The Effectiveness of Online Conversation Classes through the Use of Adobe Connect Live Learning Program

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Abstract: Within foreign language learning (FLL), it is very important to improve the students' speaking skill. Students in beginner levels particularly have a slow tendency to acquire the speaking skill. Various factors explain this inclination. One, in particular, is because of the apprension of speaking and feeling too timid to communicate in foreign language. Speaking is certain in FLL. Therefore, the students need to continue their confidence in a non-threatening environment. The introduction of Adobe Connect Live Learning Program (LLP) between the students in Live Learning conversation classes and the instructor at a language school called, EFINST International House Istanbul has offered good opportunities to these facts. As much as the distance is regarded, LLP usage can acceptedly be compared with a face-to-face conversation. The results reveal that LLP enables the students time to be able to talk and practise a foreign language sooner than anticipated. Furthermore LLP becomes a motivation source for the students providing them provides rich information with the features of online learning. Additionally, the introduction of this online conversation program in FLL opens LL authentic resources and materials' doors. It is also found that the introduction of LLP had valuable effects both as an online classroom which provides good opportunities for the students, and as a great teaching tool used in conversation classes.

Keywords: Adobe Connect, Live Learning Program (LLP), foreign language learning, conversation classes, communicative and authentic resources.

Introduction

In virtue of the possible advantages of technology on learning such as ease of accessibility, cost efficiency, flexibility of scheduling, saving time, money saving option etc., a need for online language learning has become inevitable and the necessity of computer usage has become evident. Language learners have started to use language learning programs based on computer as a new technological tool in foreign language learning (Seljan, Berger & Dovedan, 2004). For a while, educators have acknowledged and accepted computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL).

CALL is a field that has not been fully explored; however, the interest in it is growing with technology regard to education and FL learning. Most importantly, thanks to advances in FL learning on computers, people have searched for more recent technological methods to get better results. The world is rapidly undergoing changes particularly in technology (Beatty, 2010).

Following the development of technology, online language learning has also arisen as a different form of education and a significant supplementary to conventional learning. Computer-assisted education uses the internet and communication technologies as a learning domain of online language classes. These technologies may also define a kind of learning that is enabled with the help of online softwares. (Zemsky & Massy, 2004).

FL learners prefer to take conversation classes as a part of CALL in order to practice their speaking skills in language. In the computer-based English language classrooms, in which learner to teacher and learner to learner interaction occur, it is common for learners who are involved in online conversations to use computer assisted classroom discussions and conversations as a language learning and teaching activity to develop and evaluate their language skills (Beauvois, 1992). Although a learner may be especially competent in reading and writing, his lack of self-reliance and motivation, his fear and possibility of making mistakes while speaking in front of others may affect his verbal skill negatively and create a wrong impression of his ability among group members and affect . Searching the potential of better online learning within the frame of computer-assisted programs in foreign language classes, many researchers (Tao, 1995 & 1996; Peters, 2004; Cantos & Bangs, 2004) agree that it is significant to know how online learning environment is used and the influences of the materials and methods that recognize the differences in learning outcomes as the language develops with the help of computers' assistance (Moore, Dickson-Deane & Galyen, 2011).

Attempts to understand the new opportunities in this field are made regularly by teachers and researchers (Althaus, 1997; McComb, 1994, Kiser, 1999, Atkinson T & Davies G., 2005; Salmon, 2002; Fox & MacKeogh, 2003; Bernath & Rubin, 2003). Despite the extensive literature, there are few experimental studies conducted with online language learning programs specifically addressing conversation areas which still need to be explored. Little is known about how online conversation classes are seen as a learning technique. In the view of this, the main purpose of the study is to identify the effectiveness of online conversation

classes on LLP as computer-assisted communication. In this study, LLP enhanced by Adobe Connect conversational classes is introduced as a part of a language learning program which has substantial goals of improving learners' speaking skills. The results which are obtained from this study may give some suggestions for the teachers and the researchers about whether the conversation classes on LLP with regard to foreign language learning are beneficial in online learning environment or not.

