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Talents Oriented Strategy of Online Learning in Universities

STRATEGIE ORIENTEE VERS LES TALENTS DE L'APPRENTISSAGE EN LIGNE DANS LES UNIVERSITES

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Abstract: This article argues online learning strategy and teaching characteristics in universities. First it introduces learning activities in EFL must be integrated with technology appropriately to develop talents effectively. Then it puts forward the idea of talents oriented integrative online learning. For incorporating active learning into online teaching it lists some active learning strategies that can be adapted for the online “classroom”. Finally it recommends the detailed talents oriented strategy of online learning design and analyzes effective and appropriate items for learning activity.

Key words: Talents; Online Learning; Strategy; Universities; EFL

Résumé: Cet article parle de la stratégie d'apprentissage en ligne et des caractéristiques de l'enseignement en ligne dans les universités. Premièrement, il introduit des activités d'apprentissage EFL (English as foreign language) qui doivent être intégrées avec la technologie appropriée pour développer les talents de façon efficace. Puis il met en avant l'idée de l'apprentissage en ligne. Pour incorporer l'apprentissage actif dans l'enseignement en ligne, il énumère quelques-unes des stratégies d'apprentissage actives qui peuvent être adaptées à la «classe» en ligne. Et finalement, il recommande la stratégie orientées vers les talents détaillée de la conception de l'apprentissage en ligne et analyse des éléments efficaces et appropriées pour les activités d'apprentissage.

Mots-Clés: talents; apprentissage en ligne; stratégie; universités; EFL

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, computer network-based learning is widely used all over the world because of its potential and flexibility. All educational institutions over the world use computer network-based learning in EFL for expanding learning opportunities and facilitating learning activities to students separated by time and distance as well. It can be effective for delivering content to students and for instructors interacting with each other by using communication tool such as email, bulletin boards, conferencing system, whiteboards, chat rooms and videoconferencing and it can delivery contents in multimedia format like a video on demand, audio clips, animations, simulations and movies. Also computer network-based learning can support for all educational levels and can use for formal and non-formal education. While online learning is the integration among computers, network computer and communication tools, technology alone cannot makes an effective learning process and ensure learning quality (Palloff and Pratt, 2005). So learning activities in EFL are the most important factor that educators must integrate with technology and is one method that's appropriate to develop talents effectively.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Integrative English learning, cooperative learning and small group learning are terms that are often used interchangeably in the literature. However, it is important to differentiate integrative learning from the other two. Integrative learning differs from cooperative learning in that its emphasis lies in mutual engagement of learners in the learning process rather than on the sole division of labor to reach a common group goal (Bernard, Rubalcava and St-Pierre, 2005).

Integrative learning is an approach to teaching and learning in which students are required to work together in the learning process, and to reach a consensus through negotiation to accomplish group tasks. Some important attributes include learner center, constructivist, and problems-solving activities that the students explore in order to create their own knowledge, meaning and solutions. The importance of integrative learning as an instructional method has led to its application in situations in which computer network based self-learning is required by using computer network technologies for effective communication in learning activities.

In integrative learning setting, the emphasis is placed on the interactions as common understandings are negotiated and developed across differences of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Indeed, integrative learning should thrive on these differences. Motivation to participate and confidence, together, play an equally important role if benefits are to emerge from the experience. Moreover, participants need to assume a variety of functional roles as interchange progress and involve question answering and explanations that are open to challenges and justifications (Hanafin and Land, 2006). So integrative learning is the appropriate learning pattern for learning activity in modern age that needs students to enhance knowledge, experiences and potentials for conducting their real life.

3. TALENTS ORIENTED INTEGRATIVE ONLINE LEARNING

In order for integrative online learning to take place successfully, it is crucial that the learner feels part of a learning community where his/her contributions add to a common knowledge pool and where a community spirit is fostered through social interactions (Torrell and Dringus, 2007). There are two methods for using integrative network-based English learning to develop talents. First one is group

project method that supports students to do a project together by using group opinion in selecting topic and working with teamwork for learning goal. The second one is a debate or discussion method that supports students sharing and exchanging of individual ideas with group members for eventually concluding the group's final opinion for problem solving or justification.

The activities of integrative computer network-based learning use abilities and potentials of computer and network for communicating among students and facilitators for learning activities. The communication of computer networks can support student-to-student and students-to-facilitator by using communication tools such as e-mail, chat rooms, web boards, instant messaging, and desktop conferencing. When it's integrated with the appropriate activities of collaborative learning, the purpose is to shape a highly effective learning activity on computer network.

