Community of Inquiry Perspectives in English Language Practice and Social Media

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Abstract

In the 21st century, the digital revolution has transformed all of society and social media has become flexible teaching spaces, metamorphosizing the learning process in online learning communities in developed and developing countries. In the field of English language skills acquisition, this educational metamorphosis offers new learning opportunities from a traditional in person learning environment. Learners take away new skills in a learning community of inquiry, led according to communicative and collaborative sharing, according to the techno-pedagogical learning approach. This paper aims to analyze and describe the practices of English Language learners on WhatsApp according to the Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework. Through a multisite ethnography, observation, and conversational analysis, data was collected in two WhatsApp groups (169 learners interacted to empower each other and improve English as a foreign language skills mastery). Findings revealed that CoI initiatives from learners helped participants to apply 21st century pedagogy skills effectively during their online interactions and provide an environment to grow together in language proficiency. This virtual space required participants to be actively involved in organized activities to increase the learners confidence in the daily language use. Recommendations mentioned that the next generation of educational leaders should foster CoI perspectives in lingua-didactic environments incorporating teachers and learners as facilitators in online blended learning for effective foreign language learning, and education systems.

Keywords: Community of Inquiry (CoI), Educational Metamorphosis, WhatsApp, 21st Century Skills, TESOL

Introduction and Background to the Study

In the 21st century, the digital revolution has transformed all of society and social media has become flexible teaching spaces, metamorphosing the learning process in online learning communities in developed and developing countries (Duha, 2022). Similarly, English is the language of internationalization as a medium of education and communication (Rao, 2019). In non-native English-speaking countries, it is noticeable that many individuals do not speak English as their primary language and they encounter a limited ability to read, speak, write, or understand English (Menggo et al., 2019). Simultaneously, the recent COVID -19 outbreak revealed the importance of e-learning platforms like various forms of social media (Egbert, 2020) to assure the pedagogical continuity through online communities of learning constructing new opportunities to engage learners in a successful educational experience according to the Community of Inquiry framework (CoI). For Garrison (2017), from the beginning, e-learning in the 21st Century was fundamentally shaped by the CoI framework. For González & Herrera (2015), as well as Gougou & Paschal (2022), approaches and methods to language learning have significantly changed over time and the integration of a techno-pedagogy based on social media in blended communities of learning generates the growth of new practices in favor of the 21st century pedagogy and the learners' proficiency. In the field of English language skills acquisition, this educational metamorphosis offers new learning opportunities from that of a traditional in person learning environment; learners take away new skills in a learning CoI by applying a communicative and collaborative sharing to this techno-pedagogical learning approach (Garrison, 2017; Erarslan, 2019; Keles, 2018). In Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) particularly, this educational metamorphosis is visible in Africa, Europe, Asia, America, and Oceania through the growth of Facebook and WhatsApp learning groups initiated by learners and teachers in a CoI perspective. In Cote d'Ivoire, like in India and Tanzania, this transformation of foreign language learning spaces requires an investigation that supports our main question in this research regarding Garrison's (2017) reflection about this educational metamorphosis: Does social media have the potential to transform educational transactions towards the ideal of a Community of Inquiry (CoI) in the context of English as Foreign language learning??

The objective is to analyze and describe the practices of English language learners on WhatsApp according to the CoI framework in order to suggest perspectives of this educational metamorphosis for an effective sustainable educational system.

Theoretical Lens

This study used the Community of Inquiry Framework (CoI) as theory to design

the investigation in online spaces (Garrison, 2017). In fact, according to González & Herrera (2015) the CoI model aimed at acquiring knowledge by constructing, collaborating, and virtually studying; therefore, it proposes the existence of three elements that overlap and generate a meaningful learning experience: *social presence* (ability of participants to identify with the community, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop interpersonal relationships by way of protecting their individual personalities); *teaching presence* (design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes with the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes); and *cognitive presence* (sustained communication). This transformation of English language learning is a source of metamorphosis in the educational system and our investigation can help to understand the situation in various teaching contexts in order to meet the needs of learners in the digital era (Garrison, 2017). Researchers in the English learning communities of Cote d'Ivoire took into consideration these three aspects to get a clear understanding of the learners English language skills growth according to the activities including the 21st century pedagogy in their daily practices in their online community (Paschal & Gougou, 2022; Gougou & Paschal, 2022). A reflection on past articles about this study scope is required and the literature review can help in this process as it is a common concern regarding the influence of English language learners' proficiency in this West African francophone country.

