

*English Language Teachers' Digital Literacy Development: A Case Study of English
as a Foreign Language Teachers at a Vietnamese University*

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Abstract

Digital technology has significantly contributed to the shaping of an increasingly digitalised landscape of English language teaching (ELT) over past decades. Recent years have seen initial changes in the technology-supported English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Vietnam including a number of emerging initiatives aiming to developing teachers' technological competencies. With this purpose, a case study into the digital literacy professional development of a group of EFL teachers at a Vietnamese tertiary organisation was proposed. The intent of this article is to provide an overview of this current research project. The paper starts with a critical review of literature on English language teachers' digital literacy and technology-focused professional development. In the second part, the rationale for and significance of this research are justified, giving rise to its aims and questions. Following this is a brief specification of planned methodology and methods of data collection as well as data analysis. The subsequent section is dedicated to a brief discussion of research rigour and relevant ethical issues. Finally, a concise summary completes the paper.

I. THEMES FROM LITERATURE REVIEW

Many recent studies focus on how teachers actually use digital technologies in their teaching and the factors influencing their technology adoption. Teachers' use of technology varies across contexts and is markedly different in aspects of preferred tools, focused activities and instructional goals (Fitzpatrick & Davies, 2003; Suwannasom, 2010). Evidently, most teachers only use a limited range of types of technology and their technology use still stays at a personal level (Park & Son, 2009; Son, Robb, & Charismiadji, 2011; Suwannasom, 2010). A closer look into how foreign language teachers are using digital technologies in their classroom reveals seven common ways of using them (Fitzpatrick & Davies, 2003). The most popular technology-assisted activities were found to be presenting lectures, designing language practice tasks using authoring tools, employing computer-assisted and web-based tools for assessment, and referring to teachers' e-resources for activities and materials. More recently, some English language teachers have started using currently emerging technologies such as virtual learning environments and Web 2.0 tools for self-publishing and social networking (Fitzpatrick & Davies, 2003; Dudeney & Hockly, 2009).

In addition, some investigations into factors affecting technology-based teaching show that the most critical determinants are teacher-related (Ertmer, 2005; Lee & Son, 2006; Shin & Son, 2007). Common findings from these studies indicate that teachers' own teaching context and personal pedagogical beliefs about English language acquisition and technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) strongly influence their views and practices of technology-mediated instruction (Ertmer, 2005; Park & Son, 2009; Suwannasom, 2010). It is also evident that apart from external factors involving financial and technical resources, administrative and technical support (Park & Son, 2009), teachers with diverse educational and professional experiences in the use of digital technologies as well as pedagogical stances are the key element contributing to the success or failure of TELL practice (Kim, 2002; Ertmer, 2005).

For these reasons, the professional development of teaching staff in relation to digital literacy is another focal concern among ELT researchers and educators in the literature. Attempts have been made to evaluate teachers' technology competencies and examine the main challenges to, and opportunities for, developing their digital literacy. Many teachers are still novice users of digital technology and their positive attitudes cannot always be translated into high competencies (Razak, Lubis, Embi, & Mustapha, 2010). There is also a distance between teachers' self-rated abilities and their actual levels of technology knowledge and skills (Son et al., 2011). In explaining teachers' inadequate digital literacy, researchers point to major reasons including insufficient digital literacy education and professional development, limited infrastructure and support, exponential technology diffusion, and teachers' workload (Anderson-Inman & Ketterer, 2003; Razak et al., 2010; Son et al., 2011).

To address such challenges, recent studies have started exploring ways in which teachers' digital literacy can be enhanced in classroom instruction integrating technology (Chapelle, 2007). There are a growing number of comprehensive

guidelines for EFL teachers' technology integration (Davies & Hewer, 2012; Dudeney & Hockley, 2007; Erben & Castañeda, 2009) and various digital literacy development projects and programmes developed especially for these teachers (Classroom Aid, 2012; Peachey, 2010; Pegrum, 2012). These useful openly accessible resources could also be integrated into a staff development plan or used by teachers as part of a self-study plan for professional development (Hockly, 2012).

