ทัศนคติของนักศึกษาที่มีต่อการใช้เว็บไซด์เป็นสื่อเสริม
ในการเรียนภาษา
Student Attitudes towards Websites used as Supplements
in Language Teaching

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บทคัดย่อ

งานวิจัยนี้ศึกษาทัศนคติของนักศึกษาที่มีต่อการใช้เว็บไซด์เป็นสื่อเสริม
การเรียนรู้ ในปัจจุบันวิชาภาษาต่างๆได้ถูกนำเสนอในรูปแบบสื่ออิเล็กทรอนิกส์
ซึ่งนำไปสู่การเรียนรู้โดยอิสระ กรณีศึกษาสำหรับงานวิจัยนี้คือวิชาภาษาวิชาหนึ่ง
ของมหาวิทยาลัยเทคโนโลยีพระจอมเกล้าธนบุรี ซึ่งเน้นการเรียนรู้ผ่านเนื้อหา
และโครงงานของวิชาเป็นการสร้างวารสารอิเล็กทรอนิกส์   ดังนั้นเว็บไซด์จึงถูก
นำมาใช้ในรูปของสื่อเสริมเพื่อช่วยให้นักศึกษาคุ้นเคยกับสื่ออิเล็กทรอนิกส์มากขึ้น
กลุ่มตัวอย่างคือนักศึกษาระดับปริญญาตรีคณะวิศวกรรมศาสตร์จำนวน 55 คน
เครื่องมือวิจัยที่ใช้คือแบบสอบถาม   ข้อมูลที่ได้แสดงให้เห็นว่านักศึกษานั้น
มีความพอใจกับการใช้เว็บไซด์เสริมการเรียนรู้ โดยสรุปแล้วเว็บไซด์ควรจะได้รับ
พัฒนาในฐานะที่เป็นสื่อสนับสนุนการเรียนรู้

คำสำคัญ สื่ออิเล็กทรอนิคส์ การเรียนรู้แบบอิสระ

Abstract

This study is to investigate student attitudes towards the use of the
website as supplementary. At present, many language subjects are put in the
form of electronic media. Those promote independent learning. A language course

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at KMUTT will be the case. The course is content-based and the project is creating an e-zine. Therefore, the use of the website was introduced as supplementary to increase students' familiarity with electronic media. The subjects were 55 undergraduate engineering students. The instrument was questionnaires. The data showed that the students were satisfied with the use of the supplementary website. In all, websites should be considered as fruitful media to facilitate learning.

Keywords: e-learning, independent study

Background

At present, many curricula promote independent learning. Since it is believed that if learners are given an opportunity to learn by themselves, they would form a life-long independent learning style. Therefore, curriculum planners or teachers put much effort to gear learners to be able to learn in this way. To reach the goal, a variety of teaching strategies and supplementary materials need to be implemented to provide learners chances to get more involved in the practice process.

One effective type of materials which is widely used to support independent learning is in the form of electronic media. Using IT in teaching can promote independent learning as students can learn at their own pace at appropriate times and places that meet their needs. At the same time, the teacher's workload is reduced. It could be said that this technology also changes the learning atmosphere.

KMUTT, Thailand, is an institute of this case. Its current policy is to transform the university into a wireless educational organization. Many courses put into electronic format. Four compulsory fundamental English courses; LNG101, 102, 103 and 104, have electronic websites that were created and planned to be used as supplements for students to further study by themselves outside class.

Sometimes, the websites are also used as materials in the classroom. Only one website, that of LNG104, will be the focus of this study.

LNG104 is a content-based language learning course in which the students have to design their own e-zine or magazine in groups as a course project by selecting an interesting topic, writing the columns, designing magazine layout, and presenting their work. In the past, students has always complained that there were not enough in-class handouts provided. Since this course is project-based, most of the class time is spent on consultations. The language focuses are integrated by the process of writing and consulting in the magazine design process. To support and facilitate student learning, a course website was created. However, after the website was successfully launched, it was never integrated into any of the lessons of the course.

