A FRAMEWORK FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNITY AND PROMOTING
LANGUAGE USE IN THE ONLINE ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE
LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

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In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

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ABSTRACT

With online learning currently as an integral component and globalised online learning as part of the nation's agenda, a framework that provides a complete picture of the teaching and learning of English in the online medium is needed. However, there is a dearth of studies to illuminate online teaching when the focus is on community and language use. As such, this research employed a hermeneutic phenomenology research design that required accessing and making sense of the experience of the English language teacher and learners participating in an online English as a second language (ESL) learning environment. Guided by purposive sampling, the participants involved were 25 first year undergraduates and one English language teacher with Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) training and experience teaching English with technology. The instruments used were teacher's journals, interviews, online forums, and surveys. The sense-making process of both the qualitative data and the quantitative data were based on the principles of content analysis, constant comparison analysis, and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), and using Transana 2.22. The findings revealed the online practices of the teacher and learners as they engage in the twin processes of teaching and learning, developing community and promoting language use in the online ESL learning environment. Specifically, the findings that emerged from all sources of data indicated the following: teaching in the online ESL learning environment entailed establishing the learning environment and providing scaffolding to support learning; the community was developed due to the prevalence of self-disclosure and the centrality of task-oriented discussions in the online ESL learning environment; and language use was promoted by managing the logistics of the online activities, and using prompts to sustain the interaction in the online activities. The results obtained were used to formulate a socio-pedagogic framework for the online ESL learning environment. The framework suggests that interaction with the learning environment and interaction in the learning environment are key, and the phases contributing to the interactions in the forums are *orientation, socialisation* and *learning*. The study also revealed theoretical and methodological implications for second language acquisition research, implications in the ESL online instruction, and recommendations for future research.

ABSTRAK

Dengan pembelajaran atas talian sebagai satu komponen integral dan sebahagian dari agenda negara, kerangka yang menyediakan gambaran lengkap tentang pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Inggeris menggunakan medium ini adalah diperlukan. Walau bagaimanapun terdapat kekurangan kajian dalam pembelajaran atas talian yang memberi fokus terhadap aspek komuniti dan penggunaan bahasa sasaran. Sehubungan itu, kajian ini menggunakan reka bentuk fenomenologi hermeneutik yang memerlukan pencapaian dan pemberian makna kepada pengalaman guru serta pelajar bahasa Inggeris yang turut serta dalam persekitaran pembelajaran atas talian bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua (ESL). Dengan berpandukan persampelan bertujuan, 25 orang pelajar tahun pertama dan seorang guru bahasa Inggeris yang mempunyai latihan pengajaran bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa kedua (TESL) dan pengalaman mengajar bahasa Inggeris menggunakan teknologi telah dipilih. Proses pemberian makna dilaksanakan menggunakan kedua-dua data iaitu kualitatif dan kuantitatif yang berdasarkan kepada prinsip analisis kandungan, analisis perbandingan yang berterusan dan analisis fenomenologi tafsiran (IPA) yang menggunakan Transana 2.22. Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa amalan pengajaran dan pembelajaran atas talian bagi guru dan pelajar dapat melahirkan komuniti dan menggalakkan penggunaan bahasa. Secara khusus, pengajaran ESL secara atas talian melibatkan suasana pembelajaran dan dapat memberi sokongan dalam pembelajaran seterusnya, komuniti dapat diwujudkan menerusi kelaziman pendedahan kendiri dan pemusatan kepada perbincangan yang berorentasikan tugas ESL dalam persekitaran pembelajaran secara atas talian dan penggunaan bahasa telah dipertingkatkan melalui pengurusan aktiviti logistik atas talian dan penggunaan arahan untuk mengekalkan interaksi. Kerangka kajian menunjukkan interaksi dengan persekitaran pembelajaran dan interaksi dalam persekitaran pembelajaran adalah integral dan fasa yang menyumbang kepada interaksi dalam forum adalah *orientation, socialisation* dan *learning*. Kajian ini juga menunjukkan implikasi teori dan metodologi dalam penyelidikan untuk pembelajaran bahasa kedua, implikasi atas talian dalam pembelajaran ESL dan cadangan untuk kajian akan datang.

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CALL	-	Computer Assisted Language Learning
CMC	-	Computer Mediated Communication
CMS	-	Content Management System
DT	-	Discussion thread
ELLs	-	English language learners
ESL	-	English as a second language
F2F	-	Face to face
L2	-	Second language
LLT	-	Language learning theories
LMS	-	Learning Management System
OLTL	-	Online language teaching and learning
SLA	-	Second language acquisition
UTM	-	Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

With the integration of technology in education, online language teaching and learning is becoming a mainstream mode of delivery in most institutions. In spite of that, it can be argued that this mode is still in its infancy stage as online language pedagogy remains mostly unexplored. Most studies on online language pedagogy fall short in providing the much needed details for informing online practices, especially with regards to developing community and promoting language use. This is an issue of concern particularly in English as a second language (ESL) learning contexts where learners' low language proficiency is generally due to affective factors and limited exposure to and use of the target language. Developing community and promoting language use could be the panacea to learners' predicament: nurturing a community might alleviate the affective filter, and other social and psychological barriers, and as learners interact with one another, exposure to and use of the target language is increased. Besides, from a sociocognitive view, learners are social beings and interaction is an essential part of second language (L2) development. Conclusively, in-depth studies are warranted in order to shed more light on the online practices of language teacher and learners. In response to this call to action, a hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry to explore the experiences of an English language teacher and a group of English language learners participating in an online ESL learning environment was carried out. The culmination of the hermeneutic circles lay in the final product, a socio-pedagogic framework for developing community and promoting language use in the online ESL learning environment.

