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Scaffolding Engagement in the Immersive t-MALL Classroom

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Abstract

This paper focuses on engagement dynamics among foreign language students in coping within an immersive pedagogy in a tablet mobile assisted language learning (t-MALL) classroom ecology. This qualitative action research was implemented with 24 second-year undergraduates majoring in French as a foreign language in a Malaysian university. The pedagogical implementation included a task-based learning approach delivered according to personalized, meaningful and learner- controlled learning principles. In accordance with social constructivist theory, the implementation emphasized student-centered and controlled learning. Scaffolding choices involved instructor as well as peer and technological support in an immersive blended learning environment sustained with Facebook groups. The learners' engagement was investigated according to grounded theory's procedures. The learners' perceptions of classroom learning processes were triangulated with the instructors' reflections with a three-level coding applied to the constant comparative method of analysis. Findings supported the use of t-MALL as sustaining engagement in immersive learning environments. The learner-centered and controlled approach allowed just-in time triadic scaffolding which contributed to raising active participation throughout the tasks. The implementation of t-MALL enhanced the students' perceptions of the learning environment which unleashed their willingness-to-communicate in the target language. Reaching volition further contributed to enhancing the students' motivational factors of engagement towards acquisition and self-regulated learning. The discussion imparts recommendations and best practices towards efficient scaffolding for engaged language learning in immersive and participatory environments.

Keywords

Action Research, Classroom Engagement, Language Acquisition, Tablet Computers, MALL

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1. Introduction

This qualitative study was implemented in the researcher's language courses with a single cohort of students majoring in French as a foreign language in a Malaysian public university. The research site hereafter referred to with the pseudonym UniMalaysia is one of the two Malaysian universities offering French at the Bachelor level. The French program is carried out over seven semesters. The curriculum for the French major comprises intensive language courses as well as extensive French for specific purpose courses along with introductory courses about French culture and civilization. The students join the program as absolute beginners and graduate as independent users based on the proficiency scale established by the Common European Framework of References for languages (CEFR). Therefore, the curriculum includes intensive language courses weekly with an emphasis on the development of cultural and communicative skills.

However, in Malaysia, the foreign language classroom represents the only occasion for the learners to practice their speaking skills, a situation which slows down the acquisition process. Furthermore, in the Malaysian multicultural and multilingual context, learning and practicing locally spoken languages in situations of immersion is natural for Malaysian learners. Therefore, Malaysian students are accustomed to acquire language skills in a naturalistic environment through media exposure and socializing with friends (Kärchner-Ober, 2012). Therefore, from the Malaysian students' perspective, the classroom constitutes an isolated micro-French speaking zone. Moreover, owing to the Malaysian education system which promotes English as a second language as well as local languages such as Mandarin and Tamil, most Malaysian undergraduates are either second language speakers or bilinguals. According to Wharton (2000), for bilinguals learning a foreign language, the lack of linguistic and cultural exposure was described as destabilizing. Consequently, the lack of exposure was found to intensify the foreign language classroom anxiety factor as identified by Al-Schboul et al. (2013) with the learners becoming anxious upon realizing that they lacked basic notions in the language. Meanwhile, Nakatani (2012) as well as Humphreys and Spratt (2008) explained that bilinguals became confused when they came to realize that they needed to develop additional skills and learning strategies to make sense of the unknown and to cultivate learning methods to cope with the unexpected in the learning process. Arnold (2006) emphasized the linguistic and cultural challenges faced by isolated foreign language learners in order to acquire balanced linguistic and communicative skills. The learners' readiness in accepting these challenges were found determinant in the students' willingness-to-communicate by Liu and Jackson (2008) as well as by MacIntyre et al. (2003).

Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) affordances transformed the definition of blended learning. With MALL, students and instructors alike have ubiquitous access to information and virtual learning communities (Abdous, Camarena, & Facer, 2009). In UniMalaysia, ubiquitous Internet access resulted in online learning opportunities occurring simultaneously in the classroom and remotely (Gabarre & Gabarre, 2012). During contact hours, the learners have the possibility to physically interact with their peers and lecturers in the classroom while discussing the lessons' topics virtually from their mobile devices. This adds another dimension to blended learning since the learners are also able to use the online sphere within the classroom (Wang, Shen, Novak, & Pan, 2008). Therefore, the current study aimed to improve the classroom learning environment in order to promote the students' engagement in the target language through meaningful and interactive tasks during contact hours. The tablet mobile assisted language learning (t-MALL) classroom aimed to create an immersive t-MALL environment which could foster and sustain spontaneous interactions in the target language.

1.1. T-MALL Engagement Affordances

In most cases, the foreign language classroom is a physically confined space connected to the outside world through the Internet. As illustrated in **Figure 1**, Foreign Language Learning (FLL) is influenced by human actors (i.e. learners and instructors) as well as human controlled factors (i.e. settings and tools). Classroom dynamics reflect the diversity of the learners and the pedagogical choices of the lecturer. However, unforeseen factors potentially hinder the planned course's progression. The learners may, for example, request for revisions and explanations. Occasionally, the instructor may also find the class schedule and location unfit for certain tasks. Different learning objectives require diversified tasks which necessitate various tools and learning configurations based on the targeted skills. Creative learning activities such as speaking and writings tasks sustain the learners' interest, increase their exposure and challenge their understanding of course content as described by Dörnyei (2001) as well as MacIntyre and Baker (2003). Grammar drills, polling quizzes and language games are stimulating and improve language assimilation (Godwin-Jones, 2014; Méndez & Slisko, 2013).

