Reconnecting relationships through technology

Conceptualising Teachers as Designers in the Higher Education Context: Case Studies from Indonesian English University Teachers

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Empirical studies have revealed the learning design processes employed by teachers in higher education institutions in developed countries (Bennett et al., 2017; Kali et al., 2011; Markauskaite & Goodyear, 2009). However, there has been limited research into the way that university teachers in developing countries design for learning and whether they adopt similar design routines – and indeed, whether there are similarities to the work of learning designers in these settings.

A multiple-case study design was developed to investigate the design processes of eight Indonesian English University Teachers (IEUTs) working in a variety of Indonesian universities in implementing blended (pre-COVID) and online (during COVID) learning in their classes. Due to the Australian travel restrictions to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 in 2020, data gathered remotely included digital document analyses, online interviews and online class observations. This data was analysed and a cross-case analysis was undertaken in order to identify common themes.

It was possible to identify design processes that the IEUTs had in common with those described by Bennet et al. (2017). However, this model did not anticipate design issues caused by socio-economic and cultural context in which the IEUTs were teaching. Specifically, factors such as the technological affordances and the costs related to online or blended learning were not described. However, this study noted that these factors had a significant effect upon teachers' design work, often requiring them to redesign learning experiences – sometimes while a subject was ongoing. This challenge was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which also meant that teachers were required to work with technologies with which they were not familiar. This, in turn, led to further challenges, at an institutional level, as some universities were not well prepared for online learning.

Teachers who received institutional support services such as a set of curricula, teacher training, support technologies, financial support (i.e., competitive grants to develop online modules in the university's e-learning platform) and hands-on support from IT Centre's staff experienced fewer challenges compared to teachers who were less supported. However, all participating teachers' design practices were constructed from "accidental pedagogies" (McGee & Carmean, 2012) caused by the trial-and-error approach adopted during COVID-19. These teachers faced significant obstacles including ensuring academic integrity, retaining control over the classroom, and ensuring equitable access to course content. Although these design processes might not demonstrate an effective learning design in an ongoing setting, these design practices should be "forgiven" (Dickson-Deane, 2020) as they were a response to an emergency setting. The IEUTs experienced similar design routines to those of instructional designers (Dickson-Deane, 2020) in that they were required to comprehend how an unknown or unexpected event may become known or take place, which can necessitate trial-and-error during the design process and into development and implementation.

A new model of teacher professional development for language teachers was proposed to better prepare teachers for such events and challenges (i.e., other pandemics and catastrophic weather events) by conceiving of them as designers. This model adapted the 6 C's framework for learning designers (Heggart, 2021).

Keywords: design process, teachers as designers, higher education, language teachers

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