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PROMOTING INTERACTIONS IN LEARNING ARABIC LANGUAGE VIA LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

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Abstract
This paper aims at promoting a framework of interactions among learners, instructors, contents and systems via Learning Management System (LMS).These interactions allow Arabic language learners to bridge their existing knowledge with new information and make new meanings through critical comments among peers, teacher's feedback and from the interactive learning content. The common interactive activities in LMS include forum, short video, online quizzes and other tools for interactions. The interactive tools embedded in LMS will only promote effective learning through collaboration among learners. Thus, a thorough critical analysis on the theories related to constructivist and social interaction theory will allow teachers to have strategic plans in delivering online teaching and learning. The main advantage of using LMS is the freedom of teachers to add, change or utilize the system according to the individual learning style and learning needs. This paper will elaborate on the proposed design of interactive learning activities forwarded for teachers to enhance their teaching and learning approaches. An in-depth investigation on literature reviews and meta-analysis will underpin the proposed model of interaction tools designed for Arabic Language teaching.

Keywords: Interaction, Arabic Language, Learning Management System.

1. Introduction

Arabic, in Malaysia, is a foreign language and is being used in the academic setting. However, the study of Arabic for communicative ends is limited compared to the religious and academic utilities for which the language has been designated. In this era of globalization, Arabic should be taught and practiced via web based technology. Web-based instruction has become commonplace in education institutions (Collis, Peters, & Pals, 2000) and as an alternative mode of teaching and learning in higher education. Among the web-based technologies used to facilitate the design, learning track, report students activities and delivery of e-course events is the Learning Management System (LMS).

LMS is a software platform by which online courses can be administered. It is used for delivering, tracking and managing any training or education. The LMS allows teachers and administrators to track, document and report students' activities. LMS also allows students to track grades, submit their assignments and access the course syllabi.

LMS web is developed to meet the needs of institutions with growing online facilities. In most cases, LMS is part of a blended course composed of a combination of face-to-face and online support for students. LMS is designed with four aspects of interactions and it differs considerably from traditional instruction in the way learners interact with their instructors, their fellow students, contents and systems. The popularity of this LMS integration is driven by the practical and pedagogical benefits they are claimed to offer to teachers and learners (Nutta, 2001). Practically, LMS generates chances to deliver the course material in a flexible way, thus making teaching and learning more efficient (Coates, James, & Baldwin, 2005).

The underutilization of technology in a fully online learning setting by both learners and instructors would result in limited interaction. Limited interaction may diminish students' course satisfaction and affect their performance (Noel-Levitz, 2011). The more learners interact with the teachers and their peers, the more they are engaged in online learning (Veletsianos, 2010).

Previous studies highlight the impact of interactive dimension on e-learning. For example, Bouhnik & Marcus (2006) provide an analysis of previous literature that led to the understanding of the interactive

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components of e-learning, but they never discuss how the interaction can enhance second language acquisition. Cho & Kim (2013) explores a broader scope by examining variables that explain students' self-regulation (SR) for interaction with others in online learning environments in general. Those variables include demographic information, perceived importance of mastering content, perceived importance of interacting with the instructors, perceived importance of interacting with peers, and perceived instructors' scaffolding for interaction. Kuo, Walker, Schroder, &Belland (2014) investigate the relationship between the interaction dimension and students' satisfaction in online courses. In their study, they try to find which type of the three interactions (student, teachers, and contents) best predict students' satisfaction in online courses. Limited studies investigated on the interaction in second language via Learning Management System. Kamaruzzaman Ismail & Norazah Mohd Nordin (2012) develop and evaluate a prototype of Web-based Basic French courseware (EASIFRENCH) for Basic French subject at diploma level. The findings show the design aspects, the aspects of interactivity, content organization and integration of multimedia elements enhance the development of this software. Their studies focus on the development of software and there is lack of discussion on students' interaction and learning management system related to students learning Arabic. Therefore, this study promotes a framework of interactions among learners, instructors, contents and systems via learning management system and provides the teacher with many interesting tools to improve the teaching and learning process, and encourages students to reinforce their abilities and knowledge in a user friendly, stimulating manner.

2. Theoretical Background

This study uses Vygotsky' Social Constructivist and Social Interaction theory as the theoretical background. Social Constructivist theory focuses on the importance of the social context for cognitive development, meanwhile Social Interaction theory emphasizes the role of social interaction.

2.1 Social Constructivist Theory

Humans as social beings interact in various communities to get some information and knowledge. According to Vygotsky (1978), knowledge is developed through learners' interaction and collaborations with other learners. He stresses that language and communication are vital to the "cognitive development", or learning, and that the rate of development must be tailored to the students and their own communication proficiency and sociocultural context. To Vygotsky, learning is achieved through language. People use language to solve problem and at the same time, acquire the help of others.

Social constructivists maintain that learners can grip the concepts and ideas that they do not know or understand on their own with the assistance of the experts or peers who are more knowledgeable. Learners are required to be actively involved in learning activities. The activities they are involved in must be directly related to their real life (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989).