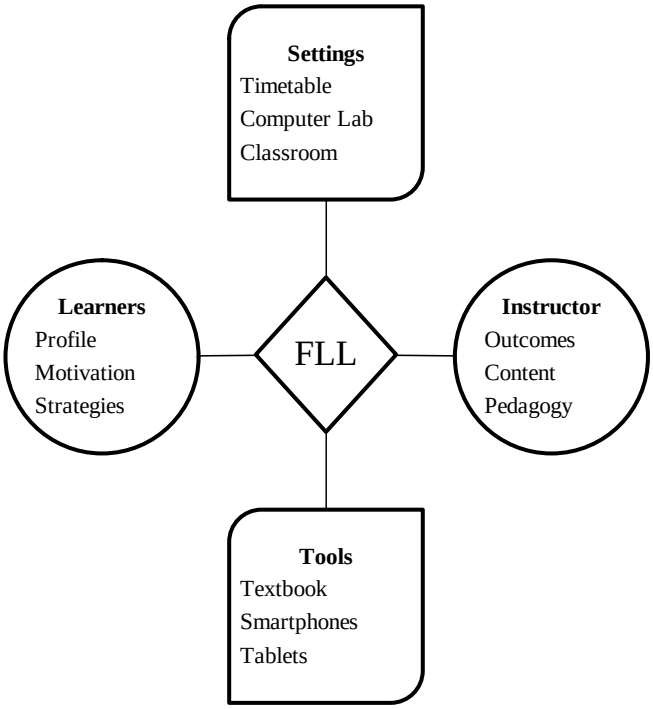

Figure 1. Actors and factors interacting in the foreign language classroom.

However, in UniMalaysia, the lack of flexibility of classroom facilities limited the lecturers' freedom to reorganize the lesson plan based on the learners' needs and thus impeded the learning pace. As explicated by Mohammad Moslemi Haghighi and Mahmud Mohd Jusan (2012), "students" attentiveness increases when the classroom seating arrangement supports the instructional goal (p. 288). These authors further established that classroom configuration was closely related to the modes of interactions as well as to the types of activities which could be efficiently conducted. As such, the ubiquity and tool diversity of tablet computers brought a new perspective to foreign language learning bridging the advantages of classrooms as well as computer laboratory settings. Incorporating tablet computers in the classroom was expected to enable the students to benefit from a student-centred technological, peer and instructor support framework (Gabarre, Gabarre, Rosseni Din, Parilah-Mohd Shah, & Aidah Abdul Karim, 2014). Therefore, the designed learning environment included a t-MALL technological scaffolding dimension aiming to raise the learners' confidence in face-to-face settings in order to promote their in-class participation.

1.2. Social Constructivist T-MALL Engagement Design

From past experiences, the researcher believes in the principles of social constructivism which considers the classroom as a community where the instructor facilitates the co-construction of knowledge among learners through learner-centered, meaningful and learner-controlled conceptual approaches as explicated in Brown (2001) and Hickey (1997). According to educational psychologists such as Bowman (2011) as well as Reschly and Christenson (2012), these approaches create a learning environment which promotes virtuous motivational factors leading to engagement and further learning. According to Skinner and Pitzer's (2012) dynamic model of motivational development, the learning environment should provide a caring, supportive and fair feedback, constructive and bonding peer relations as well as challenging opportunities to learn through structured and meaningful tasks.

In UniMalaysia, integrating mobile assisted language learning with tablet computers had the potential to improve the learning environment and thus to increase the motivational factors by providing a ubiquitous and customized support framework within the foreign language classroom. In accordance with Chang's (2005) findings, the improved learning environment was believed capable of encouraging learners to self-regulate their learning

based on their immediate needs during lessons and ultimately increasing their engagement. Subsequently, the implementation of a task-based learning pedagogical approach with tablet computers in the foreign language classroom was designed in order to expand the learning motivational factors with meaningful opportunities to practice the language. The t-MALL classroom designed in this study sought to improve the course's environment and delivery methods with the aim of promoting the learners' engagement. The technologically enhanced engagement framework with tablet computers implemented in the foreign language classroom targeted to provide the learners with a just-in-time and customized technological support in addition to peer and instructor scaffolding thus enabling the learners to self-regulate their learning while completing meaningful tasks. This framework reflected a social constructivist perspective (Vygotsky, 1978) with educators promoting engagement using a learner-centred approach (Anton, 1999; Dörnyei, 2001) associated to a task-based pedagogy. Within this approach, the learners progressively became active and in control of their own learning (Chia, 2007; Cotterall, 2000; Zimmerman, 2002) which ultimately sustained motivational factors of engagement.

2. Methodology

A grounded action research method was selected to conduct this study with one entire cohort of 24 participants during four consecutive semesters. The combination of both action research cyclical method (Mills, 2011) and of grounded theory analytical procedures (Charmaz, 2006) allowed for the continuous improvement of the immersive learning action plan throughout the research as described by Dick (2007). Grounded theory ensured the analysis remained true to the participants' learning experience regarding the fitness of the instructor, peer and technological triadic scaffolding within the immersive learning pedagogy.

2.1. Participants

This qualitative research was conducted over four semesters with a single cohort of 24 Malaysian students majoring in French as a foreign language (20 women and four men). The students were in their second semester at the onset of the research. The curriculum for the French major comprised intensive language courses as well as extensive French for specific purpose courses along with introductory courses about French culture and civilization. The researchers had worked as French as a foreign language learning lecturers in Malaysia for 14 years and had been employed for seven years in the research site.

