Situating Teacher Education in Blended Learning Mode

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Abstract. Up to now, a variety of tasks have been integrated into language teacher training courses and programs. It is hoped that the present study adds to the growing discussion about teacher education with a focus on ways to integrate technology in teacher education programs by Blackboard, a form of asynchronous computer-mediated communication (ACMC) and Skype, a form of synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC). When teacher educators learn with technology before teaching, it is possible for them to experience technology from the learner's point of view, and evaluate its uses and benefits from a user perspective. In this study, a hybrid course as blended learning is examined with respect to linguistic, affective, cognitive, and sociocultural aspects. The goal of the study is thus to explore the incorporation of technological tools into blended learning to help other language teachers in the development of collaborative cross-institutional situations.

Keywords: E-learning, Blended learning, Teacher education, SCMC, ACMC

1 Introduction

Blended learning (BL) is defined as a mix of "classroom and online learning that includes some of the conveniences of online courses without the complete loss of face-to-face contact" [1]. BL courses have the benefits of both face-to-face and online communities by combining two different modes: computer-assisted language learning (CALL) technologies and face-to-face interaction (FtF). In BL course, differing technological tools can be implemented to facilitate discussion and interaction. Recently BL has been increasingly applied to L2 instructional settings with the growing awareness of its benefits. Among its benefits are the easy access to computer technology in and out of the classroom [2] and the expansion of pedagogical potential of communication technology [3]. In addition, there has been the increasing discontent among L2 students or even language teachers with the efficacy of the CALL-only environment [4]. In this study, a hybrid course as blended learning is examined with respect to linguistic, affective, cognitive, and socio-cultural aspects. The goal of the study is thus to explore the incorporation of technological tools into blended learning to help other language teachers in the development of collaborative cross-institutional situations.

2 Method

2.1 Setting and Participants

The focal participants in this case study were 6 Korean English teachers enrolled in a large university in the eastwestern area in Korea during the fall semester in the 2012 academic year. Three of the participants were teaching at middle schools and the rest of them were teaching at high schools. At the time of data collection, 2 were graduate students in the second semester of a first-year MA TESOL program, 2 were graduate students in the fourth semester of second-year MA TESOL program, and 2 were doctoral students from the College of Education with research interest in CALL teaching. Participants ranged from more experienced (more than 5 years' teaching experience) to less experienced (5 or fewer years of experience) teachers, and most of participants were interested in the topic with respect to teaching methods and future research agenda. As regards motivations for joining the course, they citied career advancement, enthusiasm based on recent experience of technology use, or expectations of a role for technology with which they are not yet familiar.

2.2 Data Collection

The primary sources of data, which had been collected over a period of four months, were participant background questionnaires, self-reflection essay, SCMC texts, ACMC texts, and end-of-semester questionnaires. Participants were required to write a self-reflection essay on their experiences with the hybrid course. The end-of-semester questionnaires were aimed at investigating the teachers' views on the BL setting. Participants were asked to respond by selecting the statement (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree) that best described their own feelings.

There was a recursive process of data analysis in order to reveal themes and patterns that characterized the teacher participants' experiences and perceptions in a hybrid course.

Table 1. Course Outline

Main Topic & Date	September	October	November	December
Theory & practice of network-based language teaching	Offline & weekly online chat			
Teacher education: motivational factors & goal orientation	First telecollaboration Sept 21-Sept 23			
CALL & culture Task design in CALL		Offline & weekly online chat		

Learner characteristics & strategic learning	Second telecollaboration Oct 19-Oct 21
Software evaluation Virtual life	Offline & weekly online chat
The role of context and of language in learning	Third telecollaboration Nov 16-Nov 18
CALL & distance education Critical perspectives on technology	Offline & weekly online chat

3 Results

3.1 Linguistic Domain

The participants described both positive and negative experiences and perceptions of linguistic domains. Note that the participants were expected to write their reflection in English. With respect to expressing one's thoughts in L2, explicit linguistic gains from CMC interactions were not so positive. In contrast, they felt that CMC exchanges were useful in terms of getting authentic input and comparing the differences or similarities between their output and native English speaking students' output. Although the main goal of CMC discussions was to share ideas on the subject-matter, the teacher participants were able to notice the linguistic forms produced by native English speaking students.

3.2 Affective Domain

The teacher participants experienced a moderate level of anxiety and discomfort because they were conscious of the linguistic mistakes that they made during CMC discussions. The primary discomfort was attributable to their fear that their English expressions would be observed by native English speaking students. It is noted that L2 learners who are not confident in their English usually suffer from communication apprehension [5]. On the other hand, it seemed that their reluctance to initiate an exchange with other American students can be understood in terms of identity based anxiety. The sense of being a nonnative English speaker, in part, contributed to their hesitation. Interestingly, some felt that the anxiety was not entirely negative in that the whole CMC discussion helped them to use English.

3.3 Sociocultural Domain

It is apparent that the participants recognized the difference in sociocultural norms for communicating between Korea and the U.S. Their experiences in the CMC discussion included a negotiation of academic cultures, which also had an influence on the way they participated. One of the sociocultural aspects affecting their discussion was their unfamiliarity with the way communication was structured and managed in many American classrooms.

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