

PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS FOR ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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ABSTRACT

Language professionals long resisted teaching online mainly because it was unthinkable to teach speaking in the online environment. Recent advances in technology, however, have made it conceivable. This chapter presents the design and implementation of online courses in Japanese and Chinese recently developed and being offered at Purdue University. We will highlight not only technologies involved, but also pedagogical innovations that helped resolve difficult issues. The efficacy of online teaching will also be touched upon. Reactions from enrolled students and the instructors that have taught the courses will also be shared.

Keywords: e-language learning, problems, challenges, online learning, ICT.

INTRODUCTION

One major motivation for developing online foreign language courses was that some students are interested in taking a foreign language, but can't fit one in their schedule. 1st and 2nd year Japanese and Chinese courses meet five times a week. There are quite a few students who cannot fit that into their schedule. Also, some students prefer to learn on their own at their own pace. Online courses can accommodate such students. So far, we have only had Purdue students taking online Japanese courses, but the courses can potentially accommodate all college students, high school students, business people, and so on, from anywhere in the world.

METHODOLOGY

What is an online course? What do learners expect an online course to be like today? They expect online courses to be mostly asynchronous, and they expect to be able to learn at their own pace to a much greater extent than in the regular classroom course. How can we teach speaking in this kind of environment? This is our first challenge. Another challenge concerns testing. Considering that the students may be on the other side of the earth, as in the summer session, it's not practical to give a test at the same time. Even if everybody is in the same time zone, proctoring online is

very problematic. There's a technology called Lockdown Browser. It's a browser that allows students to take an online test but doesn't allow them to do anything else on the computer. It also video-records the test taker in an effort to prevent cheating. But the test taker may have cheat sheets in places that the webcam can't see. They may also have another computer or device on which to look up things. Another approach to secure testing is to have students go to test centers to take a test proctored by a human proctor. This solution requires a fee, a reservation in advance, and is not ubiquitously available worldwide. A major weakness of this solution is that a student that takes the test first can tell his classmates what the test questions were.

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has been playing a pivotal role in education over the past decade. The rapid development in ICT has made a great change in the strategies and concepts of teaching and learning. The teaching and learning process are not only limited to a traditional classroom in which Face to Face (F2F) meeting becomes a priority. The development in ICT has minimized the existence of F2F meeting by implementing a blended learning or even totally changed it into full online learning.

Currently, increasing number of universities in Indonesia has implemented a technology based learning system or that is well known as e-learning. Rosenberg (2001: 28- 29) defines e-learning as the use of Internet technologies to deliver a broad array of solutions that enhance knowledge and performance[1]. It is based on three fundamental criteria: (1) ELearning is networked, which makes it capable of instant updating, storage/retrieval, distribution and sharing of instruction or information, (2) It is delivered to the end-user via a computer using standard Internet technology, and (3) It focuses on the broadest view of learning learning solutions that go beyond the traditional paradigms of training. Moreover, regarding the benefits that universities get from of e-learning, Kusumo, et al. (2012) states that University level educations try to adopt e-learning system to enhance the effectiveness of the teaching-learning process[2].

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the questionnaire, there are five assessed aspects, namely, student's readiness for online learning, student's attitudes towards the e-language course, contribution of the program to language learning, role of teacher and peers in language learning, and preference between online and traditional language course.

Student's readiness for online learning The first part of the questionnaire assesses learners' readiness to pursue on-line education courses. As Kizlik (2001) points out, in order to benefit from distance learning, one must have a mix of self-

confidence and the ability to seek, analyze, and synthesize appropriate information without constant face-to-face feedback [3]. Parallel to this argument, the study first aimed to find out whether the students saw themselves ready for an on-line learning program. From all participating students, they are significantly willing to communicate on the net (77%) and to set time to study during e-learning (76%). The students have significant characteristics such as self-discipline (70%), self-responsibility (77%), good time management (71%), and good problem solver (74%) when they are participating in e-learning. Besides, they are significantly able to set goals (77%), aware of how they can learn well (70%), and able to work with minimal support during e-learning (66%). Regarding their mindset, the students significantly think on-line learning has equal quality to traditional learning (76%), the role of teacher is as facilitator of learning (80%), and need for feedback during e-learning (77%). Importantly, the students found themselves very significantly comfortable on the net (81%). From the results shown above, the students have no difficulty with e-learning. In other words, they have a pronounced sense of autonomy and self-direction (Kizlik, 2007)[3]. It is not a surprising fact since the students are digital natives and use technology as an integral part of their everyday lives. Of most interest is the fact that they use technology extensively for social networking and communication. Therefore, it would have more benefits if the teachers integrate all tools and techniques with the implemented e-learning program.

The second part of the questionnaire reveals students' attitudes towards e-language learning experiences. The most important thing shown from the study is that the participating students very significantly enjoyed the e-language program (83%). This plays pivotal role in succeeding the program as learner motivation is one of the key factors affecting student performance and learning, particularly online learning success (Cole, Field & Harris, 2004; Ryan, 2001, cited in Smart & Cappel, 2006). This is in line with McKeachie (2002, p.19)[4], he observes that students who are motivated to learn will choose tasks that enhance their learning, will work hard at those tasks, and will persist in the face of difficulty in order to attain their goals.

Besides, students found the e-language learning program was very significantly valuable for learning English (83%), the learning environment was supportive for better language learning (81%), and learning was fun with e-language course (83%). In line with this, various researchers have shown that learning in an online environment requires a significant amount of discipline and self-motivation (Golladay et al., 2000; Serwatka 2003). This is particularly true where the online units are completed as independent, self-study units, as opposed to users interacting as part of a community of online users (Smart & Cappel, 2006). In this e-language

learning program, students allocated two or three hours to complete weekly task. It is a commitment some students are likely to be more willing to make than others.

CONCLUSION

In line with the fast developing world of ICT, there is a big transformation of learning from traditional class to online learning. Particularly, in the case of language learning where all four skills currently could be learnt in a virtual environment. As perceived by students, although there are some drawbacks, it attempts to emphasize a certain number of advantages, for example, an opportunity for distance learning, which undoubtedly increases the quality of education and goes beyond traditional ways of teaching and learning, and thus extends further possibilities of learning. There is a lot of efforts by institutions and teachers to improve the educational quality of teaching and learning at universities by applying new technologies such as e-learning. In order to minimize the e-language learning drawbacks teachers have been trying hard to find strategies by integrating some ICT tools such as online programs, LMS, and social media.

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