

Student Preferences in Blended and Fully Online English Language Learning in Norway and Sweden (2019-2022)

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Abstract

This study examines English-language students' experiences with digital learning in Norway and Sweden from 2019 to 2022, focusing on blended learning (BL) and fully online learning environments (FOLEs). BL integrates physical and digital teaching, while FOLEs are entirely digital. Four student groups – science majors, in-service teachers, foundational-year students, and pre-service teachers – participated in CLIL courses taught in English. Using the Community of Inquiry (CoI) and digital literacies framework, the study analyses student preferences to understand and create student-centred online learning communities in language learning environments. Understanding student preferences in blended and online language learning is essential for course design, as traditional assumptions may not align with actual needs, particularly regarding orality and interaction in synchronous spaces, where teaching presence and digital literacies can enhance engagement.

Keywords: Blended learning (BL), fully online learning environments (FOLEs), Community of Inquiry (CoI), digital literacies, student preferences, course design

1. Introduction

This paper investigates English-language students' experiences with and perceptions of digital learning in Norway and Sweden from 2019 to 2022, focusing on blended learning (BL) and fully online learning environments (FOLEs). Brown (2016) contends that integrating online tools into face-to-face (F2F) teaching has become the standard model in higher education. Moreover, Oakley (2016) argues that incorporating digital technology into teaching and learning can bring about a transformative change, provided that appropriate course design processes are implemented effectively. BL is defined as combining physical and fully digital teaching situations, while fully online courses refer to entirely digital teaching and learning experiences (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research, 2021). In this study, participants included four groups of English language students: science majors, in-service teachers, foundational-year students, and pre-service trainee teachers. The study explores student preferences to understand how to create student-centered online learning communities in language learning environments. We employ the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison et al., 2000) and the digital literacies framework (Pegrum et al., 2018) to analyse the results.

2. Background

2.1 From Emergency Remote Teaching to Fully Online Language Environments

Our initial study on BL was published at the onset of the Covid pandemic (Keeling & Haugestad, 2020). The pandemic forced higher education instructors to adopt Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT), shifting from F2F to fully online instruction because of the health emergency (Hodges et al., 2020). Although some instructors already had “digital wisdom” (Prensky, 2009) from increased technology integration, many were unprepared for the transition to FOLEs. In contrast, Planned Online Learning (POL) involves carefully designed virtual learning experiences (Schultz & DeMers, 2020). As Harrison (2021) notes, “many teachers found themselves teaching online for the first time without training” (p. 68). This exploratory study seeks to enhance the evidence base by examining student preferences and perceptions during the Covid-19 outbreak. Students transitioned from initial ERT during Covid's first wave to BL and eventually back to FOLEs as the pandemic continued.

2.2 Blended Learning and the Importance of Synchronous Spaces

BL combines self-paced online learning with F2F classroom teaching, providing an effective combination of both modes (Neumeier, 2005). Şahin-Kizil (2014) describes BL as the integration of web-based applications and classroom teaching, which can motivate students and enhance efficacy in a globalized world (Tayebinik & Puteh, 2012). However, some research suggests that BL may demotivate students and reduce engagement and social presence (Kaufmann & Vallade, 2020; Tongpoon-Patanasorn & White, 2020; Wilson-Armour, 2020). Van der Bom & Pfundt (2021) assert that online learning without synchronous communication demotivates students. This underscores the importance of incorporating synchronous elements in BL to maintain student engagement.

Some scholars suggest that blended learning is largely used as a course management system (CMS). Tongpoon-Patanasorn & White (2020), for example, observe that: “When blended learning was implemented in classrooms, it was more often used as a tool to help a teacher deliver course materials, assign homework, and make announcements, and to assist students with submitting and storing their homework” (p. 2460). In this sense, it may effectively differ little from campus-based F2F teaching in that it serves to structure course components and the overall syllabus rather than manage the classroom environment. Indeed, BL classrooms are similar to those of flipped classrooms in that different kinds of online resources create a unique and partially online learning space. According to Fawley (2014), flipped classrooms, “allow instructors to transfer a lecture into something portable that can be viewed or listened to outside of class” (p. 19). In sum: “The principles that are involved with ‘flipping the classroom’ fit well with the concept of blended learning” (Bush, 2013, p. 61). Many scholars point to the changing role of instructors. Rossett et al. (2003) argue that, rather than a CMS, BL is simply a teaching strategy that can be employed to create an effective learning environment in which the teacher continues to play an important role. This may, in turn, effectively align with concepts of teaching presence in the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2000).