1.2   Background of the problem

The advancing technology in online language teaching and learning (OLTL) is resulting a shift away from the traditional face-to-face instruction to modes where the online medium has an integral part. Especially for ESL learners with limited proficiency, teaching in this medium seems to be a "reasonable and responsible option" (Malinowski, 2011: 34). Recent studies revealed an impressive list of the advantages of language instruction in the online medium that are extended to learners of any language proficiency (Table 1.1). It is claimed that the affordances of online instruction are caused by the ubiquitous effect of the online medium that presents a unique language learning environment (Nunan, 2010), while others suggested that it is the interaction between the teacher and learners that are primary and indispensable (Sun, 2014; Mason, 2011). The contributing factors may vary but, on the whole, these benefits reflect the potential of the medium to be tapped to nurture community and encourage the use of the target language. To illustrate, Nunan (2010) emphasises on the different roles of content management system (CMS) to support online language learning, while Baten, et al. (2009) reveal the use of Google as an environment to facilitate language use and to develop community, and Chen (2009) discusses the use of Wiki where learners co-construct class resources.

Earlier studies presented in Table 1.1 are also useful as teachers need to be cognizant of the possible pitfalls of teaching and learning language online. The study by Lee (2006), for instance, illustrate that learners could get confused between the language to use in the text-based environment and in face-to-face setting. Other studies indicate that learners do not necessarily possess IT skills and skills to interact online (Ducate and Lomicka, 2008). When learners interact, they have the tendency to be more focused on meaning and less on accuracy (Kessler, 2009), they have superficial communication (Harrison and Thomas, 2009) and they could easily be distracted by technology and get diverted from learning (McKerlich, et al., 2011; Sun, 2011). In short, the disadvantages provide some inclinations into the potential problems that teacher and learners may face as they venture into online language teaching and learning, and, thus, could inform their online practices. On the whole, recent studies generally present findings that are positive and favourable, and there is a dominance of the strengths of online language teaching and learning over its drawbacks. These signal that this shift towards online instruction is not

to be mistaken as a faddish pendulum swing and concerted efforts in informing online language pedagogy should be in place. Nonetheless, this is hardly the case.

Table 1.1: Affordances and constraints of OLTL

Affordances	Constraints
• Increases writing confidence, facilitates learners' writing strategies, enhances overall writing skills (Raith, 2009; Kessler, 2009; Zorko, 2009; Arnold et al., 2009; Ducate and Lomicka, 2008; Mark and Coniam, 2008; Armstrong and Retterer, 2008) • Increases interaction, collaboration, language use (Chen, 2009; Baten et al., 2009; Peterson, 2006; Lee, 2006) • Increases cultural knowledge, cultural competence (Lee, 2009; Jauregi and Banados, 2008; Elola and Oskoz, 2008; Yang and Chen, 2007) • Increases language learning motivation and interest (Chen, 2009; Liou and Peng, 2009; Kessler, 2009; Dippold, 2009; Román-Mendoza, 2009; Armstrong and Retterer, 2008; Ducate and Lomicka, 2008; Lord, 2008; Pinkman, 2005) • Enhances audience awareness (Nunan, 2010; Alm, 2009; Raith, 2009; Yang and Chen, 2007) • Provides a comfortable and relaxing environment (Armstrong and Retterer, 2008; Chen, 2009; Deris, et al., 2012a; Ducate and Lomicka, 2008; Yang and Chen, 2007) • Encourages collaboration (Kessler, 2009; Lee, 2009, 2010; McCarty, 2009; Zorko, 2009) • Nurtures community (Baten et al., 2009; Harrison and Thomas, 2009) • Promotes a deep approach to learning; stimulates active, constructivist learning; allows individualised study plan, anywhere/anytime instruction, patient tutoring, a private space to make mistakes, immediate/ individualised feedback, detailed records of achievement (Nunan, 2010)	• Leads to learners' frustration in distinguishing between the language to use in the text-based environment and in face-to-face setting (Lee, 2006) • Increases learners' tendency to pay attention to meaning and less on language accuracy (Kessler, 2009) • Requires teacher to provide training to learners on using tools and using language because learners lacks knowledge and skills to interact (Deris, 2009, Dippold, 2009; Ducate and Lomicka, 2008) • Leads to distraction of learning among learners due to technology, thus overlooking input provided by other learners (Sun, 2011; McKerlich, et al., 2011; Traphagan, et al., 2010; Ducate and Lomicka, 2008) • Leads to superficial communication (Harrison and Thomas, 2009)

Broadly speaking, online language teaching and learning has received great attention, and the studies in Table 1.2 specifically indicate that the online medium can be used to teach language skills and to promote other aspects (e.g. autonomy, motivation, identity, community, interaction, and use of technology) that are supportive of online learning. However, little emphasis has been given on online language pedagogy, as observed by other researchers (Garret, 2009; Compton, 2009; Laat, et al., 2007; Kreber and Kanuka, 2006; Natriello, 2005; Hampel and Stickler, 2005). In fact, it is a widely held belief that research pattern indicates a surplus of research focusing on tools (Sun, 2014; Blake, 2011; Garret, 2009). Searching journals using specific pedagogic keywords

such as 'online language feedback' also resulted in studies on blended learning where face-to-face classrooms were supplemented with online tools, such as emails (e.g. Soo, et al., 2013), chat (e.g. Razagifard and Razzaghifard, 2011), and computer-assisted feedback (e.g. Adams and Strickland, 2012). This pattern is also evident in the growing body of knowledge on online ESL teaching and learning in Malaysia. Some of the tools that have been researched include the use of online discussion (Bala, et al., 2012; Imani, et al, 2012; Tehrani, et al., 2012a; Tan, 2006; Hamzah, 2004), wikis (Syed Hamid, et al 2012; Tan and Mohd Nor, 2012), emails (Yadollahi, et al., 2012), blogs (Md Yunus, et al, 2013; Vethamani, 2006), and other social platforms (Shafie and Nayan, 2013; Alias, et al., 2012; Omar, et al., 2012). While researchers such as Saidalvi, et al. (2012) and Hussin (2006) are more interested in the instructional design aspect of web-based learning, others compared and contrasted face-to-face and online language learning (Tehrani, et al., 2012b; Mat Daud and Zubairi, 2006). Given that the pedagogical approaches affect language learning and technology is merely a vehicle delivering instruction (Wang and Vásquez, 2012, Warschauer, 2009; Mayer, 2005), the pattern that emerged is surprising and indicating a lack of attention on online pedagogy.

