ABSTRACT

This chapter provides suggestions on how to apply the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework to design computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) for English as foreign language (EFL) learning. Online asynchronous discussion was the focus. A case study (five discussion activities with 42 students at a university in Japan) was used to investigate the relationships between a CoI and (1) EFL learners’ participation level, (2) their satisfaction with online discussion, (3) their perceived contributions to the discussion groups, (4) English proficiency as a foreign language, and (5) their interactions during the discussion. Suggestions were developed based on the study results: (1) students must be supported to establish open communication of social presence (SP) for productive participation, (2) teaching presence (TP) and cognitive presence (CP) indicated students’ satisfaction, (3) the design and organization of TP and the open communication of SP should be considered for student contributions to a learning community, (4) The CSCL activities may provide opportunities to practice English for all level students, and (5) students need help to establish SP first and then shift their focus to academic purposes. The results and discussion lead to the importance of the careful design of CSCL, including problem identification for assigned activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) has been used to help learners acquire higher-level cognitive thinking skills and adopt constructivist, social-cognitive, and situated-learning theories. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning settings, the use of CSCL has increased, because it gives learners more opportunities to apply and practice what they have learned. CSCL allows students to express their ideas and communicate with others. Students should use a foreign language to express ideas and communicate with others in CSCL programs, which could lead to a unique Community of Inquiry (CoI).

Students with beginning or intermediate level of EFL require more time to express their ideas in English since they have to search proper words in the targeted language and to monitor and evaluate their results consulting with newly learned rules and grammar. In order to acquire higher level language proficiency, both quantitative and qualitative language practices are necessary. Asynchronous discussion could provide a better learning setting for such learners with limited EFL. They could take time to think and monitor their comments as well as to read and comprehend other members’ comments and opinions.

This chapter discusses the application of the CoI framework used to design asynchronous online discussion for EFL learners, illustrating the case study at a university in Japan. The course of the case study was designed as a blended learning, weekly face-to-face self-paced learning with computer and self-study activities outside of the classroom. Collaborative learning generally demands more time for learning activities and the asynchronous discussions were conducted outside of the classroom to increase students’ self-learning time to ensure their quantitative practice. Five discussion activities were held in the course. The discussion for a topic lasted two weeks and in the middle, students came to the classroom and studied the CALL materials individually. There was no time allocated for the group discussion in the classroom, although the instructor gave students overall feedback on the on-going discussions for about 10 minutes at the end of the class.

The course was designed and implemented based on the Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS) approach (Nelson, 1999) in the instructional design (ID) and the Teaching and Learning Guideline for CoI (Garrison, 2011). The CPS approach consists of two categories, (a) comprehensive guideline and (b) process activities. Its comprehensive guideline defines the major role of teachers, the activities of learners, and the process activities to provide detailed procedures of collaborative learning with strategies that both teachers and learners can use. The CoI guideline indicates specific actions of teachers according to the plan (design and organization) and implementation (facilitation, and direct instruction) phases. Both CPS and CoI embrace collaborative-constructivist approaches, but CPS does not consider online context, especially asynchronous communication although it provides steps for the collaborative learning procedure. CoI integrates online learning features and the teachers’ roles in an asynchronous learning environment. The rationales for employing both CPS and CoI are as follows. CPS was useful to design the activity process of each discussion and the integration of the discussion activities and other types of instructions because it contained the information of conditions for using CPS and four types of comprehensive guidelines; instructor-implemented methods, learner-implemented methods, instructor- and learner-implemented methods, and interactive methods. However, implementation and interactions focus on the face-to-face setting. The steps suggested in CPS and CoI are similar, but the CoI framework provides guideline and strategies to integrate online communication into learning. Combinations of three presences; teaching presence, social presence, and cognitive presence.
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