



Online Language Instruction with Meaning-Making Track

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ABSTRACT

*The advent of distance education elicits new challenges and issues in learning/teaching English as a foreign language. The nexus of language acquisition with online resources and tools is evident in a fast-paced and technological society. The publication reflects a broad array of studies in methodology of teaching English. The investigation touches upon sense-making techniques in the language awareness. A foreign language should become a personal need for students allowing them to set goals, choose language improvement strategies, and exercise self-esteem and self-control. The current paper delineates online language instruction focusing on meaning-making track. **Meaning-making track** is the system of meaningful and engaging technologies with the focus on personal relevance of learning English as a foreign language for individual development, boosting their transferrable skills and learner autonomy. A battery of activities with practical implementation in MMT has been devised. Against the backdrops of research, the experiment was carried out. The pool of participants was 60 tertiary students at Southern Federal University, Russia. The cohort was divided into two groups, experimental one (n=30), and control group (n=30). All of them were subject to online delivery. Experimental trainees studied the English language using meaning-making track, while the control counterparts were involved in the online content-based tuition. The substantial body of data that rest on research serves to demonstrate that motivational dynamics of experimental group has grown compared to the control group. Through this type of research, we proved that leveraging meaning-making techniques enhance intrinsic motivation of e-learning of a novel language. The study has proved that both groups have increased all their cognitive and linguistic assets and fluency in the meaning-making track. The achieved results make it possible to utilize off-the-wall Internet technologies to stimulate learner autonomy.*

Key-words: *meaning-making track, online language instruction, English as a foreign language, intrinsic motivation, active technologies.*

1. Introduction

The corner stone of open education system is distance learning, which provides the idea of life-long education. Modern information society is inconceivable without Internet. "Computers are an extraordinary resource for teachers, they are a vital and potent tool, they offer a library of resources so vast it defies the imagination, and nearly all students love using them" [12]. Unequivocally, distance learning and teaching English as a foreign language has become ubiquitous among tech-savvy users. Leveraging multi-media in teaching EFL is widely promulgated. At present, a number of foreign language lecturers at the tertiary level had to switch from in-person setting to remote teaching. As more instructors have become involved in online learning, they have realized that much that has traditionally been done in class can be done equally well or better online [2]. Another champion of the similar idea is Lebedeva [10] who deems distance interactive learning technologies as effective methods for developing students' independent activities with the goal of forming various educational and professional competences.

In the light of some conceptual overlap between traditional versus online delivery and constructs subsumed within them, the student-teacher engagements are critically important. The effectiveness of teaching depends on the methods of instruction being used. Notwithstanding the mode of teaching (e-learning, face-to-face instruction, or blended learning), a mastery of a teacher plays a crucial role. A wealth of research ascertains that a person can assimilate 10% of information with the help of organs of hearing, 50% visually, and 80% in the process of individual work. Since there is no moment of psychological contact between the teacher and the student, the structure of perception and understanding of the material changes, the means of perception from the auditory ones change dramatically -in the traditional education, the visual - in the distance learning. [1]. Kasatkina [8] bolsters the idea that "the personal relevance of this or that piece of information also has a crucial significance for the assimilation as well as possibility to incorporate it in a personal experience".

Delaney et.al. [4] highlights 9 traits that are quintessential for effective online teaching:



- 1) Mutual respect for the students.
- 2) Instructional competence.
- 3) Approachability.
- 4) Engaging attitude of the instructor.
- 5) Responsiveness to a students' query.
- 6) Organized nature of presentation of the subject materials.
- 7) Feedback on the evaluations.
- 8) Professional and humorous approach of a teacher inside and outside of the classroom.
- 9) Strong communication skills from the instructor's part.

Savery [13] espouses the **VOCAL** approach in online instruction, which is an acronym for **Visible, Organized, Compassionate, Analytical, and Leader-by-example**. Each of these traits provides a stimulating learning environment. Yang & Cornelious [16] posit the instrumental difference between the online and face-to-face delivery. As the traditional course transforms into an online course, the role of a teacher changes from the disseminator of knowledge to that of a facilitator. Underexplored issues served as a springboard for discussions of what the future holds for the framework of language instructors' digital competence.

