Chapter 46
T-MALL-Integrated Model of Engagement for Student-Driven Learning

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ABSTRACT

Communications in the foreign language classroom are entangled in both the learners' cultural values and the target language's and hindered by the lack of naturalistic practice outside of the classroom (Crawford-Lange & Lange, 1987). This research is a qualitative action research which is situated within a longitudinal perspective with the aim of understanding the factors arising from the learning environment contributing to increase active engagement in the classroom. Malaysian undergraduates majoring in French as a foreign language are the sample to conduct this research as they faced motivational issues due to linguistic and cultural gap between their target and native languages. The t-MALL environment stimulated and sustained the students' engagement and the analysis of video recordings revealed marked improvements in spontaneous participations. The encouraging results in terms of students' engagement, coping strategies and proficiency achievements validated the fitness of t-MALL in enhancing the learning environment within the research context.

INTRODUCTION

This research was conducted with Malaysian undergraduates majoring in French as a foreign language. The learners faced motivational issues due to the linguistic and cultural gap existing between the target language and their native languages aggravated by the lack of opportunities to practise outside the classroom (Arnold, 2006). In Malaysia's multilingual society, most of the learners are at least bilin-

guals having acquired their native and second languages by conversing in a naturalistic environment in situations of immersion. However for the students who join the French Bachelor program as absolute beginners, the foreign language classroom anxiety factor defined in Horwitz (1995) strikes them when they realise the extent of knowledge they will need to master just to cover basic communication skills. Issues of language classroom anxiety syndrome are anchored in the students' personalities, individual learning experiences and cultural beliefs. Authors such as Dewaele (2013) and Macintyre (2007) argued that instructors needed to create an engaging learning environment addressing self-motivational factors in order to foster participations. Similarly, in the Singaporean multicultural context, Wharton (2000) reported that a communicative task-based approach provided bilingual learners with ways to benchmark their progress and develop coping strategies.

As advocated by Dewaele (2013), an increase in engagement is desired to raise exposure and interactions in the target language. This qualitative action research is situated within a longitudinal perspective with the aim of understanding the factors arising from the learning environment contributing to such an increase. Interactions are governed by communications patterns and values which are difficult to master in foreign language courses due to the lack of naturalistic experience and practice outside the classroom (Crawford-Lange & Lange, 1987). Therefore, the development of pragmatic communicative competence requires a learning environment recreating the conditions of real-life situations in order to provide the learners with feedback on both their pragma-linguistic and socio-pragmatic communication skills (Celce-Murcia, 2007). Communications in the foreign language classroom are entangled in both the learners' cultural values and the target language's. However, the linguistic and cultural distances can be reduced with progressive exposure to authentic situations with appropriate instructor's scaffolding (Gass, Mackey, & Ross-Feldman, 2005). Furthermore, simulations induce the students' reflections on socially accepted and rejected behaviours in particular situations thus contributing to develop their cultural awareness and language adaptation skills (Chang, 2009).

Improving the Learning Environment With T-MALL

On-site research incorporating CALL and MALL technologies revealed that meaningful task-based learning in a blended learning context resulted in dynamic communities of knowledge which increased the students' enjoyment, confidence and self-esteem (Gabarre & Gabarre, 2010). The blended environment introduced a three-dimensional support associating technological, peer and instructor scaffolding which provided the learners with an immersive and customised supportive learning environment (Gabarre & Gabarre, 2012). However, interactions mainly occurred asynchronously through textual messages and comments or through learner-created content such as with audio and video podcasts. Synchronous discussions were almost exclusively carried out in the language classroom on the instructor's initiative through communicative tasks. Furthermore, findings highlighted the lack of technological support in classroom settings to support the students' need for immediate access to information, feedback and creative tools.

Subsequently, in the current study, the iPad mediated environment aimed to generate engagement in course activities through meaningful, learner-centred and learner-controlled instruction in accordance with the learners' reported scaffolding needs pertaining to face-to-face settings. Planning was influenced by a study conducted by Lys (2013) which demonstrated that tablet computers were capable of providing exposure to authentic learning resources, instant and customised support as well as creative and interactive tools. Similarly, Alvarez and Brown (2011) found that tablet computers supported synchronous

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