

E-LEARNING PEDAGOGY IN INTERACTIVE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

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Abstract. Given that most of the educational use in E-learning pedagogy, this paper reviews E-learning pedagogy and implementation in English classroom, with a view to enhancing learning English inside the interactive classroom. Key concepts such as promoting student learning through teacher actions, creating a supportive learning environment, encouraging reflective thought and action, enhancing the relevance of new learning, facilitating shared learning, making connections to prior learning and experience, providing sufficient opportunities to learn, teaching as inquiry etc. have been promoted by E-learning applications that emphasize interactive engagement, social learning, continuous feedback and real world applications. This paper also explores some implementation issues including knowledge transformation, content and application standardization in interactive English classroom. Recommendations are made about informing educators as the first step in promoting classroom interactively. The idea expressed in the paper is associated with E-learning pedagogy and extends a more cautious approach to the widespread belief in the success of E-learning pedagogy in English classroom.

Keywords:E-learning, Pedagogy, English classroom, Interactive

1. Introduction

English education is one of the most debatable topics in Chinese universities. Efficiency in university classroom requires learners to access information faster and easier and computers and their associated software can deliver instructional programs and information fast, covering virtually any area of the curriculum and geared to any age or ability level^[8]. However our understanding of how students interact or make sense of vast stores of information delivered at rapid speed is limited. One branch of technology which has gained much promise is E-learning. Chen, Lin and Kinshuk^[3] note that E-learning is immediately embraced by almost every educational institution as a positive step towards improving performance, such as learning speed, flexibility, versatility, interactivity and ultimately enabling learners to be more autonomous. As a result there is a widespread and unproven expectation that E-learning will prove to be the medium for greater learner control and interactive experiences for university students.

Reeves^[6], evaluating what really matters in computer-based education, suggests there are several reasons for this idealistic enthusiasm and lack of evaluation. First, the consumers of technological innovations for education such as principals, teachers and students, assume that these innovations are advertised as effective, yet there is little if any research to support this assumption. Second, evaluation has often been reduced to a numbers of technology represented by 1) the amount of money spent on hardware and software; 2) the ratio of students to computers; or 3) the amount of time students have access to technology within a school day, week, month, or year[1]. A third reason for the lack of the evaluation reports is because they are usually presented in the format of social science research reports, a format that 'is almost useless for most clients and audiences [7].

There is no doubt that the introduction of E-learning to universities has been one of the most significant developments for teachers and students, yet it seems to have little effect on the way teachers teach [4]. This is difficult to understand if indeed E-learning is the new literacy characterized by globalization and the new

economy. If E-learning is the new medium deemed to provide a new form of social interaction why have we seen minimal changes to teachers' pedagogical practices? As we personally and professionally focused on exploring the value and impact of E-learning on education, this question becomes the focus of this study. Is E-learning the 'new form of social interaction' or just another pedagogic experience? This matters because E-learning has increased student self-direction and autonomy which means that students need to take more responsibility for their own learning, but many students need regular assistance in achieving these new skills happily. Moreover this critique gains momentum from the very fact that all learning experiences are unproven until they have been thoroughly evaluated—well before they could be judged as appropriately or interactively for students in English classroom.

2. E-Learning Pedagogy in English Classroom Challenge

At present, E-learning is placed into two categories: synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous E-learning imitates a classroom, which entails classes taking place in real-time and connecting instructors and students via streaming audio or video or through a chat room. Asynchronous E-learning lets students' access prepackaged software on their own time, working at their own pace and communicating with a cyber-instructor or even other students through e-mail. In addition, asynchronous E-learning is reflected by university student's use of the Web; practices which involve students connecting to and downloading information. In this paper it is the asynchronous method of E-learning which is assessed under the consideration of appropriateness and happiness. The number of asynchronous E-learning program offerings in the teaching curriculum has increased dramatically, due to the ease with which teachers can purchase customized E-programs to fit their curriculum needs. The responsibility for their popularity is that they are flexible, customizable, easy to use and most importantly, happily teaching.

