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Effect of Online Learning on Students' Academic Achievement

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Abstract

Distance learning or online learning and also known as e.learning form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instruction and the use of various technologies to facilitate student-teacher and student-student communication. Online learning has a number of benefits including flexibility and self-paced learning, demonstrated self-motivation and refined critical thinking skills .However, one of its disadvantages is that online courses require more time than on campus learning. Also online courses may create a sense of isolation as every student is left to study on their own.

Keywords: online learning, physical separation, flexibility, refined critical thinking

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing popularity of the term 'mobile learning' brings with it a shift in focus that may impact on educators and trainers: it is mainly learners who carry the mobile devices and move around with them, whilst the term 'mobile teaching' is hardly used at all. This separation of meanings contrasts sharply with the way that 'web-based teaching' and 'web-based instruction' have generally been used with equanimity alongside 'web-based learning'. So our starting point and our focus is

an emphasis on learning, but our take on mobile teaching is to redefine it as facilitation and support of mobile learning.

In the course of researching this book, we have sometimes been approached by people wanting to find out what difference 'mobile learning' might make to their teaching. They have also shared with us their curiosity, skepticism or excitement about what they think mobile devices might offer, from the point of view of interested outsiders. Typical questions have included the following: Is it possible to learn from such small gadgets as telephone?

2. CONCEPTS OF LEARNING AND TEACHING IN RELATION TO E.LEARNING

Conceptions of teaching and learning have been extensively explored and documented in educational literature (Richardson 2000; Laurillard 2002), yet they continue to be the subjects of debate and revision (Coffield *et al.* 2004). In this section, we outline the more significant ideas and point to their relevance to the practice of mobile learning. The most pragmatic position for educators and developers to adopt is that mobile content and delivery systems must be robust in the face of contending and conflicting ideas in this area, that any conceptions of learning or teaching are potentially at the mercy of poor usability or accessibility, and to plan wherever possible for redundancy, diversity and inclusiveness amongst their communities of intended users. For example, redundancy might be designed in by allowing learners a degree of choice about the way in which the same information can be accessed: say, on a handheld device or on a desktop. Diversity would be well served by attending to differences in learners' needs according to their past experience and ability to adapt to mobile learning. Inclusiveness should address varied cognitive, psychological and physical traits as well as the widely accepted issues of accessibility and usability, and the growing issue of personalisation (Kukulska-Hulme and Traxler 2005).

Prior to considering intricate issues of pedagogical objective and design, a bare yet helpful distinction can be made between didactic and discursive mobile learning. *Didactic* learning can be understood as learning from mobile educational material, including novel formats such as e-books and web caching, in a way that responds to the potential and the limitations of mobile devices.

Didactic teaching would be the means to that end. *Discursive* learning, on the other hand, relies on the development and support of interaction and discourse amongst communities of mobile learners who may, in some cases, never meet each other or their tutors face-to-face. Mobile devices can also be used for other generic learning activities, such as gathering information, evaluation by ranking or rating, reflection, problem solving or skills acquisition (for further discussion of generic categories of learning activity, see Fowler and Mayes 2004). Other categorizations of learning specifically derived from analysis of virtual learning have been devised (e.g. Peters 1999).

3. CONCEPTIONS OF TEACHING

It is perhaps easiest to start by looking at teachers' conceptions of teaching since in this area some consensus is now emerging (Kember 1997). This consensus is centred on the notion that teachers and lecturers all have their own individual and perhaps implicit conceptions of what in essence constitutes the act of teaching.

They then attempt to enact these conceptions in their work but these individual conceptions of teaching can nevertheless be seen as falling somewhere on a continuum. Some teachers are at one end of this spectrum and will act as if the teacher, the content and its transmission were paramount, whilst others will act as if students and their learning were paramount. The emphasis in the first case is on imparting information, and structuring and transmitting knowledge; the emphasis in the second case is on facilitating understanding, and supporting conceptual change and intellectual development. Most educators and trainers will fall between these two extremes, and there is obviously a relationship – but there need not be a match – between these two extremes and the discursive/didactic dichotomy described above.

4. CONCEPTIONS OF LEARNING

If we now move on to learning, there is a considerable quantity of research into its processes and characteristics. There are several authoritative accounts of this work (e.g. Richardson 2000) but also ongoing work that questions the rigour and validity of much of what is routinely accepted within higher and further education and training

(Coffield *et al.* 2004). It is a complex and evolving subject. To many practitioners within further and higher education it is enormously interesting and underpins developments in their day-to-day teaching. In the context of mobile learning however, it is best to approach it with modest and pragmatic questions that allow informed and trustworthy progress to be made despite the ever-changing theoretical and conceptual formulations.

At the moment, mobile learning is still too novel for us to provide definitive and comprehensive answers to questions like these and the purpose of this book is to document experiences to date, to provide a technological, pedagogic and environmental framework and perhaps to refine the questions and areas where researchers and developers in mobile learning should focus.

