

Understanding Support Technology Tools in Online Distance Learning: Tensions between Policy and Practice

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INTRODUCTION

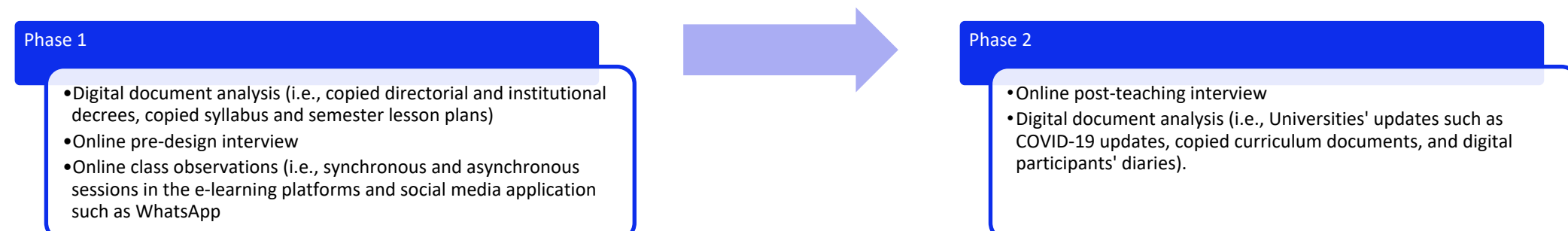
What we do not know is how teachers engage in the processes of designing learning for language learners in higher education institutions. This study is undertaken to address the gap of the current studies.

The current findings on learning design research reveal a lack of understanding as to how teachers enact learning design processes using diverse mental resources (Kali et al., 2011). This study investigated how teachers in Indonesia engaged in the processes for designing an effective online distance language learning course considering the contextual factors (such as socio-cultural and socio-economic matters) during the pandemic in 2020. The study aimed to understand the support technology tools' role in English as Foreign Language (EFL) pedagogies.

METHOD

The study was undertaken by adopting a case study design and included several data collection requirements.

This study draws from the conceptual frame of Activity Theory and TPACK to understand the context and contributors to the teachers' design practices. A case study of two Indonesian higher education institutions and teachers located in the same province was undertaken. One male teacher from a government university located in the capital city and one female teacher from an independent university located in the outer city were voluntarily recruited based on convenience sampling. Data collection procedures were undertaken digitally and remotely for one semester based on the following phases:



Data was analysed inductively and deductively using thematic analysis guided by Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell & Poth 2018).

RESULTS

The results show that selection of support technology tools by the teachers have been influenced by governmental and institutional policies and other contextual factors such as technological affordances and affordability and teachers' beliefs, experiences and knowledge.

In order to design learning, teachers adopted a redesign approach (from previous learning designs). This approach was conducted as a team. Teachers' openness, authority and agency were significant factors that influenced their designs. The design process was an iterative process starting from planning, before moving to implementation and reflection. They also demonstrated the challenges faced by teachers related to managing COVID-19, and also the solutions employed by the teachers. Some challenges could not be resolved. The table below illustrates the process involved in designing the semester lesson plans:

DESIGN PROCESSES OF THE ONLINE LANGUAGE DISTANCE LEARNING DESIGNS	
PLANNING PHASE	<p>Redesigned the semester lesson plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussed with the partners regarding to the lessons, assessments, teaching materials and pedagogy approaches to deliver the content knowledge based on the existing syllabus and semester lesson plans Included areas of improvement that identified from the teaching practice of previous semester such as creating a PowerPoint presentation to a pre-recorded video presentation Used of e-version of the printed teaching resources such as e-book of the tailor-made printed book <p>Adjusted TPACK into the semester lesson plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Visualized the sessions and learning activities that involved technologies Included the university's expectations (i.e., online class should be done in the LMS, provided less live synchronous sessions than asynchronous sessions and included online discussion forum in the University's LMS) <p>Created the online classes in the University's LMS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Redesigned the online classes (including shifted the online classes from the personal website into the University's LMS) Created new online classes Received hands-on support from colleagues with respect to the informal teacher training such as how to navigate the technologies
IMPLEMENTATION PHASE	<p>Delivering the lessons as planned</p> <p>Readjusted TPACK into the semester lesson plans (a design while teaching approach)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited access support technology tools (i.e., constraints of the LMS, not facilitated with video conferencing tools and insufficient subsidy of internet data packages) Lack of IT Centre Staff's technological knowledge (i.e., unreadiness to develop the LMS and uninteractive features of the LMS) Researched on suitable technology tools to teach Received hands-on support from the colleagues regarding to the technological knowledge Shifted to freely available e-learning platform and social media application because the University's LMS went wrong due to the bandwidth issues and students did not have laptop <p>Occurred hindrances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experienced some difficulties to engage students in online discussion forum, unsuccessful scaffolding talk and locus of control Experienced technical issues to conduct the assessments of speaking skills such as pronunciation drill and interpreting Experienced issues associated with the internet and internet data packages
REFLECTION PHASE	<p>Evaluated the subjects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experienced time consuming to develop the online classes and issues associated with time management in delivering the sessions and learning activates <p>Identified areas of improvements for future subjects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Thought on how to engage the students in online discussion forum, reshaping content knowledge of the subjects
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPEMENT	<p>Received teacher training (during the planning phase)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How to navigate to the technologies such as the University's LMS and video creation

DISCUSSION

The tensions between policy and practice, with respect to the access to support technology tools, are described below.