A large scale expansion of E-learning pedagogy in English classroom will undoubtedly alter the forms, function and values of education in negative ways. Similarly a technological web based English classroom will revise and challenge the conception of student's independence, especially the nature of teachers and teaching. Consequently, its successes are ideally geared towards happy learning in English classroom.

In consideration of the technological environment outlined and in particular, the education of university students, the appropriateness of a radical critique of web pedagogy is both imminent and necessary. Moreover, as E-learning continues to be a significant leading contender in English classroom, a timely assessment presents itself to compare a happy learning experience with the human interactions of education, sharing and experimental learning experiences.

Initially this paper was promoted by observations of technology in English teaching. The debate between teachers over technology has been a long one—should computers, the medium in which E-learning is delivered, be confined to a separate room—often called a computer lab, or should it be integrated into the classroom? Although there has been no definite conclusion, what has become apparent is that English teachers have decided for themselves what suits them best. The rapid changes that web based learning has effect on the contexts of the classroom were inspiring yet at the same time brought a skepticism to the favoring of one medium of learning over the other. Consequently, there has been an inadequate investigation of E-learning technology in English classroom, especially within the educational parameters of interactive English classroom.

3. Effective Pedagogy in Interactive English Classroom

Promoting student learning through teacher actions

While there is no formula that will guarantee E-learning for every student in every context, there is extensive, well-documented evidence about the kinds of teaching approaches that consistently have a positive impact on interactive English classroom. This evidence tells us that students learn best when teachers:

- create a supportive learning environment
- encourage reflective thought and action

enhance the relevance of new learning
facilitate shared learning
make connections to prior learning and experience
provide sufficient opportunities to learn
inquire into the teaching–learning relationship.

- Creating a supportive learning environment

Learning is inseparable from its social and cultural context. Students learn happily when they feel accepted, when they enjoy positive relationships with their fellow students and teachers, and when they are able to be active, visible members of the learning community. Effective teachers foster positive relationships within environments that are caring, inclusive, non-discriminatory, and cohesive. They also build good relationships with the wider school community, working with parents and caregivers as key partners who have unique knowledge of their children and countless opportunities to advance their children’s learning. Effective teachers attend to the cultural and linguistic diversity of all their students. The classroom culture exists within and alongside many other cultures, including the cultures of the wider school and the local community, the students’ peer culture, and the teacher’s professional culture.

- Encouraging reflective thought and action

Students learn most effectively when they develop the ability to stand back from the information or ideas that they have engaged with and think about these objectively. Reflective learners assimilate new learning, relate it to what they already know, adapt it for their own purposes, and translate thought into action. Over time, they develop their creativity, their ability to think critically about information and ideas, and their metacognitive ability (that is, their ability to think about their own thinking). Teachers encourage such thinking when they design tasks and opportunities that require students to critically evaluate the material they use and consider the purposes for which it was originally created.

- Enhancing the relevance of new learning

Students learn most effectively when they understand what they are learning, why they are learning it, and how they will be able to use their new learning. Effective teachers stimulate the curiosity of their students, require them to search for relevant information and ideas, and challenge them to use or apply what they discover in new contexts or in new ways. They look for opportunities to involve students directly in decisions relating to their own learning. This encourages them to see what they are doing as relevant and to take greater ownership of their own learning.

- Facilitating shared learning

Students learn as they engage in shared activities and conversations with other people, including family members and people in the wider community. Teachers encourage this process by cultivating the E-learning classroom as a learning community. In such a community, everyone, including the teacher, is a learner; learning conversations and learning partnerships are encouraged; and challenge, support, and feedback are always available. As they engage in reflective discourse with others, students build the language that they need to take their learning further.

