

Game-Based Pilot System for English Learning

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ABSTRACT

Game-based Pilot System for English learning (GPS-E) is a system that was produced with the intention of assisting English language learners (ELLs) who have lower English proficiency. The study was conducted in a university setting in northern Taiwan. The English classes which were categorized as “Pilot English Classes” were recruited for this research. One major goal of this study is to explore how effective and to what extent the GPS-E system can contribute to students’ English learning in the university level. A survey was designed, and the data of the first year experiment were analyzed by a pre-post test study using the SPSS t-test. Results indicated that students who have tried the GPS-E system have improved significantly.

Keywords: Autonomy, Computer Assisted Language Learning, Education, English Language Learners, Game-Based Learning, Motivation

INTRODUCTION

In Taiwan, English is one of the major subject matters at all schools, from primary schools to college-level schools and universities. Under the influence of valuing academic attainment in Taiwanese society, Taiwanese students have been “forced” to learn English and “strongly demanded” for “expected academic achievement”—the higher grades the better, not considering whether or not they could use English in real life. Research results revealed that most of the Taiwanese college students had either

fear or unpleasant feelings about their English learning experiences. Plus, the less pleasant they felt about learning English, the worse grades they obtained (Lin & Warden, 1998).

Moreover, most people in Taiwan still consider English as just a school subject matter instead of a “genuine” language tool with practical usages due to the lack of the environment and opportunities to use it. Subsequently, learning English has been a burden to many students, so that they become reluctant and even defensive toward English learning. Under this circumstance, many English teachers feel struggled to lecture for these students. Consequently, students with lower motivation kept receiving poor grades. In order to avoid the

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vicious circle, integrating entertaining games into learning seems to be a possible solution.

According to a play theorist, Sutton-Smith (1997), any useful definition of play must apply to both adults and children. In spite of different perceptions and learning behaviors influenced by ages, cultures, education process, and the like, there are still many key themes of applying playful learning for children relevant to adult learning. According to Rice (2009): "Play can be a powerful learning process for adults in higher education, and is embedded in a constructivist theory of learning, and requires experience and reflection as part of that process."

In addition, numerous articles have been written regarding Internet-relevant language instruction for English language learners. Many of them advocate positive outcomes of incorporating the Internet into the English learning process. For example, Ho (2006) suggested that e-mail exchange between English language learners (ELLs) and native English speakers helped ELLs to change learning attitudes from negative or neutral to positive, to increase motivation, and to build self-confidence. Thombs (2000) also received positive feedback from participants in his study by using e-mail to enhance English writing skills. He reported that the ESL students' English writing skills had significant growth during the two months of implementing the project. Bikowski and Kessler (2002) also proposed that the use of an electronic discussion board in the English-as-a-second-language classroom could provide flexibility, interconnectivity, and many other benefits for both teachers and learners.

Therefore, grounded in the belief that combining entertaining games and new technology can elicit students' intrinsic motivation for learning English, and subsequently improve students' achievement, the GPS-E (Game-based Pilot System for English learning) was created in order to lead low-motivation English learners into a joyful learning world. Students will be encouraged to envision how play an online game contributes to English learning by physically using the system. To better present the system, this paper aims to examine the effectiveness of incorporating entertaining computer assisted

language learning (CALL) (in this case: GPS-E) into English classes which are composed with students with low motivation as well as low academic achievement on English subject.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Based on the above mentioned discussion, the following questions are constructed as the research questions for this study:

1. What do the results suggest about the strengths and weaknesses of incorporating an Internet-based game into English Language teaching instruction?
2. What are the concerns, limitations and inadequacies arising from the study?
3. What suggestions for future researchers are revealed based on the outcome of this study?

MOTIVATIONAL LEARNING

Game-Based Learning

During the past two decades, the online computer games have grown rapidly and attracted educators to take the advantages of the gaming motivation. The attitude of students toward computer games is quite different from the attitude that they have toward learning subjects. Therefore, integrating learning materials into games provides an effective way for students to learn. "A motivated learner can't be stopped" (Prensky, 2003). Gaming environment not only motivates students to learn, but also provides a proper framework for adaptive learning since the progress of players can be monitored and directed individually in the game.

For English learning, giving an all-English learning environment is always the most effective way to learn English. Zahner, Fauverge, and Wong (2000) state that the language learning is a deliberate and controlled activity, not only involves the non-conscious and conscious processes, but also situated it the metaconscious stage.

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