2.2. Research Design

A grounded action research was implemented during four academic semesters to evaluate the fitness of the t-MALL classroom environment on the students' engagement. As such, the action plan was cyclically monitored and refined (Mills, 2011). The cyclical interventions were combined with the investigation methods of grounded theory as described by Dick (2007) and Pamuk (2012). Therefore, the data collection and analysis were conducted using grounded theory's iterative, triangulated and data driven procedures (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As illustrated in **Figure 2**, the current research was bounded within social constructivism as a philosophical conception of the world, a situated environment learning theory and as a framework for investigation. The researchers as well as the learners were involved in a collaborative inquiry towards designing the best pedagogical and technological action plan. The researchers sought a prolonged engagement with the participants and abode by the principles of "pride", "dignity", "identity", "responsibility", "space" and "place" defined by Stringer (2008: p. 33) as the human dimensions of action research.

2.3. T-MALL Intervention and Pedagogical Implementation

In the current study, all the learners owned smartphones and laptops whereas tablet computer's ownership consisted of 5 students equipped with iPads 2s. The students always brought their smartphones and tablets in class however they seldom carried their laptops due to the device's bulkiness and to the availability of desktop computers on a one-to-one basis in the computer laboratories. Throughout the implementation of the t-MALL classroom, the researcher was careful to respect the students' free will in their choice of devices, tools and strategies for language learning. Free will guaranteed the fairness of the implementation in terms of equal opportunities to learn. Free will also prevented forcing the students in directions which could be detrimental to their learning outcomes. Five iPad 2s were purchased in order to complement the learners' equipment in tablet computers. The

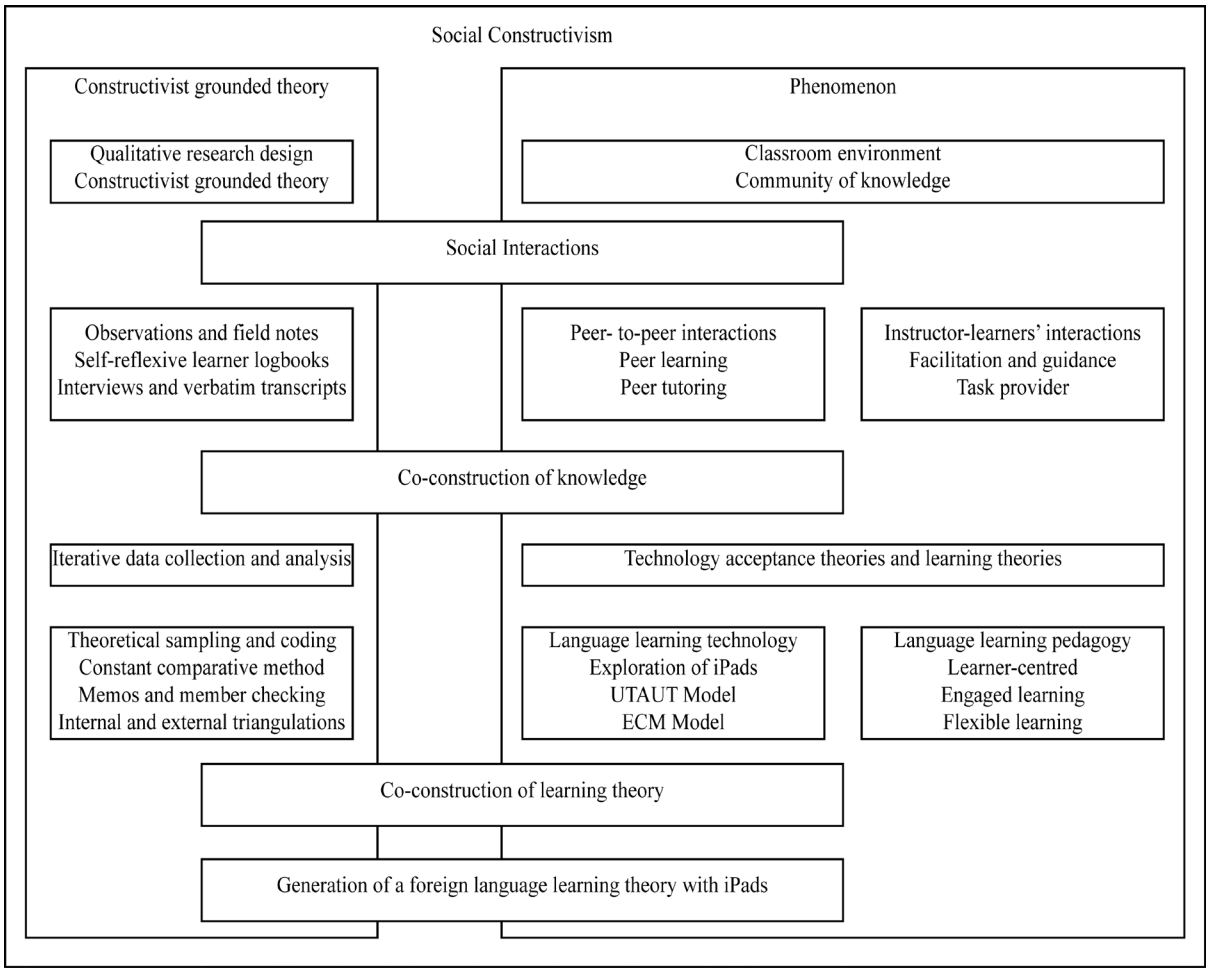

Figure 2. Social constructivist paradigm.

loaned iPads widened the theoretical sampling possibilities by preventing the research from being solely driven by an opportunistic sampling which would limit the participants to the learners' owning tablet computers. This set-up limited the biases by extending the data collection to all learners independently from their social and financial backgrounds.