- Making connections to prior learning and experience

Students learn best when they are able to integrate new learning with what they already understand. When teachers deliberately build on what their students know and have experienced, they maximize the use of learning time, anticipate students’ learning needs, and avoid unnecessary duplication of content. Teachers can help students to make connections across E-learning areas as well as to home practices and the wider world.

- Providing sufficient opportunities to learn

Students learn most effectively when they have time and opportunity to engage with, practice, and transfer new learning. This means that they need to encounter new E-learning skill over a number of times and in a variety of different tasks or contexts. It also means that when curriculum coverage and student understanding are in competition, the teacher may decide to cover less but cover it in greater depth. Appropriate assessment helps the teacher to determine what “sufficient” opportunities mean for an individual student and to sequence students’ learning experiences over interactive time.

- Teaching as inquiry

Since any teaching strategy works differently in different contexts for different students, effective E-learning pedagogy requires that teachers inquire into the impact of their teaching on their students. Inquiry into the teaching–learning relationship can be visualized as a cyclical process that goes on moment by moment (as teaching takes place), day by day, and over the longer term. In this process, the teacher asks:

What is important (and therefore worth spending time on)? This focusing inquiry establishes a baseline and a direction. The teacher uses all available information to determine what their students have already interactively learned and what they need to learn next.

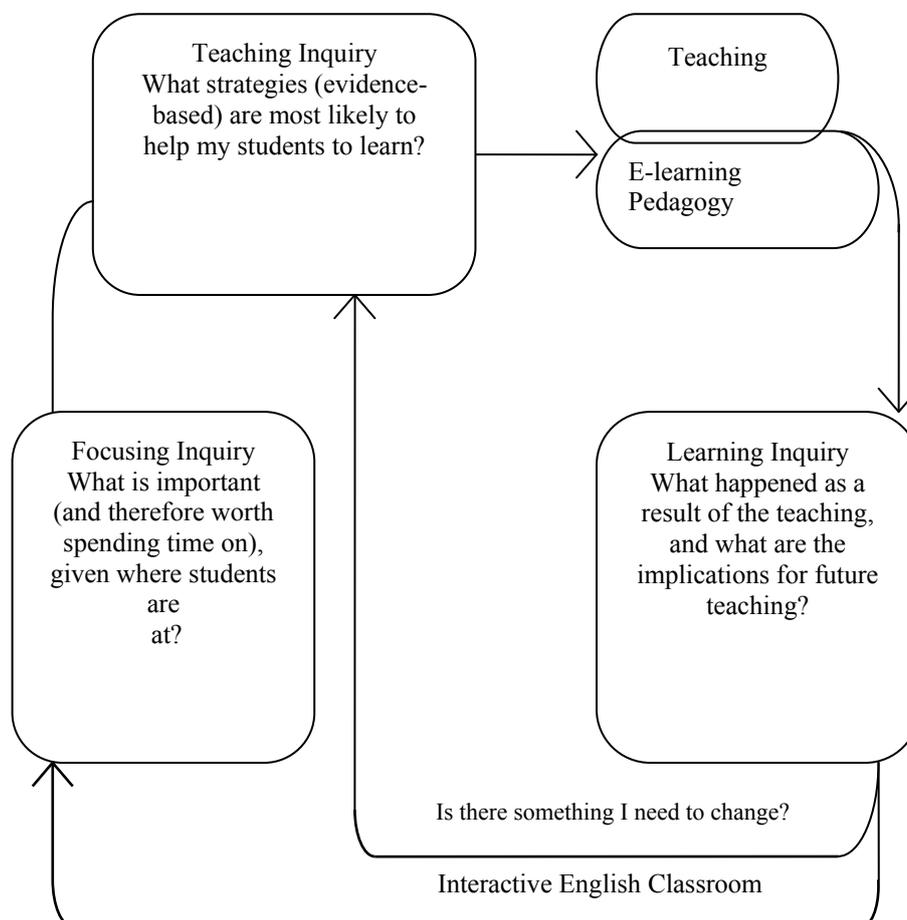


Figure1 Teaching as Inquiry in E-learning Pedagogy

What strategies (evidence-based) are most likely to help students learn this? In this teaching inquiry, the teacher uses evidence from research and from their own past practice and that of colleagues to plan teaching and learning opportunities aimed at achieving the outcomes prioritized in the focusing inquiry.

