do more. Historically, TESOL has tended to shun the use of translation because of its association with grammar-translation methodology, however, it is widely used by students and if we fail to develop tasks which encourage learners to harness its advantages and recognise its limitations then we are doing them a disservice.

Finally, searching on the internet was widely reported, but there was little recognition by many of arising issues such as referencing skills and plagiarism, or validity of content (.com vs. .edu), or saving bookmarks in a cloud such as delicious.com so that they can be accessed anywhere, anytime and on any device, together with tagging and sharing such bookmarks with friends and classmates. We need to integrate language use and develop appropriate tasks in order to address such shortfalls. These are but a few suggestions on how MALU might be realised through developing digital literacy skills in our practice.

## **Conclusions**

The emerging new challenge for TESOL is to embrace the opportunities that students residing and expressing themselves in online environment in both their L1 and their L2 offer, and this involves so much more than ‘just’ CALL or MALL. Seventeen years is a long time in technology advances and it was way back then when Levy (1997, p. 3) observed that, “Arguably, within the field of computers in Education, especially within humanities computing, it is teachers in the area of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and foreign languages more generally that

have been in the vanguard.” Equipping our learners to become globally connected citizens in English as an L2 for the estimated 70% of learning that takes place outside the classroom (Cross, 2006) and for the networked self that they express through social media are the newly emerging challenges and opportunities that we need to embrace if TESOL is to be at the forefront of cutting-edge practice. To do this we need to move to a post-CALL era of MALU for describing and investigating our practice with digital literacy-based L2 tasks, as indicated, having an ever increasing role to play. With English dominating the internet, with ever growing numbers of connected learners and users, and with a long tradition of innovation TESOL is uniquely placed to rise to such challenges.

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## **Appendix 1: Questionnaire (indicative) and results**

### **Use of the English language on computers, smartphones, and tablets: insights from Thai students**

All data is presented in percentages and is based on n=120 returned questionnaires, occasionally a participant left a particular box blank and rather than exclude the questionnaire altogether data percentages are calculated on a lower n= figure.

#### **A - General information**

Male: 58%                      Female: 42%                      Age: All participants were 19 or 20

#### **B - Ownership of computers, smartphones and tablets**

Tick (✓) yes or no

Yes    No

70%    30%    I own a computer desktop

80%    20%    I own a computer laptop



79% 21% I own a Smartphone

29% 71% I own an iPad or other tablet

*If you do not own any of the above then you do not need to complete the rest of this questionnaire please return it - 0% returned the questionnaire*

**C - Use of computers, smartphones and tablets**

About how many hours per day do you spend in total on computers and/or smartphones and/or tablets? \_\_\_\_\_

1-2 hrs 4%, 3-4 hrs 28%, 5-6 hrs 44%, 7-8 hrs 8%, 9-10 hrs 6%, 11-12 hrs 6%, 13-15 hrs 4%.

In a normal week how often do you use the digital devices below and for what purposes?

<i>Digital devices</i>	<i>Tick ✓ only one box for each listed item</i>				<i>Please list the main use – percentage of students who mentioned the following:</i>
	<i>Everyday</i>	<i>4-6 days/week</i>	<i>1-3 days/week</i>	<i>Never</i>	
Computer desktops and laptops	54%	26%	20%	0%	100% Internet , 62% Chatting, 59% Work/study, 48% Games, 32% Entertainment (music, YouTube, Facebook)
Smartphones and Tablets	79%	7%	2%	12%	72% Chatting, 55% Internet, 40% Games 26% Entertainment (music, YouTube, Facebook), 21% Work/study

**D - Statements**

For each statement below please show whether you ... Agree (A), or Disagree (D), or Not sure (N)

<i>Statement</i>	<i>Enter one letter ...</i>		
	<i>A or</i>	<i>D or</i>	<i>N</i>
Computer desktops and laptops are important to my university studies	100%	0%	0%
Computer desktops and laptops are important outside of my university studies	79%	4%	17%
Smartphones and tablets are important to my university studies	48%	11%	41%
Smartphones and tablets are important outside of my university studies	70%	7%	23%
Most information that I get from the internet is in English	47%	8%	45%
Computers, smartphones and tablets have helped me to practise my English	81%	5%	14%

Getting information from computers, smartphones and tablets is easier than reading paper books and articles	70%	7%	23%
English is important for me when using computers, smartphones and tablets	83%	3%	14%
I use computers, smartphones and tablets to do English language exercises online	35%	39%	26%
I use English with online friends from other countries	41%	36%	23%
I feel that I need to have a smartphone with me wherever I go	49%	25%	26%
I play online games in English	65%	22%	13%
I play online games in Thai	57%	25%	18%

### **E – More on language**

Generally, when using computers, smartphones and tablets which languages do you use? (tick ✓ one letter only)

- 0% A = Only Thai
- 61% B = Mainly Thai and some English
- 31% C = Mainly English and some Thai
- 3% D = Only English
- 5% E = Thai, English and other language(s) such as \_\_\_\_\_
- 0% F = Thai and language(s) other than English such as \_\_\_\_\_

### **More on social media and language**

Indicate whether you make use of following and if so use the letter key above (A-F) to show what language or languages you use.

	<i>Tick ✓ or ✗ to show if you do or do not use this</i>		<i>Enter one letter A-F, or leave blank if you do not use this</i>					
	<i>✓</i>	<i>✗</i>	A	B	C	D	E	F
Messaging e.g. Whatsapp, Line	85%	15%	33%	57%	4%	4%	2%	0%
Facebook, Instagram	100%	0%	13%	73%	8%	5%	1%	0%
Twitter	21%	79%	20%	40%	24%	13%	3%	0%
YouTube	100%	0%	8%	63%	20%	7%	2%	0%
Skype	42%	58%	23%	59%	14%	4%	0%	0%

Games	84%	16%	4%	45%	34%	17%	0%	0%
Dicussion forums e.g. Pantip, Pantown	40%	60%	61%	33%	6%	0%	0%	0%
Other uses (please specify)	VOID – non specified							

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.