Due to the novelty of tablet computers in the research site, the concepts from Huang, Lin and Chuang's adaptation (2007) of the Technological Acceptance Model (TAM) for mobile learning were used to analyze the students' iPad usage, perceived usefulness and enjoyment. In addition, the lecturers analyzed the fitness of the technological integration in view of the pedagogical objectives and desired learning outcomes with the descriptors from the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) provided by Archambault and Barnett (2010), Graham (2011), and Schmidt, Baran, Thompson, Mishra and Shin (2009). Furthermore, proficiency skills were benchmarked against the CEFR descriptors (Language Policy Division, 2009) while the students' engagement during learning tasks were recorded and scrutinized using Skinner and Pitzer's visible signs of engagement descriptors.

The courses involved in the current research used secret and private Facebook groups as a VLE (See **Table 1**) and were taught during 14 weeks. The virtual learning environment (VLE) was hosted on Facebook since all the students were actively involved academically through this social network (Gabarre, Gabarre, Rosseni Din, ParilahMohd Shah, & Aida Abdul Karim, 2013). The Facebook groups were used for the delivery of course material, to post the lessons' objectives and task instructions as well as for the students' to share their productions upon task completion. In the present study, the lessons' objectives, instructions and material were posted a day ahead of each lesson to allow access before, during and after class. The exclusive usage of the target language in

Table 1. Implementation.

Semester	Course	CECR level	Duration per week
2	French 2	A2	8 hours
3	French 3	A2	8 hours
4	Reading and Writing Skills	B1	8 hours
4	French for Tourism and Hospitality	B1	3 hours
4	Introduction to French Culture	B1	3 hours
5	Communication Skills	B1-B2	4 hours
5	Oral and Writing Skills	B1-B2	4 hours

the Facebook groups also provided a social platform used to promote exposure and interactions in French within the learning community capable of supporting ubiquitous feedback from instructors and peers. In the current research, the t-MALL environment was designed so as to bridge in-class as well as out-of class learning. Therefore, the term immersive learning reflected the ubiquitous dimension integrating mobile devices and a VLE in the scaffolding framework enabling the students to interact within their learning communities anytime, anywhere and from any devices.

The lessons were divided into three sequences comprising two micro-tasks progressively guiding the students towards a final production task. All the tasks were designed to introduce new material using multimedia channels destined to provide meaningful opportunities to practice the target language and to promote spontaneous interactions during the lessons. The tasks' instructions provided indications regarding the tasks' objectives as well as timeframes and working configurations. The students were allowed to perform the tasks individually or collaboratively. The first micro-task consisted in brainstorming activities allowing for the revision of essential structures, vocabulary and intercultural traits. The second micro-task introduced new structures, vocabulary, professional or cultural themes and thus provided discovery sequences and learning opportunities through real practice drills. The final task simulated a real situation so as to challenge the students into producing meaningful oral as well as written material. The final production took the form of debates, discussions, video and audio documentaries, multimedia and oral presentation.

2.4. Procedure and Data Analysis

Each semester represented one cycle. Furthermore, the lessons were planned, delivered and analysed as micro cycles. The multiple data sources comprised daily online and classroom observations, artefacts, weekly reflexive students' surveys and bimonthly diaries. Focus group interviews were conducted after five weeks of implementation with the 24 participants in order to clarify and expand emerging processes and to finalise the purposeful sampling. The theoretical sample retained eight expert participants (5 Malaysian Chinese women, 2 Malay women, 1 Malay man) selected for their learning profiles, behavioural, affective and cognitive engagement, their reflexivity in recalling events as well as for their willingness and ability to share their experiences in one-on-one interviews. All the expert participants were permanent iPad users (4 using their own iPads, 4 using the research iPads). The expert participants were resourceful participants based on their displayed learning behaviours and engagement patterns, their motivation and efforts to learn the language, their attitude and creativity in addressing communication and cultural challenges as well as based on their users' profiles in developing novel strategies with tablet computers for language learning. In addition, twelve resource participants (5 Malaysian Chinese women, 4 Malay women, 2 Malaysian Chinese men and 1 Malay male) were occasionally consulted for triangulation purposes regarding the interpretation of events and to explore further directions in conjunction with aspects arising from one-on-one interviews with the expert participants. Some of the resource participants were suggested by the expert participants in a sampling method known as snowballing. The researchers nurtured a prolonged relationship based on mutual trust and respect with the participants (Corbin & Morse, 2003; Damaniakis & Woodford, 2012). Two rounds of one-on-one interviews were conducted every cycle with the eight expert participants in order to generate rich data on the learning processes involved. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for coding, peer and member reflections purposes. The data analysis followed

grounded theory's three-levelled coding procedure referred to as initial, focused and theoretical coding stages described in Charmaz (2006). The constant comparative method of analysis and the triangulation process were performed with the assistance of ATLAS. ti as recommended by Friese (2012) for coding, data mining and mapping.

3. Findings

The immersive t-MALL classroom was implemented from the first lesson which also happened to be the first class of the semester for the students who had just returned from their holidays. The instructor welcomed the students in French as they entered the laboratory. They smiled at the lecturer and either responded to or initiated greetings in French. Once seated, the students seemed happy to see their classmates after the holidays and none showed signs of uneasiness or dreariness. The students vacated to their own occupations and conversations waiting for their classmates and the lesson to start. However, the lecturer noticed that the students stopped whatever they were doing whenever the door was opened. There was no feeling of apprehension from the students but rather an intense curiosity. As it turned out, they were actually monitoring the door and observing the reactions from new comers, either curious to see their faces or to hear them speak in French. The students experienced what the instructor thought as a greeting routine as some sort of extraordinary ritual. Furthermore, once the greeting was over and the new comers reached their seats, it turned out they were telling their friends about what had just happened, miming how they had felt shocked or surprised. All of them were excited by the event which was interpreted as positive. This ritual was of course repeated and the late comers were greeted not just by the instructor but by increasing pairs of staring eyes which constituted a greater challenge as they were facing a larger group. The immersive classroom had begun and the students had successfully completed their first task: performing greetings in French.