Literature Review

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and its Benefits

Levy (1997) characterizes CALL as the way of searching and studying of computer systems and usages in learning environments. As a new field of education, computer-based technology notably changes learning and teaching process. In the scope of this, CALL involves various information technology sources on FLL within conversations.

Efficient CALL usage in language classes is based greatly on instructors' attitudes on it. Various studies have touched upon this area to examine the benefits of CALL. For instance, Ramanair and Sagat (2007) conducted a study on the teachers' of ELT teachers' background information and attitudes towards multimedia technology and got positive results based on their attitudes derived from the conception of multimedia technology obtained with training or self-directed learning. Additionally, Christie (2001) supported that Computer Assisted Language Learning materials influenced the teachers' attitudes towards language learning because "more class time can be devoted to cognitively more demanding and engaging tasks" (p.511). Umstead (2013) found a positive relation between the language proficiency growth of English language learners and the innovative computer based strategies. Feng (2012) also concluded that CALL contributed to new practices for teachers, enhanced teaching efficiency, and developed educational teaching techniques. As a very effective way, CALL gave opportunities EFL learners to be autonomous learners and effected their motivations positively (Marzban, 2011).

Online Classroom Learning Environment

Sampson (2003) gives a definition to online learning as the ways of distance learning by means of interaction. Holmberg (1989) also indicates that learners choose online learning for the simplicity, flexibility and compatibility of this education type to address their own needs.

Kiser (1999) states that online learning is effectual in removing the obstacles while supplying occasion, personalized learning, authentic material, personalized learning, and supportive feedback in a face to face environment. Online technologies constitute effective ways to use the internet for education and extend learning to a non-threatening and interactive EFL environment (Broad, 1999; Cheon, 2003). Moreover, they provide learners to make them feel free during the communication in a foreign language and minimise their fear of making mistakes.

Previous studies give some evidence to support the advantages of online conversational environments. Mason (1994) argues, "Social and pedagogical issues play by far the bigger part in the creation of a successful online learning environment" (p. 52). Swan et all. (2000) also supported the findings in their study that the technology has developed a phase in asynchronous classrooms which provide valuable learning that is thought more effective than learning in real classes and highlighted student-teacher interactions' importance in these environments. Likewise, Huffaker (2004) suggested that adopting storytelling activities in online interaction gives learners opportunities to tell their ideas freely and reply their classmates' questions.

Online technologies also ensure valuable sources as asynchronous for the language learners while practising foreign language. For instance, Cheon (2003) stated that online technological sites and applications provide learning environments to promote good nonsynchronous interactions for the learners and also revealed that learners communicate from different places in these kind of online environments and they gain enough time to reflect what they learn through online sources students during their communication with other learners. Additionally, these conversations can be recorded constantly on the purpose of getting back to past learnings permanently and can easily be returned to anytime. In conclusion, online environments improve learners' motivation and provide them chances to interact together in foreign language classsrooms.

Online Interaction in Conversation Classes

One of the important element of learning in a computer-based course is the conversations that occur between learner-instructor and learner-learner interactions. Since, the learners are pleased with the feelings of mutual interconnection, confidence and interactive relation

among other learners, they share common aims and values (Davies & Graff, 2005; Rovai, 2002).

Within the frame of conversation classes, online interaction is often through conversation, between the teachers and the learners or with all other learners. Online learning needs some regulations by both teachers and students in order to have valuable interactions to appear in conversation classes. Online language courses also provide interaction through some settings such as computer web applications, conversational rooms, weblogs and mails (Fulford & Zhang, 1993).

These studies focus on useful impacts of online interaction with regards to enhancing learner involvement, developing the standard of conversations in comparison with the interactions that arise in the real classrooms, as well as research on the useful impacts online discussions in order to enchance a virtual community. For example, Citera (1988) supports that online interactions promote more silent learners to join the conversations encourage more silent learners to join the conversations on a large scale. Moreover, Warschauer (1997) also supports online interaction in conversation classes in which the chances of feeling frustration and pressure among language learners is minor in comparison with the ones in real classroom contexts. In view of the above; online interactions support student-centered learning environments, promote further learner participation, and create far-reaching conversations than a face-to-face class does (Karayan & Crowe, 1997; Smith & Hardaker, 2000). The study presented here set out to answer the following three research questions via the observation of the students.

