SCHOLARSHIP OF ONLINE TEACHING AND LEARNING: DO WE UNDERSTAND OUR REMOTE LEARNERS?

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) is an investigation into individual learning, teaching, and assessment procedures to refine those practices and improve students' learning experience. In this SoTL project, we have identified the lack of self-confidence to engage during online classes as the major issue faced by our students during the remote learning period. Since the majority of our students are kinesthetic learners, we have implemented several active teaching and learning methods including group presentation and flipped classroom. After four intervention sessions, an open-ended survey was conducted to gather their perceptions towards the project, and the responses were qualitatively analyzed. As a result, the thematic analysis using Atlas.ti software has indicated that students perceived active learning approaches suit their needs during online remote learning. At this moment, the solution for Covid-19 impacts is still vague. We never know when the situation will be back to normal, and universities can operate on its track. Therefore, the students believe that the practices should be continued in order for them to gain the best experience of higher education, although the mode is still online. In general, this SoTL project contributes to the body of knowledge by investigating the effectiveness of active learning approaches for kinesthetic learners during the online learning mode.

INTRODUCTION

In the higher education context, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) has been called a revolution, a movement, a framework, a tool, and even a paradigmatic shift (Harland et al., 2014). We prefer to think of it as a purposeful investigation into one's own learning, teaching, and assessment processes with the goal of improving those practices and improving our students' learning. SoTL is a growing field in post-secondary education that uses systematic, deliberate and methodological inquiry

into teaching (behaviors/practices, attitudes, and values) in order to improve student learning (Potter & Kustra, 2011). In general, there are three major goals of our SoTL project, which are (i) To discover better and more interesting ways to educate in order to boost student learning, (ii) To perform a scholarly investigation of what happens in the classroom, asking questions and gathering information on the efficacy of various teaching approaches, and (iii) To make the findings of our study easily accessible to other academics, inviting their feedback and evaluation, and contributing to the knowledge base on student learning. Figure 1 explains the three major activities in the SoTL project (Shawa, 2020).
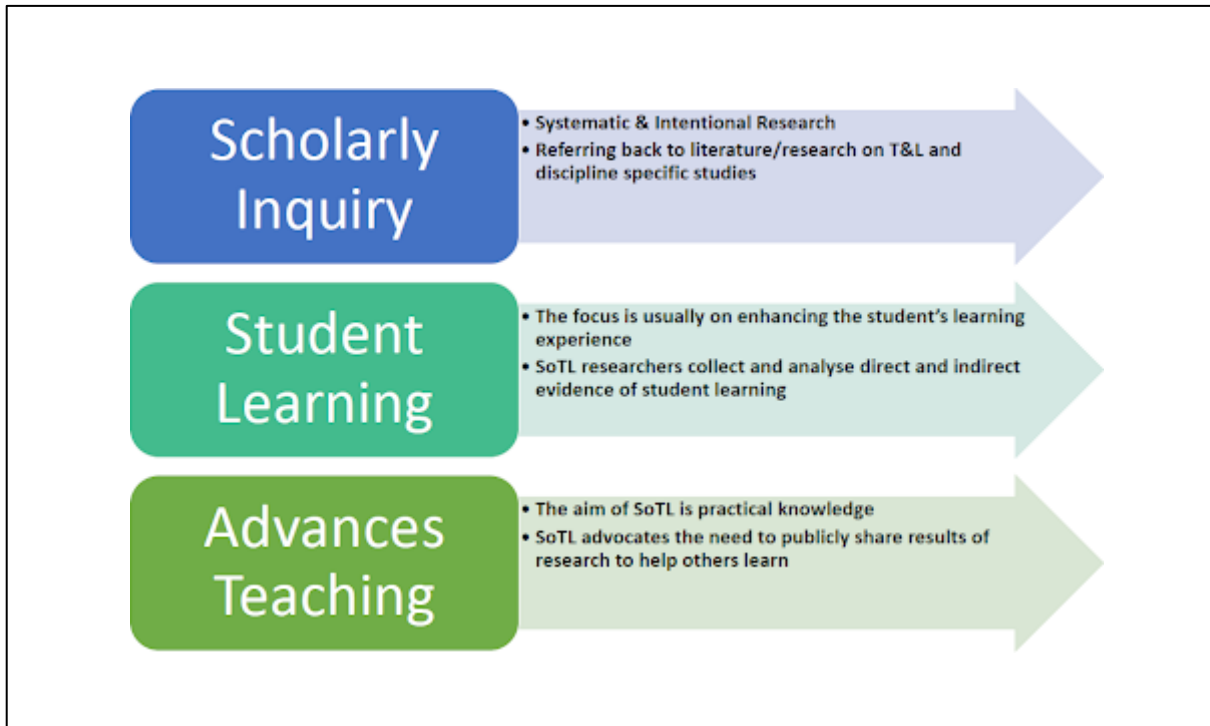

Figure 1. The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Activities

In general, we can consider teaching to be the universe of all pedagogy, then we can situate two other things, SoTL, as well as scholarly teaching within that universe. In light of this, scholarly teaching is referring to the use of teaching and learning literature to inform one's own teaching practices (Cruz & Grodziak, 2021). In other words, this kind of practice implements the research that has already been conducted. On the other hand, SoTL goes a step beyond that and conducts one's own original teaching and learning research or produces new knowledge to add to this body of literature (Haigh & Withell, 2020). It refers to the educators' activities of looking closely and critically at students' learning experiences in order to improve their courses or programs (Manarin et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is also being described as a socializing approach that involves scholarly inquiry to any of the intellectual tasks that comprise the work of teaching (Born et al., 2019). In this study's context, we believed that the most concise definition for SoTL is a synthesis of teaching, learning, and research in higher education that aims to bring a scholarly lens to what happens in the classroom (Vanderbilt Center for Teaching, 2021).