Table 1.2: Current research on OLTL

Research focus	Studies
Listening	Chang and Chang (2014); Grgurović (2012); O'Bryan and Hegelheimer (2007)
Reading	Taki (2015); Lee (2012); Kartal and Uzun (2010); Warschauer (2010); Ducate and Lomicka (2008)
Writing	Andrew (2014); Jun and Lee (2012); Tan and Mohd Nor (2012); Raith (2009); Zorko (2009); Kessler (2009); Armstrong and Retterer (2008); Ducate and Lomicka (2008); Lund (2008); Mat Daud and Zubairi (2006)
Speaking skills	Juhary (2012); Ahmadian (2012); Kırkgöz (2011); Ahmadian and Tavakoli (2010); Viswanathan (2009); Deutschmann, et al., (2009); Travis and Joseph (2009); Sun (2009); Lord (2008); Wang and Chen, (2007); Lee (2002); Coverdale-Jones (2000)
Interaction, discourse	Qian and McCormick (2014); Leung (2013); Peterson (2006)
Knowledge construction	Murugaiah and Siew (2010); Lund (2008); Lund and Rasmussen (2008)
Attitudes, perceptions	Yu (2011); Chen (2009); Dippold (2009); Armstrong and Retterer (2008); Lord (2008); Soares (2008); Ducate and Lomicka (2008); Yang and Chen (2007); Pinkman (2005); Yuveinco and Huang (2005); Stepp-Greany (2002)
Motivation	Yu (2011); Hsu (2010); Ni and Aust (2008); Krish (2006)
Learner autonomy	Kessler and Bikowski (2010); Alm (2009); Halvorsen (2009); Kessler (2009); Pinkman (2005)
Identity	Choi (2009); Halvorsen (2009); Petersen, et al., (2008)
Learning community	Mohamad and Shaharuddin (2014); Baten, et al. (2009); Yang (2009); Petersen, et al. (2008); Johnson (2001)
Technology comparison	Stevenson and Liu (2010); Chen (2009); Yang and Chen (2007); Stepp-Greany (2002)

The lack of concentrated efforts in exploring the practices that online language teacher urgently need is alarming since online language pedagogy is different from those for face-to-face (F2F) instructions and those of other subjects (Sun, 2011; Zhang, 2014). It is rather ineffective for language teachers to refer to the practices of online content pedagogy because language teaching requires teacher to pay attention to language use in terms of both "form of interaction as well as the content" (Hampel and Stickler, 2005: 312). In the context of language pedagogy itself, online practices are different from classroom practices and challenges "become exponentially more difficult" (Nunan, 2012: xii) in the online learning environment. The online learning environment presents different instructional time and space (Deris, 2009) and requires different expectations and skills (Kessler, 2006), practices in managing the learning environment and engaging learners using online communication tools (Tehrani, et al., 2012a; Lai, et al., 2008; Easton, 2003). In other words, the existing studies and best practices for teaching and learning may not be sufficient when the operative words 'language' and 'online' are added.

What language teachers need is a framework to define the online practices because the online medium significantly changes "the way knowledge needs to be transmitted" (de Larreta-Azelain; 2014: 68). A closer look at recent frameworks indicates that the efforts in providing a basis for understanding the practices that online language teacher desperately need have begun (Table 1.3). According to Meskill and Anthony (2010, 2007), online language teaching entails providing positive and negative input via teacher talk in the online environment. In their pyramid of skills, Hampel and Stickler (2005) suggest several skills that are categorised into 'low' and 'high'. Although the framework fails to explain online language pedagogy, it may provide teaching confidence for novice online teachers as the skills build on one another, from the most general skills to individual and personal styles. Compton (2009) seems to aim to provide the big picture with a framework on three major sets of skills for online language teachers, i.e. technology, pedagogy, and evaluation, and at and at three levels of expertise (novice, proficient, expert). While these categorisations are justified, in truth these domains overlap with one another. van Olphen (2008) presented a TPACK framework to illustrate how the different domains represent language teacher's knowledge and how these components interact with each other to create effective teaching with technology. Lai, et al. (2008), on the other hand, indicate that online teaching entails online practices such as communicating course requirements, implementing tasks, using tools, providing and

encouraging feedback, applying task-based instruction, conducting formative assessment, and providing multiple opportunities for and facilitating interactions. By and large, it can be argued that the frameworks overlooked the 'community' component of online language teaching and learning. Although Compton (2009) and Hampel and Stickler (2005) touched on online socialisation and community, the terms are loosely used and the practices are not mentioned. Meskill and Anthony (2010; 2007) accentuate 'teacher talk' as an online practice but the emphasis is not on promoting language use.