1. Is Live Learning Program on Adobe Connect an effective tool to communicate with the instructor and the Peers during conversation classes?
2. Does LLP help the students improve their English?
3. Does LLP on Adobe Connect present a non-threatening environment for the language learners?

Methodology

The case study conducted by the researcher was designed as a qualitative study to identify the effects of online conversation classes through the use of Live Learning Program on language learners and their attitudes towards online language learning in conversation classes.

Participants

The participants of the survey were four volunteer English language learners (2 male, 2 female), at Pre-Intermediate level studying or working in different cities of Turkey. The demographic descriptions of the participants vary in gender, age, job, educational and experienced years of learning English and taking this English course which consists of this case study.

The students participated in the study had different ages ranging from 18 to 45. Female 1 was a 18- year-old university student and Female 2 was a 45 -year-old pediatrist in a private hospital. Male 1 was a 39-year-old electronics teacher at a Vocational High School, and Male 2 was a 27-year-old lecturer at a state university.

The number of the years in studying English also ranges from 3 years to 6 years and all students were familiar with the use of LLP on Adobe Connect. While choosing the participants, convenience sampling strategy was used in this study. The researcher explained the aim of the study to the participants to assure about the confidentiality.

Instruments

As main instrument, Live Learning Program on Adobe Connect was used in the current study which faciliatates the benefits of online learning to the language learners from the idea of sharing and using networking opportunities within the program. It is widely respected in the field of language teaching as a part of online environment and creates a live non-threatening classroom atmosphere with various enjoyable tasks and authentic materials unlike the traditional ones. The other instruments are learning logs, field notes of the researcher and the interviews done for the qualitative data collection. They are all based on the observations and the notes used to collect qualitative data and gather information regarding the students' attitudes towards LLP in conversation classes.

The results of the field notes and the language logs were used as a guideline to prepare the interviews for the qualitative data collection. The interviews were performed with the four students participating the current study at times convenient to the participant. Each interview lasted almost 20 minutes. Besides, field notes were kept by the researcher during the interview.

Procedure

LLP on Adobe Connect Class Description

The learners participated in LLP on Adobe Connect, as a part of learning the English language with the students of all around Turkey five times a week for fifty minutes. Before each class, the instructor activated the webcam and asked the learners to activate their headphones and microphones as well as to be able to hear the instructor's and other students' voices.

The LLP class offered a brief lesson on the usage of Adobe Connect. Each learner was paired up with another LLP learner to be able to communicate in English for a month. The Peers were assigned by the instructor just before the study.

In each class, the researcher uploaded the course materials on a topic for LLP. The topic was briefly discussed at the beginning of the lesson. Different kinds of topics were used during the classes; introduction, daily routines, lifestyles, culture, history, food, social network, trends, TV shows and holidays. The learners were supported and motivated to 'speak in English' and share their ideas with their Peer during the conversations.

LLP methodology on Adobe Connect

First of all, learners log in the system and talk about their daily routines on the support of the instructor. Once the peers were online, they would talk to each other on a topic using a headphone and microphone. Each peer could hear what their pair says as synchronous, seeing the course materials on the screen. The conversations of the learners were all the time fluent with the help of the supervising instructor becoming as a facilitator during each class.

Data Collection

In this case study, qualitative data was collected. When conversation classes were prepared and the day before the current study, the researcher asked the learners if they would like to join this study. They all voluntarily participated the study. The students were asked for permission to participante a ten minute personal interview which done at the end of this study. The aims of the interviews were to collect information from the learners to increase the validity of the study and to reveal what the they thought about these online conversation classes.

