Relationship of the Online English Teachers' Competencies to Selected Variables: Implications to Online English Teaching

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Abstract

This paper discusses a recent study on the relationship of the competencies of the online English teachers to selected variables such as gender, age, civil status, highest educational attainment, monthly income, eligibility and years of experience in current position. The teachers are handling phone and video classes to Korean students. The study used 73 online English teachers, 21 administrators and 650 online students. First, the researcher tried to determine the levels of competencies of the teachers in four areas such as technology knowledge and abilities, communication, online education and content knowledge through the assessment of their administrators and the teachers themselves. Then the teachers were asked to assess the performance of their students in oral communication through the use of an assessment rubric prepared by the researcher. This was done before and after the contract of the students. The results showed that the teachers with excellent skills in the four areas are effective in handling online English classes. The students' performance in online English education improves when handled by highly competent online English teachers. It also showed that the teachers' gender, highest educational attainment and eligibility showed very significant relationship to their competencies.

1. Introduction

Virtual education refers to instruction in a learning environment where teacher and student are separated by time or space, or both, and the teacher provides course content through course management applications, multimedia resources, the Internet, videoconferencing, etc. Students receive the content and communicate with the teacher via the same technologies. Subsequent discussions of problems, solving exercises, case studies, review questions, etc. help the students to understand better what they learned before. Electronic media like a discussion forum, chat room, voice mail, e-mail, etc. are often employed for communication.

It is a fact that technology is here to stay. Its decline can only be least expected. It would be further become more developed and advanced which would make life easier and if properly learned, teaching and learning would be more fun. Teachers should be open to these innovations. Teachers who are up-to-date with the current trends/methods in teaching their field of specialization can very well relate to these innovations which are being introduced in teaching.

Learning a language is different. Study abroad and "homestays" are great because students had to use English in realistic and meaningful situations every day. However, the Internet has changed language learning forever. It is a common knowledge that traditional teaching methods are being done inside the classroom. Learning does take place in the four corners of the room wherein the teacher delivers the lesson in the presence of his students. The teacher and the students interact. In other words, they are both physically present. The online school is a relatively new concept for many English as foreign language (EFL) teachers but, apparently, it is an increasingly popular English-learning tool for students all around the world.

In an online teaching environment, the teacher delivers the lesson daily using the most popular technology nowadays which is the internet with additional technology tools, the teacher can present material on their computer to the student and the student and the teacher may work on the "whiteboard" at the same time. The whiteboard is the equivalent of a physical classroom blackboard that allows the teacher to write and generate illustrations on real-time. Real-time tutoring typically contains both audio and video devices. A variation of the real-time teaching is the use of online chat and instant messaging by the tutor to interact in real-time with students. Online teaching without audio or video is substantially different than online teaching with real-time audio and video. Computers used for online teaching are connected to the internet via dial-up modems.

This multifarious approach in teaching the English language is prevalent in urban areas specifically in Metro Manila. The clients come from Korea, China, Brazil, Mexico, Germany and Egypt, to name but a few. Here in the Philippines, working as an online English teacher is becoming popular among new graduates. This is now the second option if they do not want to work in a call center. Even non-education graduates can work in this industry. They just have to pass the series of examinations and interviews for them to work as an online English teacher. With this emerging popularity of online English education, the researcher decided to conduct a study on determining the relationship of the online English teachers' competencies to selected variables and its implications to online English teaching.

2. Literature Review

In a study conducted by Hukle, it was mentioned that online education has grown substantially over the years because of the flexibility it has given the student in acquiring an education. For many, higher education is now a reality instead of just a dream. With this educational format, traditional and non-traditional students are taking classes to obtain a degree or pursue lifelong learning.[1]

Filimban said that with the rapid development of technology, online learning is increasing significantly and becoming a popular method of education for many universities and colleges around the world. Because of computers and the internet, most online learning today is interactive, and sometimes more interactive than the traditional classroom.[2]

Sandon stated that online education can be an effective means of providing professional development, and learning goals and objectives directed at improving cognitive skills and knowledge are well suited for web-based learning.[3]

Thacker conducted a study on online and face-to-face teaching. Results were encouraging with 78% recommending the blended system for learning a language. Responses indicate that the online medium offered opportunities for reflection not available in face-to-face delivery. 63% felt that online component helped them learn the language more effectively and several appreciated the opportunities it provided to learn independently, to control the learning pace and to access previous weeks material for revising purposes (60%).[4]

