

Chapter VIII

English–Language Teaching with Learning Objects at PUCPR

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the experience of production and use of learning objects (LOs) for English-language learning at the Pontificia Universidade Catolica do Parana (PUCPR), Brazil. PUCPR made its first steps towards online education in 1995 when it started developing its virtual learning environment. Along this trajectory, the need was felt to look for technological resources for the development of digital didactic material. This led to the creation of the Web-based Student Support System (SAAW) by the Center for Educational Technologies. In this research, we developed a case study as the basis for this small data-collection study to elucidate and analyze perceptions and information supplied by the study population. This study was carried out by students studying for a Master's in Education and taking the "Theory and Practice in Distance Education" module. The English-language LO was considered to be satisfactory and to facilitate the teaching learning process.

INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, where students and teachers come into daily contact with technological innovations in different sectors of society outside the classroom, it has become essential to produce support material for use in classroom-based or distance education that stands out from other material.

Today's students were born in an age where information is readily available in their homes, distances are shrinking, and the pace of change is accelerating. This world—full of interaction, images, color, and video—needs to be part of the school environment to help students in the teaching and learning process. The motivation needed in the educational process can be stimulated by digital material that stands out from other such material and that allows the student to interact with, manipulate, and even change it on his or her own. Learning objects (LOs) are one possible type of digital material.

Teachers can prepare an LO themselves or build one in partnership with their students. The content matter in LOs is usually presented in the form of games, in situations that are part of the students' daily lives.

A review of the literature reveals a concern with issues related to the standardization and storage of LOs, but it should be stressed that the pedagogical aspect is also important to increase the likelihood of this type of resource being successfully used. LOs should therefore be planned and implemented by a team consisting of IT, education, psychology, and design professionals, to mention but a few. By making use of a multidisciplinary team, the resulting LO will have a user-friendly, creative, highly interactive interface that respects users' different learning styles and has clearly defined pedagogical features.

In this chapter, we describe some of the concepts and main characteristics related to LOs and provide details of the Pontifical Catholic University of Paraná's experiences with them.

SOME BRIEF CONSIDERATIONS ON LEARNING OBJECTS

There is a lack of consensus regarding what constitutes a learning object. Most authors support the idea that for a resource to be an LO, it must be digital and reusable and have an educational purpose. According to Muzio (in Bastos, 2005, p. 29): "There are many different definitions of a[n] LO, and many other terms are used. This always leads to confusion and problems with communication, which is hardly surprising, as this field of study is new."

Coutinho (2003) states that from the instructional point of view, learning objects correspond to small study segments and must be linked to one or more specific learning objectives. In addition, learning objects must follow some kind of instructional strategy (BASTOS, 2005, p. 29).

Wiley (2001, p. 5) defines an LO as any digital resource that can be reused to aid learning. His definition includes any digital resource, whether small or large, that can be distributed over a network on demand.

Tarouco, Fabre, and Tamisiunas (2003, p. 2) extend this concept to include:

...any resource that is supplementary to the learning process and can be reused to support learning. The term learning objects is generally applied to learning material that is designed and built in small units with a view to maximizing learning situations where the resource can be reused. The basic idea is that the objects should be like blocks with which the learning context will be built.

Few authors appear to be concerned with the educational aspect of LOs or consider it part of the concept of LOs. The technical characteristics are always remembered and are (Ramos, 2006):

- *Reusability:* The possibility of using a learning object in different contexts.

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