From the principle of constructivist above, it is clear that learning in the brick-and-mortar classroom would not be possible. Teachers need to employ virtual learning environments and collaborative learning to enhance the potential of language learning and other subject matters.

2.2 Social Interaction Theory

Vygotsky (1978) argues that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the learning process. Learners construct the new language through socially mediated interaction. Vygotsky views interaction as an effective way of developing skills and strategies. In an online setting, effective teaching depends on a thorough understanding of the nature of interaction and how to facilitate interaction through technologically transmitted communications. Moore (1989) identifies three types of interactions that may affect online learning: (a) student-content interaction, (b) student-instructor interaction, and (c) student-student interaction. Bouhnik & Marcus (2006), has introduced the fourth dimension which is student-system interaction.

Student-Content Interaction refers to student engagement with the content or subject matter that is presented to him or her. Moore (1989) defined student-content interaction to be "the process of intellectually interacting with the content that results in changes in the learner's understanding, the

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learner's perspective, or the cognitive structures of the learner's mind" (p. 2). To Moore, without this type of interaction, education cannot occur. Learning experience becomes more meaningful and valuable for a learner if the form of interaction between the learner and the content is properly selected.

Student–instructor interaction involves a reciprocal communication between the instructor and students such as counsel, support and encouragement (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). After presenting the content, the instructor helps the students in interacting with it by inspiring the students' interest in the subject and motivating them to learn. The instructor may also interact with the students in a way which prevents them from misguided by monitoring them via special tools that the online technology offers. Moore & Kearsley (2012) stress that through online learning, instructors have a real opportunity to enter into a dialogue with each student because each student's response to a certain presentation is different, and so the response by the instructor to each student is also different. Student–instructor interaction is the most important factor impacting student satisfaction (Bolliger & Martindale, 2004) and the only required interaction in student learning (Battalio, 2007).

Student–student interaction involves a two-way reciprocal communication among students, with or without the presence of an instructor. By interacting with fellow students, students can exchange ideas with and get feedback from each other (Anderson, 2003; Moore, 1989). Student's interest and motivation can be enhanced through peer interaction using asynchronous or synchronous tools (Moore, 1989). Engaging in peer interaction propels students to construct ideas deeply, and increases achievement (Anderson, 2003).

Student-system interaction refers to the accessibility of the modern technology for the learners and the instructors when using an e-learning system (Bouhnik & Marcus, 2006). The system offers the learners and instructors instruments for interacting. These instruments can help the instructors in monitoring the learners and their progress. For example, learners may use discussion forum to share their views and do discussion with their peers and teachers. They also can use email to contact the teachers or their classmates individually. This form of interaction can be used when a learner feels the need to ask for more information without unveiling his or her request to the other learners and without the need of adjusting the instructor's schedule.

3. Interaction Tools inLMS

3.1 Synchronous and Asynchronous Online Discussions

Synchronous and asynchronous online discussions are similar to forum and chat and are created to bring online students to share their opinions and suggestions. These facilities aim at enhancing the interaction between students and students, and students and instructors. The students can interact with each other regarding the subject matters. To make discussion become more meaningful, instructors should put a question in the forum and chat, and let students discuss it in small groups as it may increase interactivity (Kim, 2013).The instructors can view students' conversations in the forum and chat, and these enable them to see the language used by the students and also become aware of which part of the courses students are experiencing difficulties and which parts are deemed easy.

3.2 Online quizzes

Online quizzes are very helpful in the process of learning. They are set up to actually test learners' knowledge on language learning and to help them retain and remember information. Online quizzes are usually used to test Arabic reading skills and students' knowledge of syntax and morphology. Online quizzes allow learners a chance to revise the ineffective ones and recall more materials. Learners can take online quizzes from anywhere and they will receive immediate feedback and know their grade promptly. After submitting the quizzes, learners may view the answer scripts. When the learners do not understand the meaning of the words (e.g. they found new words), they may ask Google or their friends via online forum or chat (Facebook, etc.).This kind of interaction creates a collaborative learning environment that encourages the use of more social computing among learners and group members (Gay, Stefanone, Grace-Martin, & Hembrooke, 2001).

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3.3 Online Submission of Assignments

Online submission offers faster transportation of assignment than the traditional method. All students will have the same deadline when submitting their assignments. All assignments are maintained in a single location and is accessible from anywhere with an internet connection.

3.4 Online Assessment and Feedback

Online assessment plays an important role in assessing students online. It can easily track learners' learning activities. Kerka & Wonacott (2000) propose that online assessment should be conducted continuously and interactively. In online assessment, instructor plays the role of a facilitator, and provides learners with immediate feedback. Gaytan & McEwen (2007) stress that notice that provide instant feedback in online assessment is important. This immediacy recommends that understanding strategies of teaching and students' learning style is crucial among instructors before they start teaching online.

3.5 Flipped Classroom – Video Tool

The flipped classroom is a pedagogical model in which the typical lecture and homework elements of a course are reversed. What used to be homework (assigned problems) is now done in class with teacher offering more personalized guidance and interaction with students, instead of lecturing. Flipped classroom contributes a more collaborative and cooperative in the teaching process. It puts more responsibility for learning on the shoulders of the students while giving them greater impetus to experiment. Students learn new contents by watching short video lectures at home before the class session. Quizzes will be embedded into the video recording and students must answer the quizzes while watching the lecture video. Students are also encouraged to discuss the contents in the video in the forum discussion room.

