A Participatory Survey on Effective Utilization of Teacher-Student and Student-Peer Interaction on Online Platforms in Second Language Teaching Pedagogy

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Abstract— Education today has moved from direct interaction with students to distant learning as a means of adapting to the restrictions caused by the pandemic. The traditional classroom has been replaced by synchronous e-learning platforms introducing a novel experience to the teachers and students alike. In this light, the present study investigated the effective use of interaction in the virtual second language classroom at undergraduate level. The data was collected through a self-administered questionnaire distributed among a group of 116 undergraduate participants representing the first and the second years of three BSc degree programs. In addition, focus group discussions were also employed to obtain the learners' perception on virtual language learning. The findings revealed that while the learners were benefitted from online learning activities, interaction takes place best in the traditional physical classroom. Further, the responses to the questionnaire indicated that even though communication with peers was an effective approach towards language development, the learners prefer the involvement of the teacher during interactive activities. However, as per the outcomes of the study, it was evident that the participants were satisfied with online language learning as they viewed it as an innovative experience and a productive approach in second language acquisition.

Keywords— interaction, online platforms, second language pedagogy

I. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has made a significant impact on the everyday lives of people and education has not been spared. As face-to-face interaction with the students is restricted, educators around the world have been required to adopt alternative methods of teaching. Against this backdrop, e-learning has become commonplace practice over the past year. Today, online synchronous learning platforms have replaced the traditional classroom allowing the teachers and students to interact via a virtual environment. According to Dhawan (as cited in Maican and Cocorada, 2021), with the rise of the global pandemic, online learning has been reckoned as the panacea of the period, no longer an option, but a necessity.

In the Sri Lankan university context, ZOOM, Microsoft Teams and Google classrooms have become the popular online learning applications during the pandemic especially among language learners and educators. Based on a study by Guzacheva (2020), virtual learning has enabled innovative learning opportunities to the students through its "widespread of methods, activities and tools of Computer Assisted Language Learning." (p.458). According to Zhang (2020), online classes have become "the new norm among students and educators" as the universities have been required to adopt distance learning techniques in response to the pandemic. (p.2). However, the challenges and difficulties involved in using these language teaching applications has not been sufficiently explored in recent studies. Therefore, this study is an attempt to investigate the effective use of teacher-student and student-peer interaction in the online classrooms during second language learning. Since interaction plays a prominent role in language acquisition, it is a key determinant in evaluating the efficacy of language learning through virtual platforms. Accordingly, a self-administered questionnaire was distributed and focus group discussions were carried among the voluntary participated groups of first and second year BSc students to explore their opinion on interaction in the virtual language learning environment. The collected data was descriptively analyzed and the findings are presented using graphs.

A. Research Objectives

I.To investigate the undergraduates' perspective on teacher-student interaction in the virtual language classroom.

II.To investigate the undergraduates' perspective on student-peer interaction in the virtual language classroom.

III.To determine the effectiveness of interaction on virtual language learning platforms.

B. Research Questions

I.What are the preferred online interactive language learning activities of the undergraduates?

II.What is their opinion regarding communication between peers and with the teacher during online language teaching and learning?

III.Does virtual learning facilitate student interaction in the language classroom?

IV.Are the learners satisfied with their virtual language learning experience in relation to its impact on interaction ?

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted in a Sri Lankan defence university setting where English Language is delivered as a NGPA module basically in the modes of EAP, ESP and ESL interchangeably. The content of the course modules consists of functional grammar, academic writing, communication skills and skills pertaining to reading and listening. The research instrument is mainly dealt with students' perceptions of and engagement in an online interactive English language learning platform for language development and how interaction mechanisms have an effect on the overall acquisition of the language.

