

Scrutinizing Social Presence Of In-Service EFL Teachers' Instruction In The Enactment Of Blended Learning

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Abstract.

Technology utilization learning is gaining popularity especially when online learning is conducted during and after the worldwide pandemic. Many studies have examined blended learning as an effort to integrate online learning and face-to-face learning which has an impact on increasing student engagement, improving learning outcomes, and providing a more flexible and personalized educational experience. However, the results of previous research also reported that the application of online learning has minimal interaction, thus leading to less meaningful learning. To respond to these problems, this study aims to investigate perceptions about the application of social presence in English teaching in the implementation of blended learning. The results of this study show that quantitatively English teachers have applied 3 important aspects of social presence, of which 59.82% agreed with teaching activities based on affective categories. Followed by the second position, which strongly agrees with 39.50% and disagrees with the application as much as 0.69%. In the Open Communication category, as many as 62.37% of English teachers also agreed with the implementation of this activity, 34.72% strongly agreed, and as many as 3% expressed disapproval. Meanwhile, on the concept of group cohesion, as many as 64.63% agreed, and 35.37% strongly agreed with this concept.

Keywords: Social presence, blended learning and English language teaching.

I. INTRODUCTION

Blended learning is an educational approach that combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning activities [1], [2]. While blended learning offers numerous benefits, there can be misperceptions among those who are unfamiliar with the concept of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework and its role in the implementation of blended learning [3], [4]. People who are not familiar with this framework may underestimate the significance of these elements and overlook their integration into the design of blended learning courses. Blended learning is often associated with the use of technology, which can lead to the misconception that it solely focuses on online activities or e-learning platforms [5], [6]. However, the essence of blended learning lies in the intentional integration of face-to-face and online components to enhance learning experiences. Failure to recognize this may result in an incomplete or unbalanced implementation of blended learning. Some individuals may assume that blended learning diminishes the importance of face-to-face interactions and instructor-led activities. However, the goal of blended learning is to leverage the benefits of both online and face-to-face modalities to create a holistic learning environment [7], [8]. Face-to-face interactions can foster social connections, provide immediate feedback, and facilitate collaborative activities that may not be easily replicated in an online-only setting [9]. The lack of interaction in online learning is a recognized challenge that can impact students' engagement, motivation, and learning outcomes.

Several studies have examined this phenomenon and explored factors contributing to the lack of interaction in online learning [10]–[12]. Shen et al., (2014) examined learners' preferences for different types of interaction in self-paced online courses. It identified three categories of interaction: learner-content, learner-instructor, and learner-learner. The findings revealed that learners valued all three types of interaction, with a slight preference for learner-instructor interaction. The report emphasizes the importance of designing online courses that provide multiple avenues for interaction to meet diverse learner preferences. In addition, Almasi & Zhu (2018) focused on students' perceptions of social presence, which refers to the degree to which learners

perceive a sense of human connection and interaction in an online learning environment. It identified several factors that influenced students' perceptions, including instructor facilitation, collaborative activities, and the use of multimedia [15]. The report emphasizes the role of instructional design and facilitation in fostering social presence and increasing interaction in online learning. Emphasizing social presence in language learning is crucial for developing communication skills, cultural competence, motivation, and engagement. It provides opportunities for authentic language use, feedback, emotional support, and community building. By prioritizing social presence, language learners can enhance their language proficiency, cultural understanding, and overall learning experience. Szeto & Cheng (2016) scrutinized social presence and interaction in an online language course.

It investigated the students' perceptions of social presence and the relationship between social presence and interaction. The findings highlighted the importance of social presence in fostering interaction and creating a supportive learning environment. Annand (2011) in his literature review explored strategies for promoting interaction and social presence in various online learning contexts, including language learning. It discussed the use of collaborative learning activities, multimedia, instructor presence, and learner-learner interactions as effective means to enhance social presence and engagement. Furthermore, Thomas et al. (2017) investigated the impact of a blended reality environment on social presence and foreign language learning. The findings indicated that the blended reality environment, which combined virtual and physical classroom interactions, significantly improved social presence and positively influenced language learning outcomes. Although those reported studies have highlighted the research on social presence, they do not elaborate the rigid and comprehensive research on how social presence contributes to the process of learning and scaling up language skills. Therefore, to fill the gap in the previous research, it is urgent to investigate to what extent social presence-based activities furnish the way for learning language skills.

II. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative study [18]. Quantitatively, this research measures the perception of EFL teachers in secondary senior high schools on the need for social presence in their language instruction.

Participants

The participants in this research are the 30 EFL in-service teachers who are in the teachers' forum for secondary schools in Banjarmasin, South Kalimantan from different ages and length of teaching period. 28 participants were selected to be the subjects of research by using purposive sampling for quantitative data purposes.

Data collection (Instruments)

The instruments used in this study comprise of close-ended questionnaire which consists of 30 questions of Likert scale. It explains the questions spanning from strongly disagree, disagree, agree, and strongly agree. In addition, the other instruments are in the form of semi-structured interview which consist of 10 elaborate questions.

Data analysis

The data analysis in this study used descriptive statistics for analyzing the quantitative data [19]. This was used to describe to what extent the perspective of EFL in-service teachers' social presence in the blended instruction delivery.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

To correspond to the perspective of EFL in-service teachers of senior high school education for the concept of social presence in the enactment of blended learning, there are three areas that need to be depicted in affective aspect, open communication, and also group cohesion.

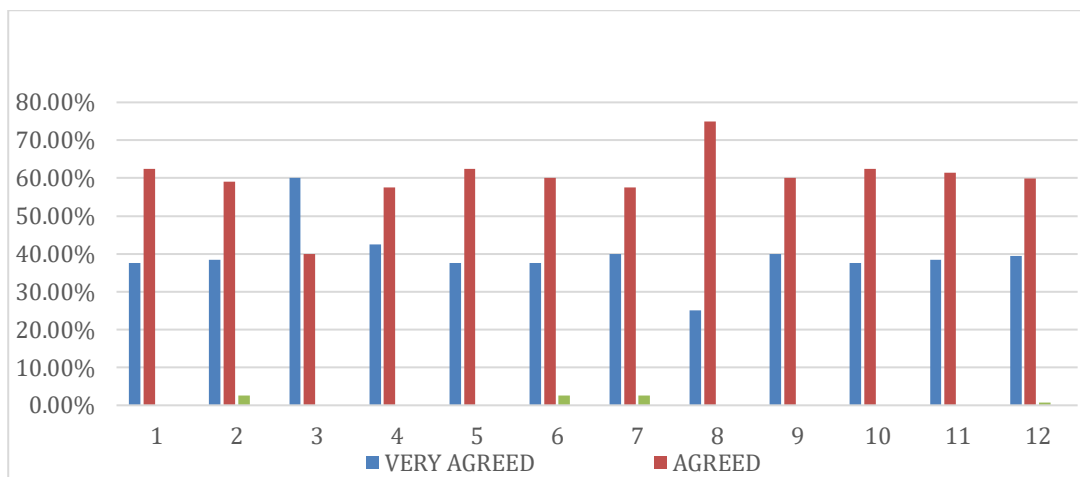


Fig 1. Affective Component

In this chart, it can be viewed on average that the number of EFL teachers who strongly accepted the notions for affective aspect should have existed in online and face-to-face instruction at 39.50%. Meanwhile, the dominant number of teachers who agreed was 59.82 % and only 0.69% disagreed. Furthermore, none claimed to very disagree with the enactment of the concept in EFL instruction.