For the purpose of the information gathered from four students, all participants were interviewed and the researcher generated the interview questions to sustain a stability among the participants. The interviews were also recorded on Adobe Connect.

Data Analysis

The personel interviews which included 3 open ended questions were analyzed by the researcher in this study. The repeated words were collected from the learners' responses while the researcher were taking some notes during the interviews and then they were categorised in different areas depending on the data collected from the interviews and the language logs of the learners.

Results

The researcher conducted personal interviews ith the participants asking open-ended questions to wBased on the data gathered from the learners, their responses were categorized in three main areas: LLP on Adobe Connect as an authentic resource, LLP on Adobe Connect as an effective tool to develop self-esteem, and LLP on Adobe Connect as communicative language teaching and learning tool. The researcher tried to find somevaluable results according to learners' perceptions on LLP and its effecrs on their language learning. The study involved language logs and personal interviews investigating the students' views towards LLP.

LLP on Adobe Connect as an Authentic Source

The students viewed LLP on Adobe Connect as an authentic source that extends their language knowledge and improvement in English as much as enhances their self-confidence in learning a foreign language level. The findings are in compatible with the results that online learner-centered environment is more encouraging and increase learner involvement (Citera, 1988; Warschauer, 1997).

Rich Authentic Materials

All learners supported that they had learned the foreign language in a natural and conversational style on authentic materials such as videos, web links, podcasts, audio records, tv commercials which were used as authentic materials on LL classes. The students had learned and practices some topics such as lifestyle, culture, history, food, social network, trends, sports, TV shows, daily routine activities in comparison with their own lives.

The learners also defined the activities they loved the most. As can be understood in the interviews, the activities that the learners loved the most were "LifeStyles" and "Daily Routine Activities" . Their responses regarding the activities they loved most were interesting and enjoyable aspects of the activities. Moreover, one of the important reasons why the learners loved these activities might be that they had a chance to talk about their daily lives and that they often observed them in their life routines. Two participants explained the reason with the following words:

> "Talking about our experiences in our daily routines in the activities was so enjoyable and attractive to say familiar facts that belong to me."

> (Female 1 & Female 2)

On the basis of the reasons why Female 2 and Male 2 enjoyed "Daily Routine" activity most, they commented with the following statement:

> "It was both enjoyable to make a comparison on our lifestyles jointly with my peer."

Female 1 and Female 1 also emphasized the importance of personal interests on the activities. As for the conversation topics, the participants commented as follows:

> "The activities and the materials were related to our own interests and fun with the topics given."

Personal Resource

LLP on Adobe Connect was found to offer a unique experience for the learners. The learners showed admiration of thoughts shared with their pairs. Female 2 explained that:

> "As LLP on Adobe Connect employs spoken style, in that way, this program helped my improvement to practice expressing myself better in."

Moreover, Female 1 and Male 1 reported as follows:

> "I had a good opportunity to say my pair's feeling and I enjoyed "the chance to be able to see the pair's thoughts and ideas goes into a change on different topics in time."

The response of Male 2 emphasized their importance of LL as follows:

> "LLP on Adobe Connect enriched students' thoughts by exchanging feelings as a distance education system and improved positive attitudes to target language and

helped me realize a chance of online learning experience that improves student motivation."

LLP on Adobe Connect as a source to Improve Self- Confidence

All learners stated that " I did not feel pressure, timidity and foolishness when undesirable questions appeared, when I made a mistake, and when it took time to give answers to the questions". The students also said that "it was not so contrasting to speak with an instructor in opposition to talking with a teachers face-to-face ", and there was "no prejudgment regarding the physical environment."

Joining in this non-threatening environment, Female 2 and Male 2 both reported in the interview as follows:

"LLP offers self-confidence us to communicate English in a more non-threatening environment if you believe its positive effects and it is a great opportunity to recognize how much you speak English. In addition, I believe that the self-fulfilment of communicating with the Peer was very reassuring."

In addition, Female 1, the student in high school, reported:

"I was looking forward to attending to LL classroom than the real lessons at school."