What happened as a result of the teaching, and what are the implications for future teaching? In this learning inquiry, the teacher investigates the success of the teaching in terms of the prioritized outcomes, using a range of assessment approaches. They do this both while learning activities are in progress and also as longer-term sequences or units of work come to an end. They then analyze and interpret the information to consider what they should do next in interactive English classroom.

4. Knowledge Transformation and Hegenmony of Computer Learning

Technology alone, of course, does not produce learning. Technology is a tool that can be used in many ways, to various effects and dependent on a knowledgeable and capable instructor. Moreover, some knowledge stands the test of time—however the changing face of computer knowledge does not. Furthermore one cannot deliver knowledge, instead knowledge is not knowledge until it is understood and arguments or evidence have been corroborated in some public conversation or dialogue. As constructivist theory highlights, knowledge is constructed and selected based on one’s experiences. A program grounded in

constructivist foundations that require students to generate or construct their own knowledge as opposed to one that requires them to select knowledge from prepacked options. Lankshear[5] suggest that educationalists should consider the possible epistemological significance and implications of practices involving information technologies. They describe this new knowledge as 'internet epistemology' and suggest that the rethinking of epistemology might be seen in the strategies that call for 'assembling', 'editing', 'processing', 'receiving', 'sending', and 'working on' information and data to transform the data into 'knowledge' comparative to 'performative' epistemology that conceives knowing as making, doing and acting—mastering the technique (Lankshear, Peters &Knobel, 2000). The implications here involve students enacting their own liberating performances of that work in English classroom.

Besley and Peters[2] connect performative epistemologies with technology. Describing performative epistemologies as 'fast knowledge'. Hence fast knowledge has developed in education through the growth of the internet and the new educational uses it permits, such as the rise of E-learning. Fast knowledge has changed educational institutions so that it has become part of an outputs-driven performance culture based on performativity. Similarly a happy English classroom becomes a provider of a global education through E-learning pedagogy. However local ways of learning are replaced by an agent of cultural imperialism. Despite widespread claims about its potential to benefit education information and communications technology (ICT) has made comparatively little impact on teaching and learning in university English pedagogy. When it comes to intellectual growth, it argues that using asynchronous E-learning in first year undergraduate university students (the net generation), a strong academic reward for using E-learning as recourse was provided. Rather than relying on information technologies, E-learning pedagogy will show how students become expert speakers, listeners, and writers in interactive English classroom.

5. Summaries

E-learning offers great promise as a powerful tool that can be integrated into curriculum and instruction to enhance interactive English classroom. Yet a careful consideration of its promises and a thorough review of the literature suggest that persuasive usage on Internet technology does not guarantee positive gains in instructional objectives, rather the heart of learning lies in effective instructional strategies that manage diverse educational provisions to optimize student learning. This would suggest a move to a more interaction rather than instruction, namely interactive E-learning pedagogy. This is because knowledge is socially and individually constructed on the basis of experience.

This paper has argued that the advent of E-learning raises many interweaving philosophical questions. These questions are important to address as there is no doubt that E-learning and web based pedagogy will continue to transform the current definitions of 'teacher', 'student' and 'learning'. At the same time, E-learning like all technology is being replaced by a supposedly better technology, interactive E-learning, which promises to further standardize and homogenize traditional face to face pedagogy.

Clearly, the potential benefits of interactive E-learning classroom for students and teachers are great, but what are the trade-offs? How do university managers employ technology for appropriate educational ends, as opposed to quick-fix pedagogical or budgetary ends? These are questions that should compel us to consider what role we want for technology in our lives and what might be missing in our universities and communities in a machine dominated age.

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