Identifying Issues Relating to Student Learning

Issue identification is one of the most crucial stages in a SoTL project. A SoTL project can be deemed meaningless if it is not solving, or at least attempting to solve a real problem that is happening among our students (Samah et al., 2016). Hence, a problem must be meaningful, focused, and feasible to be solved using the appropriate amount of resources and time that are available to the researchers

(Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2012). To understand the problems faced by our students and provide possible interventions to solve those problems, we need to know them more closely. Since the classes are done virtually, it is more effective to get to know them through an online survey. In the survey, we asked them several questions about their personal backgrounds, university life, motivation, learning styles, learning experiences, and many more. The goal was to ensure that the intervention that we design later on should also incorporate our understanding of them, such as their learning style and their expectations of the instructors.

From the survey, we found several issues that require immediate attention. Some of the top concerns are related to internet access and stability for online learning, difficulties in time management, being easily distracted during online classes, and procrastination. Of the many concerns raised by our students, our attention is profoundly directed to these three responses:

i. Difficult to communicate especially during open distance learning.
ii. Feel scared in doing group tasks.
iii. Low confidence and afraid being at the center of attention.

Generally, many students feel that they lack the confidence to give speeches or do presentations in front of a class. Although it is normal to have stage fright, it is interesting to see how this issue is raised by many students despite having to do their speech/presentation virtually. We also had the opportunity of having a small dialogue with a different group of students, whereby the students admitted to feeling shy whenever they had to speak or voice their opinions during class. Their reasons for lack of participation are, again, mostly due to a lack of confidence and they are scared that their responses or opinions might be wrong.

Our students are forced to face online classes for the past three semesters due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was quite a big change for them because they need to adapt to the new style of the learning process from face-to-face to online teaching and learning. Even though they once studied several courses in the face-to-face mode in the university before the pandemic hits, but they never studied Mandarin subjects (from Mandarin I until Mandarin III) physically. Thus, they have no opportunity to communicate in Mandarin face-to-face with their classmates or friends, and this has indirectly reduced their confidence to use a new language to communicate with others. Hence, we believe that the issue needs to be addressed. After this intervention, we believe that they will be more confident, which in turn, enhances their learning experience and communication effectiveness.

METHODOLOGY

This SoTL project was done in the Universiti Utara Malaysia; one of the public universities located in the north of Peninsular Malaysia. The respondents and participants of this SoTL project consist of 28 students who were taking Mandarin course as an elective subject. They were from the programs of Bachelor of Muamalat Administration (BMA), Bachelor of Entrepreneurship (B. Ent), Bachelor of Human Resource Management (BHRM), Bachelor of Technology Management (B. Tech. Mgmt), and Bachelor of Marketing (B. Mktg). Among them are 24 Malay and four Indian students. Most of these students are kinesthetic learners, and most of them prefer to do more activities in class than traditional teaching. To obtain their feedback on the issues faced during the online learning, have conducted an open-ended survey to the students. The thematic analysis of the finding discovered that majority of them have difficulties in adapting to the needs and nature of online remote learning. There three major issues are communication barriers, lack of confidence to engage with class activities and low self-confidence.

Intervention

The interventions were done four times, on 21st Nov 2021, 28th Nov 2021, 1st Dec 2021, and 19th Dec 2021. Based on the three major concerns regarding our students' experience with online remote learning, we have decided to implement the following interventions.

a) Allow students to do presentations in class
   Presentation skills are important to (i) Develop self-confidence, (ii) Communicate complex information in simple and interesting ways to keep the audience engaged, (iii) Communicate thoughts and feelings effectively, and (iv) Gain real-world skills, such as the ability to present accomplishments and skills during a job interview.

b) Active learning
   Active learning is an approach to instruction that involves actively engaging students with the course material through discussions, problem-solving, case studies, role plays and other methods. Active learning approaches place a greater degree of responsibility on the learner than passive approaches such as lectures, but instructor guidance is still crucial in the active learning classroom (Amani et al., 2019). Active learning activities may range in length from a couple of minutes to whole class sessions or may take place over multiple class sessions.

c) Flipped classroom
   A flipped classroom is an instructional strategy and a type of blended learning, which aims to increase student engagement and learning by having students complete readings at home and work on live problem-solving during class time. Accordingly, instructors will provide materials and students will do the task given (Ozdamli & Asiksoy, 2016).