These kinds of questions cannot be addressed without discussion of the wider context, for example:

• The convergence of distance learning and campus-based learning, in terms of both students' characteristics and learning technologies;

• The increasing industrialisation, 'commodification' and 'massification' of further and higher education in much of the developed world (Peters 1998);

• The blurring of divisions between conventional education on the one hand and informal learning, information gathering, 'edutainment', performance support and vocational training on the other;

• The increased participation and widening access agendas; increased diversity and complexity within training and within further and higher education.

All these issues and many more create a very fluid context for trying to understand and exploit the literature about conceptions and styles of learning.

However, to return to learning itself, the idea of conversation, with teachers, with other learners, with ourselves is central as we question our concepts, and with the world as we carry out experiments and explorations and interpret the results (Pask 1976 quoted in Sharples *et al.* 2002). Sharples (2001) addresses the application of Conversational Theory to mobile devices. He concludes his discussion:

> … we can welcome students who bring their own personal communicators and computers, but in the full knowledge that they will disrupt traditional teaching and that this disruption needs to be managed. This is not an argument for technological determinism, for proposing that because students come armed with new technologies then education must adapt to accept them. There is a more defensible case for moving to a more conversational approach to teaching and learning. The skills of *constructing* and exploring knowledge, *conversing* and collaborating with peers, and the ability to *control* one's own learning are fundamental requirements of effective learning. (Sharples 2001: 7)

5. USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN TEACHING ENGLISH

As the use of English has increased in popularity so has the need for qualified teachers to instruct students in the language. It is true that there are teachers who use 'cutting edge' technology, but the majority of teachers still teach in the traditional manner. None of these traditional manners are bad or damaging the students. In fact, till date they are proving to be useful also. However, there are many more opportunities for students to gain confidence practice and extend themselves, especially for ESL students who learn the language for more than just fun. For them to keep pace with ELT and gain more confidence they have to stride into the world of multimedia technology.

6. THE GROWTH OF ELT THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

21st century is the age of globalization and is important to grasp on various foreign languages and English language comes first. English Language Teaching has been with us for many years and its significance continues to grow, fuelled, partially by the Internet. Graddol's study (2000) suggests that in the year 2000 there were about a billion English learners- but a decade later the numbers doubled. The forecast points to a surge in English learning, which has peaked in 2010. The same study indicates that over 80% of information stored on the internet is in English. For the first time there are more Non-Native than Native users of the language and diversity of context in terms of learners, age, nationality, learning

background etcetera has become a defining characteristic of ELT today.

With the rapid development of science and technology, the emerging and developing of multimedia technology and its application to teaching, featuring audio, visual, animation effects comes into full play in English class teaching and sets a favorable platform for reform and exploration on English teaching model in the new era. It's proved that multimedia technology plays a positive role in promoting activities and initiatives of student and teaching effect in English class. Technological innovations have gone hand –in hand with the growth of English and are changing the way in which we communicate. It is fair to assert that the growth of the internet has facilitated the growth of the English language and that this has occurred at a time when computers are no longer the exclusive domains of the dedicated few, but rather available to many. With this there has been a very significant proliferation of literature regarding the use of technology in teaching English language. Mostly these writings unequivocally accept technology as the most essential part in teaching. In a sense, a tendency to emphasize on inevitable role of technology in pedagogy to the extent of obliterating human part of teacher by technology part has been very dominant. And as a result if we neglect or ignore technological developments they will continue and perhaps we will never be able to catch up, irrespective of our discipline or branch. For this reason it is important for language teachers to be aware of the latest and best equipment and to have a full knowledge of what is available in any given situation. Teachers can use Multimedia Technology to give more colorful, stimulating lectures (new Horizons).

There are many techniques applicable in various degrees to language learning situation. Some are useful for testing and distance education, and some for teaching business English, spoken English, reading, listening or interpreting. The teaching principle should be to appreciate new technologies in the areas and functions where they provide something decisively new useful and never let machines takeover the role of the teacher or limit functions where more traditional ways are superior. There are various reasons why all language learners and teachers must know how to make use of the new technology. Here we also need to emphasize that the new

technologies develop and disseminate so quickly that we cannot avoid their attraction and influence in any form.

7. GROWTH OF E. LEARNING INDUSTRY

With the growth of e.learning industry there have been other significant developments. First, the people who are responsible for developing e.learning do not need to have deep technical skills to produce programs. The availability of commercial software , means that anyone who can afford the program and in some cases people who can simply connect to website can author programs. This has lowered the barrier to entry and has enabled the organizations to develop the programs that would not have been possible in the past.

