Virtual Faculty-Student Linguistic Interactions via Asynchronous Web Conferencing

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Abstract — Maintaining steady progress in optimum actualization of Computer Assisted Language learning (CALL) programs in academic settings necessitates research studies that reflectively mirror the existing realities in those contexts. In the same vein, the present researcher tried to report a recent experience of her own in which a sample of one hundred and fifty university students at BA level were closely inquired in terms of their virtual interaction patterns with their Language teacher. The target group was exposed to asynchronous web conferencing features wherein the students’ postings were monitored in a four-month academic semester. Students’ postings were subjected to content analysis via inductive category formation techniques. The findings revealed eight categories concerning the nature of Iranian faculty-student interaction patterns. Out of the eight emerged categories, the two with the highest rates for making rapport with their teacher involved ‘Request on Grades’ (RG) (25.41%) and ‘Public and Religious Occasions’ (P&RO) (24.32 %). The chi-square test for the counted emerged categories indicated that the sub-optimum interaction behavior was significant. Pedagogical implications of the teacher-student interaction patterns as to text blogging at tertiary level have been discussed at the end.

Index Terms— Interaction pattern, Asynchronous web conferencing, Online postings, CALL

I. INTRODUCTION

So far, the contribution of Computer Assisted Language learning (CALL) studies has been to signify, by all means, the importance of online tools like wikis and blogs along with other services such as wemails, groupware, web conferencing etc. for promoting educational aims outside the schoolroom context (Dashtestani, 2013; Kim, 2002; Motaghiian, Hassanzadeh, & Moghadam, 2012; Park & Son, 2009). Within CALL domains, ‘Computer Mediated Communication’ (CMC) refers to online activities and educational practices with which students interact both with one another and with their teacher to promote their learning. CMC tools are mainly divided into two dimensions concerning ’time’ parameters in terms of ‘synchronous’ versus ‘asynchronous’ and ’modality’ dimensions regarding ‘text’ versus ‘audio-visual’ modes of practice. Accordingly, CMC includes both written and spoken modalities in both time parameters. Chatting, instant messaging and MOOs (multi-user domain, object oriented) in the text mode and most commonly VOIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) in the audio mode are the various manifestations in CMC and can involve emails, bulletin or discussion boards (Bax, 2003).

A case in point in CMC tools is the nature of ‘interaction’ which as Long (1996) once mentioned provides the necessary input for language processing. Recently, CMC services have been handy in launching the essential requirements of online communication, among students, their classmates and their language teachers, which have turned interaction into a more delicate issue for endorsing language learning. However, the nature of such interaction has to be studied more carefully if it is intended to endorse learning since in some cases, it might be used for non-educational aims as well. Anderson (2003: 131) once defined ‘interaction’ as both a goal and a means of communicative language learning. Here, if such interaction is to be used for sending and receiving messages for communicating meaning with a resource to form, it can be useful for language learning aims but in some cases it seems that the sole practice of interaction goes awry which makes the situation not suitable mainly for encouraging linguistic aims among students and their teachers. In this status quo, interaction might be used for some other purposes, which are not mainly promotive of learning the language. This research is thus to fill in the gap in this line of research for CALL rehearsing through exploring a practiced virtual community of practice via an action classroom research at tertiary level.

Recent Asynchronous CMC (ACMC) environments typically involve e-mail, bulletin boards, group
conference folders, podcasting, web-conferencing and 'listserves'. ACMC in text modality, which is the main focus of the present investigation, entails a delay between sending and responding to messages both between and among teachers and students. In EFL settings, many underlying reasons might lead language teachers not to follow such routes of communication for language learning aims seriously. The reasons might be large number of students present in class, shared student-teacher L1 background, which gives way to lots of code-switching practices, for which they feel if they do not use their L1, it might not seem authentic (Bueno Alastuey, 2011).