4. Proposed Model

Based on the theoretical background and instruments used in LMS, a model was developed. The model (Figure 1) highlights the relationship between interaction tools and students' learning. Interaction tools consist of online discussion forum and online chat, online quizzes, online submission of assignment, online assessment and feedback and video recordings. With proper management, small group discussion via online forum and chat may enhance students' learning. Online forum and chat can be empowering for reserved students who prefer more "space" to formulate responses and opinions through short essay writing. Once the students completely answer the online quizzes, they provide students to be better prepared for exam, engaged with the course material, and to be prepared for class. Online assessment should provide instant feedbacks to the students so that they know their progress, aware of where they have done well and indicate what they could improve on, as well as justifying the grade/mark of assessments. Assessment can be interactive when instructors make comparison between learners' answer and the correct answer and suggest remediation. The flipped classroom puts more responsibility for learning on the shoulders of students while giving them greater impetus to experiment. Activities such as watching videos and making notes can be student-led, and communication among students can become the determining dynamic of a session devoted to learning through hands-on work.

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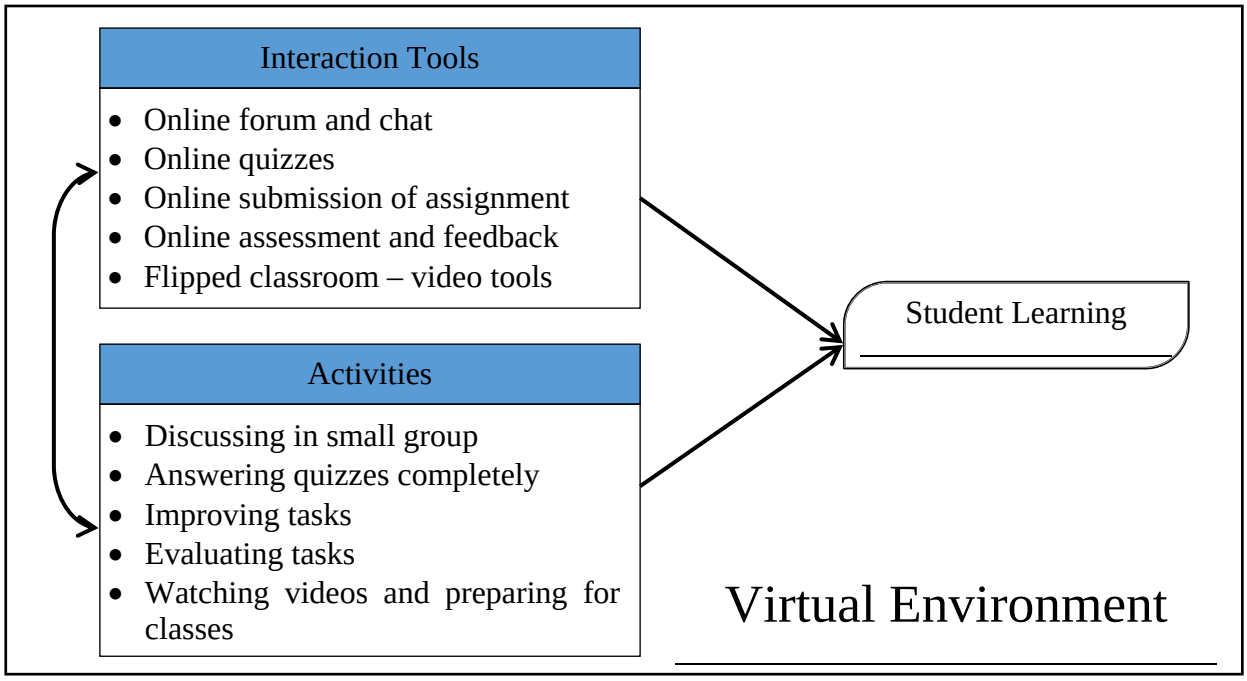

Figure 1: The Model illustrates the relationship between the interaction tools, learning activities and students' learning

5. Conclusion

In this article, we propose a theoretical framework of Arabic learning via Learning Management System. The main factors for the success of online courses are the element of interactions and learning through activities. When both of them take place effectively in an online course, the learners' satisfaction and positive outcomes are achieved. Online courses provide an active learning environment and this shift in learning process can transform pedagogy with the use of online technologies. Social interactions between instructors and students and among students themselves are required to develop the communicative skills in language learning. In the rapid development of technology, the application of synchronous and asynchronous learning tasks are practical.

In line with the Social Interaction and Social Constructivist theories, language learning should be action oriented where language is learned through collaboration and interaction. Learners would have more chance for self-study, interaction and collaboration. In asynchronous learning environments, for instance, learners would benefit by having time for research and acquire the necessary skills for further knowledge construction. The acquisition of these social and interactive skills would contribute to their development of more confident, pro-active, responsible and social individuals.

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