Also apparent in many studies on teachers' digital literacy development is the provision of technology-focused professional development for in-service teachers (Tai & Chuang, 2012). Apart from formal education and training, which is not always feasible and effective, alternatives such as expert-novice teacher mentoring, communities of practice, and self-training, have been put forward (Hubbard & Levy, 2006). Some practical examples of these effective approaches, confirmed by empirical research, are Lee's (2007) peer-support enhanced model, Ingham's (2008) student-teacher mentoring, Stevens' (2009) Webheads in Action - an online teacher community of practice. Notably, further efforts have been recorded in post-training and on-going development of teachers' digital literacy. Investigations into these issues found positive changes in teacher practice and unraveled common difficulties that teachers encountered in their application of acquired technological knowledge, skills, and integration strategies (Okey, 2006; Wong & Benson, 2006).

II. RATIONALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

Arguably, in today's participatory culture of media-saturated and automated society, digital literacy, which allows one to acquire various capabilities required across a range of future scenarios (Beetham, McGill, & Littlejohn, 2009), is no longer a luxury, but a necessity (NCREL & Metiri Group, 2003; Robertson, 2008) and even an entitlement (Payton & Hague, 2010; Becta, 2010). Moreover, the modern ELT world, full of complexity, opportunities, and challenges (Levy, 2012) has been suggesting the imperative for English language teachers' professional development, especially in the aspect of digital literacy (Krumsvik, 2006; Hockly, 2013).

Responding to this professional development demand, significant attempts have been made to provide digital literacy education for English language teachers. A growing number of studies with a focus on in-service teachers have been conducted in various ELT contexts such as in Hong Kong (Lee, 2007), Korea (Lee & Son, 2006; Park & Son, 2009), and Malaysia (Hassan, 2010). However, the majority of previous studies have tended to focus on preparing prospective teachers for digitally inclusive future work (Choate & Arome, 2006; Kerin, 2009; Farooq, Asmari, & Javid, 2012; DelliCarpini, 2012). In Vietnam, there is a paucity of research work in this field. From a review of literature, it appears that no systematic investigation has so far been elaborated in the field of enhancing Vietnamese teachers' digital literacy, leaving an apparent research gap. Thus, the study can hopefully make an useful contribution to the EFL teachers' development of digital literacy in Vietnam.

The research is also in line with the organisational approach of maximising TELL

through more effective digital inclusion as well as developing teaching staff expertise. Thus, it might also be regarded as a response to the call for integrating technology in EFL instruction and upgrading technological skills for teachers, as part of the national project, *Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system, period 2008-2020*, also known as Project NFL2020 (Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training, 2008). Ideally, the target group of teachers should be functioning as 21st century teachers, but many are novice users of ELT technologies and in-experienced TELL practitioners. Hence, findings from this research could contribute to better informing effective professional development required of these teachers, especially when there is an obvious lack of digital literacy development opportunities for them. This research proposal has received very positive support from the teachers in this case study, from an initial informal survey (T. Nguyen, H. Nguyen, & Y. Nguyen, personal communication, February 27, 2013).

In addition, this research work could potentially benefit the leaders, teachers, students, and the institution as the whole. For the leaders, the study can help better inform the organisational plan for staff professional development as well as improve implementation in the area. As for the teachers, the research might offer a good opportunity for their voices to be heard and their needs related to digital literacy professional development to be identified and attended to. It can also be beneficial to students in the sense that they may promisingly experience more effective acquisition and development in both English language learning and digital literacy.