At tertiary level, optimum online mutual interaction of teachers with students is of utmost importance and has already been highlighted by many scholars among whom some are very prominent like Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, Feldman & Hixon (2011); Grooms & Simons (2013); Grooms (2009) & Hart (2012) etc. Such prominence is for knowledge construction at higher educational levels and eradicating blocks for emotional participation on the part of some students who feel classroom context might not provide a venue for assembling such knowledge in the limited amount of time provided for language courses at tertiary levels. Research findings over the effectiveness of such online resources for developing educational skills through interaction including higher level thinking skills seem to be contradictory in the literature. For example, Grooms (2009; 2013) produced inconsistent results in two diverse studies of her own concerning interaction nature and educational success. In a research study for a group of 105 online doctoral learners, Grooms (2009) developed an instrument to find out the significance of interaction in utilizing online sources for higher education. She ultimately identified five specific types of applications for faculty-student interaction that involved ‘informational feedback’, ‘corrective/evaluative feedback’, ‘intellectual discussion’, ‘motivation/support’ and ‘socializing’. In another experiment, Grooms & Simons (2013) explored the effects of faculty-student interaction on the relationship between student mentoring and success in an online doctoral program. Her later co-authored study, however, could not support any beneficial impacts for faculty-student interaction and the target students’ success in online settings. Doherty (2006) claims in his doctoral thesis the inefficiency in reporting consistent results in this field of enquiry might have been caused by lack of empirical research over the ‘interaction’ itself.

II. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Concerning online utilization practices for virtual interaction patterns, Warschauer (2000) acted out three stages of CALL development which is worthy of mentioning to signify where EFL settings reside and what horizons the EFL scholars have to put forward for future. In his provided model for conceptualizing interaction, the 21st century is characterized by integrative CALL in which best use of multimedia and the Internet is made for content based ESP and EAP, views of language is socio-cognitive that is developed via social interaction and the principal use of computers is for authentic discourse. To the best experience of the author, in EFL settings, where proper interaction with the language teacher is impaired, interestingly, we might now see some influences of CALL for authentic discourses in our classes though as Bax termed it we might still be in an epoch of the late 19th, in which case making personal computers (PC) for grammar translation activities was a common practice. However, the argument is that the aims of EFL can, to some extent, hinder educational practitioners from making full use of CALL programs since mainly written skills including reading and writing are of high priority.

Bax (2003) called for a time period at which CALL studies are characterized in an era of normalization. In this created utopia of Bax, researchers are visualized in a world in which they are required to use ethnographic assessments and action research concerning CALL. The current status of the tertiary education in Iran for EFL studies might be in Bax’s terms in an open stage which is still distant from the normalized situation. Only when computers, probably very different in shapes and sizes from their current manifestations, are used every day by language learners and teachers as an integral part of every lesson, would CALL probably reach this state. According to Bax, at this stage, computers will not be the center of any lesson, but they will play a part in almost all sections of language development programs. At this stage, high tech tools and devices go almost unnoticed in Bax’s terms.

Along with social constructivists’ approaches towards learners’ social identities which affect their ultimate rate of achievement depending on how successful they are learning the language, Social Identity Theory is worthy of mentioning here. Norton (1997) defined ‘social identity’ as the relationship that exists between the individual and his/her larger social world, which is facilitated through institutions such as families, schools, workplaces, social services, and law courts. Such a model for interaction is seemingly quite in opposition with ‘Cultural identity’ and ‘Ethnic identity’ models. Regarding Cultural identity, the relationship between individuals and members of a group who share a common language and possibly thus similar ways of understanding the world as well as the ethnic identity approaches, the interaction nature should be substantively different. In Norton’s (1997: 210) terms, her theory investigates (1) in what circumstances do language learners speak? (2) how can we encourage learners to be involved more in their learning situation? And (3) how can teachers facilitate interaction between learners and target-language speakers? A serious concern in Norton’s research has been that she has not provided enough evidence as to
what extent the learners actually learned as a direct product of the identities they had assumed in her study.