Male 1 also commented towards to the program as follows:

"LLP on Adobe Connect was fun as the topics were more interesting and enjoyable and I gained much on my self-confidence by motivating myself to be able to speak in such a non-threatening environment."

LLP on Adobe Connect as a Communication Tool

Synchronous and Unexpectedness

Female 1, Female 2 and Male 1 commended that they enjoyed the synchronous aspect of LLP, such as the instant answers and the opportunity of interpreting what they know about the topics immediately. Male 1 also described the issue as follows:

"I rarely had to push myself hard to respond to our some lessons."

Female 1 described this experience in the following lines:

"As if I was talking with Peer face-to-face and the Peer was expecting for my response at once."

Female 2 appreciated the unexpectedness of LL such as not having an idea on the questions which could be asked when they were at task.

Male 1 commented in a similar respect saying:

"LLP is an immediate, useful communication tool like talking on the phone, feeling comfortable about how to make a conversation and to say something on it."

Language Aspects

Female 1 and Male 2 stated that they could learn several kinds of vocabulary and grammar expressions in the context. In addition, they practised the language making mistakes corrected by the Peers or instructor when necessary. Female 2 commented in her positive statement:

"Pronunciation of the words were much clearer when they were spelled accurately to be able to communicate in a non-threatening environment. Then, I gained more appreciation."

Male 1 reported another aspect saying that:

"I had learned informal structures, casual speech, and conversational English during the communication activities."

Copying Strategies

The learners improved useful conversation strategies within LLP. Although two learners, Male 1, and Female 2 reported trying some expressions or skipping unwords, or replacing the words when they could not know how to communicate during LL's activities, other two learners stated asking their Peer to clarify more when they could not understand what they meant. They considered that "asking the Peer was a faster way of learning" because they were feeling "the Peers were expecting our response just behind the computer". Female 1 stated effectively:

"I could cope with the communication strategies asking different kinds of questions indirectly and develop good communication skills within the practices I did with my Peer."

Female 2 commented with the following statement:

> "I could practice valuable grammar skills on behalf of trying to listen the instructor carefully and to understand what the others essentially meant in the conversation."

Moreover, Male 1 and Male 2 stated that they were experiencing certain misunderstandings during the activities because of " the absense of the body language and the difficulty of interpreting the expressions whether the Peer was making a joke or trying to be serious."

Different learning platform

Female 1 and Male 1 thought LLP as a "unique way of communication", a "unusual kind of learning, and "I was in the care of my own learning and I could learn several new forms on it too". Female 2 supported LLP's comfort and simplicity. Male 2 also reported having discovered new learning strategies through LLP.

To validate the effectiveness of conversation classes, the learners were asked to comment on the aspects of this online platform comparing with a traditional classroom. All the learners agreed that this online interaction was more effective than the one took place in a face-to-face classroom. The comments in regard to the quality of comunication with Peers had distinct findings. According to responses among four language students, practicing English on LLP as a useful component of learning English language skills in the presence of the classmates and peers. Female 2 and Female 1 reported that they were so glad and encouraged by their Peers' statements during the conversations while others were pleased by the instructor's interaction. The most important approval of online communication is concerning the comfort level of attendance. All learners stated that the comfort level of attendence enhanced online interactions. This finding is also in condordance with the results that the online environment is so encouraging and can support more learner participation (Citera, 1988; Warschauer, 1997).

Discussion

When the learners are aware of the differences between thinking and speaking, they show empathy on other learners' language knowledge. (Brown 1994, Ch.7) This study in general, had positive views about online conversations among students. LLP increases a sincere relationship between the students and his peer. It also helps the learners to cope with the problems exhibited by face-to-face learning.

Learners' expectations are important in the learning context because making mistakes becomes visible to other learners while learning grammar and practising pronunciation. The learners were more motivated and enjoyed LLP's natural concept in particular regarding their learning expectation due to the lack of expected face-to-face contexts. Moreover, LLP encouraged continuing authonomus communication via more progressing interactions.