It may, moreover, offer a significant contribution to understanding teachers' perceptions and expectations of ongoing professional development concerning digital literacy in the educational context where the teaching of English is undertaken by mostly non-native-English-speaking teachers. Finally, despite its scope as small-scale case study with no intended valid generalisations, the research and its transferable findings could still serve as a useful source of reference for other departments in the institution, for other Vietnamese educational organizations, and for those in similar contexts.

III. RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

The overall aim of this research is to explore the professional needs of the International Standard Programme teachers in relation to digital literacy development and to critically review current digital literacy development provision for the teachers, with a view to developing their digital literacy in their educational practice. Specifically, the objective of this study is to address the following research questions:

- How do International Standard Programme teachers at a Vietnamese university currently use digital technologies in their teaching?
- What are the teachers' professional development needs in the use of digital technologies, as perceived by the university leaders and themselves?
- How effective is the teachers' current digital literacy professional development and how should it be further developed?

IV. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

1. Methodology

The nature of this research problem and aims entail an in-depth investigation into a specific group of teachers' perception of practices, and hence, requires an exploratory and descriptive approach based on a qualitative, interpretive paradigm – a case study (Yin, 2003). The approach is a “best fit” since it allows meaningful description of such “social activities” as teachers' technology practices and professional development activities to be achieved through “a substantial appreciation of the perspectives, culture and world views” of the involved actors (Verma & Mallick, 1999, p. 28).

Another rationale for embracing this research tradition is the opportunity to collect detailed information about the focused subjects (teachers) and their on-going and changing performances (teaching and professional development) (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). Furthermore, focusing on a “particular one” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 152), which, in this case, is the International Standard Programme group, I will employ the method of a single-case study. This method offers the potential of achieving thorough explanation (Yin, 2003) with “a thick description of a complex social issue embedded within a cultural context”, providing “rich and in-depth insights that no other method can yield” (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 155).

Adopting this framework, I wish to yield qualitative information that “reflects the experiences, feelings or judgment” (Verma & Mallick, 1999, p. 27) of the institution and programme leaders as observers and informants, and of the teachers as the subjects as well as key participants, in this investigation of teachers' digital technology usage and digital literacy development. Targeting a unique context of EFL teachers in Vietnam, therefore, this choice of method could potentially obtain an insightful understanding of teachers' perceptions and actual proficiency in terms of technology integration as well as an in-depth look into how their digital literacy has or has not been developed. In other words, the employment of interpretive qualitative approach stems from the aim to uncover teachers' use of digital technologies in their teaching and teachers' technology-related professional development needs as perceived by the leaders and teachers themselves. It is also driven by the need to unravel the current levels of teachers' technology competencies and the present situation of technology-focused professional development for the teaching staff and their beliefs about effective digital literacy professional development.

2. Sampling

This study will be carried out at a Vietnamese university of languages and international studies, using a sample of eight teachers drawn from a total of 29 English language teachers in the International Standard Programme, including the Head of the group, and four other senior staff of the university. This purposive sampling, based on a prior understanding of the context, helps to ensure the chosen participants are potentially rich sources of data; and hence, provide sufficient data for

well-informed interpretation.

3. Data Collection Methods

To address the research questions, observations and interviews will be employed as the two main methods of data collection. Notably, despite not being a major data source, documents regarding professional development for teachers at the target institution, especially for the International Standard Programme teachers, will also be examined to add a reference for data analysis in general and in particular, address the third research question. One-to-one interviews (of about 40-60 minutes) will be carried out with these selected 12 informants while observations will be conducted with four out of eight International Standard Programme teachers (3 observation sessions of 90 minutes each). (*See appendix 1-3 for further details.*)

4. Data Analysis

The data analysis procedure will include coding, categorising, presenting, and interpreting the collected information. In coding the data sources, the participants will be numbered according to the order of their interview instead of using their real names or their pseudonyms. Data classification requires going through the data multiple times, reading between the lines of the observation notes and interview transcripts to identify recurring themes. An adequate set of categories will be developed to organise data in a logical system with reference to both the research questions and a relevant *priori* framework (Yin, 2003). The analysis of data will be guided by a framework derived from a sound theoretical foundation, responding to the actual data gathered, and relevant to the research inquiry (Mutch, 2005). More specifically, common issues will be grouped under themes and subthemes in the developed framework (Borg, 2006). Such quantitative data as participants' personal information will be illustrated in appropriate kinds of graphs. Other key qualitative data will be presented in summary forms or as direct quotations. In terms of analysing, data from various sources including documents, meetings, interviews, and observations, will be constantly compared and contrasted with reference to the research questions and relevant literature.

