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Learning Business English in Virtual Worlds: Effectiveness and Acceptance in a Malaysian Context

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Abstract

Motivated by the need to provide better opportunities for Malays in Malaysia to improve their oral business English communication skills, the research focused on the use of multiuser virtual environment (MUVE) for learning English and pursued the following research questions: (1) Is MUVE based learning effective in facilitating situated scenario-based learning of oral business English communication skills by Malay learners? (2) Which factors influence the acceptance of MUVE based learning of oral business English communication skills by Malay learners? To address the first research question, a controlled experiment was conducted to compare the learning gains in traditional classroom and in MUVE environment. To address the second research question, an acceptance model based on the social cognitive theory and the technology acceptance model was tested by fitting it to the data obtained by using a questionnaire. The experiment involved 152 Malay tertiary learners, who also filled in the questionnaire. Findings indicated that MUVE was effective in facilitating scenario-based learning of business English by Malay learners. Learners' oral skills showed statistically significant improvement following learning in MUVE. However, the difference between the improvement in the classroom environment and in MUVE was not statistically significant. As for MUVE acceptance, Video Games Affect, English Class Anxiety, and Perceived Usefulness affected the learners' Intention to Use MUVE for e-Learning, although the effect size for Video Games Affect and English Class Anxiety was small. The results of the study suggest that MUVE based learning is an effective environment for learning oral business English communication skills. MUVE is particularly suitable for distance learning, when traditional classroom learning is not available. The study confirmed the claims in the literature that MUVE is particularly suitable for anxious learners and for learners who like to play video games. The study involved Malay university students as participants, and the results are not necessarily generalizable to other types of learners.

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