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**Developing Sustainable Quality in English Language Education:
Evolving Policies, Innovating Practices, Transforming Learning**

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Developing Sustainable Quality in English Language Education:
Evolving Policies, Innovating Practices, Transforming Learning

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Language Learning Engagement in Computer-Based Language Teaching

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KEYWORDS: Language learning, Engagement, Collaboration, Computer-based language teaching

ABSTRACT

Students' engagement in English language learning is a crucial aspect in the process of acquiring foreign language competence. Language learning engagement contains the meaning of active participation in classroom activities that is relevant to the implementation of communicative language teaching methods. This article explores the relevant language learning engagement in computer-based language learning contexts. Integrating computers in English language teaching creates learning situations that are different from conventional English language teaching. On the one hand, the integration of computer technology into English language teaching may reduce the opportunities for the students to engage in personal contacts with other students. On the other hand, the students may have more opportunities in interaction with other learners in many different ways. The effort to optimize the facilities provided by computer technology gives different kinds of English learning experience that are more interesting and challenging. In computer-assisted language learning, the students will develop their English skills creatively, access authentic learning resources, connect with other learners, and share ideas with other learners. Those activities will provide opportunities to improve their English competence in more interesting ways.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Communicative language teaching emphasizes students' engagement with authentic, meaningful, contextualized discourse and achievement in the second language. The term "engagement" is an important term in this context. It is often defined in literature in terms of interest (Dewey, 1913), effort (Meece & Blumenfeld, 1988), motivation (Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990) and time on task (Berliner, 1990). Natriello (1984) defined student engagement as "participating in the activities offered as part of the school program" (p. 14). Skinner and Belmont (1993) mention that children who are engaged show sustained behavioral involvement in learning activities accompanied by a positive emotional tone. In more recent definition, engagement is used to refer to students' willingness to participate in routine school activities, such as attending classes, submitting required work, and following teachers' directions in class.

For example, Kuh (2003, p. 25) defines engagement as "the time and energy students devote to educationally sound activities inside and out-side of the classroom". Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004, pp. 62-63) mention that student engagement consists of behavioral, emotional and cognitive dimensions. Students who are behaviorally engaged would typically comply with behavioral norms, such as attendance and involvement, and would demonstrate the absence of disruptive or negative behavior. Students who engage emotionally would experience affective reactions such as interest, enjoyment, or a sense of belonging. Cognitively engaged students would be invested in their learning, would seek to go beyond the requirements, and would relish challenge.

Coates (2007, p.122) describes engagement as “a broad construct intended to encompass salient academic as well as certain non-academic aspects of the student experience”. According to Coates (2007) engagement comprises the aspects of active and collaborative learning, participation in challenging academic activities, formative communication with academic staff, involvement in enriching educational experiences, and feeling legitimated and supported by university learning communities. Harper and Quaye (2009) argue that engagement is more than involvement or participation – it requires feelings and sense making as well as activity. Acting without feeling engaged is just involvement or even compliance; feeling engaged without acting is dissociation.

Language learning engagement becomes a crucial issue in computer-based language teaching. On one hand, computer technology helps students to engage in beneficial negotiation of meaning both online and with other students in class (De la Fuente, 2003; Lee, 2002; Meskill, 1992; Tudini, 2004) so that effective computer integration into the instruction can contribute to better student learning. On the other hand, language instructors are inclined to view computer use as interfering with the target language input and interaction that is essential in language learning (Burnett, 2000). Therefore, it is crucial for English instructors to consider effective ways to carry out language teaching and learning processes that engage students in meaningful experiences to improve language competencies of the learners.

