Turning Anxiety to Hope:
The roles of teachers in a new blended EFL learning

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Abstract

The authors have been involved in designing a three-year English curriculum for the new robotics engineering major at Chubu University, Japan. This curriculum attempts to develop motivational strategies and to design an instructional framework to provide students with opportunities to re-build trust in EFL. This paper discusses the roles of teachers in blended learning, which forms the most principal part of the curriculum. This paper especially focuses on how teachers adapt materials to realize as much scaffolding as necessary for students to initiate and deepen their learning.

Keywords

blended learning, motivation, roles of teachers

1 Introduction

When English is one of the subjects engineering students had avoided for a long time, what can EFL teachers do to break the students' silence and motivate them to deal with language learning? The Language Center has started to develop a new curriculum collaboratively with the robotics major faculty. The goal of the curriculum, especially in the first two semesters, is to support students discouraged by past disappointments in English learning so they can move beyond past failures and find success in language acquisition, even slowly, toward their language acquisition. This study shows some new aspects of roles of teachers required to activate language acquisition in blended learning.

2 Background

At the beginning of their freshman program, 99% of the students in class of 2014 (n=80) indicated anxiety, rejection, or reluctance toward learning English. At the same time, however, they had some hope to become able to go beyond false beginner level. Most of the students in the first year seem to have very mixed feelings toward learning English: anxiety and hope. For all, it was obvious once-a-week classes wouldn't provide sufficient opportunities in acquiring any fluency in the target language. Although communicative and productive language skills are highly valued among even in the field of engineering, we decided to make a gradual take off to let students feel prepared first.

3 Curriculum design

Through the three-year curriculum, we aim primarily at accommodating students with encouraging, energizing learning experience to activate their English learning. In developing the curriculum, we strive to seek ways to improve instructions in order to motivate the low-aptitude and high-anxiety students to increase their confidence with special attention to processing instruction (Ellis, 2014, VanPattern, 2002).

3.1 Breaking the silence

With the goal of letting the students become prepared to be communicative and productive in the target language in the third year and beyond, the first phase of the language development focuses on listening and pronunciation. Especially with the students who had kept quiet in language classrooms, it is difficult to change their attitude toward breaking the first language barrier. As receptive activities are less stressful for the false

beginners, the curriculum intends to increase opportunities for students to be exposed to the target language with sound, using e-learning training with ATR CALL Brix. Brix highlights vocabulary and structures of English with special attention to pronunciation and prosody.

3.2 Blended learning

The new curriculum intensively blends learning in which Glexa (a multimedia LMS) plays one of the most important roles to help students attain self-efficacy. CALL/LMS systems assist the teachers to promptly observe the learning process, which let us structure instructions in more effective and appropriate ways for the learners.

4 Roles of teachers

Dörnyei (2011) points out how demotivating it could be if learners must face something they cannot see the point of learning. We believe one of the most essential roles for the teachers is to make the learning material more relevant and worth learning to raise intrinsic interest of students. Glexa allows teachers to adapt materials easily. It lets teachers adapt tasks and practices in the ways most adequate for the students' motivation, developmental stages, progress and intake. On Glexa, teachers can arrange the content, the volume, the order, the time limit as well as the number of trials for each task. It is all up to the teachers to decide how to present and let students carry out tasks online to make their practices successful. One of the other important roles of teachers is how to deliver face-to-face classes. From providing instructions and facilitating tasks to reflecting observation, it is dependent on the teachers to foster a learning environment, whether online or offline.

Table 1 shows the number of tasks, questions and the students' responses for questions. The new curriculum uses Glexa both in face-to-face classroom (CALL) and beyond. It shows the quantity of the chances we can provide the students to practice.

Table 1: The number of tasks created on Glexa in 2014-2015

Class	Task	Questions	Responses
2014 Freshman	345	2,926	189,833
2015 Freshman	942	11,934	427,600
2015 Sophomore	150	2,377	152,980

5 Conclusions

Figure 1 shows how the Class of 2014's CASEC scores changed over one year. The total indicates the progress of 36 points in average. The most significant progress was made in class C, which consists of the least motivated students. The improvement is a sign that they can start to feel some self-efficacy and to have more hopes in acquiring the target language if adequate lessons are provided through blended learning.
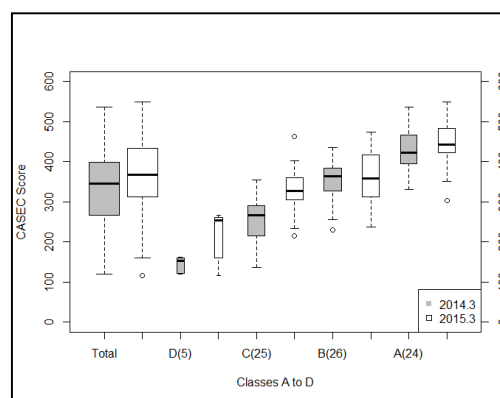

Figure 1: Score progress of Class of 2014

Roles of teachers are no longer limited to the selections of materials or facilities. These results indicate that the supportive technology in blended learning courses increases the impact of face-to-face lessons with an instructor.

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