A. Design of the Research

The primordial research instrument, the questionnaire demands responses which entail both qualitative and quantitative inputs. Qualitative data are instrumental to derive some postulations on behavioral changes and implications that can be observed in students engaged in teaching – learning process (Almekhlafi, 2006). Yang (2016) is of the view that employment of a mixed approach in language learning research garners rich details aiding cropping up of new vistas of thinking in relation to the subject being researched. Thus, this notion could well be applicable in studying about interactive language learning landscape in online domain.The primary concern deliberated in this study is how effective interaction mechanisms aid fruitful realization of ESL language pedagogy and how the stakeholders impinge on materializing healthy language related affiliations in L2 (second language) contexts.

According to Duffy & Jonassen (2013), learners are inclined to construct their inherently specific knowledge seasoned by the experience with the surroundings and corresponding reflections. This gives rise to the basis of mediated nature of language learning. The present study has been carried out in a university academic context, where learner interaction is perceived to be manifold as they are apparent amongst different cultural inputs, academicians, and learners, as well as peer learners in the process of learning. Thus, it can be postulated that ESL learning in an interactive context could be referred to as the epistemology of the substantive study. Sociocultural theories such as the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), social interaction, scaffolding, etc. need to be meticulously paid attention to in analysing the degree of success in interaction mechanisms in pedagogical scenarios (Warschauer & Healey, 2009).

B. Context of the Research

The research site of this study is a campus affiliated to a local national defence university which offers degrees in the disciplines of Architecture, Surveying Sciences, Information Technology (IT) and Information Systems (IS). The online platforms (primarily ZOOM) utilized in content delivery of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), have been considered as the review medium of this study. A variety of lecturer-made interactive activities has been prepared and is being administered in the teaching – learning process. English language lecturers always strive to devise lessons in such a way that they relate to pragmatic professional and day-to-day routine contexts; the majority are based on real-life contexts and themes. Intermingling of multimedia teaching – learning aids/materials such as texts, scripts, images, audio clips, and video clips is amply found in English second language lessons. The rationale for employment of varied approaches coupled with pluralistic cultural affiliations, is that it would serve the purpose of facilitation of second language acquisition in a mixed-ability heterogenous student milieu. This aids the scaffolded learning process as

well. Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is employed as a vehicle to couple interaction and communication, making second language (L2) learning accessible to student folks. Online ICT platforms facilitate both synchronous communication (real time video chats, text chats) and asynchronous communication (leaving messages and voice clips). Technological language learning aids greatly in enhancing learner independence and raising student awareness on psychosocial cultural domain (Schwienhorst, 2003). Learner-centrism and interactivity are perceived as prominent traits of online learning processes found in second language English pedagogy.

C.   Participants in the Research

A set of 116 first- and second-year undergraduates made up the participants of this research study including 60 females and 56 male participants within the age range of 20-23. They study English as a NGPA module, and they need to secure passes for this module in their first four semesters of study to be eligible for the conferment of the degree. All of them are English L2 users and have a sound proficiency in online learning modes. They responded to research instrument voluntarily.

D.   Collection of Data

Collection of data was basically done through a comprehensive questionnaire which included a series of questions aimed at gathering particulars on learners' inclination towards engagement in different skills-based activities in teaching – learning process, their views on various modalities of interaction in online L2 leaning context and their subjective preferences on online learning situations. Moreover, focus group discussions were conducted with randomly selected undergraduates and their perceptions on interactions in online ESL classroom were recorded.

III.DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The self- administrative questionnaire along with the focus group discussions with voluntary participants paved way to come up with the following results. Accordingly, most of the students (61.2%) prefer the online teacher-centered approach in which the teacher becomes autonomous in the interaction process other than the student. (Figure 1)
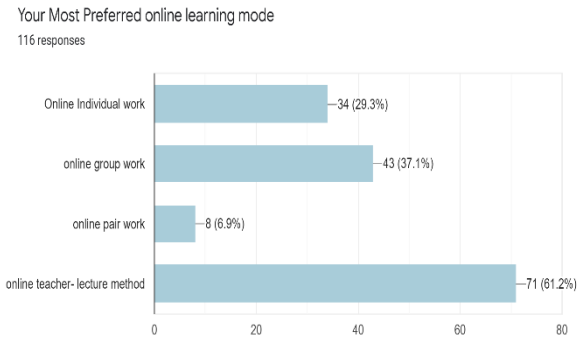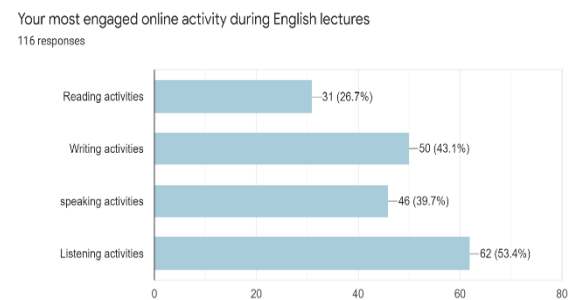