2.0 LANGUAGE LEARNING ENGAGEMENT

This paper draws on some of the ideas provided by Kuh (2003), Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris (2004), and Coates (2007), in defining engagement. In this paper, the scope of engagement is limited to student engagement related to the classroom instruction. Thus, the meaning of engagement excludes the dimension outside the context of classroom instruction such as communication with academic staff as well as communication in other non-academic dimensions. Thus, engagement in this paper is used to refer to student’s willingness to actively participate in the activities in language learning classes that does not only include behavioral dimensions but also emotional and cognitive dimensions. Student’s willingness is similar to the notion of “the time and energy students devote” (Kuh, 2003, p. 25) to participate in classroom activities. Thus, it involves the mental efforts that students actively use to focus on instructional tasks that lead to learning. This kind of engagement can be analyzed through examining levels of participation, student perception, and completion of assigned tasks (Borges, 2009). Measuring student engagement can also be done through case study research (Chapman, 2003) to address questions of student engagement inductively by recording details of students in interaction with other people and objects in the classroom.

Focusing the meaning of student engagement in the scope of active participation in classroom activities is relevant to the context of application of communicative approach to language teaching. Students’ participation and involvement in language learning activities are important in the process of making meaning of authentic, meaningful, contextualized discourse in the second language. The focus of the communicative language approach and methodologies is to promote the development of functional language ability through learners’ participation in communicative events (Savignon, 2002). Students’ participation and involvement in the process of language learning will be manifested in the activities when the learners actively use the target language. Berns (1990) mentions that learners should be engaged in doing things with language. This means that they use language for a variety of purposes in all phases of learning. Thus, the engagement in second language learning can be reflected from the students’ experiences in participating in an increasingly wide range of communicative contexts and events to expand their communicative competence.

Research to examine student engagement in classroom activities has been conducted for many years. Studies of classroom engagement carried out by Dickey (2005) and Winne (2006) found that classroom environment, including the teacher's lesson plan and lecture delivery style, can affect students' practice of metacognitive control.

Other studies report that students demonstrating cognitive strategies such as task mastery goals indicate higher levels of engagement and perform better on assigned tasks (Ames & Archer, 1988; Meece, 1988). Studies in second language learning have also indicated that students' participation in classroom interaction develops their appreciation of the different contexts requiring the imperfect tense through interaction with natives (Call & Sotillo, 1995). In this study, the researchers tested the hypothesis that focused conversations with native speakers of Spanish held on a weekly basis will contribute to the development of learners' internal grammars of Spanish. Another study examined the interactions among classroom activity, student engagement, and positive learning outcomes in computer-equipped classrooms (Bulger, Mayer, Almeroth, & Blau, 2008). In this study the researchers used a Classroom Behavioral Analysis System (CBAS) to measure student engagement in a college writing class. The findings showed that students attending a simulation-based lesson performed more on-task Internet actions, and significantly fewer off-task Internet actions than did students attending a lecture-based lesson.

In the context of English as second language teaching, English instructors have used many kinds of methods to provide students with the opportunities to participate in language learning activities to promote second language acquisition. In the communicative language programs, such activities as games, group discussion, debates, and short drama performances have been used in communicative language classroom to give learners to be individually involved in classroom interaction (Savignon, 1971, Richards & Rodgers, 1986, Celce-Murcía, 2001). These methods also accept the importance of more traditional teaching methods such as lecturing and skill practice because these activities are important in preparing students to experience the real communication activities. However, the traditional teaching methods of lecturing and skill practice do not dominate the learning activities because the bigger portion of the classroom activities is full with students' interaction using the target language. In addition, task-based language teaching (TBLT) (Candlin & Murphy, 1987; Ellis, 2009; Prabhu, 1987) has also been very popular. Tasks are used to provide opportunities for communicating in listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Ellis, 2009) especially for enhancing more individualized instruction for the students.

Language learning engagement becomes very crucial in computer-based language learning. Computer technology have the capacity to facilitate people to have access to other people as well as to information and data (Kern & Warschauer, 2000) so that it can serve as medium for local and global communication and provide access to authentic materials. Moreover, computer interactions are also potential to enhance communication skills and strengthen language skills through computer support group interactions (Bourdon, 1999). The use of computer technology in language classroom improves the target language exposure, which is important for enhancing second and foreign language acquisition. More importantly, computer technology gives language learners wider opportunity to actively participate in real communication using the target language.