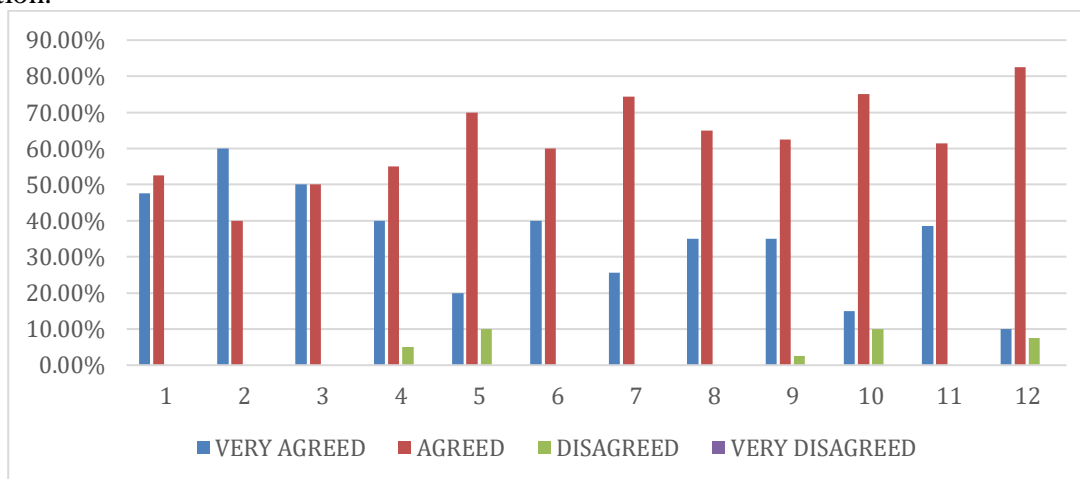


Fig 2. Open Communication

With regard to the open communication concept, 34.72% of teachers very disagreed with having it in their teaching both online and face-to-face teaching delivery. In addition, 62.37% of teachers dominantly agreed to apply this concept in the classroom because they assumed in the language classroom a lot of communication needs to be built so that a variety of interactions are required and suitable. Moreover, only 3% of the EFL teachers disagreed, and none of them had a very disagree poll for their opinion.

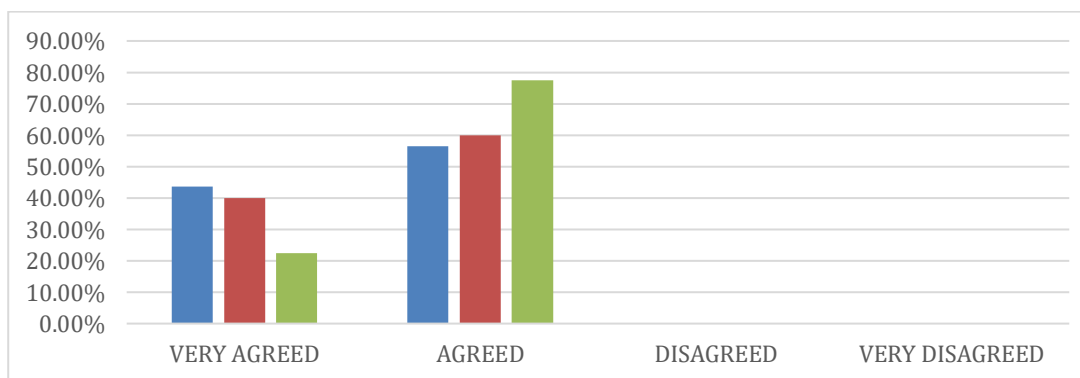


Fig 3. Group Cohesion

This chart illustrates that as 35.37% of EFL teachers casted their preference for using group cohesion in the online and classroom mode of instruction. In the meantime, most of them (64.63%) agreed that group cohesion harnesses collaborative and cooperative activities. This chat also reported that none of them disagreed and very disagreed over this notion to be applied in their instruction, meaning that the choice of activities that empowered interaction and communication took place in the EFL classroom. In summary quantitative description, the results of this research show that quantitatively English teachers have implemented 3 important aspects of social presence, of which 59.82% agreed to teaching activities based on affective categories. Followed by the second position, namely strongly agree at 39.50% and disagree with the implementation at 0.69%. in the open communication category, 62.37% of English teachers also agreed with the implementation of this activity, 34.72% strongly agreed, and 3% disagreed. Meanwhile, regarding the concept of group cohesion, as many as 64.63% agreed, and 35.37% strongly agreed with this concept. In this regard, most EFL teachers perceived positively the concept of social presence in the enactment of Blended learning even though there are very few for not approving this notion in the category of affective and communication.