Table 1.3: Summary of online language teaching frameworks

Studies	Summary
Meskill and Anthony (2010)	Using Tharp and Gallimore's (1991) model for instructional conversation, eight strategies are presented: calling attention to forms; calling attention to lexis; corralling; saturating; using linguistic traps; modelling; providing explicit feedback; providing implicit feedback.
Compton (2009)	Online skills: technology (knowledge and ability to handle hardware and software issues); pedagogy (knowledge and ability to conduct and facilitate teaching and learning activities); evaluation (analytical ability to assess the tasks and overall course and make necessary modifications to ensure language learning objectives are met).
van Olphen (2008)	The TPACK domains of language teachers: content knowledge (CK) (target language proficiency); pedagogical knowledge (PK) (knowledge of processes of teaching and learning); technological knowledge (TK) (knowledge of using different technologies); pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) (knowledge of SLA theories and teaching skills); technological content knowledge (TCK) (an understanding of how knowledge of content and technology interact); technological pedagogical knowledge (TPK) (an understanding of how technology can be used to aid the teaching and learning process)
Lai, et al. (2008)	Design principles for distance foreign language development revolves around two aspects: course communication and course structure.
Meskill and Anthony (2007)	Eight instructional conversation strategies for online learning using learning objects: Referring/Anchoring, saturating, corralling, providing linguistic/thinking tools, modelling, encouraging combinatory or synthetic responses, hyperlinking, internal dialog
Hampel and Stickler (2005)	A pyramid of skills with seven key competencies ranging from lower level skills (e.g. basic ICT competence, specific technical and software competence, awareness of constraints and possibilities) to higher level skills (e.g. online socialisation, facilitation of communicative competence, creativity, choice and selection).

1.3   Statement of the problem

The discussion in the preceding section reveals a research and knowledge gap suggesting the need for further investigation on online language pedagogy. Furthering understanding on this issue will not only contribute to knowledge but also help solve a practical problem. English is taught as a second language in Malaysia, and this nation embraces global technological changes as evidenced from its initiatives. As early as the 1970s, the government of Malaysia has been immersing learners in technology-enhanced learning environments with the provision of educational radio and television broadcasts to schools. In the 1990s, e-learning at smart schools and Learning Management System (LMS) at tertiary institutions began to revolutionise education on a national scale. At the turn of the 21st century, institutions for higher education were generally embracing blended learning and online learning. Other novel, national-scale initiative in education include the *Online Resources for Learning in English* (MyLinE) that aims to provide learners in all public institutions of higher education anytime/anywhere access to language learning resources and platforms for interactions with the intention to develop a community of self-directed learners. Meanwhile, Frog, the web-oriented, tablet-based e-learning system implemented in over 10,000 primary and secondary public schools (frogasia.com, 2013) serves to afford quality online education and to establish the nation as a model of excellence for integrated internet learning (1bestariNet, 2012). The seventh shift of the eleven shifts of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 entails transforming the education system by focusing on distance learning and self-paced learning to expand its capacity and to accommodate customised learning (Ministry of Education, 2012:19), while the ninth shift of the ten shifts of the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) moves the country to globalised online learning (Ministry of Education, 2015: 23). This shift includes the nation's Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) which has moderated the geographical distance across Malaysia and brought learners and educators closer. At present, online learning is as an integral component and globalised online learning is part of the nation's agenda. ESL teachers are among the enablers of this commitment, and this presents the bottom-line question: What does teaching in the online ESL learning environment entail?

The current infrastructure suggests that the feasibility and necessity of research to inform online practices. Embi (2011) asserts that universities with LMS have been

providing formal training programmes to tertiary educators to enhance understanding and improve practices. Other proposed efforts to ensure teachers are equipped to teach in the online environment include adding the component of virtual environment in the TESL curriculum (Wan Mansor and Zakaria, 2006), making sure TESL trainees experience learning through facilitation, peer collaboration, utilization of the online resources, and group learning in distance learning (Kaur and Abas, 2004), and equipping teachers with basic computer knowledge and operational skills, teaching and learning skills, skills in assessment and evaluation, and skills in planning and managing the environment (Abdul Razak and Embi, 2006). Others argue that familiarity with technology is insufficient; ESL teachers must also possess creativity (Puteh, 2009; Towndrow, 2007). These studies suggest that the efforts are in place but the studies are unspecific as to how a community can be developed nor how language use can be promoted. Since the government's recent initiatives signal that Malaysia is fast becoming a nation of cybercommunities, efforts should be moving towards enhancing the body of knowledge on community building in ESL context.

In the ESL context, learners experience social and psychological barriers, and language is taught "in a separate context from the native speakers of the target language" and "as a subject", and use of the target language is not apparent outside the classroom (Ipek, 2009: 160). Nonetheless, "a world that is decisively supported and interconnected by technology" (Chapelle and Hegelheimer, 2004: 300) has allowed language learning to be extended outside the classroom and brought online (Lai and Gong, 2015; Tian and Wang, 2010). Unfortunately, bringing a language class online does not necessarily promote language use and develop community. In a study by Sun (2011: 437), there was no community and learners were found "very quiet" and language use was "minimal" and merely for "survival" in the course although opportunities for both synchronous and asynchronous interactions were given. Proponents of online language learning seem to think that learners must be given the power to create their own learning environment to facilitate positive outcomes (Baten et al., 2009; Harrison and Thomas, 2009). Surprisingly, in a study by Deris, et al. (2015), it was found that the community was developing and interactions were not sustained, "sparse and infrequent" although learners were housed in a teacher-less environment. While Deris, et al. (2015) seem to think that language use leads to the development of community, Compton (2009: 79) claims developing community helps avoid 'superficial exchanges' and facilitate language use.