V. RESEARCH RIGOUR AND ETHICAL ISSUES

The research rigour of this case study could be justified by two critical qualities of empirical research: validity and reliability, which are established by its strong rationales, appropriate design and ensured by multiple data collection methods as well as the systematic procedures of data collection and analysis. Both validity and reliability in this case study are represented by the criteria of truthfulness, which includes credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Apart from this, this research complies with ethical conduct embracing the ethical principles established in the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC, 2010)

guidelines. Since this case study involved interpersonal interaction in a complex EFL context, the ethical issues of informed consent, confidentiality, security, and socio-cultural awareness and other more general principles were carefully considered. (*See appendix 4-7 for further details.*)

SUMMARY

This paper provides a justification of the rationale for the proposed research and an explanation of the main objectives and research questions to be investigated. The methodology and methods used in the study and issues related to research rigour and ethics have been concisely discussed. To conclude, as the first known research into digital literacy professional development to tertiary in-service teachers of English in Vietnam, this in-depth case study can hopefully serve as a springboard for further research to advance our understanding of teachers' digital literacy professional development needs and expectations in order to yield better improvement in English language teacher education and development.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1:

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION SCHEME

Settings

Date: _____ Group: _____ interval: _____
 Time: _____ Number of students: _____ Observation number: _____
 Room: _____ Lesson: _____
 Teacher: _____ Length of observation _____

Observation notes

<i>Time</i>	<i>Teacher's activities</i>	<i>Students' activities</i>	<i>Purpose/ Focused areas</i>	<i>Teaching aids</i>	<i>Facilities (ICTs) used</i>	<i>Notes</i>

Comments:

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APPENDIX 2:

TEACHER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (following completion of signing Consent Form)

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research into English language teachers' digital literacy professional development. My name is Xuan Nguyen and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education degree in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology and currently conducting this study as part of my study programme.

Settings

Date: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____

Personal information (confidential)

Teacher's name: _____

Gender: M/F

Age: (years old)

Qualification: _____

Years of experience: _____

Questions

Current situation of technology use in teaching practice

1. How have you used technologies in your teaching practice?
 - What technologies do you often use?
 - How often do you use them?
 - What do you use them for? (Planning, instruction, administration, professional development, etc)
 - In which language skills and/or areas do you use technologies the most?
 - What techniques and strategies do you use for integrating technologies into your classroom practice?
2. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of your technology use in teaching practice?
3. What difficulties have you experienced in your professional use of technologies?
4. Have you been able to address these issues and challenges? If so, how? / If not, why not?

Current digital literacy and digital literacy professional development

5. How do you evaluate your current level of confidence and competences in using:
 - Basic computer operation and file management
 - Office programmes (e.g.: Word, Excel, Power Point)
 - Multi-media resources (e.g.: graphics, audio-video materials) and applications (e.g.: audio-video production)
 - The internet/World Wide Web (including communication applications (e.g.: emails, video conferences) and web 2.0 tools (e.g.: blogs, wikis, podcasts))
6. How important is digital literacy professional development to you as an EFL

- teacher (in the digital age)?
7. What do you see as the most important thing(s) you need to develop in your use of technologies? Why?
 8. What technology-focused professional development have you undertaken over the past two years? How useful was it and why?
 9. What type of digital literacy professional development would be most useful to you? (Self-study, group study/community practice, mentoring, training, etc.) Why?
 10. In your opinion, what are the potential opportunities and challenges of developing digital literacy for you?
 11. Are there any other comments or remarks you wish to make?