2.3 Text-based Model of FOLEs

Research highlights several concerns regarding the successful use of BL in language courses. Adas and Bakir (2013) found that students in BL course models develop better writing skills than those in traditional F2F courses. Keeling & Haugestad (2020) observed similar results in a case study in Norway. However, Wilson-Armour (2020) argues that without essential peer-to-peer and instructor-student interaction, language teaching may revert to a grammar-translation approach. Similarly, McGee and Reis (2012) emphasize that BL often focuses more on students' use and understanding of texts than on interaction with peers or instructors.

These concerns form the foundation of this exploratory study, which aims to engage with learner preferences and explore how students perceive blended learning environments. A primary concern is the potential loss of verbal interactions and dialogue, both peer-to-peer and instructor-to-student. Wilson-Armour (2020) notes, “Instructors tend to do far less direct instruction and far more individual tutoring or small-group workshops” (p. 1). This indicates opportunities for creating a student-centered classroom with increased interactions. However, without these adjustments, BL may revert to an increasingly text-based model (McGee and Reis, 2012).

2.4 Orality in Fully Online Language Environments

FOLEs, as defined by Allen & Seaman (2013), are settings where all class content is delivered online. This study also examines orality in FOLEs, a concern highlighted in our initial single-case exploratory study (Keeling & Haugestad, 2020). Marco and Daniel (2021) found that poor interactions and lack of peer rapport negatively impact social presence, a key element of the CoI framework. This study investigates how increased teaching presence can mitigate these issues in FOLEs.

Harrington (2010) notes that BL environments create two distinct communities for students (online and F2F), which might intimidate English Language Learners (ELLs) to the point of muting, where students limit or eliminate interactions with others in their learning community. Peimani & Kamalipour (2021) emphasize the importance of visibility, both the right to see others and the choice not to be seen by others. Stern (2004) found that online classes give students more time to respond to discussion questions than F2F sessions, transforming how learners understand course material and encouraging participation from shy or introverted students. Our respondents (Keeling & Haugestad, 2020, 2023; Haugestad & Keeling, 2022) also noted the inclusivity and democratic tendencies in online synchronous spaces, where diverse voices can be heard.

Van der Bom & Pfundt (2021) suggest that FOLEs without synchronous elements are demotivating for students, stating: “A mix of online synchronous sessions and asynchronous self-study tasks, frequent interaction with and between students, and continuous feedback are more suitable teaching strategies” (p. 211). Peimani & Kamalipour (2021) underline the challenges of synchronous student study and collaboration, noting that respondents preferred synchronous lectures over asynchronous video-based lectures. However, they saw assessment opportunities positively. Peimani & Kamalipour’s (2021) study revealed unexpected results, such as perceived increased oral and formative feedback, increased orality and interaction in online settings, alongside issues of participation and engagement in synchronous online settings.

3. Theoretical Framework and Research Statement

This exploratory study uses the following theoretical framework to analyse its findings.

3.1 Learner Preferences and Engagement

Learner preferences are seen as critical to interrogating the scholarly debate around the effect of BL and FOLEs on student engagement. Plass, Chun, & Mayer (1998) define learning preferences as characteristics related to the setting, situation, and atmosphere that influence learning, such as preferred learning times and environments. In contrast, Arikpo & Grace (2015) describe learning preferences as stable cognitive, affective, and psychological behaviours indicating how learners perceive, interact with, and respond to their learning environment. These two definitions reflect both social and individual preferences that affect student engagement for the purposes of this study, particularly in synchronous versus asynchronous settings and in their impact on orality.

