

Yan Yang-Article Assessment

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A Critical Assessment: The Role of Pedagogical Mentoring in Virtual Exchange

O'Dowd, Robert, 2020. The Role of Pedagogical Mentoring in Virtual Exchange.
TESOL Quarterly, 54(1), pp.146–173.

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The peer-reviewed article published in March 2019 is a very recent research on the role of the mentoring that teachers can play in the virtual exchange setting, which is clearly stated in the title. The three authors, Robert O'Dowd, Shannon Sauro and Elana Spector-Cohen are all distinguished and authoritative researchers on virtual exchange and language learning and teaching from three countries, namely, Spain, the USA and Israel, which can be reasonably deduced from "THE AUTHORS" part at the end of the article, especially the first author who "has published over 40 publications on virtual exchange" (Robert, Shannon and Elana, p.170). Their rich experience in the field of virtual exchange ensures the readability of this paper. This critical assessment is therefore mainly a learning process of appreciating how rigorous the whole research is although there seems to be some points that need considering. In order to make a clearer assessment for the reader to follow, this critical analysis will be made in terms of five parts that are consistent with the layout of the article: Abstract, Literature Review, Method, Results, Pedagogical Implications, Limitations and Conclusion.

Abstract

In the "Abstract" part, most essential elements have been explicitly stated: background, the purpose of the research, the content of the article, the research method used as well as the conclusion, from which readers can easily and quickly find out whether the research is the focus of their study while they are reading and searching literature for their own research, which is really the significance of an abstract. However, there are some points that are a little ambiguous and therefore worth mentioning. According to Renck Jalongo and Saracho, O. (2016) an abstract should include firstly the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, secondly the sample and sampling techniques, and thirdly, data collection methods, data analysis strategies as well as findings.

In this abstract, research questions and findings are not mentioned, neither the sampling and data collection methods although qualitative content analysis is stated in the latter part of the abstract.

Literature Review

In the literature review, most of the reference are within the period ranging from 2014 to 2018 despite a book entitled *A training manual on telecollaboration for teacher trainers* in 2012 and a 2013 article named *Teaching Comments: Intercultural Communication Skills in the Digital Age*. The wide variety of literature, all of which are

Background reading

from the primary source (clearly seen in the reference) contributes to the in-depth explanation on the three types of pedagogical mentoring, creating a very strong theoretical framework on which the authors' own study in this article is to be based.

In addition, this part presents, in a very clear and logical way, the previous study on virtual exchange and pedagogical mentoring. Before the literature review, the authors firstly introduce (although there is no subtitle of *Introduction* for it) the definition of virtual exchange and the significance of studying them. Based on the basic but indispensable term defining, problems of previous study are put forward: although virtual exchange has been important for international education and some research such as models based on sociocultural and interactionist theories has been done, it is still criticized for being superficial and lacking in mentoring. (Robert, Shannon and Elana, 2020). This makes the gap in the field of study naturally presented: the lack of pedagogical mentoring based on sound theoretical framework. So, the systematic study of literature on pedagogical mentoring in virtual exchange based on deep and wide reading are developed in great detail before the two research questions are accordingly put forward:

“1. In what way does Type 1 pedagogical mentoring (i.e., presenting online interaction strategies before the exchange) influence student interaction with their online international partners?

2. What themes and issues were attended to when teachers integrated their students' own online interactions into classwork (i.e., Type 3 mentoring), and did this mentoring heighten students' awareness of these themes and issues?”

(Robert, Shannon and Elana, p.153)

Throughout the whole part of the Literature Review there is no denying that it is well-developed.

However, it is worth mentioning that some information concerning the related readings need be supplemented because critical review to the literature or, in other words, “a comprehensive and balanced account of prework” (Ryan, Coughlan, and Cronin, 2007, p.740) related to the theoretical framework should be made. As can be seen in this literature review, although, the literature that focuses on pedagogical mentoring is explained in full detail and so is a clear summary about the limitations of pedagogical mentoring, the **Critical thinking** ew is not sufficient which may lead to the readers' confusion about the connection between what has been done by others and what is to be done by the authors to fill in the gap so as to be certain whether the research questions needs improving. Also, whether there are other earlier but classic literature remains to be unknown to build up a more thorough understanding of the research on teachers' mentoring in the virtual exchange.

Method

This is the most important part of the whole article and the research design has been very carefully and explicitly explained by the authors in terms of sampling, data collection and data analysis under the subtitle of participants, tasks and tools of interaction, the practice of mentoring type1 and type3 and data analysis in the article. Qualitative content analysis is used to answer the two research questions which are put forward in the Literature Review part. To be specific, linguistic analysis is used for answering the first research question and thematic analysis for the second research question with all the details about how the coding and analysis is carried out being explicitly described.

Sampling (Participates):

In this study, the authors make a detailed description about participates such as numbers, nationality and age, language proficiency and class they are attending. Since the participates are all from three classes engaging in virtual exchange while finishing three tasks that are required, the richness of the data can be ensured. But there is a problem that need asking: Although the participates are naturally selected since everyone should attend class, is there any student who is not willing to be recorded? If so, is there any student who is reluctant to participate in the virtual communication in which the data of the study is rooted? The authors do not mention this in the article.

