

A Comparison of the Effects of Classroom and Multi-User Virtual Environments on the Perceived Speaking Anxiety of Adult Post-Secondary English Language Learners

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Abstract

The population of English Language Learners (ELLs) globally has been increasing substantially every year. In the United States alone, adult ELLs are the fastest growing portion of learners in adult education programs (Yang, 2005). There is a significant need to improve the teaching of English to ELLs in the United States and other English-speaking dominant countries. However, for many ELLs, speaking, especially to Native English Speakers (NESs), causes considerable language anxiety, which in turn plays a vital role in hindering their language development and academic progress (Pichette, 2009; Woodrow, 2006).

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT), such as simulation activities, has long been viewed as an effective approach for second-language development. The current advances in technology and rapid emergence of Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUVEs) have provided an opportunity for educators to consider conducting simulations online for ELLs to practice speaking English to NESs. Yet to date, empirical research on the effects of MUVEs on ELLs' language development and speaking is limited (Garcia-Ruiz, Edwards, & Aquino-Santos, 2007).

This study used a true experimental treatment control group repeated measures design to compare the perceived speaking anxiety levels (as measured by an anxiety scale administered per simulation activity) of 11 ELLs (5 in the control group, 6 in the experimental

group) when speaking to Native English Speakers (NESs) during 10 simulation activities. Simulations in the control group were done face-to-face, while those in the experimental group were done in the MUVE of Second Life.

The results of the repeated measures ANOVA revealed after the Huynh-Feldt epsilon correction, demonstrated for both groups a significant decrease in anxiety levels over time from the first simulation to the tenth and final simulation. When comparing the two groups, the results revealed a statistically significant difference, with the experimental group demonstrating a greater anxiety reduction. This suggests that language instructors should consider including face-to-face and MUVE simulations, with ELLs paired with NESs, as part of their language instruction. Future investigations should investigate the use of other multi-user virtual environments and/or measure other dimensions of the ELL/NES interactions.

Implications for Practice

Results from this study have important implications for conducting simulations with native English speakers in both face-to-face and in MUVEs. The current study found that simulations conducted face-to-face and in a MUVE had overall positive effects on adult ELLs' reported speaking anxiety. Simulations conducted face-to-face have implications for practice in English language pedagogy. First, the results suggest that language instructors consider using simulations as part of their language classroom. Due to its flexible adaptation, it is recommended that simulations be used to extend or supplement language activities. Second, language instructors should consider pairing their ELLs with NESs in dyads, as ELL participants in this study expressed their satisfaction in the simulation activities. Third, based on the feedback given by ELL participants from the face-to-face group, language instructors should consider choosing topics that students can relate to personally, e.g. talking about their country, their interests, or their future plans.

Gaining Insight Into Teaching: A Phenomenological Exploration of the Lived Experience of Teachers of The Year

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Abstract

The debate over the qualities, skills, and knowledge that produce quality teachers continues. Many stakeholders in education argue that teacher quality should be measured by student achievement. However, this qualitative study shows that good teachers are multi-dimensional and that their effectiveness cannot be represented by students' test scores alone.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore what quality in teaching looks like by examining the lived experiences of winners and finalists of the Broward County Public Schools Teacher of the Year (ToY) award. Phenomenology describes individuals' daily experiences of phenomena, the manner in which these experiences are structured, and focuses analysis on the perspectives of the persons having the experience (Moustakas, 1994). This inquiry was undertaken to answer the questions: (a) How is teaching experienced by recognized as outstanding Teachers of the Year? and (b) How do ToYs feelings and perceptions about being good teachers provide insight, if any, about concepts such as pedagogical tact, teacher selfhood, and professional dispositions?

Ten participants formed the homogeneous purposive sample, and the major data collection tool was semi-structured interviews (Patton, 1990; Seidman, 2006). Sixty to 90-minute open-ended interviews were conducted with each of the participants. Data also included the participants' Teacher of the Year application essays. Data analysis included a three-phase process of description, reduction and interpretation.