Closely at issue here, is Vygotsky’s (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Regarding the aid by the socially-oriented language teachers, social interaction is supposed to facilitate learning through bridging in the gap that might exist between learners’ actual development and their proximity towards their potential levels of development. Such help might not directly come from the teachers’ standpoints themselves but the language learners’ peers. Regarding such support from peer groups in online communications, McLaughlin & Lee (2007), cited in Nami and Marandi (2013), rightly gave prominence to the fact that the learners really need an environment where they can interact with their peers for exchanging ideas. With reference to the required environment, Nami and Marandi (2013) investigated wikis as socially appropriate media as a forum of out-of-classroom discussions for promoting writing skills of a group of twenty EFL learners. In their study, the findings indicated that providing such a situation for peer correction had created a fine momentum for developing interaction tapping among peer groups that was launched through wiki-based learning potentialities. Their study was undertaken in a language institute. In Iranian language institutes, the learners’ high aspirations and upper levels of motivation for learning might have also provoked such interaction patterns.

In academic settings, the pertinent role taken by teachers really matters specifically in those classes where the learners with lower proficiency levels are attending for whom the main concern is elevating motivation to learn at first place. Laurillard (2002) elaborated on the teachers as the main promoters of help in academic settings. She mentioned the university teachers’ job in verifying the world around the learners by engaging them in meaning making and meaning generating activities outside the class boundaries. She referred to such activities as picking up or apprehending the structure of academic discourse, interpreting forms of representation, acting on the description of the world, using feedback and finally reflecting on the goal-action-feedback cycle. In such a situation, as described by Laurillard (2002), since the teachers are considered as the first accessible holder of knowledge, they must initiate the first calls for creating conversational framework by interacting through which preliminary steps towards iterative negotiation of meaning are taken. In this status quo, the language teachers can specifically help the students to have a correct and clear understanding of the learning context via interacting with their students for transferring the necessary knowledge on the structure of the academic content. For such purposes i.e., corroborating the classroom context for transferring the academic knowledge specifically in language learning situations, Moodle (Modular Object-Oriented Dynamic Learning Environment) as a universally satisfactory candidate for asynchronous CMC has been recently practiced in various language research networks. Moodle was originally developed by Martin Dougiamas, an expert in computer sciences, in 2002 to help educators create online courses with a focus on interaction. It is still being renewed by the educationalists in the field for managing cooperative construction of content for educational purposes.

As to ‘Moodle’, Rost (2009) mentioned three crucial issues in his study as to English language teaching for specific purposes (ESP) which is of high concern at academic settings. They were the swift out datedness of paper-printed ESP learning materials and students’ insufficient exposure to quality ESP instruction in traditional learning environments which is typically limited to only two or three hours of instruction a week. In order to maintain a steady motivation level among the learners, Moodle had apparently showcased fully engaging web-based activities structured in 5 modules, each developing simultaneously engineering field-specific knowledge and foreign language skills, while forcing students to acquire and develop transversal skills as well. In line with Moodle as a web-based language teaching context, Rice (2006) also emphasized three distinguishing interaction-supporting features as static, interactive and social features. Concerning the second mentioned issue, promoting students’ interaction with their teacher and more importantly the learning system, he asserted the case of assignments to be edited by the language teachers and online journals which could only be viewed by the student-issuer and the teacher. Here, interactive lessons, teacher-issued questions to retrieve feedback, surveys reflecting students’ engagement and attitude towards learning intended as two-way mirrors both for teachers and for students were really interesting for language learning contexts at tertiary level.

