A Study of Designing a Communication-Technology Course to Facilitate English Learning

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Abstract
The concepts of the resourcefulness of technology and the advantages of using computer technology on teaching and learning have been wildly accepted. This study is to elaborate curriculum design for language teaching and learning and to make it learner-centered, aiming to design a community-technology and Internet based English course for college EFL students in Taiwan. Through technology tools, with consideration of research issues of infrastructure, goals, courseware selection, design and development, and assessment, the purposes of this study are to promote learner autonomy, facilitate experiential learning, and encourage collaborations and Internet research. Flexible suggestions based on the findings will be made to improve teaching methodology with the communication technology.

Introduction
Communication technology has transformed computer from being truly a device for data processing to a completely multi-function tool with communication at its core. The resourcefulness of Internet and the advantages of using Internet on teaching and learning are widely accepted concepts. Much research has delved into the effectiveness of employing it in language curriculum, particularly higher education. It also showed lots of positive impacts on students learning achievement and our life and society. However how to effectively integrate the computer technology into language teaching and make it learner-centered is significant concern for all the educators. Through technology tools, with consideration of research issues of infrastructure, goals, courseware selection, design and development, and assessment, the purposes of this study are to promote learner autonomy, facilitate experiential learning, and encourage collaborations.

Communication Technology and English Learning

“Daedalus” and “Audacity” are the software and technology applications to language learning/teaching environment. Daedalus, an integrated package of writing/thinking tools, supports collaborative learning and the writing process across the curriculum developed by the University of Texas. Audacity, a software program allows user to record his/her voices on the computer. Taking the advantages of these two computer technologies, the courseware aims to exploits the interactivity and multimedia facilities of computer network. To enable the students to participate the course with highly learning motivation, a workshop is given to introduce the software applications and to assist the students to learn how to use (play) them around. Particularly, the researcher agrees with the constructivism that individuals use their existing knowledge and prior knowledge to help make sense of the new material (1 & 2). The exercises are then assigned so that students can transfer their new knowledge immediately into their applications. An instructor, as a facilitator, will monitor students’ learning progress and students’ discussions, and answer their questions. Through the Daedalus, students might get help from their peers as well as an instructor who monitors the discussions. This study will also explore the implications of the use of communication technology in English teaching and learning in the context of Taiwan’s university.

Course Description
The course consists of three sections. Section one is an introduction of software applications, Daedalus and Audacity. Each student, in a group of four, was supposed to edit and send his/her message to other group members through Daedalus, while he/she could also read the incoming messages from others at the same time. Messages can be self-introduction, or a simple greeting. Additionally, each student was also supposed to record his/her voices on computers. After dills of pronunciation, each individual learned sending and receiving recorded messages. Section two was devoted to an assignment. The students have to do library research and read the information on the Internet. Each of the students was requested to plan a trip with a budget of US$ 500.00 and to leave messages to their peers along with software applications of Daedalus and Audacity.
The Daedalus Activity: Planning a trip

Each group of students had to give themselves a group name, so that they could be set up for discussion panel on the software. Each group had to decide where they want to go and how long will be their vacation. With the budget of US$500, they searched on the Internet for information, including airline tickets, accommodation, tour spots, and etc. They could start chatting on their computers once they have some information available while the instructor was monitoring the students’ discussions. Meanwhile, students not only have access to their own group discussion, but to other groups. The activity of exchanging messages has great advantages in sharing ideas and collaborating learning with others. At the same time, students might also enhance their reading capacity and fasten their reading speed by exercises.

The Audacity Activity: Recording voice messages

This activity aims to practice English pronunciation and provide a fearless environment to speak out for students. Students saved their own voices on their computers and listened to themselves. During the pronunciation drill, students also compared their own voice’s track with a native speaker’s that recorded earlier. Additionally, a self-test, listening comprehension test, was given. After familiarizing to the software, they learned to sending and receiving recorded-voiced messages to/from others. Each individual, after that, was given an assignment to record three voiced messages, specifically for the following three situations: leave for an absence, invite a friend over a party, report an interesting news to someone.

The most interesting part of the course is section three, students presentation. The students were all encouraged to integrate pictures and sound clips with PowerPoint software for their presentations. They expressed how they effectively spent their budget on vacation. They seemed so fun in sharing their works with the entire class.

Assumptions

This study assumes that students will develop the autonomy and promote the experiential learning by effectively practice their communicative proficiency in terms of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Working with the networked environment, the students participate in verbal discussion for true communication purposes; therefore, they are assumed to enhance their language skills. During the entire course work, it is to assume that students will learn how to effectively work and learn with/from others thus then to encourage collaborations as stated by van Manen (3), and will strengthen their skills of technological system research and broaden the perspectives international by doing research. The researcher also agrees that computer technology can bring about changes in the teacher’s role from a knowledge-provider to students’ guided in their search for knowledge, and from a classroom lecturer to a coursework designed.

Conclusions and Suggestions

A qualitative research method was used in the end of the semester to investigate the answers to each assumption. The students all responded that integrating these software applications into their course built a better language learning environment. Moreover, it also effectively provided both local and global multimedia learning resources to the students. Students also agreed that they could develop their personal communications in an authentic language text through the activities of Daedalus and Audacity. Most of them stated that they learned something from their peers such as web search skills and presentation designs during the work.

The key to a successful language learning environment might lie in the combination of multimedia and interactivity. Clearly, it is necessary and urgent to continue to appropriately add more interactive technology activities or exercises to a language learning environment. The author believes that technology has the potential to play a major role in foreign language learning and instruction. Therefore, properly integrating technology into language teaching curriculum is to believe to effectively build a better language learning environment for EFL students.

References