The findings from this study revealed that the Teachers of the Year are dedicated, hard-working individuals with a serious, steadfast commitment to improving the lives

of children. They exhibit common behaviours, such as working beyond the school day, engaging in lifelong learning, and using their knowledge and skills to assist other teachers improve their practice. Their work as teachers is their life's compass; it is the force that guides them and wraps them into meaningful and purposeful lives. The concepts of pedagogical tact, teacher selfhood, and professional dispositions were shown by the study's findings to be relevant to teaching and offer important insights into good teaching. The results of this study indicate that for these recognized as outstanding teachers, good teaching is experienced by getting through to students using effective and moral means; they are emotionally open, they have a sense of the sacred, and they operate from a sense of intentionality. The essence of the ToYs teaching experience was their being properly engaged in their craft in terms of embodying logical, psychological, and moral realms.

These findings challenge the current teacher effectiveness process-product orthodoxy which makes a causal connection between effective teaching and student scores on standardized tests, and which assumes that effective teaching arises solely from and because of the actions of the teacher.

Implications for Practice

The focus on linking effective teaching to student scores on standardized tests assumes that effective teaching arises solely from and because of the actions of the teacher. Current educational policy is thus predicated upon the causal connection between teacher improvement and student learning as measured by their scores on tests. Effective teachers are then identified on the basis of their students' achievement, and classroom behaviors that are assumed to lead to student learning are codified.

As we move forward with ever increasing standards and measurable systems of accountability it is difficult to envision how the emotional nature of good teaching can thrive. It may sound hyperbolic, but the conclusions and affirmations of this study may serve as a warning. If we lose sight of our values and beliefs that are directly informed by how we feel, then the practice of teaching is

in serious trouble. If we do not nurture and mentor new teachers to develop heightened sensibilities and to trust their inner selfhood, then we miss the opportunity to grow good teachers.

Thus, if we believe that a teaching soul can be educated, then our teacher education programs should embrace a curriculum that assists preservice teachers to understand themselves and to become aware of their inner selfhood – to have an acute awareness of their values and belief systems and to want to connect with something beyond their own ego-driven personalities.

The Impact of a Classroom Performance System on Learning Gains in a Biology Course for Science Majors

by Nilo Marin

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Abstract

This study was conducted to determine if the use of the technology known as Classroom Performance System (CPS), specifically referred to as "Clickers," improves the learning gains of students enrolled in a biology course for science majors. CPS is one of a group of developing technologies adapted for providing feedback in the classroom using a learner-centered approach. It supports and facilitates discussion among students and between them and teachers, and provides for participation by passive students. Advocates, influenced by constructivist theories, claim increased academic achievement. In science teaching, the results have been mixed, but there is some evidence of improvements in conceptual understanding.

The study employed a pretest-posttest, non-equivalent groups experimental design. The sample consisted of 226 participants in six sections of a college biology course at a large community college in South Florida with two instructors trained in the use of clickers. Each instructor randomly selected their sections into CPS (treatment) and non-CPS (control) groups. All

participants completed a survey that included demographic data at the beginning of the semester. The treatment group used clicker questions throughout, with discussions as necessary, whereas the control groups answered the same questions as quizzes, similarly engaging in discussion where necessary. The learning gains were assessed on a pre/post-test basis.

The average learning gains, defined as the actual gain divided by the possible gain, were slightly better in the treatment group than in the control group, but the difference was statistically nonsignificant. An Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) statistic with pretest scores as the covariate was conducted to test for significant differences between the treatment and control groups on the posttest. A second ANCOVA was used to determine the significance of differences between the treatment and control groups on the posttest scores, after controlling for sex, GPA, academic status, experience with clickers, and instructional style.

The results indicated a small increase in learning gains, but these were not statistically significant. The data did not support an increase in learning based on the use of the CPS technology. This study adds to the body of research that questions whether CPS technology merits classroom adaptation.

Implications for Practice

This study contributes to the extant literature on the efficacy of Audience Response Systems to promote student learning. The lack of statistically significant results in the study, in contrast to results from other studies, suggests that effects of this technology on student learning are still unclear. The study adds to the body of research that indicates that it does not provide any significant learning advantage or disadvantage over traditional course delivery or low tech flash cards.

