An Action Research: 
Application of a Three-Way Multimedia Blended Learning in a Second Language Acquisition and Development Course

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ABSTRACT

This article reports an action research, conducted in an undergraduate course, Second Language Acquisition and Development, in a 3-way blended learning (BL) environment—face-to-face (F2F), an online learning system (eLearning), and Second Life (SL). The study was the result of a joint project between a university in America and one in Hong Kong. Data collected from the American students were included in this study. The purposes of this action research is to: 1) monitor BL course and provide suggestions for future courses, and 2) investigate if students’ time spent in eLearning and the number of discussion posts impact students’ achievement. This action research provides suggestions for improving application of 3-way BL in future courses in terms of course design, instructor preparation and online grading.

Keywords: Action Research, E-Learning, English as a Second Language, Face-to-Face, Number of E-Learning Discussion Post, Second Language Acquisition and Development, Second Life, Time Spent in E-Learning, Virtual World

INTRODUCTION

There has been a trend that the worldwide linguistic and cultural minorities are increasingly taken into account, according to the policies of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (Churchill, 1986). Moreover, second language acquisition (SLA) has been viewed as a field in language and learning in the real-world situation in terms of sociocultural perspectives (Zuengler & Miller, 2006; Johnson, 2006), cognitive perspectives (Larsen-Freeman, 1991), sociolinguistic perspectives (Tarone, 2007) and many others.

This study was designed as an action research and also a pilot study to provide evaluative information as an initial cycle for the improvement of future BL courses (Hopkins, 2002; McNiff, 2002). Along with the world trend of SLA, one of the courses required for
undergraduate Education majors at Texas A&M University highlights the importance of SLA instruction and development. The course aims at helping these students to have a confident understanding of how to adapt instructional methodologies to support culturally and linguistically diverse students in the classroom. This course has been taught in blended learning (BL) settings – both face-to-face (F2F) class meetings and online eLearning setting since the Blackboard Vista (online learning management system) has emerged.

The cohort the researchers selected for this study experimented with extending the distance learning environment to a virtual world environment–Second Life (SL). In the literature and research-based references, the majority of experiences of BL, online learning systems and application of SL in learning second language acquisition manifest advantageous consequences towards teaching and learning a second/foreign language (e.g., Brandl, 2005; Chen, Belkada, & Okamoto, 2004; Banados, 2006).

**Purpose of the Study**

In order to understand the implications, principles, and ideas derived from literature, the researchers developed this study as an action research. This study solicited semi-structured interviews, online records and SL observations from the selected course. With the multimedia mixed in one SLA classroom, the first purpose of this study was to investigate the 3-way BL instruction (F2F, eLearning, and SL) and provide suggestions for future second language acquisition and development courses.

Using students’ activity logs on eLearning, a small portion of this study was to find out if there was a correlation between students’ eLearning activities (time spent online and the number of discussion posts) and their exam grades. According to the Institute for Dynamic Educational Advancement (IDEA) (2006), some online course-instructors grade students based on the course statistics, such as time spent online, the number of log-ins, the number of discussion posts, or the comments made in chat rooms. The second purpose of our study was to investigate if there was a correlation between online activities and exam performance.

**Research Questions**

1. What are participants’ perceptions of and reflections about blending multimedia (including online learning systems and SL) into learning second language acquisition and development?
2. What are the nuances in participants’ perspectives between having F2F classes, eLearning asynchronous classes, and SL classes?
3. Do students’ time spent in eLearning and the number of discussion posts impact their exam grades?

**Definition of Terms**

1. Participants’ perceptions–students’ understanding, views, impressions of and experience with the instructions the instructor employed and implemented during the course of study. In this study, we (the researchers) specifically looked for students’ views on if/how multimedia could affect their learning in a second language acquisition and development course.
2. Participants’ reflections –In this study, reflection refers to participants’ thoughts and feelings after experiencing the BL instruction.
3. Multimedia – an inclusive form to indicate multiple technologies. The study especially pinpoints to an online learning system and SL.
4. Nuance –the small and subtle distinctions the participants in this study make among the three instructional modes (F2F, eLearning, and SL classes).
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