Literature Review

For González & Díaz (2015), CoI is a techno-pedagogical framework that has gathered significant attention in online educational research. It has been implemented in diverse disciplines, foreign language learning being one of particular interest for the authors of this paper. Due to the dynamics proposed by the framework, it appears as a practical and relevant option to generate a successful learning experience for English as a Second or Foreign Language learners. Therefore, this article provided a brief description of the model, its theoretical foundation, its applications and potential uses in the area of language learning in online environments. Our current paper intends to overcome the gap and provide a new perspective of the CoI application in a foreign language CoI initiated by learners from various contexts and experiences.

In addition, Doha's, (2022) empirical study used the CoI applied to Facebook to investigate social media for educational purposes. The choice of this study was to allow and test the effectiveness of English language learning in a linguo didactic virtual environment. Through a mixed-methods study, the authors use interviews and observation to record discussion activities on the speaking performances of undergraduate students in a blended EFL speaking class in Bangladesh. Their findings revealed that Facebook was helpful for blended learning conditions in improving their performances, but in different

ways. This study underlined the importance of social media in virtual augmented learning, in educational metamorphosis, and foreign language effective learning. However, this study used a small sample of participants on Facebook and in a blended learning environment in Bangladesh. Our current study uses WhatsApp as a learning platform and is only online in order to test CoI perspectives.

The study of Wu, Ma & Santos (2022) utilized a CoI framework to investigate fostering collaborative writing integration with online learning communities (OLCs) and English language learning. Their empirical study aimed to examine the possible impacts of out-of-class OLCs (guided by teachers) on students' collaborative English writing outcomes and learning satisfaction. Findings revealed that when it comes to fostering English learners' collaborative writing, the online approach helps students to develop higher learning skills and experiences to be more fluent in the English language usage of daily life. Even if this study helps us to establish an appropriate correlation between CoI framework and learners' skills and growth in online CoI like WhatsApp, it was an initiative of teachers in a formal learning context. Our study question explores how the CoI on WhatsApp impacts a learner's initiative as service learning to empower and encourage the language skill mastery following the components of the 21st pedagogy framework.

All the articles used in the literature review give an in-depth background of our research context and reveal a critical gap to understand the dynamism of CoI in the context of learner's linguo didactic initiative on social media according to a techno pedagogical approach including 21st century skills.

Methods

In this paper, researchers used a qualitative virtual ethnography case study (Falzon, 2016; Hine, 2015) to investigate according to the CoI framework (González & Díaz, 2015; Wu, Ma & Santos, 2022; Garrison, 2017). The research design used social media as an investigative tool, specifically WhatsApp, in order to observe, record, and describe the practices of the participants of the English learning community during their interactive activities in this techno-pedagogical virtual environment.

Sample

The inclusive and exclusive criterion selection of participants and research fields considered the relevance of the chosen social media, then the interactivity and focus on English language learning on the platform which mediated asynchronous and synchronous communication for the purpose of thinking and learning collaboratively (Garrison, 2017). Researchers started by exchanging with friends and learners around them to identify the appropriate CoI initiated by learners themselves to support their hunger to learn and

practice the English language in an online, affordable environment. A sample of two WhatsApp groups were selected (*English Together and Let's Talk English)*. These communities were created by learners on WhatsApp in December 2022 and gathered students, teachers, adult professionals, and unemployed learners involved in English language practice. Facilitators of the language learning activities were students or teachers. According to the research design, this study took place online in two WhatsApp groups created by learners in Cote d'Ivoire and a sample of 169 participants was selected according to the strata: *English Together (46) and Let's Talk English (123)*.

        The practice of English language learners involved in these CoI to mentor each other on WhatsApp was the main criteria to build our sample. The investigation took place online to record the two selected group communications and extract the data from October 2022 to May 2023.

Data Collection

        The first data collection method consisted of conducting a virtual ethnographic observation of the participant's practices on the two selected WhatsApp groups. We took into consideration the social presence, knowledge sharing, and teaching experience of methods. The second method consisted of recoding the CoI in the WhatsApp group according to the activities of teaching and learning, the media, engagement and the views of the participants. The data recorded takes into account information about publications, comments, comments of comments, image comments, video comments, natural sharing and tips, the usage of multilingualism, and flexibilities. The third method consisted of short interviews of the group administrators related to their motivation to create these communities and their perception of the impact of these groups on learners' English language proficiency.