The implications extend to higher education administrators, faculty, and students. This study adds to the body of research that puts into question the efficacy of ARS technology and costs associated with adopting it. The capital expense necessary to purchase the equipment – clickers and related hardware – may not be available,

and requiring the students to make the financial commitment may not be possible or desirable. It is wise, then, for administrators to take into consideration whether or not ARS increases student outcomes, as well as consider the availability of other options for formative assessment. Cheaper options using Smartphone capabilities, such as SMS texting, are presently available, e.g., Polleverywhere.com. As new technologies develop and the options to administrators, faculty, and students become more diverse, it is important that the technologies be evaluated to determine if perceived benefits outweigh the costs.

Globalization and the Public Provision of Higher Education: Empirical Evidence from Selected Countries

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Abstract

This research study was designed to examine the relationship between globalization as measured by the KOF index, its related forces (economic, political, cultural and technological) and the public provision of higher education. This study is important since globalization is increasingly being associated with changes in critical aspects of higher education. The public provision of education was measured by government expenditure and educational outcomes; that is participation, gender equity and attainment.

The study utilized a non-experimental quantitative research design. Data collected from secondary sources for 139 selected countries was analyzed. The countries were geographically distributed and included both developed and developing countries. The choice of countries for inclusion in the study was based on data availability. The data, which was sourced from international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank, were examined for different time periods using five year averages. The period covered was 1970 to 2009.

The relationship between globalization and the higher education variables was examined using cross sectional regression analysis while controlling for economic, political and demographic factors. The major findings of the study are as follows. For the two spending models, only one revealed a significant relationship between globalization and education with the R^2 s ranging from .222 to .448 over the period. This relationship was however negative indicating that as globalization increased, spending on higher education declined. However, for the education outcomes models, this relationship was not significant. For the sub-indices of globalization, only the political dimension showed significance as shown in the spending model. Political globalization was significant for six periods with R^2 s ranging from .31 to .52.

The study concluded that the results are mixed for both the spending and outcome models. It also found no robust effects of globalization on government education provision. This finding is not surprising given the existing literature which sees mixed results on the social impact of globalization.

Implications

This research fills an important gap in the literature in terms of providing a quantitative as opposed to a qualitative assessment of the relationship between globalization and higher education, by focusing on higher education as opposed to education in general and by including as many countries for which substantial data was available. Empirical research on globalization and education is limited. Research on globalization tends to focus mainly on social welfare and where studies have included higher education the emphasis has been on educational globalization. Much of the research is also limited to total education and is not specific to higher education. Further, the emphasis is on spending in education. This study, by including education outcomes in addition to education spending, recognizes the importance of these factors in assessing the relationship between globalization and education is one that is more than financial in nature.

**The Relationship between Faculty Perceptions
and Implementation of Elements of
Transactional Distance Theory and Online
Web Based Course Completion Rates**

by Victor Nwankwo

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Drs. M.O. Thirunarayanan and Leonard Bliss;
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Janice Sandiford and Suman Kakar**Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between faculty perceptions, selected demographics, implementation of elements of transactional distance theory and online web based course completion rates. This theory posits that the high transactional distance of online courses makes it difficult for students to successfully complete these courses, which are too often associated with low completion rates. Whether online or face-to-face, faculty members play an indispensable role in course delivery from design to implementation and ultimately to how students will experience the course.

This study used transactional distance theory as the conceptual framework to examine the relationship between teaching and learning strategies used by faculty members to help students complete their online courses and faculty members' sex, number of years teaching online at the college level, and their online course student-completion rates. A researcher developed survey was used to collect data from 348 faculty members who teach online at two prominent colleges in the southeastern part of the United States.

An exploratory factor analysis resulted in six factors related to transactional distance. The factors accounted for slightly over 65% of the variance of the transactional distance scores as measured by the survey instrument. Results provided support for Moore's theory of transactional distance. Female faculty members scored higher in all six factors of transactional distance theory when compared to men. Faculty number of years teaching online at the community college level correlated significantly with all six elements of transactional

distance as measured by the instrument. Regression analysis determined that two of the factors, learner technology interface and instructor-learner interaction, accounted for significant variance (12%) of student online course completion rates. Faculty perceptions concerning learner-learner interaction was not an important factor and there was no learner-content interaction factor as well.