In this paper, the researcher investigated the learner-teacher virtual interaction patterns for CMC through asynchronous web conferencing in an Iranian academic setting to describe a factual event which might also be current in other EFL settings at tertiary level. Within this enquiry of research in language research studies, the significance of student-teacher interaction outside the borders of classrooms has been recently turned into one of the hot issues (Hughes & Chen, 2011; Liberante, 2012; Nabi Karim 2012; Roorda, Koomen, Spilt, & Oort, 2011). Regarding asynchronous CMC in Iranian EFL settings, few studies existed in the literature which showed a grave necessity for the applied linguists and researchers in the field to initiate further practice. Quite recently, Gorjian et al. (2011) explored the applicability of asynchronous CMC for retention and recall of vocabulary items among some Iranian low versus high university students achievers. The results indicated that only high achievers could have benefited from such CALL methodology for learning vocabulary and the low achievers had benefited from the technology just in
retention period. In another study by Zarei (2008) the
effect of synchronous Computer mediated Interaction
(CMI) and face-to-face oral interaction was investigated
on the recognition and production of vocabulary by
Iranian learners of English. Contrary to the previous
study by Gorjian et al. (2011), written vocabulary
recognition among some low-proficiency level learners' was affected by CMC interaction more than that of the
high-proficiency level learners. However, high
proficiency group had gained greater results in written
vocabulary production. As to interaction patterns, quite
recently a study was done by Burrows and Stepanczuk
(2013) for an EFL setting on a group of multi-national
language learners among them were some Iranian,
Chinese, Thai, Indonesian learners among others from
other nationalities. The intention was to elaborate on
Featured characteristics for successful on-line
communications with a focus on interacting. In this
regard, some non-parametric effective features were
enumerated and decided as ‘learner autonomy’,
‘computer self-efficacy’, ‘attitude towards online
learning’, ‘motivation’, ‘English language self-efficacy’
and ‘learning style’.

In fact, in CALL programs and practices, if we want to
achieve the desired outcomes, the virtual faculty-student
interaction should first be rightly established to enrich the
capabilities of the users, and the nature of the use must
also be taken into account (Gray & Tehtani, 2003). In
this study, web-conferencing for asynchronous
interaction pattern detection has been closely an issue
which has rarely been investigated in an Iranian context.

The research questions of the present study in response
to lack of research on learner-preparedness for CMC
interaction were:

1. For what purposes do Iranian non-major EFL
students make use of asynchronous web conferencing in
their language classes?
2. To what extent do the emerged patterns of
interaction among university students and their language
teachers show optimum learner-preparedness for
Asynchronous web conferencing in EFL settings?

III. METHOD

In this study, the researcher reported a recent
experience of her own in which a sample of university
students at BA level were closely inquired in terms of
their virtual interaction patterns with their Language
teacher. The target group was randomly chosen from one
of the several university classes for which ACMC tools
were provided and exercised along with their actual
classes during their academic semester. Below a close
description of the situation and the selected participants
are given.

A. Participants

One hundred and fifty university students (male and
female) with an age range of 20-30 years who were
taking English for their General English (GE) course
credit participated in this research. The students were
asked to initiate conference talks on any aspects of the
provided lessons during their weekly actual classes with
their professor who was the sole researcher of the current
study. The whole period of data collection lasted for three
semesters that each took four months approximately. An
enquiry was made over the participants’ access to the
Internet for CMC purposes to make sure they are able to
make use of the Internet services. This was sought
through initial discussion with students in the first weeks
of each semester when the necessary introduction to the
course was delivered. The participants’ first language was
mainly Persian, with some sporadic instances of Kurdish
and Turkish among the registered students. The study
was undertaken in one of the open (non-governmental)
universities of Iran to ensure more learners with various
majors and thus diverse capabilities for reliability
purposes. During their course semester, in addition to the
virtual access, the students also attended their weekly
actual class which took three hours a week.