Therefore the ethical rigor should be considered.  2

Data Collection:

The data that are collected in this research including “written interactions from Whatsapp chatscripts”, “Moodle forum discussions”, “Google Docs”, “class notes and emails by teachers” (Robert, Shannon and Elana, p.154), are all, according to the authors, from the real context of virtual exchange and the whole process of how the data collection is undertaken has been explicitly described in this part.

But there is a point that should pay attention. For data collection of qualitative study, data saturation, which means “no new information will arise from further sampling” (Ryan, Coughlan & Cronin, 2007, p.742), need considering for researcher to decide whether the data is sufficient for the study achieving the convincing results. (Thorne and Darbyshire, 2005). This is not mentioned in the article.

Data Analysis:

Data analysis is “fundamental to determining the credibility of the findings”, and therefore “sufficient description” of the whole process of how the data are analyzed is vital to ensure the credibility. (Ryan, Coughlan & Cronin, 2007, p.742). This article very explicitly describes every detail of it such as how to design the mentoring in different groups of students to make the whole methodology rigorous, how to divide the students into two categories of groups, one being a mentored group and the other

being comparison groups in order to see whether there is any difference between them with or without mentoring in order to answer the first research question of in what way mentoring influence student interaction. It is worth mentioning that the coding and analysis of this research are theoretically guided under the coding manual of qualitative content analysis by Zhang and Wildemuth (2009) in which guidelines for carrying out qualitative content analysis are explained in great detail for the researchers to follow.



However, because the whole content analysis is based on Zhang and Wildemuth's code manual, more information on whether the manual is the widely acknowledged and authoritative tool should be demonstrated in the article.

Results

This part is quite well-written in terms of answering research questions that have been clearly listed in the Literature Review part. Based on the data analysis, the discussion of the results is consistent with each research question, which can be easily identified because of the subtitles. Before definite answers to the research questions are finally put forward in the end, detailed data supporting the discussed results are explicitly listed to avoid exaggeration. So, no "exaggerate claims as to the significance of the research" (Ryan, Coughlan & Cronin, 2007, p.743) is found in this part.

Besides, the answer to the first question is concerned with a new term (social presence) which is not mentioned in the previous part, further explanation is fully provided in order to make the answer to the first question more explicit.

The last but not the least, although data collection and analysis have been very carefully designed to ensure the credibility of the whole research process, how to guarantee rigour in the process of data analysis to avoid being untrustworthy is not mentioned in the article. For example, how is the thematic analysis on the type 3 pedagogical is carried out? Is there any technique of rigor that is used to avoid subjectivity especially the coding process? Therefore, some necessary steps of imposing rigor for data analysis should be added in the process of data analysis, for example, Investigator triangulation which is defined as "the participation of two or more researchers in the same study to provide multiple observations and conclusions." (Carter, Nancy et al., 2014, p.545) can be used to ensure rigor in the process of data analysis.



Pedagogical Implications, Limitations and Conclusion

In this article five principles of teaching in the context of virtual exchange are put forward based on the results of data analysis with the first three directly related to research questions and the other two related to the research methods, which makes this research meaningful in practice.



In addition, two aspects of limitations are mentioned by the authors and recommendations for future development are clearly stated in the limitation and especially conclusion part of the article for exploring further.

Global Review

This article based on qualitative content analysis is of a very high standard. Based on a comprehensive review of literature, the theoretical framework is convincingly put forward to ensure the success of the research design. Data collection from various source of the virtual exchange in the real teaching and learning setting provides rich material for future analysis. Under the guidance of content analysis manual, the data analysis is credible, which lays a solid foundation for the results to be convincingly analyzed.

However, in addition to its excellence, there are two important aspects that need to be considered except for some minor points that have been discussed in the body part of this critical review: The first is ethical risk. Evaluation. no related information is provided in the article; and the second is data analysis rigor because of the lacking in explanation on how the data is analysed from different perspective of researchers.

Reference

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GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

65/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

Scientific method / theoretical considerations

This is an excellent assignment which explores mentoring within virtual exchanges.

You demonstrate your ability to understand key research approaches by considering the background literature effectively.

Methodology

You have succeeded in identifying key research methods. The context of the article is described clearly and reference is made to appropriate reading in the module.

Results and relevance to theory

A range of evidence is discussed with reference to good practice. Your review is supported by insights into further research but this could be analysed more systematically.

The style is coherent and reflective adopting a suitably tentative approach. A good range of additional sources are synthesized to form a clear discussion. References are complete and the conventions are applied consistently.

You might like to consider:

1. Ethical considerations in further detail.

PAGE 1

QM

topic

interesting choice of topic



Comment 1

Well presented.

QM

Background reading

Evidence of wide reading

PAGE 2

QM

Critical thinking

Ability to be critical and appraise the literature to further knowledge and thinking.

PAGE 3



Comment 2

How could this be remedied?

PAGE 4



Comment 3

What are these guidelines?



Comment 4

Detailed knowledge.



Comment 5

Check whether the research questions are valid.

PAGE 5



Comment 6

what are your criteria for assessment?

QM

Evaluation.

A useful evaluation of the study with appropriate commentary.

PAGE 6