Besides supplying a non-threating environment is considered, positive replies overbalanced the negative ones. Frankola (2001) recommends that motivation occured during LLP contexts and usage of web-based programs make a big contribution to corporate online learning environment.

The learners verbalised the useful aspects of LLP indicating that making mistake was not a matter of concern and they did not correct the mistakes of their peers. Therefore, LL classroom appeared as a beneficial learning tool. Johnson & Morrow (1981) supported that communication activities engage the students to share what they learn and negotiate their interactive relation. Brown (1994) also defines communicative classes as a non-threatening environment in which the learners speak effciently in extemporary contents. Thus, LLP makes useful activities available to the learners.

Learners reported that LL might be a motivating tool to support speaking skill. Additionally, in LLP classroom environment, the learners were encouraged to practise target language via the topics which they were not aware before. According to the findings, LLP can fullfill so many CLT aspects as well. With this kind of langage learning, methods and materials were designed to embark the students on authentic and structural usage of the language (Brown,1994). LL also helps the geographical distance abolish among the learners and gives them opportunities to interact with the others more in order to share what they learn during the conversation lessons.

The effectiveness of LLP as a supporting tool recommends that LL conversation classes can be used in extensive patterns in which especially speaking and listening skills are necessary to be developed. LLP classrooms include various aspects of communication activities to enhance related skills. Besides these skills, all learners stated that they learned several grammar topics and vocabulary patterns through meaningful reading and writing settings. Their responses in the interviews suggest that the learners develop autonomous language skills within LLP.

In this current study, student-centered learning practised with the peers was used as a beneficial source and the learners could develop unique LL conversation strategies. These strategies arised when the learners were in need of clarifying the words they did not know and trying different expressions on the purpose of getting the others' messages. At the end of the month, the learners could successfully interact with their classmates and their peers while using this new learning.

Conclusion

The case study shows that LLP is considerably competent on integration of online learning classes as a new effective tool managed in different levels of language classes. Eventhough the traditional language teaching still plays a part in language classes, the results show that the contributions of LLP presents a different perspective as an effective language instrument. All learners supported that LL supplementation into the classes helped them find themselves in a non-threatening environment. They all participated in the classes as active learners and were motivated with enjoyable activities.

All learners communicated with their peers on the activities using the appropriate language skills and having fun. They stated that they could learn and practise the language well as making conversations with their peers through a computer system in a non-threating environment and find LLP beneficial for their own learning a foreign language. They created a strong relationship with the others who might help their skills develop by overcoming the obstacles on English language.

However, the current study has some limitations, too. According to the learners' needs and interests, much more studies are needed on the application of LLP involving a developer classroom design to improve their language skills. For a further study, It might be necessary to follow an appropriate assessment for LL classes to be able to test the effectiveness of online learning. In addition, enhancing writing skills which do not be developed on LLP need to be supported. The written practice might be carried out along with different classroom activities. LLP can be beneficial if it is applied through other language tools. Formal assessment of the tasks and activities in a written form is a contributory factor to be able to evaluate the learner's performances and to ensure the effects of this language tool. (Judd, T., Kennedy, G. & Cropper, S. 2010).

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Appendix

Interview Questions

1. Is Live Learning Program on Adobe Connect an effective tool to improve your language learning during conversation classes?
2. Do you find LLP on Adobe Connect an authentic resource on your learning?

3. Can you specify the activities you enjoyed the most during the conversations? How effective do you find them?

4. What effects of LLP as a personal resource do you have on your development of practicing English?

5. To what extent does LLP affect you to develop your self-confidence?

6. How do you describe the synchronous and unexpectedness aspects of LLP on your language learning?

7. How do you describe your Live Learning experience in terms of its language aspects and copying strategies?

8. How do you define the aspects of LLP as a different learning platform to the effectiveness of online interaction compared to a traditional classroom experience?

9. How do you explain the effects of working with a peer during communicative activities? Do you find these pair-work activities efficient and useful for learning?

10. Does LLP on Adobe Connect provide a non-threatening environment for you while learning a foreign language ?