Your Most Preferred online learning mode
116 responses

Figure1.Most preferred online learning mode of undergraduates

The study further focuses on the teacher- student, student-student interaction levels on behalf of the four skills of second language pedagogy. As per the responses of the students, it can be seen that the students most interactively engaged in listening skills related activities. (Figure 2) 43.1% of students are interested in learning through activities

Your most engaged online activity during English lectures
116 responses

pertaining to writing skills.

Figure 2. Most engaged online activity of the undergraduates

When considering the aspect of peer-peer interaction on online platforms, the most preferred online learning activity type of the participants was group discussions. The number of undergraduates, those who prefer to work individually without any kind of peer interaction was also relatively at a higher level. (Figure.3)
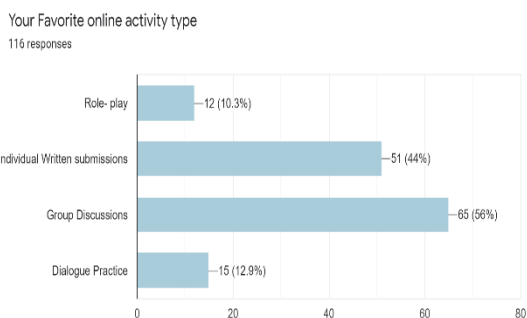
Your Favorite online activity type
116 responses

Figure 3. Most favorite online activity type of the undergraduates

In the language classroom, how often do you communicate with your colleagues?
116 responses

Figure 5. communication with colleagues

Moreover, the questionnaire that has been circulated among the students consists of a Likert scale series of questions and hereby the students are supposed to express their opinion on the levels of interactions in their online second language learning classroom. Accordingly,72% of participants state that English language can be best learned by counterfeiting in activities with their peers. The gathered data further indicated that when selecting activities in an online platform, the lesson should contain both group and individual activities.

The participants affirm that they prefer teacher talk in online platforms rather than the learner talk and 22.4% of participants insists that the teacher should always participate in the language teaching activity with students. When further examining upon the extent of interactions among the undergraduates with their peers and with their teacher, the participants state that they are not always conversing with their teacher and with their colleagues on online platforms. (Figure.4 and Figure.5)

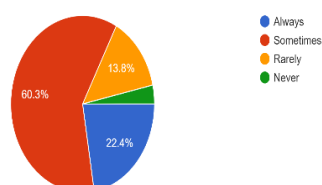In the language classroom, how often do you communicate with your teacher ?
116 responses
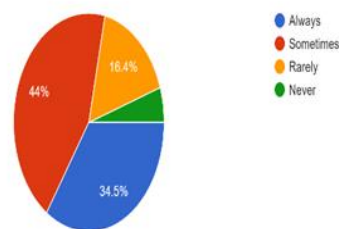

Figure 4. communication with teacher

Overall, the participants of the study have stated that they are actively collaborating to the ultimate output of the second language learning process via online platforms. However, it has been evident that they mostly prefer their teacher's active interaction during the learning process with them. They are more intimidated to be active learners who are always engaging in classroom activities while interacting with their teacher and peers. As in the physical classroom, the majority of students prefer teacher- centered method of learning.

When comparing and contrasting the percentages of interactions in online platforms vs physical platform of learning and teaching, although the majority of participants are in a mediate point of view, they have acclaimed the fact that language learning better do take place in authentic environment where the teacher and the students are closer to each other. The following statements of the students explicitly depict this stand point.

