

Topic: Using popular mobile application software to increase learner motivation

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Abstract

Immersed as they are in technology today, educators have more options to create a curriculum using the most-advanced and convenient means in their classrooms. Teachers of English as a foreign language can now utilize technology-enhanced communication to connect their students to other English learners in different countries and cultures. With the widespread of instant messaging system and the increasingly easy access to hand-held devices such as cell phones and tablet computers, English learners worldwide can experience authentic cross-cultural communication for language and cultural learning. This paper argued that using popular mobile software and incorporating cross-cultural learning in an instructional design of a language learning course can increase learner motivation for cross-cultural communication, whereas the cross-cultural learning context can lead to willingness to communicate in an international context. In order to examine the willingness to communicate cross-culturally of English learners, a culturally oriented, collaborative language-learning project integrating mobile mediating technology was implemented on university students of two cultural groups. Data were collected for quantitative analysis in order to explore participants' willingness to communicate cross-culturally based on the utility of LINE and the cross-cultural learning context. Results showed that both the use of LINE and the effectiveness of cross-cultural collaboration gained from the instructional design had significantly predicted these learners' future willingness to communicate in an international context.

Keywords: LINE, mediating technologies, m-learning, willingness to communicate, cross-cultural

Introduction

The purpose of English teaching and learning in non-native English speaking countries shall consider 21st century globalizing context particularly in an environment shaped by mediating communication technology development. Steering away from the traditional focuses of grammar, reading and translation, English as foreign language should be taught based on a combination of fostering intercultural awareness with authentic environment using the language learned. Raising cultural awareness, promoting intercultural communicative effectiveness, and incorporating online technologies in higher education curriculum are becoming prevalent since these strategies are believed to be beneficial to students' future career in the workplace (Fitzpatrick & O'Dowd, 2012). Technology closed the gap of borders of physical geographical presence and brought people with more opportunities to communicate across cultures. Currently more focuses are placed on mobile technology, as the portability of mobile devices makes learning easy.

This study examined the effect on students' future willingness to communicate in intercultural context, from a cross-cultural, language learning instructional design via the popular mobile phone application software, LINE, between Taiwanese and Japanese college students. The researchers propose that the online collaboration influenced by the partnership and efficiency of Instant Message enabled via LINE will increase students' willingness to engage in communication in cross-cultural context in an effective

Liu, C.-C. et al. (Eds.) (2014). Proceedings of the 22nd International Conference on Computers in Education. Japan: Asia-Pacific Society for Computers in Education

way.

Design and instrument

Japan and Taiwan has one hour time difference which work as an advantage in this research design for authentic communication. Using the application, LINE, students were assigned 3 guided questions embedded with cultures and personal believes. Participants exchanged information using Instant Messaging and actual verbal correspondence via LINE are media for communication between students of two cultural groups for 4 weeks. In the final week students had to hand in individual report to their instructors respectively. One of the reasons the researchers selected LINE is that a certain amount of familiarity with mobile devices on the part of learners will increase the effectiveness of mobile communication, as the difficulty of using a new tool may possibly hinder their willingness to communicate (Hockly 2013).

Methodology

In order to statistically investigate how the effectiveness an instrumental design incorporating cross-cultural English learning in mobile communicative context can impact learners' future willingness to communicate in an international context, stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted, with “future willingness to communicate in an international context” as the dependent variable, and “the use of LINE” and student's perception of “the effectiveness of the cross-cultural English learning activity” as independent variables.

Participants

In fall semester of 2013, a total of sixty 2nd year university students of non-English majors were selected according to their English level and accessibility to mobile device. Thirty Japanese and thirty Taiwanese students were randomly assigned to pairs as a team for collaborative learning. Each group contained 6 students, with 3 from each cultural group. Students' English level was determined by a pre-test of English designed by the researchers.

The measures

We used a survey to investigate possible factors influencing student future willingness to communicate in an international context. This study had used a self-created survey that includes three measures.

Future willingness to communicate cross-culturally measurement consisted of four items. These items were adopted from and revised part of Yashima's (2002) question items measuring “Intercultural friendship Orientation in English Learning” within the L2 Willingness to Communicate (WTC) structure, to indicate future willingness in an international context. These items were used to measure if students have interest in communicating with people of different cultural backgrounds. Cronbach Alpha coefficient was .85, indicating a high reliability. Ratings for the 5 items were averaged as a continuous scale for future willingness to communicate cross-culturally.

Cross-cultural cooperative learning effectiveness measurement consisted of four items. These items were adopted from and revised part of Koh & Hill's (2009) measurement on student satisfaction toward an online group work to indicate the feeling of success in a cooperative learning environment. Cronbach Alpha coefficient was .86, indicating a high reliability. Ratings for the 5 items were averaged as a

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continuous scale for cross-cultural cooperative learning effectiveness.

Using mobile application software measurement consisted of five items. These items were self-created based on several recent studies. These items were used to measure participant's satisfaction using LINE as a mediating tool for cross-cultural cooperative learning. The first two items in the measurement asked participants to self-report their digital literacy about using LINE for communication. The following two questions asked students to self evaluate their satisfaction toward using LINE for cross-cultural learning. The last item was a global question measuring overall mental effort for the synchronous mobile mediating communication context. Alpha coefficient was .78. Ratings for the 5 items were averaged as a continuous scale for using mobile application software as tool.

Result and Analysis

“Cross-cultural collaboration effectiveness” and “using mobile application software” had significantly predicted the variance in “future willingness to communicate in an international context.” ($F(2,30) = 24.512, p=.000^{***}$). The two variables together account for about 62% of the variance. The figure shows that the fitting is very appropriate. Additionally, beta value had shown significant influences that the two predictor variables influence “future willingness to communicate cross-cultural,” with “cross-cultural collaboration effectiveness” variable showing beta value .599 ($\beta=.599, p<.00$) and “using mobile application software” showing beta value ($\beta=.279, p<.05$). The result shows that students' future willingness to communicate in an international context is affected by their perception of an effective collaboration from an instructional designed in cultural context and the use of popular mobile mediating software, with learning effectiveness showing higher influence than the use of popular mobile software.

Conclusion

Communication in an international context is becoming a pervasive truth in the globalized world. The teaching and learning of language in higher education should reflect this fact. This study suggests to integrate online technologies and cross-cultural issue in EFL classes to prepare students for future workplace. The researchers proposed to use popular mobile mediating software to increase students' motivation engaged in international context. The results of this study indicated that the use of LINE had successfully increased student willingness to communicate cross culturally in the future, as statistic result showed that both an effective cooperative learning experience between partners of different cultural groups, and the experience of synchronous communication using LINE, can successfully predict learners' future willingness to communicate cross-culturally in the future.

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