EVALUATION AND FINDINGS

We had set five open-ended questions for students, and these questions were voluntarily answered by 26 participants. The questions were given through an online survey to get their feedback on the interventions. Finally, the responses were analyzed using thematic analysis with the aid of Atlas.ti software. These are some of their remarks.

Question 1: In the process of preparing group presentations, what have you learned?

I learn to know word by word for better understanding. [Respondent A1]

I learned how to communicate with my groupmates and learned to cooperate in doing the slide and discussing the translation together. [Respondent A5]

I learned to embrace myself to present in the class with other group members. I also learned the fluency of my pronunciation of Chinese words more efficiently. [Respondent A6]

This question aimed to find out what the students have learned in this group presentation. From the feedback, most students think that the intervention brings benefits to them in learning Mandarin, especially in completing the group task. Some of them said that they do not even know their classmates, although they are in the same class. It is also due to online mode, some of the group tasks are changed into individual tasks. Besides, many of them think that they have learned a lot in terms of pronunciation, typing Chinese characters and Pinyin (Mandarin spelling system), preparing questions as well as providing answers in the Q&A session.

Question 2: As a PRESENTER, do you think group presentation can help you deepen your understanding of Mandarin? If YES, how does it help? If NO, why?

Yes. This is because when preparing for the presentation, I must try to understand whether I want to or not as I have to present to others in the class, therefore, for me, preparing to be a presenter can help me to understand Mandarin very well. [Respondent A7]

Yes, of course, it is very helpful. because being presenters, we can increase our confidence. And of course, we also know what our strengths and weaknesses are in presenting the results of our group work in front of the class. [Respondent A9]

Absolutely YES. This is because it can improve and give me a clear understanding. Furthermore, I make slides for the group, so I am more familiar with the pinyin I write. [Respondent A10]

The feedback for this question shows the presenters' positivity and dedication in learning Mandarin. All presenters stated that they need to make full preparations for pronunciation, grammar, and sentence structure before the presentation so that the presentation can proceed smoothly. This preparation allows presenters to understand and know better about the topics to be presented.

Question 3: As a LEARNER, do you think group presentations can enhance your learning in Mandarin? If YES, how does it help? If NO, why?

Yes. I can learn the words and the Chinese characters in more depth. Even though it was quite hard for me at the first time, I manage to cope with this presentation and learn a lot of lessons. [Respondent A18]

Not really because the presenter did not really explain the sentence and words. [Respondent A16]

Fifty yes fifty no because explanation by 'laoshi' [sic] more than match to me. [Respondent A13]

From this question, some students said that they did not learn too much. It can be seen that the presenter will learn more than the learner because the learner is only the one who receives information. This shows the importance of the preparation process.

Question 4a: What do you think about your presentation? (For those who already presented)

Question4b: What do you think about others' presentations? (For those who have not present)

To be honest, laoshi, this is my first time ada mandarin punya presentation, so far okay 'sahaja cuma saya sometimes tak yakin dengan apa yang saya bentangkan' [sic]. [Respondent A15]

I felt the presentation was worth continuing, as everyone had the opportunity to pour out ideas and it was very interesting. [Respondent A9]

In general, students could know their strengths and weaknesses when doing presentations. They could learn from each other among their group members. When other groups are presenting, they could also know which parts are good and which parts can be improved. So, in the next presentation, they can present better.

Question 5: Do you have any suggestions that can improve your learning process and communication skill in group presentations?

I feel that to improve the learning process and communication skills in a presentation group are to diligently ask friends if they do not understand something, give ideas for more interesting presentations and make rehearsals. [Respondent A17]

I suggest to always implementing things like this for next semester, so, in the future, it will not only be lecturers who are actively explaining but also the students who are active too in the class. [Respondent A19]

Maybe other groups also can ask questions to the groups that will do a presentation for more understanding. [Respondent A24]

Most of the students think that this group presentation should be continued for next semester in the Mandarin course. They think that their direct participation in the learning process is more impressive than traditional teaching.

CONCLUSION

Through this SoTL project, we were very excited about being able to research the learning behaviors of our students. Previously, we always heard students say that literature has no relevance in their lives. That showed that our students do not see theories on educational practices as relevant to improve their learning experiences. However, through this project, it turns out that the students did enjoy it and it was revealed through their positive responses.

For educators trained outside the educational disciplines, the approaches and methodologies required to evaluate aspects of teaching and learning are often outside our normal experience. SoTL is a rigorous and systematic approach to investigate student learning and engagement. With research practices that are generally more familiar to social science, an intellectual shift is therefore required to shift from other discipline-based research to SoTL. This SoTL project makes us think more about the production of the scholarship. We are expanding our view of what that might be, and it is not just about empirical research. SoTL is also not just inquiring about teaching practices, but it aims at students' learning. Hence, learning is the actual focus of SoTL inquiry. Moreover, it is about bringing our habits and skills as scholars to our work as educators. This might involve a cycle of activities, starting from asking questions, gathering evidence, and drawing conclusions. As educators, it is important to understand our learners in order for the learning process to take place effectively. The problems that are faced by students will never end. Thus, we must continue to find out and understand them so that we can do our best to help them achieve their full potential.

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