There have been many examples of successful technology integration programs that are grounded in the separate subject approach. However, there is no single model or program that is applicable to all situations. Technology integration is not a 'one fits all' practice (Wepner, Tao, & Ziomek, 2006) where teachers do the same things for their students. The success of the integration should be measured based on the contextual situation of the school or, even more specifically, the group of the students. The engagement in computer-based learning depends upon the sociocultural context that shapes the interaction using computers where students learn via the multimedia mode (Kern & Warschauer, 2000). Contextual situation should also become an important consideration in foreign language teaching. Graves (2000) suggests that the question about how to teach a subject does not have one answer. The answer to the question "will depend on the context in which the teacher teaches" (Graves, 2000, p. 13). In summary, computer-based language teaching does not represent a particular technique or method but it constitutes an amalgamation of ways by which students communicate via computer technology, interpret and construct information using computer technology.

Computer integration carries the meaning of full-time, daily operation within the lesson (Gorder, 2008) where teachers consciously decide to designate certain tasks and responsibility to

technology (Bauer & Kenton, 2005). Hooper and Rieber (1999) described five phases of teacher's use of technology: (1) familiarization, (2) utilization, (3) integration, (4) re-orientation, and (5) evolution. It was asserted that most teachers only reach the utilization stage. In this stage teachers are already satisfied with the limited use of technology and tend to cancel the use of it when they experience signs of troubles. They lack positive commitment to find better ways to break the barriers to the successful utilization of computer technology. Hooper and Rieber (1999) further explain that in the true integration, the teachers experience a "breakthrough phase" (p. 254) where the computer plays significant roles in the success of the lesson.

Jaffee (1997) suggests four highly important pedagogical principles for the implementation in the classroom where technology is integrated: active learning, mediation, collaboration, and interactivity. Active learning using technology constitutes the interaction between the student and the content in which the interaction allows knowledge building and construction. Using technology for active learning keeps students focused, engaged, and motivated (Barak, Lipson, & Lerman, 2006). Mediation is interaction between the teacher and the students to solve problems, respond to questions, and discuss topics relating to the course. Collaboration is interaction among students through questions and information sharing. Interactivity is the principle that represents the greatest pedagogical potential for learning using technology. This principle is consistent with the principles of language learning. Interactivity is the master concept where active participation is building the understanding and knowledge through interaction with other students, teachers, and resources using technology.

Successful computer integration into the curriculum is influenced by teachers' capabilities in translating the principles into the classroom practices. The teachers' best strategy to prepare for teaching is to use important teaching principles, translate these principles into practices, and think creatively while using technology instruction methods (Alley & Jansak, 2001). To explore the models of activities in language learning, Engagement Theory will be used as a framework to examine the specific design of the English instruction to provide opportunities for learners to engage in meaningful language learning experiences. The major premise of engagement theory is that students must be engaged in their course work in order for effective learning to occur (Kearsley & Shneiderman, 1998). Engagement theory is based on the idea of creating successful collaborative teams that work on tasks that are meaningful to someone inside and outside the classroom. Its core principles are summarized as "Relate", which emphasizes characteristics such as communication and social skills that are involved in team effort; "Create", which regards learning as a creative, purposeful activity; and "Donate", which encourages learners to position their learning in terms of wider community involvement

The core principles of Engagement Theory are consistent with the purpose of communicative language teaching. The teaching learning processes in communicative language learning lessons should involve the learners in the experience of meaningful communication (Savignon, 2002; Canale & Swain, 1980; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Widdowson, 1984). Meaningful communication is accomplished through collaborative activities among students, teachers, and other people outside the classroom. The idea of relate, create and donate in Engagement Theory provides the basis for providing meaningful collaboration and authentic experience of communication. The theory posits three primary means to accomplish engagement: (1) an emphasis on collaborative efforts, (2) project-based assignments, and (3) useful contribution to wider context of learning environments. Kearsley & Shneiderman, (1998) suggest that these three methods result in learning that is creative, meaningful, and authentic. Engagement might happen without technology, but the use of technology provides more possibilities for such engagement to occur.