There are many suggestions on improving practice. Nevertheless, referring to the vast research and best practices for online teaching and learning may not be sufficient or applicable when the operative word 'language' is added. The suggestion for face-to-face teachers to 'easily jump in and teach' in this new medium (Ferdig, et al., 2009) is, without doubt, erroneous since teaching online and teaching face-to-face have different requirements. The sensible choice would be to refine the pedagogical and theoretical foundations to underpin the infusion of technology (Garret, 2009; Chapelle, 2009; Kern and Warschauer, 2008) because there is no ideal second language teaching approach or method to reflect online language teacher practices (Compton, 2009). However, it appeared that there is a dearth of research on the specific area of interest (Table 1.3). In fact, generally, "very little has been published" and the current body of knowledge "typically looks at individual stand-alone online learning tools, or teaching methods, or particular settings of a blended learning program", with a focus on learners' attitude toward, perception and evaluation, or satisfaction and performance (Sun, 2014: 2-4). Meanwhile, Compton's (2009: 74) observation is that there is "little concerted effort ... to prepare teachers for online language teaching ... beyond the technical and software specific".

While it is undeniable that these existing frameworks are instrumental towards understanding online language pedagogy, it is also clear that more studies are needed to illuminate online teaching when the focus is on community and language use. Developing community is completely necessary considering that in the online learning environment, language learning is on one's own as well as with others, and teaching is carried out through coordinated and shared activities that require a high degree of peer interaction and teamwork (Andrade, 2015). Meanwhile, promoting language use is important because language teaching entails providing "support to use English" to help learners become proficient in the target language (Che Musa, et al., 2012: 42). It is claimed that language teachers have "little understanding of how to build a learning community" in the online medium (Yang, 2012: 19), and language use is not automatically promoted just because the online ESL learning environment is provided (Deris, et al., 2015).

Long (2011: 375) claims that it is "irresponsible" not to study pedagogy and to suggest that "teachers should use a pinch of this, a dash of that". Therefore, this research intends to investigate online language pedagogy within the scope that is identified through

the research gap. Earlier studies conducted by the researcher provided some insight into the issue of interest. In Deris (2009), it was found that the online practices of teacher include communicating course requirements, using tasks, utilising ICT tools, trainings on how to use the ICT tools and trainings on using language to participate, and projecting teacher presence. However, this study was set in blended-learning mode where the tasks were linked to the face-to-face lessons. Further studies, as illustrated in Table 1.4, were conducted in either fully online mode or in contexts where the online activities are separate from the face-to-face activities. In Deris, et al. (2011), Deris, et al. (2012b) and Deris and Salam (2014), the teacher's overarching role was found in shaping the outcomes of the teaching and learning processes. In Deris, et al. (2015), the online ESL learning environment was teacher-less, and the findings recommended the presence of a teacher to orchestrate learning. Another important point to note is that in the teacher-led environments, the researcher was the teacher. While other studies have accentuated the importance of teacher to investigate own practices to support understanding of both language learning theories and practices (Hatasa, 2013; Ellis, 2010; Chapelle, 2007; Towndrow, 2007), in the current study the researcher adopted the role of 'observer as participant' (Chua, 2012: 169) to avoid taking active part in the event being studied.

Table 1.4: Summary of preliminary studies

Sources	Findings (online practices)
Deris, et al. (2011), Deris, et al. (2012b)	Careful planning of a course, and effective discourse facilitation and direct instruction, with emphasis on teacher's personal presence, are fundamental in delivering English course that is fully online. The practices include employing various communication tools that enable teacher-student interaction, designing the physical layout of the course to represent teacher and to evoke positive impression on the online course, increasing opportunities to get to know teacher, empathising with learners and providing learning opportunities that allow learners to learn individually and as community.
Deris and Salam (2014); Deris, et al. (2013)	Teacher's participation in the online discussion is indispensable in sustaining community and helping learners engage with content. Working as a community, learners helped one another to reach consensus, initiate group activities, and provide detailed explanations on academic items. However, online teacher needs to provide learners confidence by posting messages that confirm their understanding. In addition, discussion requirements alone are not sufficient to sustain community; teacher needs to participate in the interaction.
Deris, et al. (2015); Deris and Tan (2014)	Demonstrated by findings on shared idea of politeness, manner of expressing opinion and manner of supporting opinion by using personal experience, online communities of English language learners may develop even in teacher-less online learning environment as long as tasks exist in online discussion. However, community may not be sustained, and, therefore, opportunities for practice through language use may diminish.

In summary, there are several key points of concern that demonstrate this study worth doing. First, as discussed in the preceding section, there has not been sufficient research to date that resulted in a framework for informing online practices to develop community and promote language use, especially for application in ESL context. Second, the brief history of ICT-integrated education in Malaysia demonstrates an increasing use of the online medium for delivering instruction. Finally, it is the nation's agenda to move forward and towards globalised online learning. With online learning currently as an integral component and globalised online learning as part of the nation's agenda, a framework that provides a complete picture of the teaching and learning of English in the online medium is necessary. In particular, a focus on the online practices of teacher and learners as they engage in the twin processes of teaching and learning, developing community and promoting language use in the online ESL learning environment is needed.

1.4   Research purpose

The preceding sections have demonstrated that online language pedagogy warrants further investigation because it is less researched despite its overarching role in ascertaining learning. Therefore, this research is conducted to support the efforts to address this gap. Analysis of what is already known about online language pedagogy has refined the focus to include the online practices of teacher and learners, teaching, language use, and community. A hermeneutic phenomenological research design is selected in order to understand how these concepts fit in online pedagogy. Getting a complete picture of the phenomenon being investigated is essential in materialising the end product of this research; thus, it is crucial to maintain a focus on those who are most involved, the English language teacher and learners. Specifically, this research aims to explore the experiences of an English language teacher and English language learners participating in an online ESL learning environment, the purpose being to develop an understanding of their online practices and in so doing to generate a framework for developing community and promoting language use in the online ESL learning environment.