4. INCORPORATE ACTIVE LEARNING INTO ONLINE TEACHING

Active learning is not only an effective instructional strategy in the traditional English learning environment, but also it is effective in an online environment. Instructors or designers must continue to design activities that support learning objectives, but structure them to work online, outside of the traditional classroom environment where active learning techniques are heavily dependent upon face-to-face interaction (e.g., discussion, group work, role play). For example, consideration must be given to the fact that instructor and learners may not be in the same place at the same time (asynchronous) to interact whereby relying on instructional technologies as part of the interactive learning process. However, the online environment can sometimes be a more favorable learning environment for students in that all have equal opportunity to participate, share thoughts and develop ideas over periods of time. Students' expressions are not limited by the class size, which are called upon or time allotted to participate (Harasim, 2003). Components of good active learning activities are the same, whether presented in traditional or in online environments. Activities should 1) have a definite beginning and ending; 2) have a clear purpose or objective; 3) contain complete and understandable directions; 4) have a feedback mechanism; and 5) and include a description of the technology or tool being used in the exercise.

What are appropriate active learning strategies for an online environment? Designing instructional strategies (traditional or online) to engage learners is challenging. Traditional strategies must be adapted to develop new strategies for the online learning environment. Widely used effective and active learning strategies such as group work or role-play can even be successfully adapted for an online environment (McAlpine, 2004). When developing active learning strategies for an online environment, the instructor and designer should first consider sound design practices including, but not limited to: assessing the learners, knowing the context and environment in which learners will be operating, knowing instructional tools and techniques for delivery, developing strategies in the form of directions and resources, incorporating assessment of learning outcomes and course design, and designing with active engagement in mind.

When using traditional active learning strategies, instructors/designers will want to consider the following: Can learners complete the activity independently? Will they need specific guidance before or during the activity? Will visuals or other materials be needed? Will they need to collaborate with other learners? How do the learners ask questions? Will there be formative or summative evaluation? What tools will be available to support the activity, including technology, resources, and examples? Should different strategies and tools that provide multiple ways of experiencing learning? There are many examples of active learning strategies that can be adapted for the online "classroom" including:

- Assessment -- tests and quizzes that provide immediate feedback
- Readings and case studies
- Discussions (virtual chat, bulletin board)
- Writings (summaries, essays, critiques)

- Projects-- group or individual
- Experiential Learning--Internships/ Externships
- Demonstrations with questioning (video clips)
- Study/support groups
- Visual-based instruction (streamed video or CD)
- Games & Simulations, problem solving, online presentations, community building, role-play, directed research, etc.

5. TALENTS ORIENTED STRATEGY OF ONLINE LEARNING DESIGN

5.1 Strategy for Online Learning

First, make it Interactive. An online learning is different from the classic environment: the responsibility is on the student to become an active participant rather than a passive recipient of learning. An interactive learning environment encourages discovery, experimentation, and experiential instruction that provide multiple representations of knowledge. Integrative learning is more effective than passive learning, showing how knowledge is interrelated and associated.

Second, keep it Engaging and Motivating. Motivation can be affected by the task, learning environment, the teacher, and the student. But without motivation, there can be no learning. Shneiderman (2002) stated that memorable educational experiences are enriching and transformational. Motivation theory argues that relevant experiences satisfy intrinsic needs or goals, encouraging effort and performance. Some ways that online learning can foster motivation and increase perceptual arousal are: (1) incorporate novel, surprising, incongruous and uncertain events; (2) pose questions or problems to solve; (3) vary the elements of instruction; and (4) use concrete and familiar examples that are related to learners' a priori experiences. Also, learner confidence and satisfaction can be bolstered by explaining the utility of instruction, providing positive learning experiences, and supporting internal attributions for success. Learners should feel that they are, for the most part, in control of their outcomes and that their success is a direct result of the amount of effort they have put forth.

Third, put Things in Context. Learners can experience problems using knowledge and skills in everyday contexts. This inability to make meaningful connections results from the decontextualization of formal learning experience: learning is isolated from the contexts in which it derives meaning (Bransford, 2006). Context, then, is seen as a critical environmental factor in how knowledge is assimilated, represented, negotiated, and used.

Fourth, maintain Diversity. Online learning can support multiple modes of representation by being able to incorporate various kinds of media such as English text, illustrations, animations, video, audio, and simulations. Consequently, learning can take place through different sensory channels, and learning is more effective when more channels are engaged in learning. Diversity also helps to keep the student moving, focused, and motivated.