B. Experimentation

A special online page for virtual teacher-student
interactions was accessible for all the learners to add their
comments during the whole term. At the beginning of
each semester, the teacher repeatedly notified that the
learners could make use of the provided website to be in
touch with her and their classmates. A list of suitable
websites for language learning purposes was also linked
and made immediately available on the main homepage
to invoke the students accordingly. The websites were on
various topics and subjects including podcasts, reading
skills, ESL activities, free level tests, sample TOEFL
tests, etc. The learners were allowed to initiate
conference talks with the teacher on various aspects of
the taught lessons during the week. They could send
postings to the teacher in both Persian and English, since
they were not English majors and the intention was to
inquire into the nature of the non-English major student
talks in online asynchronous web conferences via the
different lenses of interaction. The quantity of their talks or writing
quality was not at issue in this study. The researcher went
through just the nature of the talks via analyzing
the postings by the students to verify if the students would
fully benefit from asynchronous web conferencing tools
for improving their educational purposes or they
preferred to utilize this technology for other purposes like
socialization aims and practices. For their convenience on
privacy matters, the learners were allowed to conceal
their identities when sending the questions and
comments. The whole data collection period was
IV. DATA ANALYSES

On the whole, a sum of three hundred and sixty-six messages were received by the researcher. All three hundred and sixty-six postings were subjected to content analysis techniques. For content analysis as a reliable technique for text analyzing practices, it should be noted that since the data in the present study was to be investigated qualitatively as to interaction patterns, this could be facilitated via rule-governed and systematic nature of content analysis procedures by coding, classifying and interpretations. Since enumerating the postings were not intended in this study, coding was performed via rule-governed, systematized procedures for content analysis techniques which called for inductive methods. From inductive methods for qualitative research inquiries, pattern coding was selected to highlight and analyze emerged patterns of interaction (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In pattern coding, a lot of material is turned into a more meaningful and parsimonious unit of analysis. Firstly, similar codes are assembled together to analyze their commonality and then a pattern code is generated. Several ideas are brainstormed and in the next stage the previous emerged patterns may be taken to a second cycle for more elaboration through content analysis. In this way, in pattern coding, a summary of emerged themes might be grouped into smaller set of themes and constructs (p.64). The whole process of data analysis was managed unobtrusively through which the researcher could observe the phenomenon without being observed which could lead the researcher to more reliable results (Robson, 1993).

In this study, the intention for content analysis of the sent postings by the learners were closely broken down into linguistically constituted facts that could , at its best, reveal some online interaction behavior of the targeted users along with the existing institutional realities and social relations of faculty-student interactions (Krippendorp, 2004). Categorizing, coding, comparing and concluding stages were thus precisely followed via qualitative techniques in this study. While analyzing the sent texts, eight categories emerged that indicated the main purposes for which the present research participants had used the provided online facility to interact with their teacher. The postings were closely scrutinized by the researcher and rechecked by one of her qualified colleagues in the ELT field for ensuring content validity. In the following parts, the criteria for classifying and categorizing the emerged items are explicated step by step.

The groupings were characterized and the following categories emerged for student-teacher interaction patterns. The pattern coding process was also rechecked with two PhD candidates in TEFL to verify their content validity. The following categories and the relevant codes indicate the purposes for which students had interacted with their teacher:

1. Curriculum and lesson planning (C& LP)
2. Linguistic knowledge enhancement (LKE)
3. Students’ request on their grades (RG)
4. Learners’ probing for test specifications and contents (TS&C)
5. Critical comments for better class management and discipline (CC4CD)
6. General questions unrelated to the taught themes in the classrooms, (GQ)
7. Comments on various public or religious occasions (P&RO)
8. Learners’ comments on classmates’ postings (CP).