"*sometimes it get bored cause the relationship between teachers and us is so low and also it's not like attending in a class and learning.*"

"*I actually think doing physical conducting lectures is the best way of learning anything than online learning.*"

However, the participants have acclaimed that the strength of online language teaching depends on the levels of interactions among the teacher, student and the peer and their active participation and interaction would lead to foster a sound output and they further indicate the fact that , both the students and the teachers should get adapted to the condition of ' New Normal' under the pandemic.

"I am satisfied with learing English language in online, in my point of view I think as it is our lecturers' active participation."

"because of this prevailing situation I think that online education is the most suitable method for learning languages also."

IV. SUGGESTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

As stated by Pegrum (2009), the evolution of the web and its applications has been crucial for changes especially for L2 learning environments because it has determined a shift from information retrieval and rote trainings to learner autonomy and to the emergence of multiliteracies tightly connected to the hypertextual content users generate in collaboration with other people. Therefore, it is evident that the current Internet scenario seems to meet the needs of language learners and enable them with all the opportunities to become active members of online environments. Therefore, learners should be encouraged to utilize the virtual facilities that are available for them on online platforms in a productive manner.

Moreover, since Student-to-student interaction is vital to building community in an online environment, which supports productive and satisfying learning, and helps students develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills (Kolloff, 2011), peer- peer level of interactions in language learning should be enhanced in a proper manner. Hereby, socially-focused exchanges such as guided introductions, exchanges of personal information, and participation in activities designed to increase social rapport can be utilized. As suggested by Beaudoin (2001), Students in an online course with a high level of interaction achieved higher performance than students in the same online course with only a moderate level of interaction. Therefore, instructional activities and the technologies appropriate for the course goals should be utilized in an effective manner.

V. CONCLUSION

This research study was conducted to investigate the effective use of teacher-student and student-peer interaction patterns in knowledge-construction and knowledge-sharing via online classroom learning. The analysis of data depicted undergraduates' preference to teacher-learner interaction being the greatest motivation for their learning success. In addition, level of peer interaction in the discussion process as a language learning activity is taken for granted, depicting their willingness to maintain group cohesion through collaboration and expression of ideas amongst each other. Thus, such depictions would be useful as prerequisites for teachers to become reflective practitioners and to develop more learning-centered interactive activities in the process of teaching. As opposed to the findings of Weiner (2003) as cited in Zhang (2020), in which students portrayed more inclination towards student-centered autonomous learning, the results of this study emphasized undergraduates' preference for more teacher-centered learning. Hence, this research finding was indicative of teacher's pedagogical role as a facilitator being a positive predictor in student satisfaction.

Murphy& Rodriguez-Manzanares, (2009) as cited in Zhang (2020) has indicated the importance of scaffolding as a positive factor impacting on student motivation. Moreover, under pedagogical teaching practices, Coppola et al., (2002) postulate that more individualized and engaging learning activities should be designed to match both asynchronous and synchronous sessions, ensuring a high student interaction with course content. Liu ei al. (2005) has conceptualized the pedagogical role of online teachers through four facets; as a course designer, profession-inspirer, feedback giver and an interaction facilitator. Therefore, it is required that a teacher take on these multiple facets and diverse responsibilities for a fruitful interaction based teaching.

Taking into consideration the demonstrated importance of interaction in online English language learning as depicted by this research, following implications can be recommended for future research avenues. For further studies, perceptions on interaction in English language learning should be taken in to account from undergraduates of different areas of disciplines. Studies could also be conducted to test to what extent specific teaching patterns of lecturers can stimulate different types of interaction among learners. Furthermore, it would be worthwhile to determine lecturers' perception on their interactive teaching mechanisms in online classroom contexts.

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ABBREVIATIONS

NGPA   Non Grade Point Average

EAP   English for Academic Purposes

ESL   English as a Second Language

ESP   English for Specific Purposes

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