Implications for Practice

First, to improve instructor interface, it is critical for faculty to be familiar with all the possible means to relate to their students to help reduce the transactional distance between them and their students. It is not enough to provide a learning management system; institutions should go above and beyond in offering faculty training and support so faculty is able to use this training appropriately.

Higher learner expectations, the other factor, also supported the existing educational philosophy that students tend to perform to expectation. Therefore, when faculty has higher expectations for students it might help in reducing the degree of transactional distance for the students especially for online students.

**A Phenomenological Exploration of Black Male
Law Enforcement Officers' Perspectives of
Racial Profiling and their Law Enforcement
Career Exploration and Commitment**

by Gregory Salters

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Hilary Landorf and Thomas G. Reio, Jr.**Abstract**

This phenomenological study explored Black male law enforcement officers' perspectives of how racial profiling shaped their decisions to explore and commit to a law enforcement career. Criterion and snowball sampling was used to obtain the 17 participants for this study. Super's Archway Model was used as the theoretical framework. The Archway Model illustrates

how social learning connects the various segments of career development to construct an individual's self-concept and ultimately inform their career decisions.

Interview data were analyzed using inductive, deductive and comparative analyses. Three themes emerged from the inductive analysis of the data: (a) racial profiling (b) putting on the badge and (c) living with the badge. The deductive analysis used a priori coding that was based on the segments of Super's Archway Model. The deductive analysis revealed the participants' career exploration and commitment was influenced by them being racially profiled, their knowledge of others being racially profiled and their knowledge of how others view them. This exploration and commitment was driven by their desire to make a positive difference in the community by treating people fairly and improving the image/professionalism of law enforcement. The participants also report making efforts to build relationships, share information and provide others the same type of information, support and encouragement they continue to receive.

The comparative analysis between the inductive themes and deductive findings revealed racial profiling was present in the relationships between and within all segments of Super's model. The comparative analysis also revealed an expanded notion of self-concept for Black men and marginalized/oppressed individuals. Self-concept, is normally only associated with how one views themselves. This definition/understanding does not completely address the self-concept of Black men and marginalized/oppressed individuals. The self-concept of Black men and marginalized/oppressed individuals expands the construct of self-concept by adding the awareness of how others view them. Ultimately self-concept is utilized to make career and life decisions.

Implications for Practice

This study revealed the essence of racial profiling from the Black male law enforcement officer's perspective. The participants addressed the issue on

local, county, and federal levels. The study implies the following: color and/or race does matter, and racial profiling negatively impacts Blacks' career options.

Organizations should have training to discuss the essence of racial profiling from a human resource standpoint. The training should be broad, including supervisors and managers who will be participating in the hiring process and the officers. Officers should be included in this training so that they are more aware of the impact of their actions. The officers may not be aware of the long-lasting implications of their discretionary actions on others. "People do not enter the police because they are racist; rather, they acquire racial prejudice through a process of professional socialization" (Zauberman & Le'vy, 2003, p. 1065). Organizations may also wish to establish accountability and assessment measures to detect the essence of racial profiling and address the issue with the officer and within the law enforcement agency. The organization should also recruit and retain individuals who reflect the demographics, visually and mentally, of the community they serve. Currently, organizations' diversity efforts appear to be focused on visual diversity.

Organizations should also consider implementing community internships where employees work with a community-based organization to provide them a better appreciation of the community. Mentorship programs should also be considered for officers who are unfamiliar with the dynamics of the community they serve. Psychological training could also be provided to discuss the effects of racial profiling on the victim, Black males, and perpetrators.

A Retrospective-Longitudinal Examination of the Relationship between Apportionment of Seat Time in Community-College Algebra Courses and Student Academic Performance

by Steven Roig-Watnik
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Abstract

During the past decade, there has been a dramatic increase by postsecondary institutions in providing academic programs and course offerings in a multitude of formats and venues (Biemiller, 2009; Kucsera & Zimmaro, 2010; Lang, 2009; Mangan, 2008). Strategies pertaining to reapportionment of course-delivery seat time have been a major facet of these institutional initiatives; most notably, within many open-door 2-year colleges. Often, these enrollment-management decisions are driven by the desire to increase market-share, optimize the usage of finite facility capacity, and contain costs, especially during these economically turbulent times. So, while enrollments have surged to the point where nearly one in three 18-to-24 year-old U.S. undergraduates are community-college students (Pew Research Center, 2009), graduation rates, on average, still remain distressingly low (Complete College America, 2011). Among the learning-theory constructs related to seat-time reapportionment efforts is the cognitive phenomenon commonly referred to as the *spacing effect*, the degree to which learning is enhanced by a series of shorter, separated sessions as opposed to fewer, more massed episodes.

