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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>Chan, SYS; Lin, AMY; Lo, YY; Tavares, NJ; Lai, H</td>
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Access to English Medium Education through Blended Learning at Higher Education in Southeast Asia

The MEd LAC Team
(Simon Chan, Angel Lin, Yuen Yi Lo, Nicole Tavares & Kelly Lai)*
Faculty of Education, University of Hong Kong
Introduction

• Globalization ➔ English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) ➔ Need for developing formal/academic English literacy

• Multiple semiotic resources scaffolding students’ content learning (Kress, et al., 2001).

• Blended learning: mixed-mode, hybrid-, or web-enhanced learning (Miller & King, 2003) integrating traditional face-to-face instruction with online communication
Literature Review

• Web-based communication tools in blended education studied, ranging from Moodle (Deng & Tavares, 2013), Facebook (Deng & Tavares, 2013; McCarthy, 2013), blogs (Deng and Yuen, 2011; Dickey, 2004; Wopereis et al., 2010), to Web 2.0 technology (Crook, 2008; Deng & Tavares, 2015).

• Little research on real-time and interactive communication tools such as Skype

• Less attention paid to the programme level (than individual classes) while evaluating the effectiveness of blended learning (Ayala, 2009; Phipps & Merisotis, 1999).
Research questions

• Q1: What are the experiences of a foreign student in using Skype for classroom learning? Are there any difficulties or challenges in using Skype in blended learning?

• Q2: What are a group of MEd LAC students' perceptions of utilizing Moodle as an online communication tool such as Moodle and Skype for mixed-mode instruction?

• Q3: How do instructors help geographically-diverse learners fulfil the same task in a blended learning context?
Theoretical framework

**Figure 1**: Knowledge and identity in relation to pedagogic practice (Martin & Rose, 2012, p.314)
Figure 2: Adapted pedagogic model (Martin & Rose, 2012, p.314) in a blended learning context
Methodology

• Research design: qualitative and exploratory case study
• Research context: an English medium university in Hong Kong
• Participants:
  1) Four instructors who have been teaching the MEd LAC program for four years,
  2) one PhD student who was auditing the core courses of the program,
  3) 26 MEd LAC students: ① fresh undergraduate students from Mainland China; ② in-service HK local teachers of English, content-subject teachers conducting their lessons using English as the medium of communication; ③ one Thai student who holds an MSc. degree attained from a university in Thailand and experienced Skype classes.
Methodology

• Data collection: ① semi-structured individual interviews with students, ② instructors’ reflections, ③ participant observation, ④ online artifacts.

• Data analysis: Thematic data analysis was used to examine the teachers’ reflections, the interview data collected from the learners, and observation data.
A) Instructors’ efforts in promoting blended learning via Moodle

1) Maximising the Use of Moodle as a Learning Platform
   ① The function of a ‘glossary’ on Moodle
      • connecting the students at the start of the course,
      • cultivating a more cohesive and hence collaborative learning atmosphere (Bates, 2005; Dawson, 2006; Yuen, et al., 2009)
      • advocating their appreciation of individual differences (Graff, 2003) or learning styles (Parkinson, et al., 2003),
   ② Needs analysis
   ③ Private discussion forum

(Notes in the screenshots of a course Moodle interface: A. An example of a ‘Random Glossary’ entry; B. The needs analysis prompts for students to fill out using their mobile devices)
How the opening of the MEDD6316 course Moodle interface looks – with the tabs to A and B illustrated
Figure 4: Private discussion forum

Sessions 9 - 10: Mini-Teaching

In these two sessions, you will be given the opportunity to put into practice all the methodologies, strategies and techniques we have been discussing on the course, on the basis of which you will practicalise, personalise and internalise the theories. We will also engage ourselves in joint reflections of your mini-teaching with your coursemates and teachers, and be guided to reflect critically on how you can play a more active role in promoting LAC initiatives in your (future) teaching context.

1st December 2014
**Team 1:** Cora, Kenneth, Lydia & Samuel
**Team 2:** Emily, Enoch, Holly, Ria & Summer

8th December 2014
**Team 3:** Anna, Jacqueline, Nicole & Terence
**Team 4:** Heidi, Kenny, Michael & Ocean

- **Team 1’s Discussion Corner for the Mini-Teaching** (Cora, Kenneth, Lydia & Samuel) (Team 1)
  - Not available unless: You belong to a group in Team 1 (hidden otherwise)

- **Video-clip of Team 1’s Mini-Teaching** - Teachers: Albert, Crystal, Joanna & Justina & Phoenix

- **Team 2’s Discussion Corner for the Mini-Teaching**
  - Emily, Enoch, Holly, Ria & Summer) (Team 2)
  - Not available unless: You belong to a group in Team 2 (hidden otherwise)

- **Video-clip of Team 2’s Mini-Teaching** - Teachers: Cecilia, Esther, Gary C, Judy (& Karen)
Advantages of using Moodle

- output from the students in class were uploaded onto Moodle for them to take greater ownership (Parkinson, et al., 2003) of their contributions, for peer learning and joint reflections.