Nobody ever doubted the power and prepotency of the English language as the global language of communication, business, travel, etc. In Russia, English as a foreign language (EFL) is being learnt since the elementary form at school till tertiary University courses. The present finding aims to unravel how the engaging strategies and effective use of the Internet stimulate the language environment.

Novel questions have just emerged from this increased attention to innovative technologies in e-learning a target language. New emphasis on sense-creative technologies is enshrined and supported the process of transition from traditional methods of teaching to innovative ones. [14,15]. We attempted to ameliorate the target language skills and increase the intrinsic motivation by adopting meaning-making track. **Meaning-making track** is the system of the off-the-wall technologies with the focus of personal relevance of learning English as a foreign language for individual development, boosting their transferrable skills and learner autonomy. In this effect, with meaning-making track we change the priorities and form sense-creative approach, the bedrock goal of which is to place students in the stimulating and enlightening setting when one feels the intrinsic necessity to acquire knowledge and follow their educational track. The seminal principle of choosing the activity/track is contingent on the meaning a person infer in the matter. A trainee should be knowledge-conscious and put the sense in the study. Thanks to meaning-making track in learning a foreign language, students acquire transferrable skills in the domains where the foreign language will be vital. All in all, **meaningful methods** in learning and teaching EFL are such interactive methods as creating meaningful web pages, project-based computer assisted language learning (PBCALL), debates, role-plays, creative writings/ essays, academic controversy, thought-provoking assignments, critical thinking, technology-enhanced flipped classroom, language portfolio, case-studies, etc. All these activities can also add extra motivation for students because they offer students the opportunity to use language skills in a new and challenging way [5]. All the authors are monolithic in their theoretical stances about the key language skills of the 21st century incorporating **4Cs**, i.e. **Creativity, Critical Thinking, Communication, and Cooperation** [11].

Prioritizing online language instruction, we propose the author's classification of meaningful techniques in distance education.

Table 1. Meaning-making track (MMT) in e-learning/teaching English as a foreign language

No	Type of MMT	Goals	Practical Use
1	MMT of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to overcome the distortions in mutual perceptions • to use verbal and non-verbal cues to observe the emotional states 	Success stories life-value orientation Metaphor description Information Gap Activities
2	MMT of communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to break down psychological barriers of speaking English • to understand consistent patterns of communication 	Presentation Role-plays Conference Gamification



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to get feedback 	
3	MMT of creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to figure out issues under consideration • to draw up diagrams, charts 	Project-based computer assisted language learning (PBCALL) Infographics Meaningful web-pages
4	MMT of problematic character	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to teach patterns and cliché of expressing one's opinion • to analyze and evaluate the facts • to formulate the hypothesis, to identify the lack of information 	Problem-solving Critical thinking Thought-provoking assignments
5	MMT of self-regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to reflect on the educational content • to diagnose difficulties which occur while learning a language • to mark progress 	Technology-enhanced flipped classroom Language portfolio Essays

Distance and electronic technologies open up new possibilities, augment resources and expand new practices. Distance education change the methodology of language instruction, and the tuition becomes more flexible.

2. Materials and Methods

In the empirical study a cohort of 60 full-time distance students of Southern Federal University in Russia took part. The sample was divided into two groups: 1) Group A (control) group (n=30) studied English under content-based curriculum in distance education. 2) Group B (experimental) group (n=30) implemented meaning-making track employing engaging technologies in online instruction. Against the backdrops of the research, we analyzed motivational dynamics of e-learning of English using MMT. We tested three criteria: 1) L2 awareness; 2) intrinsic motivation; 3) communication motivation. We hypothesize that meaning-making techniques can enhance motivation to learn a target language.

At the first stage, the current study involved administering questionnaire BALLI (Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory) by Horwitz [7]. The questionnaire includes 31 points to evaluate students' stance in five global domains: 1) difficulties of language learning 2) the English language aptitude, 3) the nature of language learning, 4) learning and communication strategies, and 5) linguistic motivation. In this part of the experiment a person-centered data analytic approach was used.