APPENDIX 3:

LEADER INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (following completion of signing Consent Form)

Introduction

Thank you for your interest in participating in my research into English language teachers' digital literacy professional development. My name is Xuan Nguyen and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education degree in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology and currently conducting this study as part of my study programme.

Settings

Date: _____ Time: _____ Place: _____

Personal information (confidential)

Leader's name: _____ Position: _____ Qualification: _____
Gender: M/F _____ Age: (years old) _____ Years of experience: _____

Questions

Current situation of technology use in the International Standard Programme (ISP)

1. How have technologies been used in the ISP?
 - What technologies are used most?
 - How often are they used?
 - What are they used for? (Planning, instruction, administration, professional development, etc.)
2. How do you evaluate the effectiveness of technology use in the ISP?
3. What constraints has your institution experienced in the use of technologies in the ISP?
4. How well has your institution been able to address these issues and challenges?
5. What do you think about the potential development in technology use in the ISP?

ISP teachers' digital literacy and digital literacy professional development

6. How do you evaluate the ISP teachers' current level of confidence and competences in the use of technology in teaching practice?
7. How important is it to develop digital literacy for the ISP teachers?
8. How do you view the ISP teachers' professional development needs in the use of technologies? How could you identify their needs?
9. What technology-focused professional development has been provided for the ISP teachers in the past two years and how effective do you think it was?
10. What types of strategies would be employed to further develop the ISP teachers' digital literacy? (Self-study, group study/community practice, mentoring, training, etc.) Why?

11. What do you see as potential opportunities and challenges of developing digital literacy for the ISP teachers?
12. Are there any other comments or remarks you wish to make?

N.B.:

Digital literacy is the awareness, attitude and ability of individuals to appropriately use digital tools and facilities to identify, access, manage, integrate, evaluate, analyse and synthesise digital resources, construct new knowledge, create media expressions, and communicate with others, in the context of specific life situations, in order to enable constructive social action; and to reflect upon this process (Martin & Grudziecki, 2006, p. 255). In other words, digital literacy goes beyond the mastery of technological skills and knowledge to engage complex non-linear cognitive and social processes that empower an individual to live, learn, and work in a digital era (JISC, 2012).

APPENDIX 4:



INFORMATION SHEET (for interviews)

Title of Thesis:

English language teachers' digital literacy professional development: A case study of English as a Foreign Language teachers at a Vietnamese university

My name is Xuan Thi Thanh Nguyen and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education degree in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology. I am seeking your help in meeting the requirements of research for a thesis, which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is to explore the professional needs of the International Standard Programme teachers in relation to digital literacy development and critically review current digital literacy development provision for the teachers, with a view to develop their digital literacy in their educational practice.

I will be collecting data using an interview schedule with some questions and would appreciate being able to interview you at a time that is mutually suitable. This one-to-one interview will take approximately 40-60 minutes and will take place in a place on campus that is suitable for the interview and accessible for both of us. I will also be asking you to sign a consent form regarding this event.

Neither you nor your organisation will be identified in the Thesis and all the collected data will be stored securely and kept confidentially. I will be recording your contribution and will provide a transcript for you to check before data analysis is undertaken. You may withdraw yourself from the research up to two weeks after the interview. You will also have the right to edit or withdraw any information that you have contributed before the completion of data collection in October 2013. This can be done by seeing me or contacting me personally via email xuan_nguyen_tt@yahoo.com.