Axelsson and Flick (2010) define student engagement as “how involved or interested students appear to be, and how connected they are to their classes” (p. 38), emphasizing individual involvement. Coates (2007) highlights the importance of a sense of belonging within a learning community, active and collaborative learning, and meaningful interactions with teachers. This study accepts both of these aspects of engagement. The emphasis on belonging corresponds with the CoI framework, while the emphasis on the individual aligns with digital literacies and technology acceptance. Together, these perspectives help discuss the identified issues of engagement, interaction, and the need for effective online and blended learning spaces.

3.2 Community of Inquiry Framework

The CoI framework, as outlined by Garrison et al. (2000), is used to discuss the findings. It comprises three key elements for successful online classes: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. Social presence refers to participants’ ability to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop interpersonal relationships (Garrison et al., 2000). This element is significant for cultivating engagement and a sense of community among students and promoting participation and interaction in synchronous environments.

Cognitive presence is “the extent to which participants in a community of inquiry can construct meaning through sustained communication” (Garrison et al., 2000, p. 89). It involves problem definition, seeking relevant information, integrating ideas, and testing solutions. This element is crucial for meaningful interaction, promoting sustained communication and orality in online and blended learning settings. Enhancing cognitive presence through synchronous interactions improves engagement and participation.

Teaching presence is “the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for achieving meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (Anderson et al. 2001, p. 5). Teaching presence thus mediates the quality of interaction encouraged by social presence. Effective online learning requires more than learner interaction; it relies on teachers designing attainable tasks, facilitating learner understanding, and providing instruction (Garrison et al., 2000). Our first study (Keeling & Haugestad, 2020) highlighted the teacher’s central role in successful interactions, reinforcing the importance of teaching presence in the CoI framework. Teaching presence is essential for guiding student engagement and learning, ensuring effective learning environments and promoting interaction.

3.3 Digital Literacies and Technology Acceptance

Pegrum (2017) and Pegrum et al. (2018) outline a digital literacies framework that includes text literacy, multimedia or multimodal literacy, personal and networking literacy, multimodal and spatial literacy, remix literacy, and coding literacy. This framework helps analyze how students navigate and utilize digital tools for language learning. Examining student preferences through these diverse literacies aims to reveal how learners enhance their educational experiences with these tools. Understanding technology acceptance, characterized by perceived usefulness and ease of use (Davis, 1989), further informs these preferences and impacts learner engagement and presence. Specifically, understanding these literacies helps address questions related to technology acceptance and the balance between text-based learning and synchronous interactions, promoting participation and active engagement in online learning settings. Exploiting digital literacies can enhance student participation and engagement, as indicated in the study's findings.

3.4 Research Statement

This study explores student preferences to understand how to create student-centered online learning communities in language learning environments.

Research Questions:

1. What are student learning preferences in blended and FOLEs?
2. How do students perceive orality in these environments?
3. How do digital literacies influence student engagement and learning preferences in these environments?

4 Method

This mixed-methods study employs quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine student preferences and perceptions in blended and fully online language learning environments.

4.1 Participants

Participants included 207 English language students from Norway and Sweden, divided into three groups. Group 1 (G1) consisted of 33 second-year STEM students studying CLIL courses in English, who started F2F and then moved to ERT online until the end of the course. Group 2 (G2) comprised 42 in-service teachers initially signed up for BL but moved to FOLEs after a further outbreak. Group 3 (G3) included 132 pre-service and in-service teachers, along with foundational-year English students, mostly enrolled in FOLEs with limited F2F meetings.

Table 1 Phases of Data Collection

	Respondents	Summary
G1	33	Campus-based CLIL English courses, moved online
G2	42	Blended English courses, moved fully online
G3	132	Online English courses, primarily online with some campus days
Total	207	

4.2 Data collection

Data was collected through an anonymous Survey Monkey Internet survey. The survey included: Questions 1-2: In-class preferences; Questions 3-4: Orality and oral interactions with lecturers and peers; Question 5: Out-of-class preferences; Questions 6-9: Digital components and spaces (technology acceptance); Question 10: Open-ended question collecting qualitative data.

