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LESSONS LEARNED FROM EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING DURING THE PANDEMIC: WHAT IS MISSING?

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Introduction

Teaching online classes is not always easy. When the government called for the implementation of online classes at the beginning of the 2020 pandemic, I designed some online classes. Out of eight modules, these online classes were more dominated with asynchronous activities (70%) than those of synchronous one (30%). In the asynchronous class, every week my students accessed all study material and conducted discussions and work on project assignments via the MS Team learning management system. The following week, I scheduled a teleconference meeting with the students. Sadly to know, I was a quite surprised with the results of the evaluation of my teaching performance at the end of the semester. Most of the students complained about my online teaching. Some said that they had got too many assignments to complete. Some others mentioned that they got little feedback, and encountered with learning difficulties, etc. Learning from the results of this evaluation, I realized that I had to improve my performance. What I personally believe about good online classes has been proven to become somehow ineffective.

Running online classes during a pandemic is one of the best options. This choice always includes two inevitable sides. The negative side may include high-cost Internet packages, uncooperative learners, low attendance of learners, teachers' technology confidence, limited availability of educational resources, lack of ICT knowledge, and poor network infrastructure (Noor, Isa, & Mazhar, 2020). Sepulveda-Escobar and Morrison (2020) mention the lack of direct interaction with learners and the sudden change of setting are among those that most strongly have affected the participants' own learning process. However, the sudden shift to online learning during the pandemic has prompted teachers to adapt to e-learning teaching and learning environment and simultaneously become more creative when it comes to teaching students to become digitally and technologically literate (Marshall & Ward, 2020). In short, the success of this online class belongs to a lot of parties starting from the government, school principals, teachers, to parents (Rasmitadila, et al., 2020).

Lessons Learned in the Emergency Remote Teaching

I reflect on the results of my evaluation last semester. I finally have come to the conclusion that my students have lost a golden moment in learning, namely, the interaction to exchange ideas or get information directly from me. Heckart, et al. (2020) said being present (synchronously) teaching the lesson is the best option to encourage that interaction so that we as teachers get more participation. Organizing these activities synchronously also compensates students' desire to meet other students. They enjoy seeing and interacting with each other online in our sessions. Promoting interactions as facilitated by synchronous activities is the necessity not only to convince students of our attention as teachers but also to ensure the presence of quality teaching and learning process. Departing from this awareness, I have changed my teaching strategy to spend more time with my students interacting in online classes. From the results of interviews and evaluations of the student open forum, they have expressed satisfaction with my strategy. Below are some tips about how I enhance interaction with my students, and I hope that they find them useful for their online classes.

Drawing Attention

Learning something new requires attention from the students. They have to read the material and even listen to the explanation from the teacher. Susman (2021) defines attention as the ability to process detailed information. People' ability to process and store this information is very limited in terms of capacity and duration. Cognitive Load Theory (CLT) has extensively discussed the phenomenon of limited working memory capacity of humans in processing information through the triarchy theory of cognitive process: dual channel, limited working memory capacity and active processing (Sweller, 2004). Therefore, it is important for teachers to optimize the attention of students in a limited time by providing the essence of the lesson while carefully eliminating other irrelevant elements such as background music, animation, flowery speeches (Sweller, Chandler, Tierney, & Cooper, 1990).

Interleaving

The way I teach online classes is relatively straightforward. I only present important points in my teaching material. During the teleconference, I avoid giving too much new information presented at once such as long lists of words or a large number of PowerPoint slides. I believe it is likely to result in information overload and a failure to encode much of the information to memory. Instead, learners must at least devote attention to the task at hand in order to process new meaningful concepts at all.

I sometimes consider extending the duration of topics rather than teaching them in an intensive block, and / or conducting review and extension after a time delay rather than immediately after the topic is first taught. It will occur to many teachers that interleaving of new target learning items can be difficult and lead to confusion. When I teach anything intensively, such as revising a topic several times within a weekend, this will only lead to more rapid forgetting than introducing a delay. Cepeda et al. (2008) said that information is better remembered if there is a larger rather than smaller interval between the first time it is studied and the second. Therefore, having two study sessions spaced apart will be far more effective than a single session - in fact, the larger the gap, the better, within certain limits. In short, a time delay before restudy changes the context, boosts attention, and gives the learner more time to consolidate the first learning event via sleep. It also allows more time for forgetting, which (counterintuitively) might actually be helpful, because it makes the second study session more effortful, leading to it having a bigger impact (Pyc & Rawson, 2009).