3.1. Willingness to Communicate as an Engagement Catalyst

The first contact was encouraging for the lecturer and seemed positive for the students as well. What transpired from this initial sequence was the eagerness of the students to speak followed by the joy they expressed once they had spoken even if they had uttered only a simple word. This feeling defined as volition by Macintyre (2007) describes the state of transgressing individual barriers to transform the willingness-to-communicate into the act of speaking. For Macintyre, the willingness-to-communicate is the learner's inner wish to speak while volition is the exact moment when the wish materialises itself in the act of speaking. The transformation of expectations into acts include motivational, cognitive and affective factors which are intertwined in both the learners' history and the context at the exact moment the speech was uttered. Crick (2012) situated these factors within the learner's regulated context or Perezhivanie. The learners' self-regulation, identity and personal history constituted the core of each individual which controlled volition, cognition, affect and behaviour. In her representation of engagement in a learning environment, Crick positioned these factors immediately adjacent to the zone of proximal development and highlighted the interwoven personal, social and global contexts on the engagement process. This concurred with observed behaviours which revealed that the students started greeting each other in French once they reached their seats, sharing the hype of the instant. This concurred with Csikszentmihalyi (2000)'s definition of a state-of-flow resulting from experiencing a profound enjoyment. **Figure 3** illustrates the emerging engagement processes based on the students' perceptions of the immersive approach triangulated with their expressed willingness-to-communicate. Initial findings corroborated Macintyre's volition analysis as well as Crick's engagement factors as being intricately connected to the learners' interests, perceptions of the environment and self-perceptions of their performances.

3.2. Reaching Volition

The proficiency requirement of the first sequence was situated within the learners' regulated zone. Therefore, the students were expected to be able to greet their instructor without external assistance in accordance with Krashen's (1983) Comprehensible input theory. The students all succeeded in this task which showed they had acquired appropriate linguistics skills as well as social greetings skills. Their initial surprise revealed their lack of exposure to spontaneous interactions in the target language. At this moment by the door, some students seemed to float for a few seconds. As they later explained, their first reaction was of surprise with the medium

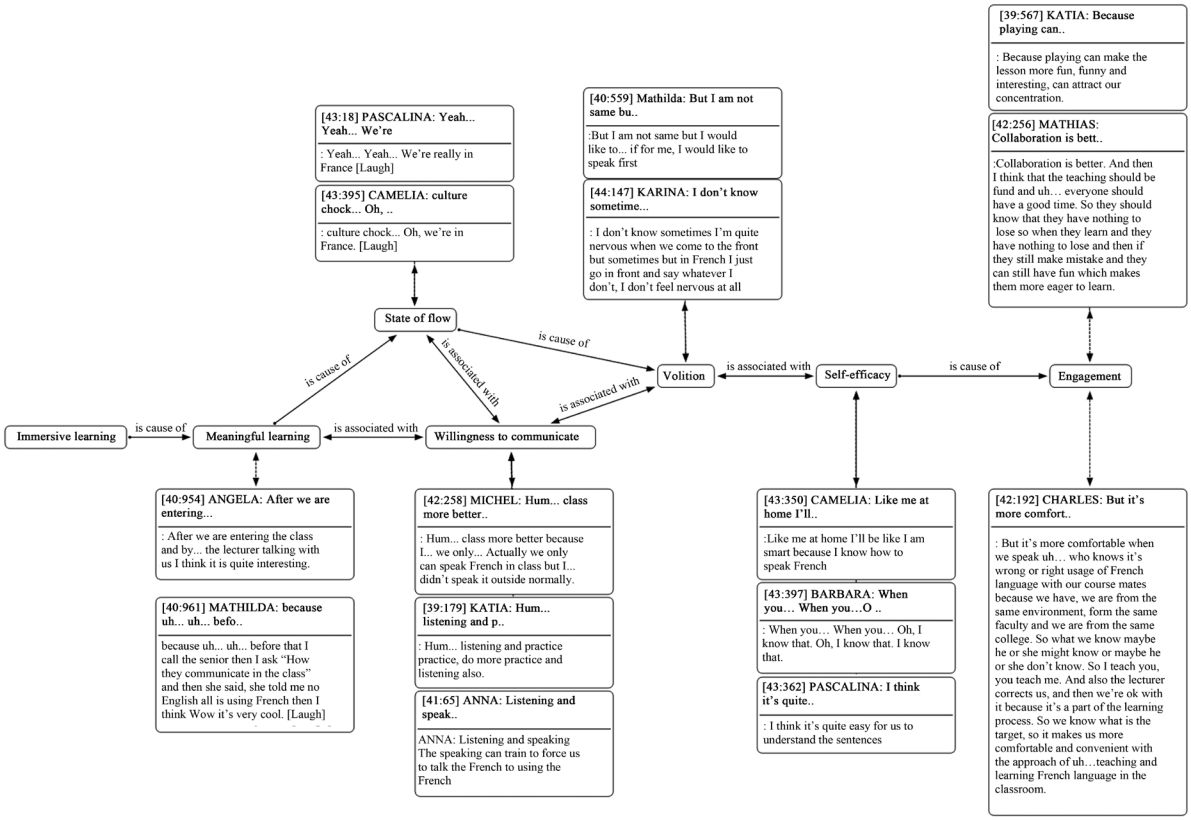

Figure 3. Virtual engagement processes within the immersive approach.

used during the class. In this short instant, they were lacking control over the situation as they had been challenged into the task by surprise. This sensation was further explicated during the interviews as reflected in the following excerpts.

"*This is new… This is new guys*" (Barbara).