4.3 Data analysis

Quantitative data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify patterns and correlations. Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and insights from responses to the open question (Q10).

4.4 Ethical considerations

All data was collected anonymously via a Survey Monkey Internet survey. No individual IP addresses were stored or collected. The process was registered with and approved by the Norwegian Center for Research Data (NSD).

4.5 Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity, survey questions were designed to measure specific constructs related to in-class preferences, orality, out-of-class preferences, and digital components, based on previous literature and studies. The survey was pilot tested with a small group of participants, and it was administered anonymously to reduce bias and ensure accurate responses.

For reliability, survey questions remained consistent across all three phases of data collection and sample groups. The survey was conducted online using the Survey Monkey platform, minimizing errors or variations. Longitudinal data analysis assessed the consistency and stability of responses over time.

5. Results and Discussion

Quantitative cross-sectional Internet survey results are presented in turn as the questions read in the survey. Informants produced a 65% response rate for the open Question 10, providing additional anonymous qualitative data.

5.1 What setting do you prefer for lectures?¹

Table 2 Question 1

	%	Responses	G1	G2	G3
Campus	43	87	47% (15)	68% (27)	34% (35)
Online	51	103	31% (10)	33% (13)	61% (80)
No difference	11	22	25% (8)	10% (4)	8% (10)
Total	105	212(203)	32 (1)	40 (3)	131 (0)

*Q1 was set to multiple answers for G1. 203 answers (incl. 9 multiple), 4 skipped.

The sample points to the fact that online synchronous lectures are preferred to campus-based F2F lectures. This will surprise teachers who generally see the interaction of F2F instructions and lectures as higher (Keeling & Haugstad, 2023). Mitigation can occur through various factors. First, it increases student-centring and control; levels of engagement and participation can be self-regulated, even to the degree of self-muting. Moreover, the ability to ask questions in real-time through chat functions may favour less confident students (Stern, 2004) and even increase perceived instructor-student interaction (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2021). The cost-benefit calculation for students may point to the fact that there is more to gain in student-centring and self-regulation. Increased digital literacies (Pegrum, 2017) may increase acceptance of online synchronous lectures, especially in terms of personal and networking literacies. This in turn suggests that social presence (Garrison et al., 2000) is not unduly affected, and that online synchronous lectures may mitigate any perceived loss of belonging in blended learning courses. Lastly, there is a suggestion that the teacher is a perceived factor in terms of the success of their teaching presence. Effective teaching presence can help maintain engagement and support students in online environments.

5.2 What setting do you prefer for in-class group work?

Table 3 Question 2

	%	Responses	G1	G2	G3
Campus	53	108	48% (16)	78% (32)	47% (60)
Online	35	71	30% (10)	15% (6)	43% (55)
No difference	12	24	21% (7)	7% (3)	11% (14)
Total	100	203	33 (0)	41 (2)	129 (2)

There is a clear preference for F2F settings for synchronous group work, i.e. done during synchronous meetings. Group 2 shows a very strong preference. These in-service teachers were considerably older on average than the other groups and expressed a clear preference of F2F settings in all categories. They would definitely be considered “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001) and even resistant to any technology acceptance (Davis, 1989). Their general digital literacies were considerably lower than the other sample groups pointing to a clear generational division. Their struggle with personal and networking literacies (Pegrum, 2017) definitely impacted their social presence, and in turn affected their cognitive presence (Garrison et al., 2000). The perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989) of the online environments affected their ability to feel belonging in a community of inquiry and required greater efforts on the part of teachers to mitigate, i.e. greater teacher presence (Garrison et al., 2000). This said, all groups showed a similar preference for F2F settings for group work.