In this study, the particular website used as part of classroom language learning will be evaluated on its effectiveness on student learning. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to investigate students' attitudes towards the use of LNG104's website as a supplement so as to find out its strengths and weaknesses. It is hoped that if the website can provide lots of support and benefits for students' learning, it should be integrated into the course teaching.

Literature Review

Since the early 1960s, language teachers have seen continuous changes in the way that language is taught. The principles of teaching have changed from grammatical focus to the fostering of communicative competence. The recitation of rules and dialogues has been neglected whereas creativity and self-expression have been promoted. Comprehensibility is considered to be an important facet. In other words, the meaning of words has been more negotiated rather than the form itself. Culture, ways of life, and ways of thinking, and so on, are other facets that have been emphasized. Language literary textbooks have gradually been

dominated by various kinds of authentic materials since learners' needs are more taken into account. At present, one type of authentic materials which is very well-known concerns the use of information technology, since it is easily accessible and contains a great deal of information.

In the 21st century, "everyday language use is so tied to technology that learning language through technology has become a fact of life" (Chapelle, 2001: 1). Nowadays, tape recorders, for example, are rarely found in listening labs but language media centers where "language learners can use multimedia CD-ROMs and laser discs, access foreign language documents on the World Wide Web, and communicate with their teachers, fellow classmates, and native speakers by electronic mail" (Warschauer and Kern, 2000:1). Therefore, it could be mentioned that information technology plays an important role in language teaching. The most significant type of IT always seen and widely used is computer-oriented as it can best reduce the teacher's workload and take over tedious activities.

Kenning (1983) points out the ideas of positive impact of computer-oriented that it teaches more than language. Learners' metacognitive strategies will be developed in ways that will allow them to develop their accountability for their learning beyond the classroom. Computer-based learning also engages learners' interest in the target culture which helps develop their willingness to seek out opportunities to communicate in the target language. This also helps learners gain pragmatic abilities that will serve in communication beyond the classroom. Kenning (1983: 4) also puts forward the idea that, in the long run, "the greatest advantage of the computer must be that it urges the teaching profession to analyze what goes on in the classroom and reassess the basic tenets of the educational process." There are many ways to implement computer-oriented language teaching. E-learning is a good illustrator of learning in such a way.

Since language learners **"**are entering in the world where their communicative competence will inevitably include electronic communication**"** (Chapelle, 2001: 2), current language pedagogy seeks out opportunities to integrate e-learning in teaching. E-learning is defined by the Open and Distance Learning Quality Council in the UK (http://www.odlqc.org.uk/odlqc/n19-e.htm) as **"**the effective learning process created by combining digitally delivered content with (learning) support and services.**"**

Kenya Education Network states that e-learning is seen as a trouble-shooter to several challenges. These include the move towards **"**lifelong learning, with its ongoing demand for continuous professional development, and the drive to widen participation**"** (http://cbdd.wsu.edu/edev/Kenet_ToT/Unit1/WhyeElearning. htm). These challenges occur when the pressure on resources and the diversity in learners**'** population and modes of attendance, which include the access and flexibility as part time learners at a distance are increased. In other words, e-learning helps improve the flexibility and quality of learning by, for instance, providing access to a range of resources and materials which may not be available or accessible such as animation, multimedia, etc., giving learners opportunity to study at their own pace, providing a learning environment which meets the needs of individual learners, encouraging them to take charge of their own learning, and so on (Ibid).

In a context similar to the study, Kamhi-Stein et al. (2002) conducted a research by using computers in a project-based language classroom. The course relied on the interactive principle: learner-teacher interaction (such as when language learners complete an exercise, submit their work by e-mail, and receive teacher feedback) and learner-computer interaction (such as when language learners complete an exercise and check the answers from the website). The results showed that the students felt more confident and became more skilled in using computers to aid their classroom learning.

