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Exploring the Motivational Aspects of a Technology-Enabled Language Program Design

Abstract

The overwhelming proliferation of technology in language education over the past few decades has manifest itself in varied forms inside and outside language classrooms across tertiary educational institutions worldwide. While motivation gains potential importance for language teachers in helping students put in efforts for successful language learning, the use of technology can prove valuable in fostering motivation amidst language learners. As part of an ongoing research study, this paper investigates the design of a technology-enabled language enhancement program to develop the written communication skills of ESL learners at tertiary level in light of enhancing intrinsic motivation. The paper shall furthermore explore aspects that promote motivation and weigh them against the various features provided within the technology-enabled program.

Short Paper

Introduction

In recent years, the widespread use of technology in education manifests itself in various forms, via the Internet through multimedia learning, online learning, or information and communications technology. This ever-increasing growth of technology in language learning environments, calls for a study of how the immense potential of technology in language learning can be tapped to the advantage of designing language programs and what effects technology-enabled programs can have, on the attitudes and motivation of language learners. This paper aims at studying one such technology-enabled language enhancement program to develop the writing skills of ESL learners at tertiary level with respect to student motivation. The paper first discusses various aspects of the language program design, and then presents the results of a survey that evaluates the effectiveness of the program in light of enhancing intrinsic motivation of the participants.

Program Design

The program that was administered to 60 first-year university students was designed and delivered through the existing e-learning platform of the university, i.e. WebCT CE8. As a result, the program utilized most features made available by the e-learning platform. The 30-hour program divided into 5 units of 6 hours each was administered over a period of 8 weeks. Since the program aimed at enhancing writing skills of learners, each unit focused on a particular form of writing such as, describing, reporting, experience sharing, summarizing, and expressing opinions or responding. Each unit also focused on particular language skills such as vocabulary, grammar, and other soft skills such as comprehension, organization, planning, researching, and processing information. Most units were based on a similar sequence of activities: i.e. a) researching an online material, b) reading/watching/listening to the online material, c) making notes from the materials as part of the warm-up task, d) doing exercises based on the materials in the warm-up task, e) discussing ideas via an online forum based on the warm up material, f) organizing ideas, g) writing a paragraph based on the warm-up task, h) exchanging and peer-reviewing each other's work, and i) Revising and finalizing the written paragraph. A varied range of materials and resources including online news articles, audio

interviews, video links of reports, and a several web sites, were used in the program which provided textual, auditory, as well as visual input. The program thus, provided students with a more modern teaching and learning space beyond the classroom, by providing ease of use, variety in learning resources, freedom of choice in materials, interactivity and feedback, and most importantly responsibility and control of one's own learning.

Program Evaluation with respect to learner motivation

An evaluation of the program design was done via an online survey sent out to all 60 participants at the end of the program. The survey had a 65% response rate and showed an overall positive result with respect to analysing various motivational features of the program. The demographics of the survey included mostly first-year university students, both male and female, aged between 18 to 23 years, with majors across History, Philosophy, Visual Studies, Business Administration, Social Sciences, and Chinese. The online survey analysed areas such as (i) overall perception of the program, (ii) accessibility, (iii) attitudes towards using technology in learning English, (iv) use of resources, (v) interactivity and feedback, (vi) perception of self achievement, and (vii) future use. Each area of evaluation consisted of a set of questions based on a five point scale: Strongly Agree; Agree; Not Sure; Disagree; and Strongly Disagree. The responses to almost all the questions had a higher combined percentage of Strongly Agree and Agree, which resulted in overall positive findings about the features in the program that could potentially lead to fostering intrinsic motivation.

Conclusion

Finally, the paper provides further suggestions on the implementation of technology-enabled programs that help foster learner motivation and thereby language proficiency. In conclusion, as research on motivation continues, the paper advocates that the potential of various technologies can definitely be tapped in order to provide new ways of configuring and accessing language learning opportunities.

Keywords

motivation, technology-enabled language learning, English language teaching

Bio Data

Preet Hiradhar is Language Instructor and ePortfolio Coordinator at the Centre for English and Additional Languages (CEAL), Lingnan University, Hong Kong. As ePortfolio coordinator she has been responsible for the planning, implementation, and development of the ePortfolio platform at her university. Along with her ELT experience, she also carries varied e-learning experience. As Instructional Designer, she has been consulting, designing, and developing, computer-based training (CBT) and web-based training (WBT) programs for several academic and corporate organizations. Her background in ELT and e-learning has proved a great combination for her services offered at Lingnan. In addition to having an international research paper publication, she has presented research papers at various international conferences including Taiwan, Canada, and Thailand. Her academic interests lie particularly in ICT in language education, technology enabled language learning, and e-portfolios.