1.5   Research objectives

The main research intent described in the preceding section is to determine the constituents of a framework for developing community and promoting language use in the online ESL learning environment. In order to fulfil the research intent described in the preceding section, the following research objectives have been formulated:

i.   To examine the teacher's online practices in teaching in the ESL learning environment

ii.   To explore the teacher and learners' online practices that led to the development of community in the ESL learning environment

iii.   To explore the teacher and learners' online practices that promoted language use in the ESL learning environment

1.6   Research questions

To develop a composite picture of what the findings are collectively saying, a key question is established: What are the constituents of a framework for developing community and promoting language use in the online ESL learning environment? Based on the purpose, objectives, and key question of this research, the following research questions have been designed:

i.   What did teaching in the online ESL learning environment entail?

ii.   How was community developed in the online ESL learning environment?

iii.   How was language use promoted in the online ESL learning environment?

1.7   Significance of the study

This study is significant in order to respond to the problem statement and gap in research and knowledge:

- One intended outcome of the study, on a theoretical level, is to explain online ESL pedagogy from a sociocognitive SLA perspective. Given that there is no ideal second language teaching approach or method to reflect online language teaching and learning, discussing the theory in the context of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge to address the problem statement and gap mentioned earlier.

- On a practical level, a second intended outcome of the study is to clarify the online practices on the specific area of interests. Specifically, it proposes a data-driven online pedagogy in the form of a framework on developing community and language use. The qualitative insights offered from this research will add to the scholarly research and literature that is lacking in studies related to online pedagogy. Focusing on teacher and learners' practices, the findings delineate how these practices can support the development of community and promote language use in online L2 environment. This information might be useful in informing teaching approach/method.

- Further, a third intended outcome contributes to the methodological considerations in researching online pedagogy. In the context of this study, the use of the hermeneutic phenomenology research design is found useful in accessing and making sense of the experiences and practices of the teacher and English language learners.

- Another rationale lies in the fact that the findings might benefit researchers. As an example, other researchers may be able to generate quantitative measures based on the information from this research in assessing the concepts of this study. Qualitative researchers, on the other hand, will be able to extend this research on the possible dimensions of community in an online L2 environment. Similarly, the parameters and findings contextually delineated in this qualitative research will also be able to guide other research practitioners researching online English

education to explore the development of the community of language learners in online setting, and to determine and describe the dimensions of teacher and learners' practices in online language course.

1.8   Scope of study

With the goal to develop a framework for developing community and promoting language use, this study employed hermeneutic phenomenology research design to capture the lived experiences of participants and to understand the meaning of those experiences. To provide a complete picture, the participants of this study were both teacher and learners populating an online ESL learning environment. Guided by purposive sampling, an online English language teacher with prior training and experience teaching in online ESL environments was selected. Consequently, the 25 language learners who were taught by this teacher were selected as participants as well.

Data were collected via multiple instruments including teacher's journals, interviews transcripts, online forum analysis, and surveys on community. The sense-making process of both the qualitative data and the quantitative data were based on the principles of content analysis, constant comparison analysis, and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). This hermeneutic phenomenological inquiry was idiographic in nature as it stressed the importance of detailed examination of the specific phenomenon of interest. In particular, this research was mainly concerned with examining the experiences of the participants with the aim to develop an understanding of the practices in the online L2 environment and understanding of how the practices developed community and promoted language use. Consequently, the phenomenon of interest was explored at both the macro (the practices expressed in the teacher's and learners' accounts of the shared experience) and micro (what transpired in the online learning environment) levels.

1.9   Theoretical framework

Theory is "a set of statements about natural phenomena that explains why these phenomena occur the way they do" (VanPatten and William, 2007: 2). In computer assisted language learning, a theory is also needed to inform both research and practices (Chapelle, 2007; Egbert and Hanson-Smith, 2007). Literature has indicated that research in language learning has had a paradigm shift. Despite this fact, all second language acquisition (SLA) theories have their merits (Larsen-Freeman, 2007) and "no single theory can do justice to the dizzyingly complex and multifaceted phenomenon" (Atkinson, 2014: 467). Therefore, the sociocognitive approach to second language acquisition (SLA) that bridges the gap between earlier SLA theories (Larsen-Freeman, 2007) is adopted to guide this research and to explain language teaching and learning. It is also claimed that the sociocognitive paradigm is particularly relevant for online learning environment with emphasis on community (Lyman-Hager, 2009; Malinowski, 2011). Specifically, this research is underpinned by the sociocognitive approach to SLA that has been developed by Dwight Atkinson because this approach "does not yet exist in SLA" (Atkinson, 2002: 536).