"*Culture shock… Oh, we're in France*" (Camélia).

Subsequently, volition occurred and they spoke. The act was spontaneous, sudden and extremely brief but as they walked towards their friends, they felt like sprinters crossing the finishing line. Joy and pride constitute visible on-task engagement behaviours as well as strong motivation factors. Furthermore, being successful raised their confidence and perceptions of efficacy as illustrated in the following passage which concurred with Skinner and Pitzer's (2012) model of classroom engagement.

"*Yeah… Yeah… We're really in France*" (Pascalina).

"*It's very exciting.* […] *When you… When you think… Oh, I know that. Oh, I know that. I know that*" (Barbara).

The instructor endeavoured to capture the students' interests in order to raise their engagement to this state of volition. Bowman (2011) situated the highest level of on-task engagement in the behavioural expression of a state of flow. In the current research, the instructor aimed to create tasks which could induce flow within a learning environment which could motivate the students and help them to move beyond their anxiety. The concepts of flow was defined in Krashen's (2013: p. 103) forgetting hypothesis as a state where the students are so absorbed in the task that their attention was "focused on the message to such an extent that thoughts of anxiety do not occur".

3.3. Expressed Willingness to Communicate

In the focus-group interviews, the willingness-to-communicate occurred in 39 instances. In congruence with Alalou and Chamberlain (1999), speaking and listening skills were ranked higher than writing, reading, and grammar skills. As explicated, the students' perceptions of their speaking skills benchmarked their level of ex-

pertise in the language and therefore were associated with their employability. As such and as reflected in the following extracts, most participants did not foresee being able to communicate in the target language with native speakers until the fourth and subsequent semesters.

"*Maybe in the next or next or next semester*" (Sarah).

"*If at least I can speak French after I graduate…*" (Sylvia).

In addition, the participants' multilingualism surfaced at regular intervals when they recalled their previous experiences in learning locally spoken languages. The participants resented the lack of opportunities to practice their French and considered the resulting lack of practice as the reason for their difficulties in acquiring the language in congruence with Wharton (2000)'s findings on the need for bilinguals particularly natural bilinguals to acquire the language through socialisation and immersion.

"*In Malaysia, I use different languages with my friends. I switch from one language to another depending on the person. It's natural. Except for French*" (Mélissa).

"*It's different from when we learnt Malay and English in primary school. When we learn French in the university hum… our surrounding… not many people will speak French so maybe a bit difficult for us to speak fluently and understand more about French. For English and Malay, everyone is using these languages so maybe we can easily communicate and easily understand. So it is a very big difference*" (Catarina).

"*I think it's better to learn French in a French speaking country. It's very difficult to learn French here in Malaysia because when you see your friends, you want to speak French but then you don't know whether it is correct. And you don't know whether your friends can correct you*" (Barbara).

However, even though the student unanimously rated their proficiently level as too basic to sustain conversations they were eager to practice in class and to take the necessary steps to achieve their speaking goals. The fact that French was used as the medium of instruction was a motivational factor which answered the students' wish for exposure.

"*In class, it is better to speak because actually we can only speak French during class*" (Michel).

"*Our level is very low because we seldom speak. So we need to speak, speak, speak, speak, and speak*" (Katia).

Interacting in the target language rationalised how they evaluated their proficiency levels and helped them focus on the skills they needed to improve. It also helped them to define their learning strategies and to identify whether they learnt more from exposure to reading or from increased listening input. Listening skills were linked to the development of speaking skills as the students explained they needed to cope with the situation in order to be able to express themselves accordingly.

"*For me, I would like to speak first. Not just writing because as I hear the word first… then I speak it and after I just write it*" (Mathilda).

"*I think listening and writing …and speaking… because listening can train us… hum… because just now I'd say that I cannot catch the words so I think that listening will help me in conversations*" (Emilia).

Feelings of excitement, enjoyment, confidence and pride emerged from the participants' narratives which showed the immersive classroom was providing the learners with a meaningful, caring and comforting learning environment. Overall, the participants described the immersive classroom as beneficial in their efforts towards language learning and their language acquisition process.

"*We actually connect with what other lecturers has taught us in theory. We bring it to this class which involves speaking. So we use what has been taught there in theory and also the grammar parts from this class… and it teaches us how to speak*" (Charles).

The fact that the medium of instruction was French stimulated their interests during the course and made them more focused and eager to participate. Being able to complete the tasks and to share their productions contributed to raise their self-esteem. During the interviews, introvert learners expressed the desire to be forced to speak in French as they declared themselves as too shy to grab the opportunity to speak. This transpires in the suggestion of Emilia who went as far as suggesting some kind of punishment for the students who used another language.

"*In class just speak French. Other language not allowed.* […] *and if we do, the lecturer can warn us first and then give a fine*" (Emilia).

4. Discussion

This section discusses how the triadic scaffolding sustained the students' engagement while coping within the

immersive classroom and promoted the development of their self-regulated learning skills in order to be able to interact in their French.

4.1. Nurturing Volition in the Classroom

As described in the previous section, the students were initially surprised with the French immersive learning environment. During the warm-up sequence, the instructor solicited the students' spontaneous interactions in brainstorming activities. These pre-task sequences aimed to stimulate the students' willingness-to-communicate in order to trigger the volition process. Therefore, the instructor strived to build a propitious environment from the beginning of the course as it would impart a positive mood for the rest of the lesson. The learning contract for the pre-task was focused on interactive participation not on forms. Mistakes were acceptable and the learning contract established dealing with hesitations and mistakes in a learning community of practice. Therefore, the instructor encouraged the students to work together and to use whatever support they needed. The students were seated in groups of five or six. The round tables were like islets scattered in the classroom.