Table 1 below displays some samples of the students’ postings together with the categories to which they belonged.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Students’ posting samples translated to English</th>
<th>Keywords for categorizations</th>
<th>Category abbreviations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Dear teacher, Hi. Why should we work on “Academic vocabulary…” book? It is too large to study completely. Please help us!</td>
<td>Book/ completely</td>
<td>(C &amp; LP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Could you please introduce some good sources for our translation skills?</td>
<td>Introduce/ sources/ skills</td>
<td>(LKE)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Dear teacher, please recheck my mid-term paper. I feel I had done much better. I need some bonus points.</td>
<td>points/ Mid-term/ exam</td>
<td>(RG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>For final exam, should we also study the final words at the end of the textbook?</td>
<td>Final words / final exam/ study</td>
<td>(TS&amp;C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Dear teacher can you use larger fonts on the board?</td>
<td>Board/ fonts</td>
<td>(CC4CD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>We are anxious, when you call us by our names.</td>
<td>Anxious</td>
<td>(CC4CD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>To which unit should we go forward until the end of the term?</td>
<td>unit/ term/</td>
<td>(C &amp; LP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>How can we retain British vs. American accent?</td>
<td>Accent</td>
<td>(LKE)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The categories were classified via inductive category formation techniques i.e. the codes and categories were not pre-defined but emerged in response to the interpretations undertaken on postings as explicated above during pattern coding stages. Contrary to structuring content analysis where parts of the texts may be filtered out for cross-sectioning using pre-ordinate criteria, in this study the categories were thus generated through analyzing all the text contents in students’ postings. Another rationale behind utilizing the inductive category formation techniques in the current research was that in the process of coding, the frequency of a concept might sometimes be lost and frequency might possibly give an indication of the significance of a concept in the text which might in reality not be a true picture of the investigations. Since the data were nominal in nature, frequency counts and percentage rates were first tallied for each eight category separately. Then, the Chi-Square test was employed for the data analysis since the dependent variables were categorical in nature. In statistical terms, the intention was to check whether the observed frequencies or proportional distribution of the emerged interaction patterns in this study were significantly different from the distribution we would serve frequencies or proportional distribution of the findings which are worth mentioning for prompting interaction patterns. The minimum expected cell frequency is 45.8. As table 2 clearly shows, out of the three hundred and sixty-six sent postings, just a minority of the learners’ postings, about (6.01%), were mainly devoted to LKE or Linguistic Knowledge Enhancements which is a major purpose of CMC in CALL studies. The majority of postings (93 messages) equal to (25.41%) belonged to P&RO or the learners’ comments on various public and religious occasions. Of the analyzed data, the other second ordered emerged categories were RG (general questions) at 24.32%, TS&C or (test specifications and contents) at 14.21%, CC4CD (Critical comments for better class management and discipline) at 27.3% and CP (Learners’ comments on classmates’ postings) at 1.37%.

The chi-square alpha (213.410) and the subsequent X\(^2\) test showed that the p-value was also significant (.000) for the emerged categories (see table 3). To explore the discovered sub-optimum interaction behavior more intensely, and along with the statistical results for the Chi-Square, the achieved results have been more deeply scrutinized below.

### Table 2. Frequency Rates and Chi-Square Results for the Eight Merged Categories from Students’ Postings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interaction categories</th>
<th>Frequency rates and percentages</th>
<th>X(^2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C&amp;LP</td>
<td>15 (4.10%)</td>
<td>213.410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LKE</td>
<td>22 (6.01%)</td>
<td>df. 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RG</td>
<td>89 (24.32%)</td>
<td>Asymp Sig 0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS&amp;C</td>
<td>52 (14.21%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC4CD</td>
<td>10 (2.73%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QO</td>
<td>80 (21.86%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P&amp;RO</td>
<td>93 (25.41%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CP</td>
<td>5 (1.37%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:8</td>
<td>Total: 366</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3. Chi-Square Results on the Emerged Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codings</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chi-Square</td>
<td>213.410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Df</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp Sig</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5.
b. The minimum expected cell frequency is 45.8.