This ex post facto study explored whether seat time in a postsecondary developmental-level algebra course is significantly related to: course success; course-enrollment persistence; and, longitudinally, the time to successfully complete a general-education-level mathematics course. Hierarchical logistic regression and discrete-time survival analysis were used to perform a multi-level, multivariable analysis of a student cohort (N=3,284) enrolled at a large, multi-campus, urban community college. The subjects were retrospectively tracked over a 2-year longitudinal period. The study found that students in long seat-time classes tended to withdraw earlier and more often than did their peers in short seat-time classes ($p < 0.05$). Additionally, a model comprised of nine statistically significant covariates (all with p -values less than 0.01) was constructed. However, no longitudinal seat-time group differences were detected nor was there sufficient statistical evidence to conclude that seat time was predictive of developmental-level course success.

Implications for Practice

In recent years, with the addition of select 4-year baccalaureate degree programs at many institutions and more rapid changes in the labor market, the societal role of 2-year colleges has become even larger and more complex. Concurrently, while the impetus to innovate has increased sharply, so have the accountability demands upon 2-year colleges to improve their very low graduation rates. However, there are several crucial pieces of this complex puzzle that this researcher contends (a) have not been given ample attention and (b) are significant hindrances to reform initiatives aimed at increasing learning gains and success rates.

First, deficiencies in staffing and methodological expertise in many community college institutional research (IR) departments have been well documented (Achieving the Dream Community Colleges Count, 2005-2010; Levin & Calcagno, 2008; Morest & Jenkins, 2007; Romero et al., 2005). In light of the case made throughout much of this dissertation for improvements in research methodology and decision-making processes, the closing recommendation in Levin and Calcagno's scholarly paper merits a verbatim reiteration, for it fuses the assessment of other scholars (Morest & Jenkins, 2007) with many of the decision-making methodological concerns examined in this researcher's dissertation:

... establish a central resource at the state level and cooperative efforts with universities to assist community colleges and individual faculty members in creating experimental interventions and to provide support for evaluating them. Standard intervention designs and data collection centers could be established as well as methods for analyzing data on outcomes and costs. Faculty members and administrators could collaborate with the evaluation staff inside or outside of their institutions to specify the appropriate outcomes and control variables, help administer the data instruments, and assist in the interpretation of the results. (p. 202)

Secondly, the notion of increasing faculty engagement in such activities is particularly noteworthy. Morest and Jenkins (2007) found that, in general, 2-year college faculty are neither included among the participants in nor among the audience for IR studies. As Hardré (2012) observed, “Community college faculty members see lack of expertise and opportunities, as well as administrative support, as roadblocks to both basic research and teaching research activities, and these are elements that can be administratively addressed” (p. 558). Not only can they be administratively addressed, this researcher maintains they must be addressed. Otherwise, educational policymakers and 2-year college administrators and faculty, by and large, will continue to be incapable of properly evaluating initiatives, to assess which are working, specifically why they are working, and how (and where) to best institute and refine them.

Thirdly, there is an essential prerequisite that must be fulfilled before community college faculty and administrators can be motivated and equipped to actively

engage in such activities, first as readers (and users) of research studies and ultimately as collaborators with IR professionals and others: they must be provided ongoing training, support, and encouragement to steadily increase their understanding of (and appreciation for) educational research methodology.

The fourth recommendation echoes others’ calls (e.g., Di Muro & Terry, 2007; Jones et al., 2003) for devising means to increase faculty knowledge, awareness, and classroom application of relevant and robust theories of cognition, information processing, and social development, in tandem with better training in methods of learning assessment. This is, arguably, the most pressing priority, in terms of properly equipping 2-year college faculty—especially mathematics educators—with the pedagogical tools and heightened self-awareness needed to more effectively in the classroom with today’s increased diversity of students and learning-style predispositions.