

Using the Learning Management System for Encouraging Self-reflection on Expressive Actions in Higher Education

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Abstract. This study examines the effectiveness of using a learning management system (LMS) for learning expressive actions in higher education. The author intended to use the LMS as a tool for students' self-reflection on their class experiences. Students in the course "Seminar on expression" were given writing assignments with the LMS. An analysis of the student essays showed that the students were able to reflect on their class experiences and improve their understanding of expressive actions. Specifically, through their essay writing using the LMS, they related changes in their way of thinking with regard to expressive actions with their class learning experiences.

Keywords: learning management system, self-reflection, conceptual change, expressive education, teacher-training course.

1 Introduction

This study examines the effectiveness of using a learning management system (LMS) for learning about expressive actions in higher education.

LMSs are an application for e-learning. LMSs such as Moodle, Blackboard, and WebCT are widely used for effective learning in higher education. They allow teachers to handle students' learning outside the classroom, as they can both create and deliver course materials and track student progress. Students can access the provided materials, submit their homework, and exchange their opinions on lesson topics. However, in only a few universities in Japan students can complete an entire course online. About half of Japan's higher education institutions use a LMS to complement the face-to-face classes [1].

This study focuses on self-reflection in expressive education. Experience-based learning is prevalent as the method of education in this field, with students typically engaging in performance and appreciation activities. However this learning style has been criticized for failing to ensure that students acquire conceptual knowledge. Therefore, reflecting on their learning experiences is essential for students to gain a better understanding of course contents [2]. The author intended to use the LMS as a tool for students to reflect on their classroom experiences. The purpose of this study is to demonstrate the effect of self-reflection with the LMS.

2 Method

2.1 Outline of the Course

The course “Seminar on expression” was offered for college students who aim to become teachers. One hundred sixty-six freshmen took the course held in 2012. The purpose of the course is to expand students’ understanding of expression and to enhance the communication skills that are essential for teachers.

The course consisted of 15 classes held once a week. During the first half of the course, 7 lectures were given by a professional high school teacher, a laughter yoga instructor, a ceramic artist, and 4 performance artists, respectively. The lecturers told the students their own view on expressions by giving a performance and explaining about the motivation behind their works. During the second half of the course, the students formed groups of 10 to create original pieces of work using physical expressions. At the end of the course, all the students acted on stage.

2.2 Use of the LMS during the Course

The students were assigned homework with LMS (NEC Corporation’s i-Collabo.LMS V4). They were asked to write a weekly essay reviewing what they had learned in class. The essays were written and submitted with the LMS. The themes were as follows:

- Something that you hope to learn from the course
- The most interesting topic of the class and your thoughts on the topic
- Something that you hope to learn from the group activity for planning a performance
- A plan of your group to perform on stage
- Feedback/comments on the group performances
- An evaluation of your own performance, of the group work done to create a piece of work, and of your self-understanding
- Your thoughts about what “expressions” are

2.3 Analytical Perspective

The student essays written with the LMS were analyzed according to the following aspects:

- Length (number of characters)
- The types of change that occurred in the students’ thinking regarding expressive actions
- Lessons/activities that changed students’ understanding of the concept of expressions

3 Results

3.1 Essay Length

Table 1 shows the length of the student essays, which were written after each class. The third set of essays was written by hand during class, in response to the lecturer's request. The midterm essays (7th) and final essays (16th) were essential tasks. The students were asked to write these two essays in approximately 1000 characters. Except for the handwritten and mandatory essays, the average length of the essays was 421 characters.

Table 1. Length of student essays

Week	Total character count of the essays submitted with LMS	Number of students who submitted an essay with LMS	Average number of characters per essay
1	30824	131	235.3
2	71759	151	475.2
3	-	-	-
4	63562	154	412.7
5	73723	161	457.9
6	62630	154	406.7
Midterm	179113	166	1079.0
8	50997	161	316.8
9	50781	159	319.4
10	51798	157	329.9
11	27729	96	288.8
12	91945	139	661.5
13	97653	160	610.3
14	76653	157	488.2
15	73867	157	470.5
Final	172936	164	1054.5

3.2 Types of Changes in Students' Thinking about Expressive Actions

Students' Understanding of Expressive Action at the Start of the Course. First, descriptions of expressive action were identified in the student essays written after the first class. They were divided into the following categories:

— Sending and receiving a message

- Conveying ideas or feelings clearly
- Understanding the right meanings of words, gestures, and facial expressions

— Teaching children

- Catching children’s attention
- Motivating children to learn
- Giving understandable explanations
- Giving a proper response to a variety of children
- Encouraging children to express themselves

— Self-expression

- Expressing oneself in one’s own way

Students’ Understanding of Expressive Action at the End of the Course. Next, the students’ descriptions of expressive action were identified in their final essays. Some of the new perspectives on expressive action fell into the following categories:

- Having an effect on others
- Identifying what I want to say
- Revealing one’s personality and way of life
- Discovering an unknown self-disposition

The student essays from the start of the course had no mention of the audience. However, a number of students referred to the audience at the end of the course. (“*We need to care about the audience. Expressive actions are not meant to convey information in only one direction.*” “*A message can be understood by each audience member in a different way. The audience (receiver) is an integral part of the performance*”). Some students focused on expressive actions not just as a result but also as a process. (“*The process of creating the performance is an important part of expression. A performance is realized on the basis of the process of looking for a new way to express an idea and preparing for a good performance.*”) Moreover, students’ negative feelings about expressive actions turned into positive ones. (“*Expressing an idea is very enjoyable. I feel very happy when my message is accepted.*” “*Expressive actions are not extraordinary experiences. They are what we do every day.*”)

3.3 Lessons/Activities That Changed Students’ Understanding of the Concept of Expressions

Through the process of essay writing, the students associated their changes in thinking about expressive actions with their experiences in the class. Each student described the topic or activity that he or she had been most impressed with and that had influenced his or her understanding of expressive actions. Examples are as follows:

- An exercise to see how much the message was transferred
- A pantomime performance that expresses a feeling beyond words
- A performer’s attitude of improvisation based on audience response

- An example of ceramic works that are given an entirely new meaning by a viewer
- An activity of creating a drama based on the theme, “my way of living”

4 Discussion

The analysis of student essays written with the LMS showed the following:

- Students wrote 400-character essays after each class. They were able to look back on their learning experiences and improve their understanding of expressive actions.
- Students’ understanding of expressive action was expanded through the course. They found out that expressive actions consist of more than conveying information accurately.
- Through the process of essay writing, students related the changes in their thinking with regard to expressive action with their classroom experiences.

These effects may be attributed to both the activity of writing an essay after each class and use of the LMS. Compared with conventional handwritten reports in class, the LMS has two advantages for student learning. One is that students can write essays at their own pace. When students use the LMS outside class, they can take time to reflect on their experiences and to develop their thinking. Without the LMS, the students were forced to write an essay in just 10 minutes. The second advantage is that students’ essays are accumulated automatically in the LMS, enabling students to review them at will and access their learning trajectories.

5 Conclusion

The study suggests the possibility of LMS as a tool for students’ self-reflection. LMS is often used for providing learning contents. In addition, LMS may help students to reflect on their classroom experience and improve their understanding of the concept. By using LMS in combination with hands-on activities in class, educators would provide an enriched learning environment for students to learn.

References

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