Fifth, use Collaborative Skills. Learners are capable of performing at higher intellectual levels when asked to work in collaborative environments. Group diversity and experience contributes positively to the learning process. Bruner (2005) argued that cooperative learning methods improve problem-solving strategies when learners are confronted with different interpretations of the given situation. Peer support makes it possible for the learner to conceptualize both external knowledge and critical thinking skills and to convert them into tools for intellectual reasoning. Collaboration involves the mutual engagement of the participants in a coordinated effort to solve the problem together. The active exchange of ideas within small groups also generates interest among learners. Shared learning gives students an opportunity to engage in discussion, take responsibility for their own learning, and become critical thinkers.

Sixth, reduce Cognitive Load. Cognitive load may be seen as the level of mental energy required to process a given amount of information. As the amount of information to be processed increases, so does

the associated cognitive load. Cognitive load theory suggests that effective instruction promotes learning by directing cognitive resources towards activities that are relevant to learning rather than to processes that are adjunct to learning. Thus, providing too much information all at once with distracting or competing information, increases complex information and further exacerbates cognitive load and associated mental energy. Chunking information into “information bits,” focusing attention to coincide with explanations, reducing information “overload,” and providing appropriate support to aid in the reduction of cognitive load.

Seventh, provide adequate scaffolding. Scaffolding is a learner support structure essential for student success. That is, as the student increases in competence, the teacher relinquishes the learning situation to the student and withdraws support. The move to less scaffolding is achieved by teaching students problem-solving strategies, fading assistance and introducing more complex contexts--to help students distinguish essential and nonessential details. In other words, there should be a conscious attempt to foster independent and higher-order thinking. Interactions between peers and teachers provide the kinds of scaffolding and coaching support which teachers normally bring to the traditional classroom setting. Mechanisms to support and motivate students isolated in online learning environments are considered necessary to encourage active participation, inquiry, discourse, and progress. Moreover, a social context stresses the importance of learning being germane within the cultural context of the group.

5.2 Talents Oriented Strategy of Online Learning

The talents oriented strategy of online learning can be realized in following procedures:

5.2.1 Preparing for facilitator

- a. Give knowledge in collaborative learning and computer network-based learning.
- b. Give knowledge, skill and management of integrative learning.
- c. Give knowledge and skill in computer, software and network application related with English learning activities.
- d. Build a confidence for conducting learning activities.

5.2.2 Preparing for learner

- a. Give integrative learning skills.
Interpersonal skills, such as request, motivation, maintenance, acknowledge, discussion.
Group building/Management skills: inquiry skills, presentation skills.
- b. Give knowledge and skill in computer, software and network application related with learning activities.

5.2.3 Appropriation of content

- a. Content should be variety.
- b. Content should not be deep.
- c. Content related with learner’s life or real situation.
4. Content of learner’s experiences.

5.2.4 Step of integrative learning

- a. Personal learning activity
- b. Collaborative learning activity

5.2.5 Talents oriented learning strategies

- a. Encouraging participant
- b. Maintaining social grounding
- c. Evaluating student performance
- d. Promote group processing
- e. Supporting integrative learning conversation skill practice
- f. Applying appropriate technology

6. CONCLUSION

The first of the components is Facilitators. In talents oriented learning strategy, instructor roles were changed to facilitator roles that had different missions. So there is a necessity to prepare concepts, knowledge, and skills used in integrative learning and computer applications for facilitators to build a confidence in learning activity operations. The success of integrative learning depends on facilitators. Hence, facilitator preparation is the main component in this model and a short-course of training is an appropriate method for facilitator preparation.

The second component is Learners. This component is very important because learners are the human resources that we want to develop. The environment of integrative network-based learning is different from traditional classroom, so preparation in the knowledge and skills of collaborative learning activities is necessary mission that must be considered. The major factors for learners are: how to learn between online applications and integrative learning skills.

The third component is Content. Although all content can be delivered with computer network-based learning, integrative learning has a specific characteristic because the learning activities is group process and use communication to share, exchange, discuss, argue, solve problem and build knowledge based upon learners' experiences. So appropriate content should be various related with their life. The more learner experiences are integrated, the more benefits and better learning can be achieved in that effective learning will result.

The components that were selected for use in this prototype model were approved and recommended by researchers and developers to ensure effective talents and appropriate items for learning activity, especially for integrative learning and computer network-based learning activities, which is believed to be suitable and well matched for talents development in higher education institutions.

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