

Chapter 27

Familiar or Unfamiliar Context?

Application of M-Games in the Blended Module of L2 Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter endeavored to devise a motivating way to engage learners in L2 English learning tasks presented through the mobile game (m-game). It started on the issue of whether types of a displayed picture on m-games had any significant relationship with learners' performance in the blended mode of L2 learning. To that end, a cellphone-based form of the non-English game of 'Xane Bazi', modified as didactic 'Xane Bazi' for English vocabulary learning, was grafted onto the face-to-face mode of content representation in the blended language learning module. 100 Iranian boys and girls within the age range of 10-13 were divided into two groups to learn English vocabulary items during 12 sessions of an academic semester: One group played a version of 'Xane Bazi' with learner-made paintings and the other group played a version of the game filled with photos. The results hinted at the desired effect of utilizing m-games as applying learner-made painting condition to didactic 'Xane Bazi' was proved to significantly ratchet up the participants' L2 learning.

INTRODUCTION

Most schools realize the prime nature of technology in preparing learners for college, careers, and citizenship. In today's world, the rise of educational applications (apps) has impacted classrooms across the world (Kinney, 2014). Devaney (2014) maintains that "young learners who develop an early enthusiasm for learning in technology-enhanced pedagogical environments develop high-level skills and interests that can carry them through to college and the workforce" (p. 15). Currently, parallel with the development of information and communication technology (ICT), new forms of pedagogy is being held up as

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5472-1.ch027

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the way of reforming education. Nearly ICT extension of the last few years has mandated a new manner of teaching and also expanded the use of revolutionary pedagogical programs which advocate continuous evaluation of needs, objectives, materials, and teaching strategies. In a similar vein, Peters (2013) argues that technology can be introduced in education to develop a better connection, interaction, and communication between learners, educators, and materials developers. Mobile technology, by conducting education in real life contexts, also provides a contextual support for enhancing the information process of new didactic contents (Chen & Chang, 2011); in this way, learning is not divorced from experience; learners construct their knowledge by experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. Accordingly, in order to ensure the success of the recent wireless mobile technologies in the era of technology-mediated pedagogy, practitioners have to orchestrate diverse variables in the learning environment to create favorable conditions for second/foreign language learning (Banados, 2006).

BACKGROUND

Role of Wireless Mobile Applications in Education

The popularization of wireless or mobile devices in the last 1990s and with beginning 2000, accompanied by some evidence that virtual games may, if used efficiently, increase learners' performance (e.g., Ang & Zaphiris, 2006; Ashraf, Ghanei Motlagh & Salami, 2014; Vahdat & Rasti Behbahani, 2013), has paved the way for further use of technology as the new frontier for teaching and learning. Virtual games as the affordances of digital technologies indeed have powerful effects on the way educators construe the technology-mediated language learning module. Practitioners now have more options for teaching new instructional content to learners using a variety of instructional virtual games. Virtual games can fill the gap which remained intact in the conventional course of teaching bridging classroom and non-classroom settings which allows for unprecedented interaction between educators and learners. Playing education is also beneficial to educators themselves as the gaming field, through simulating the real-world situations, provides them with insight into what is happening in classroom as students are attempting different learning strategies to carry out a variety of didactic tasks. In this vein, the requirement of higher-order skill of interpreting new didactic contents in the user-friendly contexts of native games makes way for improved comprehension of content and appreciation of the game as well as its background story; that is, surprise technique of media (Hoken & Van Vliet, 2000). Not only does higher-order learning seems to be retained longer, but it is also likely that it encourages the development of intrinsic motivation and favorable attitudes towards lifelong learning (Willis, 1992). When students learn materials in the frame of didactic games in order to accomplish a new adventure, they search for connections and conflicts with what is already known (Rashid, 2006). Athanases (2005) believes that "the game-enhanced pedagogy approach moves the focus from merely the culminating act of performance to encompass more broadly the cognitive, kinesthetic aesthetic, and communicative processes that students exercise during performance study" (p. 102). In effect, on the practical level, the application of didactic games may lead to facilitation of target language learning that affects psychological and social as well as occupational and academic affairs in the society.

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