It could be seen that e-learning requires the investment of time and effort in developing new skills, new approach, and new resources. If it is well-prepared, it helps save time and effort in the long run. Moreover, it will be possible to cope with a great deal number of students with no increase of teaching loads such as face-to-face teaching, marking, etc. However, the key is that e-learning has to really replace traditional modes of teaching with active learning opportunities whenever and wherever appropriate.

Although e-learning represents an innovation in language teaching, there will be some constraint effects that should be taken into account. Skehan (cited by Chapelle, 2001: 56) suggests that **"**the tasks should provide learners an opportunity to work with a range of target structures appropriate to their level. If the language of a task is already known to the learners, the task presents no opportunity for development. Language that is beyond the learners**'** grasp relative to their ability is not useful either. Learner characteristics such as willingness to communicate, age, and learning style also come into play in task choice.**"**

A research conducted in a Thai context (Wiriyachitra and Sunitham, 2004) shows that the full web-based course which was open to learners of all levels and from different situations was not successful. It did not serve a particular group of learners with a particular level of language proficiency. The research also suggested that this unsuccessful issue could be tackled by finding an appropriate group of learners and increasing the motivation of the learners. It could be done by integrating a web-based program in a certain course as supplementary material. Therefore, this point brings about the focus of this study.

Methodology

Having seen that there are arguments and a variety of beliefs in the implementation of e-learning in language teaching, it is worth investigating what these arguments and beliefs are. Therefore, the purpose of the research is to

investigate students**'** attitudes towards the use of the LNG104 website as a supplementary material. It is hoped that the findings will illustrate the strengths and weaknesses of the website for making improvement.

In order to reach the purpose of the study, this section then aims to give an overview of the research methodology: subjects, instruments and data analysis.

Subjects

The study was conducted with 81 second-year undergraduate engineering students who enrolled in LNG104: Content-based Language Learning I, in the academic year 2004. The subjects were mixed-ability students.

LNG104 website

There are four main sections in the program: course outline, learning units, references and about us. First, in the course outline section, the course description, course concept, course objectives, tentative schedule, and evaluation of LNG104 are provided.

Second, there are 10 lessons available in the learning unit section: Unit 1: Introduction to e-zine/magazine, Unit 2: Identifying a topic, Unit 3: Citation & References, Unit 4: Writing a proposal, Unit 5: Presentation Skills, Unit 6: Writing Organization, Unit 7: Introduction to Tools for Designing e-zine/magazine, Unit 8: Writing Elements in Group A, Unit 9: Writing Elements in Group B, and Unit 10: Editing. For each unit, there are objectives, content, and exercises provided.

Next is the reference section. A list of references is used as a source of information for designing the program content. Finally, there is an **"**About us**"** section which is about two teachers and five students who are the program designers. This section also provides help in case of any obstacles in using the program.

Instruments

A questionnaire was administered at the end of the semester (See Appendix). It consisted of two parts. Part I was a rating-scale administered to measure the students' attitudes towards the use of the LNG104 website as supplementary material. Each item consisted of a four-point rating-scale. The meaning of these four-point scales was: 4 = Strongly agree, 3 = Agree, 2 = Disagree, and 1 = Strongly disagree. The other part was an open-ended section provided for any other comments. The data of this part was used to support those of the previous part.

Data analysis

Each part of the questionnaire was analyzed. Arithmetic means ($\overline{X}$) were calculated for Part I and interpreted as follows:

Criteria for rating-scale interpretation

Mean ($\overline{X}$)	Interpretation
1.00-1.75	Strongly disagree
1.76-2.50	Disagree
2.51-3.25	Agree
3.26-4.00	Strongly agree

Part II of the questionnaire was open-ended. The subjects could answer with any suggestions or comments. The responses were grouped into main themes relevant to the research's purpose. Relevant information was used to supplement the findings from Part I. The numbers of students who shared the same ideas were also counted.