Limited access to support technology tools

The individual cases show that designing effective learning designs was a source of frustration for the teachers because they did not have access to suitable technology tools (i.e., the LMS and video conferencing tools). Therefore, they spent more time researching other tools to deliver online classes. They also employed these other technologies due to problems with the institutional LMS. Colleagues were central in this process as they provided internal teacher training (i.e. non-institutional) and hands-on support in handling the technical issues.

No university leadership and inter-unit coordination

The University Leaders could not resolve the bandwidth issues and provide professional development for the IT Centre Staff. There was also no inter-unit coordination to overcome the obstacles in the teaching and learning process during the immense challenges caused by the pandemic.

Mismatch between university's expectation and teachers' preferences

For one institution, it was required that an online discussion forum was implemented in the LMS for the purposes of record-keeping. However, this frustrated the teacher's pedagogical intent. The lack of features of the LMS, such as a delay to receive real time information and interactivity issues, did not engage the students. The teacher's creativity was limited because the university placed more value on administration of teaching and learning rather than pedagogical practices.

Issues associated with the technological affordances and affordability

The teachers were required to design less live synchronous sessions using video conferencing tools because of the cost of the technology; it consumed a lot of internet data. This meant less teacher presence and this led to the quality of teaching being questioned.

University culture toward the covert policy of BYOD

There was no clear institutional policy addressed the students about the need to bring their own devices. This led to problematic design decision-making as teachers were unable to ascertain who had access to what kinds of devices and how best to provide the sessions and learning activities.

SIGNIFICANCE

Some of the key findings of this study show similar themes that found in the current research in other disciplines. The data also revealed new emerging factors that influenced the teachers' design work.

Similar key findings found relatable to the previous studies:

- Internal factors (i.e., teachers' belief and experiences) and external factors (i.e., understanding students' needs and colleagues' hands-on support) have influenced teachers' design decision (Bennett et al., 2015)
- Teachers' design work use redesign approach and demonstrate an iterative process (Agostinho et al., 2016).

This study has revealed several new contextual factors such as laptop, internet, internet data packages that have caused potential constraints to design works.

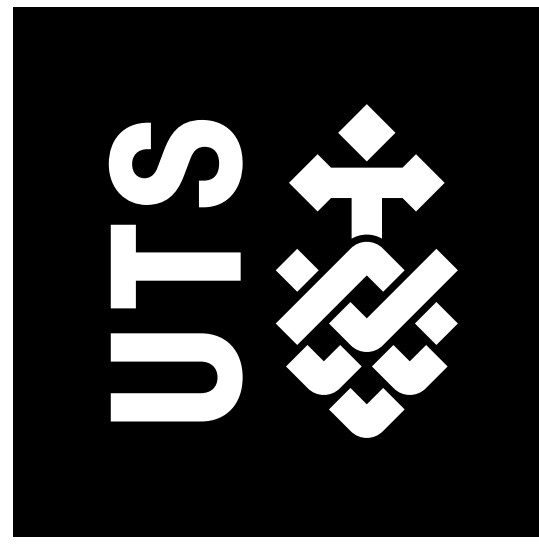
CONCLUSIONS

More research should be conducted to investigate how language university teachers design. This study only focused on English language teachers.

This study demonstrates that technological affordances can be conceived as one of the diverse mental resources that influence teachers' design work. Technological affordability of the support technology tools also has a significant factor as well. Future research may explore how other factors, such as institutional resources and community resources (i.e. outside the university), influence design work.

References

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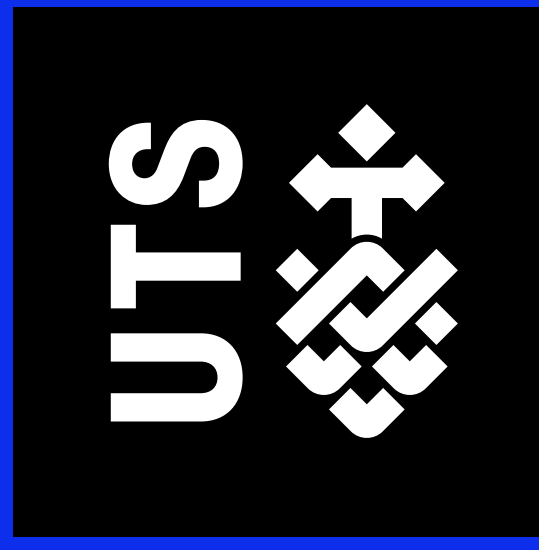
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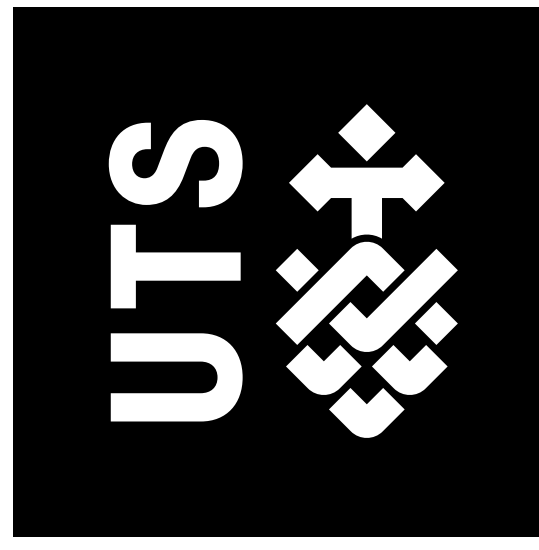
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