Data Analysis

        This virtual ethnography qualitative research and the data analysis took into consideration the views and practices of the participants. The data is a result of observations, conversations and interviews. The descriptive analysis of the practices in the two communities and the content analysis of the conversation and interviews were used to process the data (Ringoot, 2014). Findings are categorized taking into account the three lenses of the CoI: 1) *social presence* (sense of community and engagement in collaborative and interactive activities); 2) *teaching presence* (facilitation and language skills acquisition according to the 21st century pedagogy); 3) *Cognitive presence* (co-construction of knowledge).

Findings

Social Presence

Social presence is characterized by the sense of community and engagement in collaborative and interactive activities. Our observations revealed that even though participants have different English language proficiencies, many still choose to write, make audios, and share their views without taking into consideration mistakes. These connections are a source of voluntary self-expression with peers. Example conversations:

- *16/05/2023, 18:59 - Hello dears!!!!*
Hope you're doing well! I'm very happy to meet anyone (even if it's virtual).Very excited to know that you're here and hope by the support of anyone we will grow together!
- *16/05/2023, 19:00 -: Yeah, I'm good!*
- *16/05/2023, 19:01- Here the rule nº1 is the authorization to make mistakes because it's the best way to learn*
- *16/05/2023, 19:02 - Absolutely!*

It is shown in the conversation below also:

- *26/01/2023, 21:46 -: Hi all and sundry , hope you are doing great. Just to Hello you check up on you. I really appreciate the effort and the commitment. Nothing comes effortlessly so let's make it together ...*
- *26/01/2023, 21:50 - Hello Great bro!! I Hope you do well too!!!! Thank you very much for the your commitment and your advices. WE are a family*

Social presence is expressed by the usage of emoticons, daily sharing, and the connection between the learning community members as a family involved in English language practice to overcome the non-English language native contextual challenges. It is a collaborative educational approach using WhatsApp to connect learners in a flexible learning space offering communicative activities of English language practice at a low cost with engaging opportunities. The daily social presence of the learners on this social media platform is a good tool of engagement and interactivity that motivates English language practices without barriers of sanction and psychological fear.

Teaching Presence

In the study, observations revealed that English language learning facilitation by peers increases motivation and interactivity. See the below sample conversation:

- *16/05/2023, 20:13 - : Ok ,u will teach everybody to learn English*
- *16/05/2023, 20:21 -: Why me! I'm here learn like you I think*
- *16/05/2023, 20:27 - : That's swell i will learn from you and you will learn from me ,both case are useful*
- *16/05/2023, 20:30 - : We'll learn from each other's*
- *16/05/2023, 21:05 - : Ok, that's right. We're all here to learn. Thanks*
- *16/05/2023, 21:05 -: Don't mention it*

The presence of peers (friends, classmates …) as facilitators increases the engagement and motivation to practice the language. According to the two English language learning facilitators, the initial goal of these WhatsApp groups was just to create a family feeling in order to empower each other and practice English daily. The groups were also created to increase satisfaction in participation and to encourage learners to stay active in community activities in order to continually grow in speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Learning from each other increases the learners' autonomy and involvement in the usage of English in daily contexts.

Cognitive Presence

Cognitive presence is a co-construction of knowledge by learners in various activities of speaking, writing, listening and reading as in the conversation below:

- *16/05/2023, 19:01 Here the rule nº1 is the authorization to make mistakes because it's the best way to learn*
- *16/05/2023, 19:02 - Absolutely!*
- *16/05/2023, 19:04 -: Thank you brother .If my English is bad please help me sometime*
- *16/05/2023, 19:05 -: Don't worry brother! We're all here to learn. Let's just practice!*
- *16/05/2023, 19:17 -: Who can explain us this picture?*

Social media reduces the distance and offers a self-directed e-learning experience through techno pedagogy according to the CoI approach. The cognitive presence in these English language learning CoI's promotes discussions when participants' contributions show their different perspectives while sharing ideas. It is source of high engagement to write or make audios for their views and share various materials.

Discussion

Our investigation in *English Together* and L*et's Talk English,* two English

language learning WhatsApp groups showed the great metamorphosis of educational models in the digital era according to the participants' interactivity and peers' growth based on collaboration. For Garrison (2017), a CoI is a collaborative approach to thinking and learning.