5.3 In what setting did you receive most oral feedback from lecturers?²

Table 4 Question 3

	%	Responses	G1	G2	G3
Campus	31	63	42% (14)	23% (9)	31% (40)
Online	42	84	18% (6)	49% (19)	46% (59)
No difference	27	54	39% (13)	28% (11)	23% (30)
Total	100	201	33 (0)	39 (4)	129 (2)

The majority (42%) of students perceived that they received more oral feedback from lecturers in online settings. This was unexpected and indeed produced shock from the course teachers when asked in a separate study (Keeling & Haugestad, 2023). However, there are clear differences in the groups. G1 started as F2F and moved into ERT. The perceived loss of interaction is greater there, though, it is important to add that, a similar number (38%) perceived no difference. Overall, the trend is clear and corroborates Peimani & Kamalipour’s (2021) findings. The reasons are unclear, but several factors are to be stressed. First, the text-based model (Adas & Bakir, 2013; McGee & Reis, 2012; Wilson-Armour, 2020) may favour certain groups of students (Stern, 2004). Moreover, the interplay with increased texting literacy (in both students and teachers) may facilitate greater interaction. None of the respondents mention student-to-student interaction in chat functions. But overall, this seems to be an important factor increasing perceived social presence in online settings and even teaching presence where used successfully.

5.4 In what setting did you receive most oral feedback from students?³

Table 5 Question 4

	%	Responses	G1	G2	G3
Campus	41	83	48% (16)	36% (15)	41% (52)
Online	41	83	24% (8)	50% (21)	43% (54)
No difference	18	36	27% (9)	14% (6)	17% (21)
Total	100	202	33 (0)	42 (1)	127 (4)

Equal numbers of students reported getting more feedback in campus and online classrooms (see Table 5). This suggests that the less preferred in-class group work (Q2) may still lead to higher perceived levels of student feedback, i.e. peer assessment. Even though online environments for synchronous group work were Zoom-based across the groups. The overall response is again unexpected as teachers generally expect a loss of interaction (Keeling & Haugestad, 2023). Again, this supports findings in other studies (Peimani & Kamalipour, 2021). Increased digital literacies, i.e. personal and networking, may have increased the perceived ease of use (Davis, 1989) of these environments. There is certainly no clear indication of large-scale loss of social and cognitive presence (Garrison et al, 2000) and peer-to-peer interactions are perceived as increased. It seems that perceived orality is no lower in online settings in our sample. The group that was forced into ERT did perceive a loss to some degree. But our second group, that hoped for F2F which never materialised through the second wave, and our third group, that was mostly online across the board, did not perceive any such loss.

5.5 What setting do you prefer for group work out of the classroom?⁴

Table 6 Question 5

	%	Responses	G1	G2	G3
Physical	32	66	27% (9)	43% (17)	31% (40)
Online	17	35	15% (5)	3% (1)	22% (29)
Both	47	96	55% (18)	53% (21)	44% (57)
No difference	4	7			
Total	100	204	33 (0)	40 (3)	131 (0)

For assignments performed as synchronous and asynchronous group work out of the classroom, there was a clear preference for blended solutions. None of the groups preferred a FOLE for this. All of them stressed the need for F2F synchronous meetings and effectiveness in planning, decision-making, brainstorming, and delegation was perceived. The social presence experienced, and the attendant cognitive presence seems critical here. This is essentially something students must do themselves as a student-led and centred iteration, which cannot be entirely mitigated by teaching presence. However, the suggestions that FOLEs are a text-based model find support in the preference for writing tasks in online settings. Orality and social and cognitive presence clearly suffer in decision-making phases, i.e. when choices are made, and learner engagement and participation is critical.

5.6 How useful were the recorded lectures?⁵

Table 7 Question 6

	%	Responses	G1	G2	G3
Very	44	91	41% (13)	21% (9)	53% (69)
Useful	30	62	31% (10)	40% (17)	27% (35)
Not useful	2	4			
Did not use	24	48	25% (10)	33% (14)	20% (26)
Total	100	205	32 (1)	42 (1)	131 (0)

The recorded lectures were a key component of courses where used, with the majority of students finding them very useful or useful. However, there were notable differences between groups, with G3 showing the highest level of engagement. This suggests that recorded lectures were particularly effective for students with higher digital literacies (Pegrum, 2017). G3 students, who were mainly university freshmen and sophomores, likely benefited from their higher levels of personal and networking literacies, which facilitated their engagement with recorded content.