Online learning is in its infancy. As pioneers struggle with new technologies and new practices, the discipline evolves almost daily. An online course that was considered state-of-the-art twelve months ago is today considered to be out of date. Technology employed only by early adopters last fall in this summer in wide circulation and in danger of becoming obsolete by the fall semester. [5]

It cannot therefore be denied that technology these days bring an enormous influence even in the worldwide educational system. In the future, as higher education shifts from traditional classroom teaching to online learning, academic support programs will increasingly become more in demand by online learners especially advising, career preparation, learning skills, orientation, tutoring, and intervention to overcome on-line technical problems.[6]

The worldwide e-learning industry is estimated to be worth over 38 billion euros according to conservative estimates, although in the European Union only about 20% of e-learning products are produced within the common market.[7]

English, being recognized as the universal language, must be learned and developed especially in non-speaking English countries. It cannot be denied that being articulate in using the language is a plus factor and it makes the speaker superior to others. Therefore, learning it is indeed essential to an individual.[8]

"On average, students in online learning conditions performed better than those receiving face-to-face instruction."[9]

Elizabeth Ramos developed an interactive multimedia courseware and tested it among her computer students. She concluded that the web-based interactive multimedia courseware is an effective learning aid and it reflects the characteristics of an effective computer-aided education.[10]

The articles and studies from both local and foreign authors added knowledge to the researcher in the conduct of his study.

3. Research Rationale

Many language centers located in the capital of the Philippines are so involved in this newly found method of teaching which really help non-English speakers to really learn to speak the language and at the same time enhance the knowledge and abilities of English teachers who are employed in these Language Centers.

There are two kinds of online English learning method in the Philippines which English language centers cater to. These are the phone English online and phone and video English online learning. The first is learning the English language via landline or mobile phone through the Internet. The teacher and the learner do not see each other they only hear each other's voice. Lessons are conducted through phone. Materials are already printed prior to the conduct of the lessons. This kind of method usually takes place from ten (10) to twenty (20) minutes per day.

The other method is the Phone and Video English Online learning. The teacher and the student see each other through a webcam using the internet. Lessons for the day are already printed. During the discussion, the lesson being conducted by the teacher is incorporated with visual materials that are flashed on the monitor screen for the advantage of the learner and for further enhancements of the lesson. The lesson takes place from ten (10) to twenty (20) minutes.

Meanwhile, the English education explosion in the Philippines among South Koreans was a product of ideal factors that fit together. The Philippines who ranked in the top 10 in terms of English-speaking population, has affordable education.\

The influx of Koreans in the country most of whom enroll in ESL language/learning for low-cost English Education and encourage their families in Korea to enroll in an online English classes in the Philippines to lessen their expenses proves one thing, -that language centers catering to these types of foreigners are here to stay.

Teaching in an online environment requires specific sets of skills (competencies). It is believed that online teaching necessitates are moving beyond traditional pedagogy to adopt new, more-facilitative practices. It is noted that "not all faculty are suited for the online environment". Furthermore, it is believed that "faculty cannot be expected to know intuitively how to design and deliver an effective online course" because, even though courses in technology are becoming more available to students, "seasoned faculty have not been exposed to techniques and methods needed to make online work successful." Although the principles of designing online and traditional classroom courses are similar, "online English teachers need training and support to be willing to adopt this new teaching paradigm and to be cognizant of how the details of their course will be implemented in the new environment".7 The teachers need to move beyond simply trying to use the Internet to deliver standard classroom models and instead focus on developing ways to use the Internet to develop a "richness" that enhances education.

4. Findings

1. Characteristics of the Respondents

1.1. Teachers. Majority of the respondents were female, with 80% of the population. The biggest number of respondents belonged to the 23-27 age bracket with a percentage of 49.3%. Majority of the teacher respondents were single with a percentage of 79%. Meanwhile, there were 54 or 77% of the teachers who were bachelor's degree holders. The biggest group of respondents numbering 20 or 27.3% was receiving more than Php 18,000 monthly salaries. Also, the biggest number of the respondents did not take any eligibility exams with a total of 52 teachers or 72%. Majority of the teachers numbering 22 or 30% had been working for 2 years.

1.2 Students

Majority of the students numbering to three hundred forty with a percentage of 52.3% were female. The biggest group of students, composed of 267, belonged to the 11 – 20 age bracket representing 41% of the population. Majority of the students were single with a percentage of 73.5%. There were 473 or 57.3% of the students enrolled in the online English school who were elementary to college students. In terms of their performance in the diagnostic test, the students got a mean grade of 38.96. Meanwhile, the evaluation results mean score was 49.16.