Indeed, *the social presence* on WhatsApp increased the motivation to interact, learn and share, knowing that most of the members of this community are not selected on the basis of age, activities, or gender. It created an environment to practice utilizing the English language daily, without the fear of mistakes and punishments (Gougou & Paschal, 2022). Teaching in this linguo didactic virtual environment offers no pressure, accepts mistakes, and offers flexibility to write, speak, listen and improve grammar and vocabulary. For Garison (2017), dialogue for conversations (feeling of trust, respect and concern) is directly associated with the need to create social presence and increase learning outcomes. Wu, Ma & Santos (2022) remarked that applying the CoI framework in English language teaching fosters English learners' collaborative learning and mentoring of each other. This techno pedagogy online approach helps students to develop higher learning skills and experiences to become more fluent in the daily use of the English language. This educational metamorphosis in English learning language as a foreign language facilitates interactions during (and engagement in) collaborative learning (Jiang & Zhang, 2020). It means that in a CoI perspective, the social presence of learners as mentors of each other is an innovative reality adapting the learning process, meeting learners' needs, and mutual sharing to empower all.

Additional findings revealed that CoI helps group members to become proficient and fluent depending on the motivation and activities of learning. Foreign language learning is promoted through respect and usage. Indeed, some participants use their local languages, and emoticons to write when they encounter difficulties This community offers empowerment to learners. CoI also increases soft skills. Linguo didactic environments increase motivation and engagement of community members by offering diversity of activities, writing and immersion in the practices (Duha, 2022; Shamaieva et al. 2023). For Garison, (2017) while it may seem surprising to mainstream education, e-learning is not a radical new innovation but a return to traditional values associated with discourse and collaborative inquiry that distinguishes human development. Innovative e-learning practices represent authentic approaches to teaching and learning based on collaborative construction through critical reflection and discourse for an effective linguo-didactic environment.

The context of virtual interactions on WhatsApp increased the learners' confidence to practice and gave learners the opportunity to grow together, thanks to various activities. Teaching presence is expressed by the learners' sharing their thoughts freely. Language skills acquisition is supported according to the 21st century pedagogy. The sharing of videos, learning materials, apps, and tips contributes to the improvement of participants

and their confidence level in the usage of the English language in their daily life through virtual community activities. This aspect is shown through the sharing of tips, practices, and teaching resources applying the six elements of 21st century pedagogy (Norris, 2019): c*ollaboration and communication, creativity and imagination, critical thinking and problem solving, digital literacy, citizenship, student leadership and personal development*. All the activities use the CoI framework to increase the learners' ability and skills to practice and perform in the English language daily. In our ever changing world, it is crucial to foster learner's autonomy and proficiency in foreign language skills acquisition by using both the traditional classroom and an e-learning platform to create a new, hybrid learning environment (Keles, 2018; Minalla, 2018). This educational metamorphosis is a common concern in developing and developed countries as the usage of social media like WhatsApp is an innovation in the traditional learning model giving the voice to learners as facilitators of their peers' empowerment in a mutual service learning initiative.

Fostering CoI in a linguo didactic environment through a techno pedagogical approach offers new alternatives for a sustainable educational metamorphosis. It is a good way for teachers, educators, and individuals to expand outside of the traditional classroom to enhance student engagement and learning (Duha, 2022). Collaboration on social media transforms inquiry activities into processes of co-construction of knowledge around shared understandings or concepts (Koehler & Vilarinho-Pereira, 2021). Teachers and educators are encouraged to join these learners' initiatives on social media to help the facilitation and support the dynamism of these communities as a lever of community involvement in knowledge sharing outside of classrooms. In addition, facilitators of online learning communities are encouraged to adopt lifelong learning approaches, like the benefits of free MOOCs offered by the British Council, American English, or similar institutions for an effective integration of the 21st century skills in the techno pedagogy of English language on virtual learning environments like WhatsApp (Paschal & Gougou, 2022; Wu , Ma & Santos, 2022). Indeed, new technologies and pedagogies need to be adopted to meet the changes taking place in the new century (Wu, Ma & Santos, 2022). Similarly, Garrison (2017) stated that this convergence of technological developments calls to rethink effective educational experiences driven by e-learning innovation.

Conclusion

This study aimed to analyze and describe the practices of English Language learners on WhatsApp according to the CoI framework in order to suggest perspectives of this educational metamorphosis for an effective sustainable educational system. Findings show that the digital usage of social media like WhatsApp in the educative approach regenerates innovative practices of self-directed learning of English as a foreign language through the service learning initiative on WhatsApp. This study emphasizes the necessity

to foster blended learning, flipped classroom, or techno pedagogy in both linguo- didactic and the other learning disciplines for an effective impact of teaching/learning. As a limitation, this is a qualitative study in one West African, francophone country. Future studies can be mixed and taken into consideration.

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