Using Personalized Approach

Using more personalized language is one of the most effective strategies to attract students' attention. Personalized means a way to make the classroom more real or closer to our daily lives that students can relate to or feel directly. With a personalized approach, I use examples in everyday life. In addition, using informal language or mentioning the names of our students are other examples of the personalized approach. This personalized way can have an impact on the emotional aspects of students. Emotion also plays a key role in prompting attention. Pupils tend to pay more attention to things that attract them on an emotional level - from amusement to curiosity, and even disgust. Things that are funny, surprising or rude tend to be better remembered than things that are bland or repetitive. This does not mean that we need to shock our learners every day or that everything has to be funny, but we should be wary of making the presentation of content overly standardized. In short, personalising topics by

presenting them via real-life stories can also help to boost attention and engagement. It certainly helps to make things relevant to individual learners, activating their schemas and finding analogies that they can relate to.

Start the Lesson with the Questions

Giving questions that challenge their critical thinking. Catching learners' attention involves stimulating curiosity via simple strategies. One example is to avoid starting lessons with a set of facts, but instead to begin with the questions or problems. This is a kind of hook that arouses their curiosity and trains their critical thinking power. For example, in TEFL class, I ask my students, "What makes students cheat on the test?" Most of them never expected this question to be asked at the beginning of the lesson. However, asking questions at the beginning of the lesson proved to be effective in creating interactions between me and my students.

In online classes, I try not to assign too many assignments to students. It's not that I underestimate the quality of assignments. However, giving assignments that they lacked was not a wise choice. Giving too many assignments resulting in students' shortage of sleeping hours sleep is something that teachers should avoid. On the other hand, homework should be designed to be as brief as possible, to avoid learners having to stay up late working on it. We as teachers cannot have much control over student sleep or lesson timing, but we should encourage good and regular sleep habits.

Retrieval Practice

I always give quizzes or small tests to students after teaching online via teleconference. Of course, I gave them enough time to ask me questions or give them the opportunity to review the current course material. They need sufficient time to consolidate the new knowledge they receive. After that, I gave them a little test using Socrative or Google Form.

I have certain reasons to explain why I gave the test to my students. This is retrieval technique (Smith & Firth, 2018). In general, the term retrieval can be interpreted as the term used to mean accessing our memories and recalling the facts and skills and include prior knowledge/experience: performing a piece of music, making a link between new information and something previously studied, or answering a multiple-choice question are all examples of retrieval. Related to my online class, giving a retrieval exercise in the form of this small test is as a study strategy - people learn better when they are tested than when revising more passively. As a learning strategy, this is commonly known as retrieval practice, and is considered one of the most effective educational interventions (Dunlosky et al., 2013), along with spacing. It should be noted that the use of retrieval practice is not the same as formative assessment - a method of using performance to identify weaknesses and priorities (although the two can complement each other). Retrieval practice helps because the active use of learned information appears to consolidate that memory and make it less likely to be forgotten (Karpicke et al., 2014).

Conclusions

The pandemic has made education practices shift into remote teaching. In spite of challenges, this education change opens wide opportunities for teachers to increase their professional development through the adaptation and adoption of technology as tools for instruction delivery. Regardless of instruction delivery channels, teachers should never neglect the importance of the interaction. Through the interactions, teachers help students learn new knowledge and build emotional connections with all members in an online community. Like in a traditional class, teachers teaching a remote class should monitor students' learning progress, maintain quality discussion through question-and-answer sessions, provide regular feedback, and help low achievers with some extra attentions, etc. Interaction helps the learners to share and acquire knowledge from different yet rich information sources such as teachers, materials and peers.

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Bio

Daniel Ginting received his doctorate in English Language Teaching from State University in Malang (2015). He is a member of the IMOOC (Indonesian Massive Open Online Course) module development team, a program initiated by the Regional Language Official (RELO) of the American Embassy, 2016-2017. In 2018, he was the specialist responsible for facilitating IMOOC instructors. In 2020, he and a team of lecturers from State Surabaya Technology Institute University of ITS Sepuluh November developed the Massive Open Online Course for Non-academic staff. Daniel is currently the editor in chief of Klausa journal, and a reviewer for Humaniora ITS 10 Nopember Surabaya journal, Sage Open, MEXTESOL and Lenguas En Contexto.

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