2. Levels of Competencies of the Online English Teachers
2.1 As perceived by the teachers themselves

2.1.1 Technology knowledge and abilities. The teachers evaluated themselves as having very satisfactory competence (4.24) in the area of technology knowledge and abilities.

2.1.2 Communication. The teachers perceived that they have excellent competence (4.50) with regard to communication.

2.1.3 Online education. The teachers evaluated their online education skills as very satisfactory (4.35).

2.1.4 Content.   The teachers perceived that they have very satisfactory competence (4.30) with regard to content.

2.2 As perceived by the administrators

2.2.1 Technology knowledge and abilities. Most of the administrators believed that their teachers have very satisfactory competence (4.19) in the use of technology in their online English teaching profession.

2.2.2 Communication. The administrators rated the level of competencies of their teachers as excellent (4.55) in communication.

2.2.3 Online education. The administrators perceived the online education skills of the teachers as excellent (4.58).

2.2.4 Content. The administrators perceived that their teachers have a very satisfactory competence (4.49) with regard to content.

3. Comparison between the Perceptions of the Administrators and the Teachers on their Levels of Competencies in the Four Areas

There was no significant difference in the perceptions of the administrators and the teachers with regard to the level of competency of the teachers in technology knowledge and abilities, communication, online education and content. The perceptions of both the administrators and their teachers were just the same.
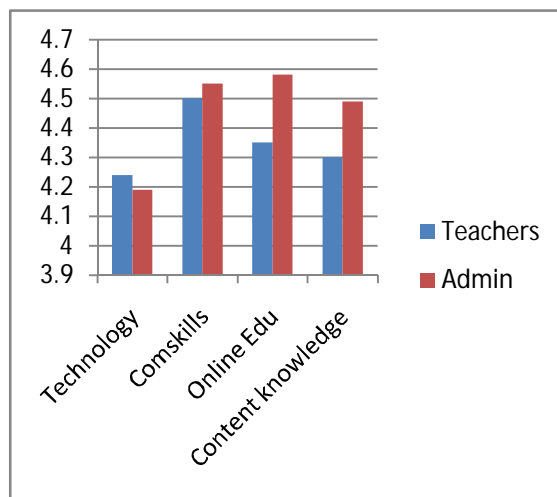

Figure 1. The Summary of the Levels of Competencies of Teachers as Perceived by the Teachers Themselves as well as their Administrators

4. Relationship of the Teachers' Level of Competencies and their Aforementioned characteristics

The teachers' levels of competencies and their gender, highest educational attainment and eligibility are correlated. Age, civil status, income and years of experience did not show any relationship in an overall perspective with teachers' competencies.

5. Comparison between the Diagnostic Results and Evaluation Results of the Students

There was a very significant difference between the diagnostic result scores and evaluation results of the students. The students performed better in the diagnostic suggesting that teachers were competent.

Table 1: Comparison between the Diagnostic Results and Evaluation Results of the Students

Results	Mean	Standard Deviation	T-Value	Significance
Diagnostic Results	38.96	15.15	39.05	P= .00 < .01 VS
Evaluation Results	49.16	12.93		

6. Relationship between the Teachers' Levels of Competencies and Evaluation Results of the Students

There was a very significant correlation between the teachers' levels of competencies and evaluation results of the students. The higher the competencies of the teachers, the better are the performance of their students.

Table 2: Relationship between the Teachers' Levels of Competencies and Evaluation Results of the Students

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Significance
Teachers' Competencies	4.34	.484	.00 < .05 Very Significant Relationship
Evaluation Results	49.16	12.93	

7. *Implications of the Findings to Online English Teaching*

The findings imply that in the area of technology, the teachers should improve their technical skills by attending different trainings and seminars regarding the latest technology in online education. In the area of communication, teachers should continue improving themselves through continuous learning and education. For online education, the online English teachers should be able also address the issue on handling online distractions. For content, an online English teacher should effectively create educational materials while simultaneously providing the most engaging educational experiences for students.

5. *Conclusions*

Based on the foregoing, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Teachers with excellent skills in technology, communication, online education and content knowledge are effective in handling online English classes.
2. Students' performance in online English education improves when handled by highly competent online English teachers.
3. Teachers' gender, highest educational attainment and eligibility are strong indicators of success in online English education.

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