If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec Institute of Technology. My supervisor is Dr John Benseman and may be contacted by email or phone. Phone: (09) 815 4321 ext 8736 Email: jbenseman@unitec.ac.nz

Yours sincerely

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2013-1041

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25 June 2013 to 25 June 2014. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

APPENDIX 5:



INFORMATION SHEET (for observation)

Title of Thesis:

English language teachers' digital literacy professional development: A case study of English as a Foreign Language teachers at a Vietnamese university

My name is Xuan Thi Thanh Nguyen and I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education degree in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology. I am seeking your help in meeting the requirements of research for a thesis, which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The aim of my project is to explore the professional needs of the International Standard Programme teachers in relation to digital literacy development and critically review current digital literacy development provision for the teachers, with a view to develop their digital literacy in their educational practice.

I will be collecting data using observation schemes and would appreciate being able to observe your classes for three sessions of 90 minutes each, at times that are mutually suitable. I will also be asking you and your students to sign a consent form regarding this event.

Neither you nor your organisation will be identified in the Thesis and all the collected data will be stored securely and kept confidentially. I will be taking notes during my observation of your lessons and will provide the observational notes for you to check before data analysis is undertaken. You may withdraw yourself from the research up to two weeks after the observation. You will also have the right to edit or withdraw any information that you have contributed before the completion of data collection in October 2013. This can be done by seeing me or contacting me personally via email xuan_nguyen_tt@yahoo.com.

If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor at Unitec Institute of Technology. My supervisor is Dr John Benseman and may be contacted by email or phone. Phone: (09) 815 4321 ext 8736 Email: jbenseman@unitec.ac.nz

Yours sincerely

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2013-1041

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25 June 2013 to 25 June 2014. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

APPENDIX 6:



CONSENT FORM

(for use with teachers and leaders)

Research event: Individual interview

Researcher: Xuan Thi Thanh Nguyen

Programme: Master of Education

THESIS TITLE: English language teachers' digital literacy professional development: A case study of English as a Foreign Language teachers at a Vietnamese university

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in any public reports.

I also understand that I will be provided with a transcript for checking before data analysis is started. I am aware that all the collected data will be stored securely and kept confidentially and that I may withdraw myself from the research up to two weeks after the interview. I acknowledge that I will have the right to edit or withdraw any information that I have contributed before the completion of data collection in October 2013. This can be done by seeing me or contacting me personally via email xuan_nguyen_tt@yahoo.com.

I agree to take part in this project.

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2013-1041

This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 25 June 2013 to 25 June 2014. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

APPENDIX 7:



CONSENT FORM

(for use with teachers and students)

Research event: Classroom observation

Researcher: Xuan Thi Thanh Nguyen

Programme: Master of Education

THESIS TITLE: English language teachers' digital literacy professional development: A case study of English as a Foreign Language teachers at a Vietnamese university

I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research and I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered. I understand that neither my name nor the name of my organisation will be used in any public reports.

I understand that I will be included in the researcher's observations of teaching in my class. The researcher will take notes about these observations, but will not identify me or any other students in her writing about these observations. Also, I will be provided with the observational notes for checking before data analysis is started.

I am aware that all the collected data will be stored securely and kept confidentially and that I may withdraw myself from the research up to two weeks after the observation. I acknowledge that I will have the right to edit or withdraw any information that I have contributed before the completion of data collection in October 2013. This can be done by seeing me or contacting me personally via email xuan_nguyen_tt@yahoo.com.

I agree to take part in this project.

Name	Signature	Date
<i>Teacher</i>		
<i>Student 1</i>		
<i>Student 2</i>		
...		

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Author's information:

Xuan is an English Language Lecturer at University of Languages and International Studies, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam. A part from her BA in English Language Teacher Education, PG Diploma in TESOL, Xuan trained in the Development of Audio-Visual Learning Materials programme at University of Leuven, funded by VLIR-OUS scholarship. She is currently a Master of Education programme student representative at Unitec, New Zealand, wherein her study is funded by New Zealand ASEAN Scholars Awards. Her current research interests include English language teacher education, training and professional development, e-learning, TELL, and lifelong learning.

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