While it has already been claimed that the main CALL programs can be boosted via knowledge diffusion purposes, indirect techniques that were utilized in the current research indicated a contrary to fact among the target group. At first sight, this might show, among other things, low enthusiasm on the part of the participants to make use of this online platform for educational aims. Pedagogically speaking, the findings of this short survey indicate that students of higher education especially those taking GE courses, who are primarily non-English majors, are not yet prepared to properly interact through Asynchronous Web Conferencing for their learning needs. But, a close look might also indicate other hidden reasons for the gained sub-optimum faculty-student interaction patterns.
In response to the proposed question, i.e., for what purposes the target group of the present study made use of Asynchronous Web Conferencing, the rated codes in terms of statistical tabulation in terms of frequency rates showed that the majority of postings (93) messages (equal to 25.41%) belonged to the learners’ comments on various public and religious occasions or P&RO through which the learners had used asynchronous web conferencing not for their educational aims but as in Groom’s (2009) study for socializing aims with the their teacher. Some interpretations are probable. From socio-psychological standpoints, it seems that Iranian learners are more inclined to use this technology mainly for their rapport building with their teacher. Still, another possible reason for the learners to be conspicuous in P&RO category compared with other emerged categories could probably be their desire to lessen their tensions with the language teacher that emanated from their fear and anxiety in English classes due to their lack of language proficiency. This proposition might be justifiable by the fact that nearly in all postings related to P&RO, the learners had revealed their identities that obviously verifies the fact that students were more inclined to use online tools for socializing purposes mainly. In fact, when the teachers addressed the message senders by their names, such bi-directional interaction might have brought about greater satisfaction on the part of the learners that promoted higher motivation for attentively following language courses.

Another finding of this study was the statistical figures on two other core categories associated with (CC4CD) or the same critical comments for classroom discipline and students’ viewpoints on (CC) or the same classmates comments with 2.73% and 1.37% respectively. These two emerged categories could apparently reveal some deficits in critical thinking skills among learners and self-regulatory meta-cognitions to evaluate both themselves and others. This was because compared with other emerged categories, CC was more infrequent in number. Regarding web conferencing skills and strategies, the critical talents for online users are of utmost importance since, as Johnson (2002) asserts, a person without the possibility to search the truth in a load of online resources and subjects to reach one’s goals is at a grave loss. A case in point here is Marandi’s (2014: 19) proclamation that ‘online production requires at least as much critical thinking as online consumption.’

Still, the other emergent category, which ranked the highest after P&RO, was RG. About 24.32% of the postings that had been sent catered for the learners’ requests on their grade promotions or their work reports. The interesting evidence was that the majority of the learners who were absent in online conferring sessions during the terms followed the sent messages after the final grades were announced. This might indicate among other things the students’ sensitivity towards their grades and immediate achievements of the course.

Another category that emerged during the content analysis was that of Q (general questions) that was rated at about 21.86% of the postings. These questions were unrelated to the taught themes of the language lessons and were of many varieties ranging from social issues such as job satisfaction, living in European countries, and studying abroad to matters pertained to logic and philosophy.

Overall and in line with the second research question, the students were the least active in the two categories of LKE i.e. language knowledge enhancements and C&LP or the same curriculum and lesson planning with 6.01 and 4.10% respectively. These two categories are in fact among those target components of CALL programs which, as the statistical results clearly indicated, had been used by the students to the minimum. This might, at first, imply negative connotations for those practitioners trying to extend ‘place to space’ movements concerning CALL programs, but this should not deter us from making further attempts. The fallacious idea that computer alone is enough for CMC aims is apparently true. Learners may require more causes to make best use of online services like web conferencing for their educational development aims. Bax (2003) reported in his article a similar case of a small private language school which had proudly announced the opening of a new computer center with 12 new computers, the latest technology and the latest software. Apparently, four years later, it was almost unused and redesigned to teach computer skills to local businesses.

Why was the facility underused? Interviews with teachers indicated that although a lot of time and money had gone into the purchase of equipment and furniture, all the other crucial factors in successful CALL implementation had been ignored ‘training for teachers, administrative and pedagogical support, integration into the timetable and so on’ (p. 26).

