Promotion of EFL Student Motivation, Confidence, and Satisfaction Via a Learning Spiral, Peer-Scaffolding, and CMC

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ABSTRACT

This study presents an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instructional model in which peer interaction improves motivation, confidence, satisfaction, and actual performance of students. Researchers used peer interaction for repeated assignments via Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) to study how focused peer interaction contributes to changes in the four factors. EFL students in Taiwan interacted “live” via the Internet with a native English speaker in America. Integrative and instrumental motivation, satisfaction, confidence, and actual performance all improved as a result of the peer interaction with CMC methodology. Affective variables, such as anxiety, motivation, and self-efficacy, coupled with positive peer dynamics and teacher support, all influenced the students’ reported motivation, confidence, and satisfaction. This EFL instructional model has two strengths: 1) it demonstrates that peer interaction, properly channeled, results in improved motivation, confidence, satisfaction, and actual performance, and that, 2) CMC expands the engagement of students using peer learning, resulting in improved learning compared to traditional instruction.

Keywords: Actual Performance, Computer Mediated Communication, Confidence, Constructivism, EFL, Instrumental Motivation, Integrative Motivation, Learning Spiral, Peer Interaction, Satisfaction, Scaffolding

INTRODUCTION

The current generation of college students places an ever-increasing demand on colleges and universities for innovative approaches to teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This is because in the 21st Century, English is the language of international business, science, and culture (Benzie, 2010; Ferguson, Pérez-Llantada & Plo, 2011). Graddol (2006)
predicted that in the foreseeable future English may be seen in EFL countries as a basic skill, not a special talent, as it is still conceptualized today. Many EFL programs around the world, however, use instructional designs that fail to focus on the diverse needs of students (Halver-son, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2007; Toffler & Toffler, 2006), including in Taiwan, the site of this study. EFL programs benefit greatly from active learning methodologies that use authentic source materials (Wu, Yen, & Marek, 2011; Chu, 2007; Gömleksiz, 2007). But for teachers used to the lecture-memorization format, active learning opens up many new challenges.

One commonly cited approach that both fosters active learning and offers authentic material is the use of Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC), which has been studied by many researchers (Guthrie & Richardson, 1995; Liou, 1997; Scardamalia & Van Aacken, 1999; Wiebe & Kabata, 2010). Students in the 21st Century are already common users of similar technologies for personal and social interaction with friends and family. As a result, they see the benefits of learning environments that enable them to use technology for classroom-related interaction. Research is clear that use of online tools, i.e., CMC, improves the listening and speaking skills of young learners (Terrell, 2011), but the CMC literature rarely addresses real communication between people of different cultural groups (Wang & Chang, 2011). In addition, many teachers and academic programs are often nowhere near as advanced as their students in use of technology.

An equal challenge, in Taiwan, the site of this study, is that students are often passive learners (Wu, 2006). Innovative teachers seek ways to engage students in active learning that applies Constructivist principals. Such Constructivist learning models in which students have significant control over their learning methods, including the use of technology, strengthen the ability of the students to select information and make connections in their minds to other knowledge, thus learning more deeply than superficial memorization (Sengupta, 2001).

The purpose of this study, therefore, was two-fold. First, it was to employ a Constructivist model of student-centered learning with extensive and relatively independent peer interaction in order to strengthen student motivation, satisfaction, and self-confidence in EFL learning. The second purpose was to use CMC technology to allow students to interact “live” with a native speaker of English via CMC technology in order to promote student motivation, satisfaction, and self-confidence. The participants in the study were thirty-seven students taking an English conversation EFL class at a private university in Taiwan, as part of the requirements for completing the class.

These following specific research questions guided this study:

• Did the students’ perceived level of integrative and instrumental motivation, satisfaction, confidence, and their actual performance in learning English change over time as a result of the methodology used in this study?
• What factors stemming from the methodology in this study affected the students’ perceptions of changes in their own motivation, satisfaction, and confidence in learning English?

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section elaborates the framework of this study based on past studies related to this research, including the following subsections: First, the relationship between satisfaction and academic performance, then, the Constructivism and the relationships among integrative and instrument motivation, satisfaction, and self-confidence, next, disconnects between self-esteem and actual ability, after that, the importance of peer learning and scaffolding from peers, and finally, the role of CMC in instructional designs using the above principals.
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