- to free time for more focused and in-depth discussion (Yuen, et al., 2009) during class;

- ‘private forums’ were established for individual teams made up of members in varied geographical locations to discuss their ideas free from time and space constraints (Burge, 1994), upload drafts of materials developed and plan their part collaboratively.
Problems or challenges in using Moodle

- students often doubted the presence (Edirisingha, et al., 2009; Yuen, et al., 2009) of their coursemates on Moodle. This thus impacted negatively on their degree of online participation, leading to discussion forums being under-used and thereby affecting their overall quality of learning.
B) Experimentation with the Use of Skype

- An international participant a Thai student’s (John) delay in joining the group for lessons in Hong Kong when courses commenced

- The instructor vividly recalls, “I was a bit worried if he could follow us, so I kept asking him if he could once in a while. However, when I once asked the whole class a question and everybody was silent, suddenly an answer came from him out of my surprise!”

- John: “I could listen to every part of the discussion in the session and make notes for further understanding. This gave me the opportunity to recheck contents with online materials on Moodle. However, the problem lied mainly with time-lags on the Internet, mostly with visualization, that led to a blurred screen at times and this really hindered me from seeing everything in detail.”

- How the use of Skype, Panopto or other such systems facilitate distant and e-learning is nonetheless not fully explored (Murray, et al., 2015).
Advantages & disadvantages of using Skype

• **Advantage:** ① satisfy the urgent needs of experiencing classroom teaching setting **across time and space**.

• **Disadvantages:** ① **technical problems** eg blurred screen, background sounds impeding communication, unstable net connection, time-lag; ② **difficulty** in establishing **small-group interaction** among the students

• Possible **solutions:** ① sent the PPT slides and other materials to John before the lessons; ② additional laptops or mobile devices and microphones for group work to be carried out more effectively; ③ Upgrade software systems and integral use of Skype, Panopto (a lecture capture service), & Moodle
Students’ reflections on A) Moodle and B) Skype as blended Learning strategies

4 Themes/categories related to their experiences via semi-structured interviews:

1) **Technological issues**
   - Using Moodle and Skype for learning is **convenient and flexible** across time and space;
   - good for their **self-directed learning** by keeping track of the updated course materials via Moodle;
   - fostering their **learning autonomy** (Herse & Lee, 2005)

Technological problems:

- the use of Skype, John “unstable connection, screen breakdown, unclear pictures, sometimes mute occurred, most of the time interaction with peers could not be achieved” (Interview1, Oct. 30, 2015).
- Moodle is “not so helpful to get **instant online feedback**” (Interview3, Nov. 2, 2015)
2) **Interactivity**

- Using Moodle for downloading course materials, submitting course assignments, and receiving announcements from instructors.

- However, students proposed that online discussion related to course reading materials could be initiated and activated by course instructors at a particular time, which give equal opportunity for everyone to post and answer questions, and is good for shy students who dare not raise questions in F2F classroom teaching.

- The Thai student John suggested that iPad and microphone could have been used to help him join group discussion with his peers in the Skype class.
3) **Multimodal affordances**

- All student interviewees agree that multimodal resources facilitate their understanding of teaching content, and the integration of conventional F2F classroom instruction and e-learning platforms is more effective than only F2F or only e-learning.

- “Written materials on Moodle and visuals, as well as verbal instruction in real-time classroom teaching help me better understand the target content” reported by John (Interview 1, Oct. 30, 2015).

- “LAC is new to me. It is helpful and useful to use multimodal resources to reduce my cognitive workload” (Interview, Nov. 2, 2015).
4) Learner satisfaction

• Moodle and Skype serve certain pedagogic purposes. But students don’t think these two online communication tools are excellent media for social interaction.

• But Moodle and Skype foster a sense of cyber community to some extent, or “a sense of belonging for a particular course”,
• “More ‘human touch’ can be added on Moodle such as uploading a profile including pictures, self-introduction, conference or seminar information, sending e-birthday card to students, which can be a valuable asset for them in the future” (Interview3, Nov. 2, 2015).
Conclusion

• Following new blended learning educational paradigm (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008), this study explores the experiences of using Moodle and Skype in an MEd LAC program at a university in Hong Kong from both teachers’ and learners’ perspectives.

• The MEd LAC students are acquiring content knowledge via English medium, and they believe that traditional F2F instruction complementing web-based learning is more effective in helping them to acquire academic English literacy as well achieving the dual goals of CLIL.