Additionally, for the category group cohesion, no one refutes the importance of social cohesion to exist in EFL classroom design. Meanwhile, in the qualitative description, the research results analyzed qualitatively showed that the activities carried out by many teachers, especially pioneering teachers in online learning, prefer feedback with emoticons and using web-based media. In addition, teachers also use video learning media both synchronously and asynchronously, followed by the more dominant use of two-way communication. In this sense, most of the involved EFL teachers put warm communication to their apparatus to make the class activities run fully as expected. Pioneering English teachers also provide activities that enable critical attitudes, and interactions according to students' personalities, and emotional connections as well as providing feedback in providing assessments.

Discussion

Anchored in Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, (2001) on the three subcategories of social presence (Affective, Open Communication, and Group Cohesion), the research findings unravel the preference most to group cohesion, it opens the explorations to apply group-based activities both in collaborative and cooperative learning in learning English. This is in line with Kim et al., (2011), Liu et al. (2009), and Molinillo et al. (2018) who put forth that social presence can be depicted apparently by applying those instructional techniques. The affective aspect plays a crucial role in social presence within the context of blended instruction. Social presence refers to the degree to which participants in an online or blended learning environment perceive the existence of other participants and feel a sense of connection with them. Blended instruction combines face-to-face and online learning, and the affective aspect refers to the emotional and social elements of the learning experience. In this regard, integrating affective aspects into blended instruction fosters a positive social presence, creating a supportive and engaging learning environment. This emotional and social connection enhances the overall learning experience and contributes to the success of blended instruction. Open communication is a key factor in enhancing social presence in blended instruction. Social presence refers to the sense of connection and community that learners experience in an online or blended learning environment. Open communication, involving transparent and responsive interaction, plays a crucial role in establishing and maintaining social presence. Besides, Open communication is instrumental in creating a positive and interactive social presence in blended instruction [4]. It fosters a sense of community, encourages active engagement, and supports the overall learning experience by promoting transparent and responsive interactions among learners and instructors. Group cohesion plays a significant role in enhancing social presence in blended instruction [14].

Group cohesion refers to the degree to which members of a learning group feel connected, share a sense of belonging, and work together toward common goals. In the context of blended instruction, which combines face-to-face and online learning, fostering group cohesion contributes to a positive and engaging learning environment. Group cohesion significantly enhances social presence in blended instruction by creating a sense of community, fostering support, increasing engagement, promoting effective communication, facilitating collaborative learning, encouraging social interactions, and fostering a shared sense of accountability among learners [23]–[25]. Building and maintaining group cohesion are important aspects of creating a positive and connected learning environment in a blended instructional setting. In

addition, with regard to the creative use of digital applications for teaching, EFL teachers in this research context have been exposed to the use of myriad feature feedback while teaching students in the material presentation. This can spur students' engagement in attending the course [26], [27], [28]. In addition, critical thinking, according to Turula (2018), can also be fostered so that students can accelerate their understanding of the input they receive during and after material presentations. Besides, when teachers have been linked with feedback provision, it can make learning more meaningful in the short and long term which can accelerate skill-based learning [9], [30], [31].

IV. CONCLUSION

This research has been reporting the positive view and preference of EFL in-service teachers in the concept of social presence. It implies that they are likely to be open to the changes that happen in the online and face-to-face mode of delivery for promoting the affective, open communication and group cohesion with certain levels of preferences.

Moreover, this research highlighted the positive views on the combination of affective aspects, open communication, and group cohesion which is crucial for the success of blended instruction. These elements work together and are believed to create a positive, engaging, and supportive learning environment that fosters collaboration, active participation, and a sense of community among learners

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