5.7 How useful were the padlets?⁶

Table 8 Question 7

	%	Responses	G1	G2	G3
Very	27	54	19% (6)	24% (10)	29% (38)
Useful	49	100	55% (17)	62% (26)	44% (57)
Not useful	10	21			
Did not use	14	28	16% (5)	5% (2)	16% (21)
Total	100	203	31 (2)	42 (1)	130 (1)

Padlets were generally well-received, with a high percentage of students finding them useful or very useful. The interactive nature of padlets helped bridge the gap between in-class and out-of-class environments. However, the effectiveness of padlets varied depending on the students' multimodal and spatial literacies. Students with higher levels of these digital literacies were more likely to find padlets useful, as they could navigate and utilize the interactive features more effectively.

5.8 How educational was the multimedia project (podcast/video)?⁷

Table 9 Question 8

	%	Responses	G1	G2	G3
Very	20	39	18% (6)	7% (3)	24% (30)
Useful	33	67	67% (22)	17% (7)	30% (38)
Not useful	4	8			
Did not use	43	87	0% (0)	69% (29)	46% (58)
Total	100	201	33 (0)	42 (1)	126 (5)

Multimedia projects were effective in enhancing student engagement and building social and cognitive presence where used. These projects were particularly popular in the form of podcasts and vlogs. The perceived ease of use of these projects varied, with G2 (in-service teachers) showing the least engagement, likely due to lower general digital literacy. In contrast, G1 and G3, who had higher levels of multimodal and remix literacy, engaged more actively with multimedia projects, using these skills to make meaning and develop student-centered narratives of learning.

5.9 What course components would you keep given a choice?

Table 10 Question 9

	%	Responses	G1	G2	G3
Multimedia project	37	76	67% (22)	21% (9)	35% (45)
Collaborative writing	37	74	67% (22)	40% (17)	27% (35)
Oral presentation	26	53	21% (7)	38% (16)	23% (30)
Recorded/video lectures	51	104	33% (11)	36% (15)	61% (78)
PowerPoints/Padlets	61	124	48% (16)	57% (24)	66% (84)
Synchronous lectures	67	135	67% (22)	76% (32)	63% (81)
Total		(203)	100% (33)	100% (42)	100% (128)

The course components most favoured by students were synchronous lectures and interactive elements such as padlets and multimedia projects. This indicates a preference for engaging and interactive learning experiences. The asynchronous lectures were the primary element of a flipped classroom in most of these courses. Interactive pinboards in the form of padlets were a secondary component and were used by some instructors to bridge the space between in-class and out-of-class environments (Keeling & Haugestad, 2023).

Some researchers suggest that BL creates “distinct communities” in online and F2F environments (Harrington, 2010). While shy students may enjoy the relatively low-anxiety of the FOLE due to self-regulating and organizing opportunities (Stern, 2004), this may, in contrast, be interpreted as lower engagement and social presence by the less shy among the student body. The challenges of differing digital literacies (Pegrum, 2017) may help explain this. Personal and networking literacy may be easier in a text-based model for certain groups. Interactive pinboards require multimodal and spatial literacy, which may lead to feelings of being “overwhelmed” and perceived difficulties in ease of use (Davis, 1989). That said, the padlet is still a text-based model for language learning. Students generally do group work in Zoom spaces but report into the shared interactive pinboard in synchronous sessions. This can then continue into group work or assignments out of class that are shared to the pinboard. Such spaces help to prevent “distinct communities” and may increase social and cognitive presence, in addition to teaching presence if the instructor can give continuous feedback.

Multimedia projects also use digital literacies to enhance student engagement and build both social and cognitive presence in communities of inquiry. They help make meaning and develop student-centered narratives of learning. These types of projects were incredibly popular. Perceived ease of use varied, particularly for G2 in our sample, who can be termed accidental digital immigrants with potentially low general digital literacy. In contrast, university freshmen and sophomores used their multimodal and remix literacy to engage with knowledge and reorganize material to enhance cognitive presence.