As expected with beginner students, spontaneous interactions resulted in a few words spoken in the target language. At this level, participation needed to be nurtured and rewarding in order to foster engagement from the group. The instructor wrote the students' contributions on the board which provided immediate feedback to the participating students as well as to the whole class. Seeing their contributions on the board was immediately gratifying as it confirmed their answers were relevant to the lecturer's expectations. In addition, the contributors received instant feedback on the word spelling without being directly exposed. However, this tactic could backfire in the eventuality the instructor could not catch the student's utterance because the student might become confused or ashamed resulting in attrition which risked preventing future attempts of volition. As such, when a student uttered isolated words, the situation became particularly delicate for the instructor who needed to project a positive image of the participating learners to their classmates. Extrovert students volunteered easily. They belonged to the communicative type of students who learnt from being engaged in real practice. For those students, the task-based immersive classroom came as a relief after their first experience with the form-focused pedagogy of the first semester.

"*Well this way to me is fun because… when you speak to other people it's more than just grammar. A language is more than just grammar. It's something that you have to feel*; *you have to know what to put pressure on. You have to express your feelings.* […] *So when I feel that I am emotionally involved with this words it gives me the feeling that I want to know more*" (Mathias).

4.2. Dealing with Anxiety

Therefore, it was essential to nurture the students' willingness to communicate in order to sustain their engagement. Furthermore, their efforts to communicate carried a strong potential to motivate others to try. Extrovert learners were brave enough to speak in public however except for three students the majority of the students were too shy to speak loud. Most of the time, the instructor needed to read on their lips as they were not really talking. Speaking louder implied being confident in their pronunciation skills however, pronunciation accuracy was among their highest source of anxiety as expressed by Léa in the following interview extract.

"*Actually we seldom speak because we are afraid to speak.* […] *We are shy. We're afraid we speak with the wrong pronunciation*" (Léa).

Subsequently, the instructor refined her feedback strategies just as the students developed their speaking and listening strategies in order to cope with the needs arising from each situation. The lecturer lent her voice to introvert learners by conveying their inaudible messages to the rest of the class with some positive feedback. Often, introvert students were perfectionists afraid to lose face by making mistakes like in Emilia's narrative and needed more time to compose their messages.

"*I must do an outline for myself then only I can speak.* […] *I am not confident. I am afraid that I will speak wrong or make some mistakes*" (Emilia).

Some introvert learners needed more time to cope with the situation and were not ready to participate in public. These learners as explicated by Michel felt reassured when the tasks were carried out individually using the references from the Internet. Their anxiety hindered their willingness to communicate in class. However, they practiced their French out-of class within their circle of friends.

"*In the French class, actually I can understand but I am not a good listener… I think I need some time to*

think about what the sentence means. […] *I prefer to write more than to speak actually.* […] *I think I prefer to learn individually because for me I am more like an introvert person so maybe I can try to learn from website and try to speak with my friends*" (Michel).

4.3. Scaffolding Volition

Therefore, the lecturer navigated between tables in order to collect answers from all groups as well as to provide feedback whenever requested. The proximity made the students more confident. They could check their answers with the lecturer in private before speaking in public. The students were encouraged to speak in French however they could as well express their ideas in their native languages in order to compensate for missing vocabulary or structures. Whenever the students could not find the words in French, the lecturer tried to help or else brought the question in the open so that everyone could contribute to find an answer. The students generated spontaneous challenges such as guessing word and translation games. Often, the students went directly to the board to write their answers. The instructor also reminded them that they could search online and refer to their notes, books and dictionaries. The instructor made the link between the groups by congratulating each group and repeating the answers so that everyone could hear. In addition, the lecturer went back to the board to write the contributions which gave the opportunity to other groups to raise their hands and to participate. Progressively, the learners became more confident and the tasks became livelier. Some sort of competition arose spontaneously from each group. They began using their textbooks and dictionaries as well as the computers and tablets to brainstorm for ideas. They referred to Internet references to listen to new words in order to correct their pronunciation before speaking.

"*Search Google and listen native French*" (Elisa).

"*Use Google and listen repeatedly*" (Colette).

"*I used the headphones before the lecturer enters. I search Google translate and listen to the native speaker speaks*" (Karina).

Regarding automated translators, the interviews revealed that the learners used them to make sense of the structures. However, learning occurred through repeated search for similar structures. The learners made the connections after noticing similar forms from anterior search. The resemblance activated the recall and memorisation processes. This illustrates the benefits of frequent exposure to the target language in order to multiply opportunities for structures to resurface from their memory.

"*Maybe we do not understand what the lecturer says so we search what this sentence means* […] *and we can learn all these sentences*" (Mélissa).

"*If the lecturer repeats …uh… several times then we'll know it. So it is something like memory …memorise. We keep reminding more than three times so we remember*" (Catarina).

The students entered the French expressions and opted for the translation results to be expressed either in their first native language or in English. Some learners run the program twice, first to get the translation in English, then to obtain the results in their native language. As explicated by Angela and Mathilda, they reverted to their first language when they could understand the query results in English.

"*Chinese is better because Chinese are our first language… If we translate in Chinese we automatic absorb*" (Catarina).

"*So if the English… We don't know we have to check dictionary again to translate to the Chinese*" (Mathilda).

4.4. Sustaining Engagement with Personalised and Meaningful Learning

While launching the tasks, the instructor consulted the students regarding their interests for selecting topics, their needs as well as their preferences regarding individual and collaborative learning. Being involved in decision making raised the students' engagement. The tasks always provided a large selection of topics to choose from in order to cater for both individual and peer-work configurations. The task documents were also varied in order to cater for diverse learning preferences. The students enjoyed being able to present their work at the end of each class as active participation helped them remember the lesson.