VI. CONCLUSION

This experiment was conducted along with those studies sifting through an individual localized environment which can authentically report a grave problem in CALL studies in EFL settings. This also signposts, among other things, the immediate need of non-English major university students to be guided through CMC tools and services via some compulsory course periods, since in those classes that voluntary online courses are provided as the present research exhibited, the outcome is not always satisfactory. The contribution of compulsory CMC tools for non-English major students gets more pertinent when one considers the positive effects of such tools for promoting inner forces for learning among those involved.

As to inadequacies in CALL programs, some scholars like Stockwell (2008) drew the public attention to the
failure in online programs arguing that such inadequacies might not be directly related to the learners’ lack of preparedness but to their deficiency in skills and expertise to meet the requirements of online tools and services for linguistic development purposes.

As a matter of fact, it is true that in some cases the learners themselves might not be apt and full-fledged users of technology for engaging in such teacher-student interfaces, however such inadequacies might have also been caused by many other factors. The national standards pertained to educational policy makers from above, on the one hand, and the due restraints made on the EFL practitioners, on the other hand, might also give rise to the learners’ low desire to achieve high standards in this regard. Inappropriate utilization of online tools for entertainment only instead of knowledge enhancement and low interest in managing cooperative online tasks that require interacting with other classmates or the language instructor are then current in such a situation.

In an in-depth review by Hart (2012), it appeared that in those online courses, if some factors like ‘a sense of belonging to the learning community’, ‘motivation’, ‘peer, and family support’, ‘time management skills’, and ‘increased communication with the instructor’ did not exist, persistence or success, was hard reaching. By persistence, he meant the attempt made by a student when s/he completed an online course with the required perseverance. Barczyk et al. (2011) also brought the educationalists’ attention towards an atmosphere during online interactions which promoted learning and that was nothing but a rigorous pedagogical practice which was conductive to learning among online course participants.

More recent CMC tools have embedded within their structure features like instant messaging (IM), voice chat and social networking sites, in which textual as well as audio-visual and graphical information are used. Such features, since they are usually practiced to the minimum in EFL situations, can, in effect, promote interaction patterns for non-English major students who lack the necessary skills for proficient interacting. This can be done by orienting these learners to the right track in CMC roads via being more involved in reflective, experiential learning and cooperative learning tasks.

A. Implications of the Study

This study indicated that in EFL settings like Iran, interaction patterns for communicating messages between and among students and their teachers is practiced at a suboptimum level. Social networking systems were mainly used by the students for socialization aims with their teachers which indicated lack of students’ preparedness for making benefit of online resource tools as desired for their educational development. Such claims can still be (re)studied and analyzed by other interested researchers to find the roots of these problems. This could at first signify an immediate attention line for CALL promoters to do further needs analyses for constructing proper online networks to activate students’ motives for using CMC tools and secondly using such resources for EFL settings must be (re)oriented towards defined goals that motivate learners to make best benefit in this regard. Maybe at policy levels changes should be set. The findings in this study were in line with Gunawardena, Lowe and Anderson’s (1997) study in which their Interaction Analysis Model signified how co-construction of knowledge during students’ online collaboration had taken place at lower levels of interactive phases in their ESL situation. Such inadequacies regarding using online resource tools for an EFL setting was also noted and could be taken into more consideration if optimum use is desired by those activists in CALL fields of enquiries.

B. Limitations of the Study

Lastly, the current study had some limitations. Low level of participation on the part of the students, which could at first indicate their indifference toward older modes of CMC textual topographies, led to a lesser amount of data to be analyzed compared with the number of one hundred and fifty registered students in GE classes. The author admits that still more extensive data were needed to be collected. However, to compensate for the few number of postings for data collection purposes, the researcher had to extend the length of the study which this in itself faced her with lots of other variables to consider like maintaining the same conditions for the learners during the three semesters and keeping the logged features on the teacher’s private website. Further research is needed to inquire multiple modes of CMC in ESL settings to justly inquire the true picture of interaction patterns for non-English major students.
REFERENCES


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