5.10 What were the best and worst things in the course?

The open question (Q10) adds detail and colour—rich descriptions if you will—to much of the above discussion. First, it underlines the perceived importance of teaching presence as suggested by Rosett et al (2003). If instructors are an important factor in direct instruction in F2F classrooms, then they are even more important in FOLEs. An instructor's ability to help build social and cognitive presence through continuous interaction both in and out of the classroom, in synchronous and asynchronous spaces, is critical in uniting the community of inquiry in all of its social spaces. Far from being just a CMS, BL can be both a path to text-based student-centring and a collection of learning spaces that foster increased orality, interaction, and engagement in learning.

6. Conclusion

This study explores student preferences to understand how to create student-centered online learning communities in language learning environments. We employ the CoI framework and the digital literacies framework to analyse the results.

6.1 Research Questions Answered

6.1.1 What are student learning preferences in blended and fully online language environments?

In our sample, students prefer online synchronous lectures over F2F lectures. This preference suggests that online synchronous lectures might be more inclusive, allowing greater orality and inclusivity through chat functions that favour text-based communication. Group work is preferred F2F in class. For assignments or collaborative projects, students prefer to meet F2F to make decisions about group work but then prefer to write or do check-ins online. In-class online group work (i.e., synchronous) seems to be the most demotivating component. However, students experienced greater levels of interaction, both peer-to-peer and instructor-to-student, in online synchronous spaces.

6.1.2 How do students perceive orality in these environments?

Engagement is often seen as lower in FOLEs, and the environment can be demotivating. However, our sample showed that despite reports of difficulties, students could build sufficient social and cognitive presence to feel belonging in an online learning community of inquiry. Synchronous spaces play a significant role in this. Interactive pinboards can create spaces that bridge the gap between the flipped classroom and collaborative work on assignments out of class, fostering both social and cognitive presence. Moreover, the ability to ask questions in real-time through chat functions may benefit less confident students and enhance perceived instructor-student interaction.

6.1.3 How do digital literacies influence student engagement and learning preferences in these environments?

The group with higher and more diverse digital literacies had little trouble adapting to new platforms and creative tasks. They demonstrated high levels of technology acceptance, reflected in their learning preferences for multimedia projects and online collaborative writing. This group displayed advanced abilities, including coding and remix literacies, making multimedia projects particularly rewarding. Texting literacy also appears to be a factor that can increase inclusivity and participation, helping unite different types of students through simple functions like chat and shared spaces such as interactive pinboards.

6.2 Future Implications

A nuanced understanding of student learner preferences in blended and online language learning in higher education is critical to course design and development. Student preferences do not match traditional wisdom and need to be examined further. In particular, the perception of increased levels of orality and interaction in online synchronous spaces should be pursued as a line of study. Evidence suggests that teaching presence as outlined in the CoI framework is critical to this. Instructors can leverage digital literacies to harness these preferences in order to increase student participation and engagement.

Endnotes

- 1) Lectures here denote synchronous course meetings. These generally include content presentation by the teacher and, to varying degrees, in-class group work.
- 2) Oral feedback is any dialogue-based interaction with others. In terms of feedback, this may then be seen as formative rather than summative teacher assessment.
- 3) Oral feedback from other students denotes peer assessment.
- 4) Course requirements or assignments fulfilled in a collaborative group setting were features of all courses.
- 5) Recorded lectures here denotes both synchronous recorded live lectures and pre-recorded asynchronous lectures. According to Davis (1989), perceived usefulness is the degree to which a user believes that using the technology will enhance their performance. This idea was explained to respondents before taking the survey.
- 6) According to Davis (1989), perceived usefulness is the degree to which a user believes that using the technology will enhance their performance. This idea was explained to respondents before taking the survey.
- 7) Perceived usefulness (Davis, 1989) was replaced with educational as many students express finding multimedia projects fun and engaging but not particularly useful. The focus here was on what they contribute to learning outcomes. Again, this was explained to students before taking the survey.

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