Today's students are "digital natives", technologically sophisticated learners who process information differently than many of us did at their age (Prensky, 2001). Instead of being "native" to today's technology, many of us teachers are either "digital immigrants" or "naturalized digital citizens", brought into the digital world after experiencing, for the most part, an analog way of life. As this digital world continues to evolve, new technologies emerge and trends we once took for granted, say an interactive chat room, now face creative challenges that we never imagined possible. To support new trends, or to utilize new emergent technologies, we must understand how much such changes can potentially influence our students' learning as well as our own teaching.

The buzzword today is Web 2.0, an overarching technology paradigm that facilitates interaction between individuals, both socially and educationally. A sub-term in this Web 2.0 world, computer-mediated-communication (CMC), has long focused on the use of communication tools, such as synchronous chat rooms, to support collaboration, interaction, and rich, deep conversation both in and out of the classroom. Given that technology never remains static, it is no surprise that new applications and new trends emerge that literally "blow our minds"! It is, in fact, a new form of CMC that is the focus of this chapter, a new technology that has been projected to "wash away" how we interact, communicate, and collaborate electronically with each other. This new emerging tool is Google Wave, an online communication environment that supports multiple

forms of interaction, including synchronous and asynchronous communication.

This chapter demonstrates how Google Wave can support synchronous conversation among students. In a recent advanced-level second language (L2) technology course, this researcher compared synchronous conversations in Google Wave to synchronous conversations in a standard Blackboard chat room. Students enrolled in the course experienced both forms of technology while participating in cross-cultural and pedagogical discussions relevant to L2 learning. A structural comparison in terms of message length, message turns, and numbers of words, clarification, and technical issues revealed the extent of students' expression in both formats. To present these findings, this chapter begins with a review of literature relevant to computer-mediated communication (CMC) and the emerging technology, Google Wave. The chapter next turns to the active research study that examines the extent to which Google Wave and chat rooms are similar and/or different when students synchronously discuss specific topics. The chapter then concludes with a summary of the results, and recommendations for teaching and research using this rich, innovative tool.

8. COGNITIVE SKILLS THROUGH CALL

The availability of computer-assisted language learning tools which help students to learn the formal aspects of language and which assist them in the acquisition of an associated metalanguage (i.e. linguistic terminology) seems limited at present. The acknowledgement of the need for such input and training facilitates is growing but availability of appropriate tools is still scarce. This is so despite the obvious strength of computer applications to provide platforms for individualized options which allow students to operate at their own pace with a focus on their particular individual needs. There may be a link from this need for computer applications to the continuing debate on the usefulness and desirability of metalinguistic knowledge (i.e. knowledge aboutlanguage) in language learning. The issue needs to be viewed from two perspectives: 1) the role of explicit knowledge in language-learning performance and competence, and 2) the requirement of metalinguistic knowledge as part of the education of future language teachers. For both of these, the objective is a

subsequent enhancement of autonomous learning as well as facilitating the readiness to receive instruction at an academic level. Depending on the particular language taught, and the proficiency level aimed at, the language teacher- training programs at university level will need some inclusion of the formal aspects of the language in question for the reasons. The role for grammar in language learning in general is debated (see for instances Long, 2007, pp. 139-168), but there is a growing understanding of the need to include grammar instruction in the language learning classroom, "Many teachers and researchers currently regard grammar instruction as 'consciousness raising' […] in the sense that awareness of a particular feature is developed by instruction even if the learners cannot use the feature at once" (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002, p.6). One prominent proponent of the role of grammar is Sharwood Smith who states that awareness of grammar "is a necessary step, many people believe, toward fully mastering any language" (2008, p.179). In teacher education, there is the further concern that language teachers should be equipped with the rudimentaries of a language description inventory and the ability to read and understand pedagogical grammars and expositions on language learning in order to make decisions in the language classroom.

9. TEACHERS AND METALINGUISTIC SYLLABUS

Several studies in a number of countries have found that language teachers often appear to lack sufficient background knowledge of the metalinguistic syllabus, including the lack of a metalanguage in which to talk about language (see for instance Newman & White, 1999). The same is the case for student teachers in Danish universities. When

Danish and other Nordic students enter university; they are already proficient users of English with eight to ten years of English language learning behind them. They are basically treated like native speakers in the expectations they are met with concerning reading and comprehension skills. However, they lack knowledge of some of the formal aspects of the language and the ability to discus linguistic and conceptual aspects of the language in metalinguistic terms (Borg, 2003; Vinther, 2004). Grammar is an unfamiliar concept to many of them, and the little explicit grammar instruction they did receive in

their pre-university education was on a very basic level and functional/ pragmatic in nature.

10. CONCLUSION

Online teaching stresses the role of students, and enhances the importance of "interaction" between teachers and students. A major feature of multimedia teaching is to train and improve students' ability to listen and speak, and to develop their communicative competence, during this process, the teacher's role as a facilitator is particularly prominent. Using multimedia in context creation creates a good platform for the exchange between teachers and students, while at the same time providing a language environment that improves on the traditional classroom teaching model. In this way, teachers in the classroom no longer blindly input information and force students to receive it in a passive way.

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