Some studies have used the framework provided by the Engagement Theory. Marshall (2007) used a case study in which a popular learning management system, WebCT, was used in an academic writing course at the University of Sydney, Australia. The study highlighted both the benefits and difficulties of using technology when teaching academic writing and shows how effective Engagement Theory has been in the design, implementation, and outcomes of the website associated with the course.

Marshal found out that in the creation of the website, Engagement Theory was deemed relevant and useful to the aim of providing an authentic experience of the writing process. In the context outside language teaching, Freeburg and Hana (2006) investigated the use of the Personal Response System (PRS) in a behavioral sciences graduate research methods course. In the study the researchers used qualitative and quantitative data to explore how the use of PRS as game-based learning increases students' engagement that focused on engagement in research topics, participation, perceptions, opinions, and grades. The researchers used Engagement Theory to describe that the PRS was effective for engaging students in acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to conduct research. Reich and Daccord (2009) used the modification of Engagement Theory in a case study to investigate how the Collect-Relate-Create-Donate (CRDR) framework shaped the development of the "Day in the Life of a Teenage Hobo Project". The project was a multi-day investigation into the social history of teenage homelessness during the Great Depression. The history teacher used multiple technologies including search engine, blogs, and podcasting to help students investigate the political, economic, and social history of the Great Depression. The study found that CRDR could provide the framework for organizing technology activities in pedagogically sound order. In addition, the study also revealed that the framework provided important basic structure for designing a successful project and serving as a checklist for review and reflection after completing a new unit.

The endeavor to engage students in English language learning in computer-based language teaching requires attention from the instructors. The design of computer-based instruction should be focused on developing learners' English competence through many kinds of activities that involve collaboration, interaction and project-based learning. When the computer based language instruction is designed well, the students will engage in the experience of using the language that is more challenging for the students.

3.0 COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The idea of collaboration in learning has been considered as an important aspect of successful learning for a long time especially when constructivist principles of learning is used in designing instruction. Collaboration refers to a recursive process where two or more people or organizations work together to realize shared goals. Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learning is a naturally social act in which the participants talk among themselves. It is through the talk that learning occurs (Gerlach, 1994). Herrington, Oliver, and Reeves (2003) argue that collaborative learning is an important way for creating authentic and deep learning. "Cognition occurs not only 'in the head' ... but in the objective elements of communication among individuals" (Cole & Engestrom, 1993, p. 3). Therefore, in collaborative activities, processes of learning taking place in the head are apportioned across members of a learning group. This process involves coordination between the members and objects (produced or imported) within the group (Hollan, Hutchins, & Kirsch, 2000). The participation in collaborative activities in which students work together to achieve desired results will help them to achieve the communicative goal of language learning.

Computer technology can serve as collaborative tools to help students to improve their communicative competencies. Warschauer (1997) argues that computer-mediated communication encourages collaborative learning in language classroom in five ways. First, computer-mediated interaction is more powerful than text-based interaction. Text-based interaction has been used for a long time in language pedagogy. In free-writing activities, for example, students share their compositions written or typed on papers. The use of computer-mediated interaction enables the reader to edit and reedit the composition while rapidly interacting with the writer. Second, computer-mediated online learning allows learners to engage in many-to-many interaction. An individual student can initiate interaction with any or all of the others. Thus, it opens the opportunity of participation in interaction activities.

Third, computer-mediated communication allows time- and place-independence interaction. Learners can write and receive messages at any time of the day from any computer with the Internet connection. Fourth, while place-dependent interaction can be conducted in a local network system, the Internet is able to help students to engage in long distance exchanges to people around the world. Fifth, the access to authentic information is crucial in communicative language teaching, Hypermedia allows learners to access up-to-date and authentic information that can be incorporated into the classroom collaborative activities. Through the interaction in students are building their knowledge instead of relying on simple memorization skills.