"*I don't know normally I'm quite nervous when we come to the front but in French I just go in front and say whatever I have prepared. I don't feel nervous at all. It's not just speaking it's also… using… the words, the grammar, and the verbs something new for me*" (Karina).

Others enjoyed working in groups in a learner-controlled manner. They felt they could be adventurous as the

environment encouraged them to explore the topics on their own. Trial by error was acceptable and mistakes were dealt with in a non-judgmental manner. Feedback and further explanations were provided whenever necessary as well as upon request. The instructor answered all questions and thanked the students for asking them as they were benefiting the whole class.

"*Collaboration is better. I think that everyone should have a good time. The students should know that they have nothing to lose so when they learn if they still make mistake they can still have fun which makes them more eager to learn*" (Mathias).

Peer scaffolding occurred spontaneously during the lessons. As explicated by Laetitia, the students turned first to their peers for assistance. They would ask the lecturer only in the eventuality that none of their peers could provide the answer.

"*We ask our friends if they understood. If not then we ask other friends. If still, we don't have the answer then we ask the lecturer to repeat or we ask again*" (Laetitia).

The students seemed confident to interact and to ask for the instructor's assistance. Observations revealed that the students used their own notes as well as the Internet to cope with the tasks. They would divide the working load then combine as well as discuss their search results. They called the lecturer for help mostly to check their work before sharing it with the rest of the class. They also asked focused questions to verify their comprehension of some grammar points. Unexpectedly, the students' inquiry showed some deep critical thinking skills about the language structure particularly at the beginner level. This was probably due to their browsing of websites dedicated to French learning as well as to the peer scaffolding. The instructor scaffolding was well received. The students appreciated being corrected. They benefited from short focused explanations conveyed to small peer groups as well as upon individual request.

"*But it's more comfortable when we discuss the usage of French with our course mates because we are from the same environment, from the same faculty and we are from the same college. So what we know maybe he or she might know or maybe he or she doesn't know. So I teach you, you teach me. And also the lecturer corrects us, and then we're ok with it because it's a part of the learning process. So it makes us more comfortable and convenient in the classroom*" (Charles).

4.5. Sustaining Perceived Self-Efficacy with Fair Feedback

For some learners, the instructor's feedback provided an end to discussions among peers, a way to settle disagreements and to preserve their self-esteem. When the students seemed to argue, the lecturer tried to show that there was more than one solution to convey their ideas. Therefore, all the group members could improve their own work. Then, they could always decide to contribute individually or collectively.

"*Well, in the class it is more efficient if we receive feedback from the lecturer. It is convenient. It's more convenient because uh… well… if the lecturer corrects you it's a lot better than the students.*" (Mathias).

Due to the self-regulated learning option offered by the technological scaffolding, the instructor was available to attend to the learners' needs. This personalised feedback gave the students confidence to request for the instructor's support whenever they needed. Some learners also took this opportunity to interact in French with the lecturer.

"*Sometimes, we use the wrong grammar for French then the lecturer writes the new one and we learn something new like, we replace this one and instead we put this one. It helps*" (Karina).

"*I can always speak with the lecturer in French*" (Léa).

In addition, the instructor listed the questions and summarised the feedback provided individually to the whole class at the end of each tasks. The lecturer also highlighted the student's contributions, presenting the strengths of each production in order to motivate all groups as well as to foster the learners' interests in the work of their peers. Learner-created as well as learner-led content represented an important source of learning material for the course. The learners' contributions were considered as reference material which the students could use for extra exposure and revisions. Regarding the learning content, the students were satisfied with the course being split between two lecturers who taught with different pedagogical approaches as illustrated in Barbara's narrative.

"*For this course, one teacher stresses more on grammar… it's just a continuation from Sem.* 1. […] *But then, the other teacher stressed more on the language, just on how to speak French. Mixing both types is ok. It's good*" (Barbara).

4.6. Promoting Self-Regulated Learning

In the interviews, the students also explained how they studied and revised for their French courses. Most of the learners referred to online websites in order to understand the lessons' content. Others tried to practice among their friends using basics structures and vocabulary in their private social network groups while a few tried to join other communities as well as to socialise with French native speakers.

"*I think it is not so difficult if I am working to do revision, to find more information about French, about the grammar, vocabulary*" (Sylvia).

"*I think the difficulty in French is the grammar because the grammar is totally different. Then for me, my basics in English grammar are not good, very poor. So sometimes, I am confused. So I always go online and check online sources like YouTube. I think that after I use online sources I feel it is easy for me*" (Pascalina).

"*I start to communicate with my course mates in French… I start with our Facebook group first. Try the settings in French language and the second hand phone then the computer. After that when I become more confident I will try to use maybe MSM or something to chat with French people*" (Thomas).

5. Conclusion

Engagement, motivation as well as commitment to improvement emerged from the triangulation of observations, interviews and artefacts. Even though some anxiety remained as transpired in the interviews regarding speaking and interacting spontaneously in class, the willingness-to-communicate was strongly emphasised as the students' main objective. The real task-based approach kept the students positively motivated throughout a succession of learning-by-doing activities which challenged their coping strategies. Furthermore, immersive learning with authentic material was found to enhance the students' perceptions of the learning environment as meaningful. Meaningful and personalised learning was found to support learner-centeredness and to be associated with a caring and enjoyable environment. Therefore, this action research confirmed the contribution of immersive learning as a motivating factor enhancing the students' perceptions of the t-MALL classroom environment which prevailed in the emergence of the virtuous cycle of engagement. This research sought to understand the t-MALL classroom engagement dynamics; however, further research is needed to delve into the students' personal lives in order to uncover the sources of the impeding anxiety factors deeply rooted in their inner self.

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