English language teaching and learning do not take place in a vacuum; it is deeply embedded in a social milieu instead (Atkinson, 2012) and language learning must be viewed as a matter not only of cognitive development but also of shared social practices (Batstone, 2012). Both teaching and learning are viewed as highly social activities that require interaction with teachers and peers (Fahim and Mehrgan, 2012). Language, according to Atkinson (2002: 536) is learned in interaction and is a rich resource for "getting on with the world – for performing social action". The sociocognitive approach establishes that language use, language acquisition, and language teaching have social and cognitive dimension that interact (Atkinson, 2014: Batstone, 2012). This interaction is explained in its four theoretical principles (Atkinson, 2002) and its centrality is recently further emphasised as interaction in/with second language (L2) environment (Atkinson, 2014). The four theoretical principles of the sociocognitive approach, with interaction at its heart, are as illustrated in the following Figure 1.1.
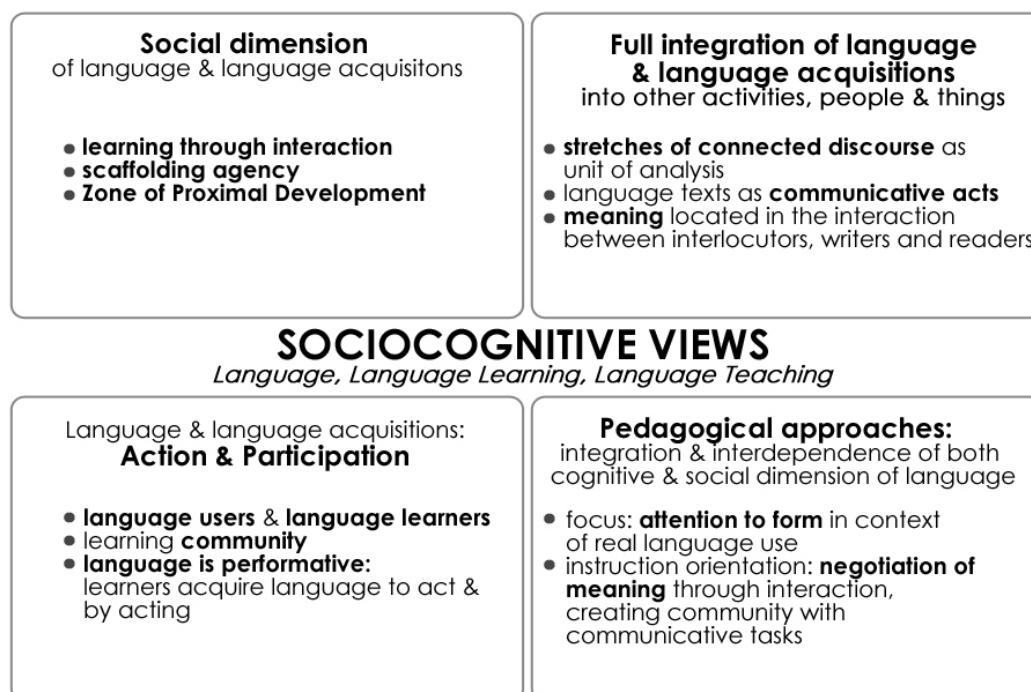
Figure 1.1: Sociocognitive theoretical principles

Specifically, there are four principles of this theory that underpin this research. First, sociocognitive takes into account the social dimensions of language and its acquisition. Cognition on its own does not suffice to promote language acquisition (Fahim and Mehrgan, 2012); learners learn language through interaction with more capable social members (language teacher and peers). The second principle refers to the full integration of language and its acquisition into other activities, people and things. In the words of Fahim and Mehrgan (2012: 162), "cognition is extended and distributed…that it projects out into the world, often via multitude of adaptive tools". Third, language and acquisition would be viewed in terms of "action" and "participation" (Atkinson, 2002). Language exists primarily for a vital function i.e. to enable people to perform and participate in activities. Since language itself is performative, (1) learners acquire a language in order to act, and (2) learners acquire a language by acting. The fourth principle calls for the interdependency and integration of both cognitive and social dimensions of language (Atkinson, 2002). Given language as a social and cognitive phenomenon, this means that pedagogical approaches must be focused on fostering attention to form in the context of real language use. In their sociocognitive framework for Integrative CALL, Kern and Warschauer (2000) established that instruction should be oriented toward negotiation of meaning through interaction with others in communicative tasks.

1.10   Conceptual framework

According to Maxwell (2013: 39), a conceptual framework refers "to the actual ideas and beliefs" concerning the phenomena being studied. The phenomenon of interest in this study is online ESL teaching and learning. With recent research indicating a lack of emphasis on pedagogy, this investigation is focused on formulating a framework for developing community and promoting language use in the online ESL learning environment. Underpinned by the sociocognitive approach, this research believes that the framework can be developed by investigating the experiences of teacher and learners in the learning environment.   Given that this research relates to the 'how?' question and its research goal is to develop a framework, the process framework is chosen, as opposed to the content framework.   The conceptual framework that underpins this study is as illustrated in Figure 1.2.
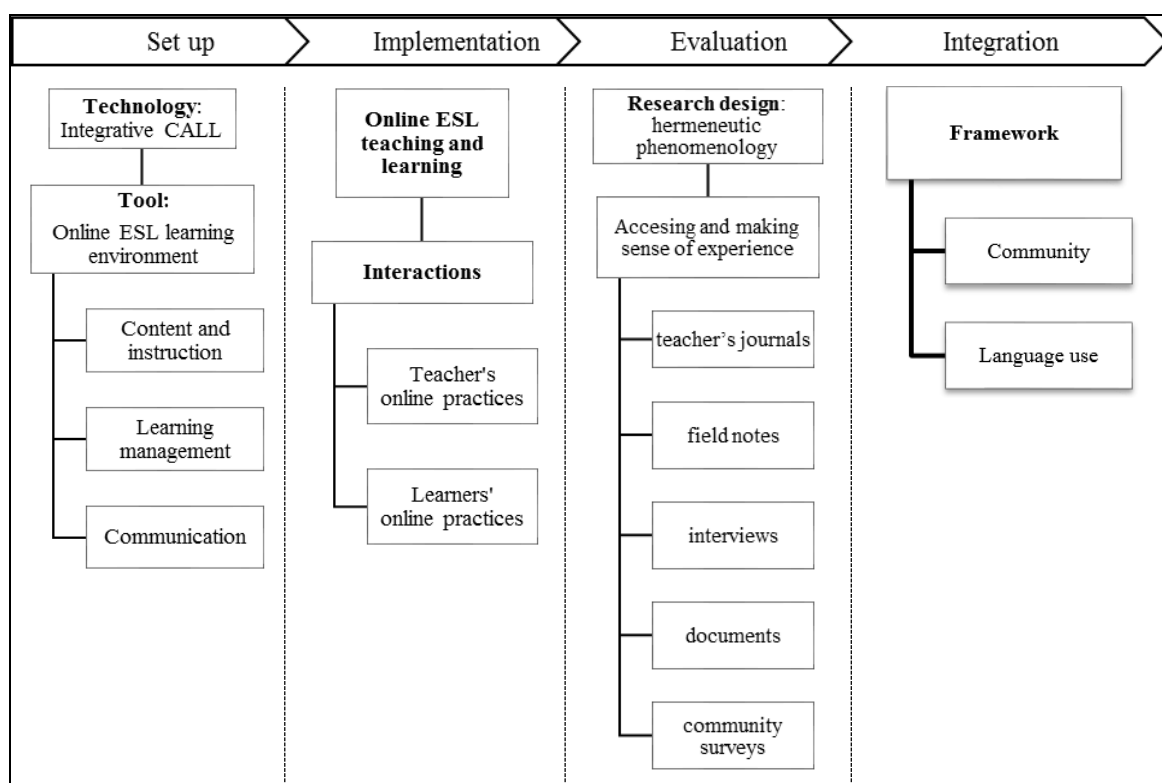
Figure 1.2: Conceptual framework underpinning this study