For revelation of motivation profile, the questionnaire by Douglas Brown "Strategies of Learning English" [3], and the questionnaire by Michael Harris [6] were used. The participants were asked to estimate their motivational strategies of learning EFL. Further on, the subjects were asked to fill in the questionnaire "Sense-creative strategies in learning a foreign language" [14,15]. The questionnaire included 3 units consisting of various statements: 1) metacognitive strategy (developing ability to manage time, self-study, and learner autonomy); 2) cognitive strategy (developing the skills of using the effective learning methods); 3) socio-affective strategy (developing social skills, a student-teacher interaction).

In the second stage, the respondents of the experimental group were exposed to meaning-making techniques during online instruction. They were to create meaningful webpages, participate in project-based computer assisted language learning (PBCALL). Also, grammar material was scrutinized in a technology-enhanced flipped classroom.

Quantitative data were analyzed employing the Mann-Whitney U-criterion and Pearson Correlation analysis.

3. Results

Table 2. Comparison of factors of Group A (control) in the content-centered instruction



(mean ± standard deviations)

Variable	Group A Control	Dynamics	P-value
L2	5,63 ± 1,16	29,59%	<0,0001
Awareness	6,00 ± 1,29	26,67%	<0,0001
Motivation	5,17 ± 1,05	30,97%	<0,0001
Communication			

The results of the finding in the traditional content-based online instruction showed that language skills (L2 awareness) are in accordance with students' level (A2-B1). However, communication parameter has increased due to a raft of discussions, problem-solving and other speaking activities. The dynamics of motivation to learning English in the control group A plummeted due to constraints and the paucity of innovative technologies and tasks.

Table 3. The performance of Group B (experiment) in the meaning-making instruction (mean ± standard deviations)

Variable	Group B Experiment	Dynamics	P-value
L2	8,73±0,98	60,74%	<0,0001
Awareness	9,03±1,22	60,36%	<0,0001
Motivation	8,63±0,93	66,03%	<0,0001
Communication			

We analyzed the dynamics of the outcome scores in two groups under study before implementation of meaning-making instruction and after the experiment. To support our claims, we have referred to observations and data in the experimental group. All indicators have changed dramatically. The analysis allows to make assertions about the way language works superb in Group B (increased to level B2). Compared to the Group A (Control) intrinsic motivation skyrocketed. As contrasted with Group A, communication dynamic parameter boosted as well.

4. Discussion

In the present research, we conducted multiple studies to identify and examine how language learning in the meaning-making instruction affect motivation. We administered different language and motivational testing to two samples of respondents before pivoting to practice meaning-making strategies, such as critical thinking tasks, debates, thought-provoking activities, etc. The advantage of engaging activities produces certain outcomes. The study has proved that both groups have increased all their cognitive and linguistic assets and fluency in the meaning-making track. Every participant could choose their own meaningful track by compiling the activities and technologies appropriate for the channel of information perception, individual profit, and learner autonomy. In the same vein, students could establish individual style in group activity like MMT of group unity and think "outside the box". Novel questions have thus emerged from the increased attention to online language instruction leveraging innovative Internet tools.

Beyond this, students of distance learning are more independent in their choice and self-regulation (MMT of self-regulation). Project-based computer-assisted language learning (PBCALL) and creating web pages turned out to be very motivating since students had personal contribution to it, and they saw the results. Although there are many similarities between PBCALL and traditional project work, while using technology, students have higher expectations in terms of their participation and control over the activity [9]. Be that as it may, students were eager to explore how to use technology more effectively.

5. Conclusions



The dearth of research in the field of enhancing motivation in online language instruction allowed us to carry out the longitudinal study and make the following conclusions. The current insightful finding introduced the meaning-making track to the effective e-learning of English as a foreign language.

1. Meaning-making track and cognitive motivation gained a fresh acceptance with the reawakening of distance education. Knowledge management is the most over-arching of all the skills.
2. We have come to find the benefits of e-learning are profound and the drawbacks are tenuous. The study released the data of correlational analysis of content-based online instruction and MMT in distance education. We proposed the system of meaning-making technologies in e-learning of the target language.
3. The role of student development in independent study is crucial in the educational process. A trainee is to make important strides towards understanding how to study under the selected individual track implying personal relevance.

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