

Using a perceptual measure to evaluate the use of video objects in English language learning



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Economies in the creation and delivery of digital objects, the ability of tutors to easily re-purpose and re-present media-rich content and the increasing ease of access to previously controlled network storage areas by students are but a few of the perceived drivers behind initiatives to re-use digitally created content. However, while it maybe economically beneficial and technically feasible to continuously make available to students' a range of re-usable digital objects a number of issues should be explored before it is recommended tutors use the digital materials available. This poster outlines the preliminary development of an evaluation tool to investigate students' perceptions of re-usable video objects in an English language course in Japan.

Keywords: digital content, learning objects, perceptual measure, evaluation

Overview

At Matsue National College of Technology, English language teachers have been challenged to develop and deploy appropriate digital materials to deal with new information and communication technology rich ways of teaching and learning. To meet this challenge teachers have created a range of streamed video clips, accessible from the web, to engage their English language students. The materials are designed specifically to help English as Foreign Language (EFL) learners understand the social context of conversations and to help them practice the language in authentic settings by making use of the digital videos. The material was designed using a task-based learning approach categorised as an '*Integrative CALL*' application (Iwata & Fujii 2001). Each lesson consists of four (4) tasks: Warm-up, Watching and two "Follow-up" tasks. The warm-up task aims to attract the students' attention and build an expectation of what they may experience in the video clips. The watching task reviews their comprehension. The two follow-up tasks provide them with firstly, communicative activities relevant to the language topic and secondly, allow participants to practice the English structures learned in authentic settings.

Learning environment research

The essence of a learning environment is the interaction that occurs between individuals, groups and the setting within which they operate. The investigation in and of learning environments has its roots nourished by the Lewinian formula, $B=f(P, E)$. This formula identifies that behaviour (B) is considered to be a function of (f) the person (P) and the environment (E). It is recognised both teachers and learners hold views on the learning environment they operate within and these views will affect the way they facilitate/participate in learning activities presented (Fraser, 2002). Perceptual measures have been proved to be flexible, reliable, cost effective and versatile (Clayton, 2007) and the authors believed it was feasible to develop a perceptual measure capable of successfully analysing students perceptions of video material presented in web-based activities. It was envisaged the data generated from such an instrument would firstly help validate the instrument and secondly, inform English language teachers at Matsue of the effectiveness and appropriateness of the video material presented to students.

Pilot study

Using the multi-choice question functionality of the open source learning management system Moodle a web-form, consisting of four scales and 24 items, was created in both English and Japanese. After some technical field tests the form was made accessible to English language students at Matsue. The sample for the initial study comprised fifty (50) 15 and 16 year-old students. The initial, tentative findings of the

study indicated firstly, the provision of technical support is crucial in ensuring ongoing learner engagement, secondly, digital materials created for students with a high degree of interactivity and feedback are valued by them thirdly, digital materials created for learners should be graphic rich and visually appealing and finally, the enhancement of traditional courses by providing access to digital materials would be appreciated by students.

Summary

In the not too distant future there will be increasing expectations media-rich web-based environments, re-using and re-purposing digital objects will be a standard feature of all course offerings. However, while it is technically feasible to present and create media-rich digital material, this is not an inexpensive activity. Extensive fiscal, human and physical resources will need to be allocated for production, storage and delivery. Because of these high costs individuals, departments and institutions need to be assured students easily engage with and learn from the digital materials presented. This exploratory study has described how a perceptual measure can be used by individuals, departments and institutions to evaluate if content presented meets the learning needs of their students.

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