Figure 1.2 depicts the constituents in the process framework and how they fit together to facilitate the research intent. The setting up stage refers to the role of technology in online ESL teaching and learning since "language and its acquisition are

integrated into other activities, people and things" (Atkinson, 2002: 536). In the context of this study, the use of technology in supporting language teaching and learning is viewed from the Integrative Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) stage. Integrative CALL refers to the integration of multimedia and the internet for computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Warschauer, 2004). Regarded as *tool*, the principal use of technology is for affordances of interactions. However, in the case of the online ESL learning environment as specific *tool*, it serves three purposes simultaneously, i.e. (1) as a carrier of content and an instructional tool, (2) as a learning management tool, and especially (3) as a communication tool (Nunan, 2010).

In the implementation stage, the focus in on the online ESL teaching and learning where teacher and learners engage in online practices, experiencing, thinking, reflecting and modifying practices. In order to understand this phenomenon, it is important to include both teacher and learners in the picture. As suggested by da Silva (2004: 163), a language class is "a co-production between teacher and learners together" with "overlap of roles between them". In line with the sociocognitive views, the central proposition of this framework is that language is a social and cognitive phenomenon, and therefore, language teaching and learning entails interactions. It is in the interaction that learners' accuracy, fluency as well as agency are being promoted. In terms of teaching focus, attention to form in context of real language use should be fostered and instruction should be oriented towards negotiation of meaning through collaborative interaction with others. As important as it is for language learners to be self-directed and collaborative in outlook, they cannot be left entirely on their own devices, nor can they be allowed to get the impression that they are to figure out language entirely on their own.

This process framework also includes the evaluation stage which entails accessing and making sense of the experience of the learners and teacher engaging in the online ESL teaching and learning. Multiple instruments were used to ensure a detailed and complete picture of the phenomenon (teacher's journals, interviews, online forum analysis, and surveys). Capitalising on a hermeneutic approach of data analysis, the phenomenon was viewed and its meaning was interpreted through the eye of the participants. As depicted in the diagrammatic representation of the conceptual framework of this study, the integration process culminated in the development of framework that is both teacher and learner-driven. Focusing on the important trends, the general principles that underpinned the

online practices was discerned and a framework for developing community and promoting language use in the online ESL learning environment was formulated.

1.11   Operational definition

This section lists the terminologies that are important in the context of this study and are used in describing and discussing the research.

1.11.1 Online practices

The term 'online practices' refers to the actions performed in the online ESL learning environment. The practices may be expressed in the teacher's and learners' accounts of the shared experience (macro) and may be directly observable (micro) in the learning environment. The online practices of the teacher could be "planned and spontaneous, direct and indirect" in communicating the "instructional design, direction and facilitation" (Deris and Salam, 2014: 10).

1.11.2 Language use

'Language use' refers to the "stretches of connected discourse" (Kern and Warschauer, 2000) that are "elicited" (Ellis, 1999: 672) that enable learners to perform and participate in the online ESL learning environment.

1.11.3 Community

Community refers to a group of ESL learners in a shared space who feel a sense of "connectedness" (Rovai, 2004), and who "interact and engage in shared activities, help each other, and share information with each other" (Wenger, 2006).

1.11.4 Online learning environment

The term 'online learning environment' refers to any Internet-based environment with communication tools for asynchronous or synchronous interaction that is used for online teaching and learning purposes. This term includes online teaching environment, virtual environment, virtual classroom, and online medium as equivalent statements.

1.11.5 English as a second language

English as a second language, or ESL, is the use of English by non-native English speakers in contexts where English is commonly used. In the context of this study, English is a language commonly spoken in Malaysia but the native language of the teacher and the learners is the Malay language, and English is learned and spoken as a second language.

1.11.6 Framework

In the context of this study, discussion of the findings will culminate to the devopment of a framework for developing community and promoting language use. In other words, the framework is a (data-driven) online pedagogy. Therefore, in this study, the framework refers to a set of recommendations about how things should work in the online ESL learning environment as it outlines the best online practices for others to follow. Since, the constructs of the framework have not been tested or proven, it should not be considered yet as a model.

1.12   Summary

This chapter explicates the point of departure of this study. It begins by presenting the potentials of online pedagogy in enhancing language teaching and learning. After that, this chapter continues with a discussion pointing towards the research and knowledge gap in the specific area of interest. Then, a brief account o f the progression of technology in education in Malaysia and the nation's agenda is described, suggesting the necessity of this research to help solve a practical problem. Afterwards, the expected insights are outlined to illustrate the merits of conducting this research. Finally, the frameworks informing this research are described and the terminologies used are defined to provide a frame of reference and complete understanding of the main intents of this research.

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