The second aspect of Engagement Theory refers to the importance of project-based assignment. As a matter of fact, the idea of project-based assignment has also occurred on the discussion of language learning methods for a long time. Moss and Van Duzer (1998) define project-based learning as “an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting learners with problems to solve or products to develop” (p. 2). The activities in project-based learning functions as a bridge between using English in class and using English in real life situations outside of class (Fried-Booth, 1997). In project-based assignment, learners are presented with open-ended generative tasks in which there is not a prescribed approach or solution and that the learners generate their own questions, plans and goals (Howard, 2002). Therefore, project-based assignments change the role of the teacher to a cognitive coach who models, coaches, guides and encourages independence in goal setting and decision making and promotes reflection. The creative nature of project-based assignment enables language learners to process new language inputs to develop their communicative competencies.

The use of computer technology in language learning enables learners to develop creative projects. The process of developing creative works is beneficial for providing comprehensible inputs when the learners search for the material for their projects. Computer technology with multimedia environment provides language learners with juxtaposition of different and supporting modes of input including text, graphic, sounds, and video. Those modes may facilitate greater comprehension of input than input that is delivered only via one mode (Bret, 1998). Computer-based project in language learning also helps learners to process the negotiation of meaning. Learners will combine the language inputs with a variety of supporting materials that they can find on the Web. The process of negotiation of meanings occurs when learners seek for clarification and find confirmation about un-comprehensible inputs. Pica and Doughty (1986) argue that strategies such as requests for clarification, confirmation checks and comprehension checks seemed to promote comprehension and to facilitate acquisition. Finally, the production of project-based assignment can reflect the process of language learning itself. Students may create a presentation in the forms of composition, wall magazine, drama performance, and oral presentation.

The aspect of contribution to wider context of learning in Engagement Theory might become the most typical nature of computer integration in English language learning environment. Furthermore, it may become the most challenging nature in the integration of computer technology into language instruction. It is common that in the accomplishment of project-based language learning the students display the final products in the school or the wider community, and become a stimulus for thought and action for other students, teachers and local community (Fragoulis & Tsiplakides, 2009). Students may publish the result of the project in a web blog that can be created on group or class basis. Another option is that the students may present the result in the form of a wall magazine that can be presented along the hallway so that other people outside the classroom can enjoy the learning product. Some other English teachers require students to perform skits of drama or poster exhibitions at the end of the semester in which the faculty members and students from other classes are invited to watch. Those activities have been very effective in motivating students to carry out the learning process.

The integration of computer technology enables learners to share what they have done not only within the school environment but also outside the school to the greater community of the world.

Students can be encouraged to use production or editing software such as Corel Draw, Adobe Photoshop, Sony Sound Force, and Microsoft Video Maker to design production of language learning in the form of stories, poems, pictures or movies. Students can create interesting posters, wall magazine pages, and recorded drama skits that can be shared with other people outside the class. The use of Internet enables students to use the Web to publish their learning production in the form of text or multimedia materials to share with partner classes or with the general public (Kern & Warschauer, 2000). Outside consumers have the potential for generating intense motivation and help students to clarify their work (Shneiderman, 1998). Therefore, using outside parties as the target of language project production can motivate learners to do their best in accomplishing the projects.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The integration of technology in language teaching will be effective if the instructors design the instructions to provide students with the opportunity to explore the microworld and use the technology as the medium for local and global communication as well as the source of authentic learning materials. The use of communicative language teaching principles enables the instructors to provide learning experiences that promote autonomy, choice, cooperation, collaboration, interaction, creativity, and meaningful communication. Computer-enriched instruction in language learning has more capabilities than conventional lessons without the use of technology to provide such experiences.

A good design of computer-based language teaching provides students with many activities to engage in English. The use of computer technology encourages students' engagement in English language learning. The students should be able to access authentic language learning resources using technology. They can find many kinds of language learning materials using the Internet. Students should be encouraged to engage in discussion both in the classroom and in online environment. This way enables the students to participate actively in interaction using the target language. The interaction using the target language should happen in an engaging environment through collaborative activities, creative activities, and sharing of learning result.

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