Findings

As the purpose of the study was to investigate the students' attitudes towards the use of the LNG104 website as a supplementary material, the data from the questionnaire had been reviewed as the main aspects. The results of the study indicated two main discussion areas in the use of the program: strengths and weaknesses.

Statements	Scores
Quick access	3.13
Ease of use	3.03
Covers the course contents	3
Language use appropriate to the learners' level	2.96
Useful guide to course content	2.91
Sufficient examples with clear explanations	2.82
Sufficient exercises	2.78
Attractive appearance	2.75
Interesting presentation techniques	2.71
Clear explanations to access the program	2.68
Further resources recommended	2.67
Useful links to educational websites	2.66
Clear and accurate contents	2.6
Average Means	**2.82**

Table showing the learners' comments on the website

Regarding the above table, the scores are interpreted as the strengths and weaknesses of the website as follows.

1. Strengths

The strengths of the program were found to be as follows:

1.1 Quick access

Most of the students rated the program highly as they were able to access it quickly. This issue was an important motivation in the use of the

program. If the access had been very slow, it might have affected desire to use the program. In this experimental study, it could be seen that the program was implemented with only a few number of students. Thus, problems such as failure due to thousands of simultaneous accesses, inadequate server space, management, etc. did not occur.

1.2 Ease of Use

The students rated the program as easy to use. This might be because of the fact that the program was designed for academic purposes with few icons for students to click on: there were only two main areas for them to practice: contents and exercises.

1.3 Cover the course contents

The students believed that there was sufficient content for them to review and practice their lessons by themselves. All lesson units in the classroom had been provided in the form of electronic. Thus, they felt that all units were completely covered in the program. This also met the objectives of the program to support learning by having every lesson ready for use.

1.4 Appropriate language use

Another outstanding positive issue of the program use was the language illustrated in the program. The students mentioned that the language was appropriate to their level of proficiency. They did not have to put much effort in comprehending the contents. This point also served the objectives of the program design which aimed to support learning, and not to test language proficiency.

1.5 Useful guide to course content

The students felt the program was helpful because they have more comprehension of their lessons due to the fact that there were descriptions of the contents and exercises provided. This might have helped clarify their understanding of the lessons.

2. Weaknesses

Although the students found the website to be very useful in many aspects, there were four issues where most students agreed to it needed improvement.

2.1 Inaccuracy of the contents

Based on the results of Part I of the questionnaire, more than half of the students mentioned that there were lots of mistakes on the program. The examples of the mistakes were spelling, incorrect answers, non-parallel format, and so on. The students also suggested the teacher should carefully edit the contents and exercises before officially making use of it.

Moreover, the results of the open-ended section also revealed the following problems.

2.2 Difficulties in reading small fonts

Since LNG104 is the third and the last compulsory fundamental English course, the contents and learning processes would be more complicated compared to the preceding two: LNG102 and LNG103. Such complexity was also illustrated through the contents of the course. Thus, learning units needed clarification to help facilitate student learning. It was mentioned by most students that the font size on the unit **"Writing References"**, for example, should be enlarged. Information on sources that needed to be used for writing citations or references, etc. had to be clear enough to read.

2.3 Insufficient number of exercises

The next issue that needed to be improved was the number of the exercises. Since the students had not enough practice in class, it was hoped that more and more exercises would have been provided in the program so that they would be able to practice whenever and wherever they could. This might have helped them have more understanding about the lessons.

2.4 Unattractive design

The students found the style or the design of the program was not attractive or interesting. This might result from a style of learning which was more academic-oriented. The program, then, was plain and dry. The teacher should take into consideration, when designing a program to make it attractive enough to call for students to use.

Discussion

From the findings, it can be seen that the LNG104 website could successfully serve the purpose as it was an e-learning program. It facilitated the self-access mode of learning of students. The students enjoyed studying and practicing by themselves. They could learn without the teacher. However, before making use of this kind of medium as a supplement, there are some factors that the teacher should take into consideration, such as student age, learning pace, training, etc. The teacher has to be sure that the students are ready as independent learners, otherwise learning will not occur. Moreover, it was also important for the teacher to make sure that the amount of content and exercises provided should be adequate and comprehensive for the sake of student learning.

A lot of mistakes in the program showed that careful editing was needed. The lack of editorial quality control could dissuade people from using websites (Crystal, 2001). Mistakes could negatively affect student learning. If the students are not good at using English and are unaware of the mistakes, they might learn something wrong. Thus, the teacher should be very careful on this particular point.

In this case, one thing that the teacher could do is that s/he should check students' understanding whether they go on the right track, especially on the areas where the mistakes are found. If the students get lost, they should be

wrapped up since what and how students learn play an important part of their learning.

According to the finding which indicated that the design of the program should be more creative to match learner age and preference, this issue had been raised significantly. This refers to student motivation in learning. In this study, since the students were forced to access the program, they tried to take it as a part of their learning. However, after the course, the program might not be accessed again. It could be seen that if the students' intrinsic motivation in learning has been successfully raised, this affects independent and lifelong learning behavior. Therefore, the student preferences and needs have to be considered.

The program might be redesigned in terms of the attractiveness to raise student motivation in learning. More animation and picture movement might be needed. The web screen may be composed of some movies and soundtracks to make the website more interactive and also attractive to draw the users' attention, in the other words, the teacher and the web designer should bear in mind that "the appearance of websites is more crucial then ever (Ibid: 205)". Moreover, student sense of belonging might be integrated such as the number of coins in the treasure box will be increased if they get more marks from the exercises, their pet will die if they do not access the program for a long time, etc.

Implications

From the results of the study, it can be seen that student motivation after using the website as a supplement of a closed community language course was quite high. Therefore, we might say that the website could also be developed into a full web-based course in which the students are required to study the contents of the website by themselves throughout the whole semester. Nevertheless, to launch a particular website as a fundamental learning

tool for language learning might raise some issues the teacher should take into consideration as follows.

The website should be implemented as a closed community language course, that is, the website is specially designed and limited to a particular group of learners who are likely to possess roughly the same level of both knowledge of the world and English proficiency level. This is because similar background knowledge and proficiency level could encourage the learners to interact with each other more through some communicative features available in the website e.g. chat groups, discussion lists and web boards. Furthermore, the learners should also earn credit from participating in the course to fulfill the requirement of their study programs. This is because in case teachers who have already used the website as a basis for a particular course may feel uncertain as to whether the use of a full web-based course is really able to intrinsically motivate their learners. They can make use of course credits as a requirement for graduation to initially force the learners to use the website, while the teachers try to gradually raise their intrinsic motivation.

The next significant issue is, before designing any websites, it is necessary to know who the target users are and learn more about them in terms of language proficiency level, needs, interests, and so on, so that the teachers are able to design the websites' contents to match with them the most. The number of exercises provided in the website also plays a vital role. Exercises should be varied and adequate for the learners choose according to their preferences.

Although it is possible to launch websites as a main tool for language courses, the final evaluation, unfortunately, should still be organized based on the traditional paper-based exam. Online exams may leave teachers unable to identify who the exam takers really are causing reliability problems.

Conclusion

The use of websites as supplementary material in language courses seems to be successful. Most of the learners in this study expressed positive attitudes towards the use of this medium, as it is easily accessible and matches with their level of proficiency. Pertaining to pedagogical benefits, it also increased their comprehension and supported their learning. Although there were some problems about inaccurate contents, the researchers consider them as valuable comments to further develop the website. For other researchers, it is interesting if an online course in which the students could completely and independently study without any in-class contact hours can be created and successfully implemented.

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