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The Mobile-Based Training in an EFL Classroom

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Abstract: In this paper, we will introduce a new mobile e-learning platform in an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom. The system constructed in our project is based on iPod Touch (2nd generation), Wi-Fi, and LMS software. Crucially, our system does not depend on the wired Local Area Network (LAN) or 40 to 50 personal computers as seen in typical computer rooms or CALL rooms. Our platform is expected to be introduced to such normal lecture rooms or classrooms as are common in many of the EFL countries and give much of the contribution to methodology in the field of Blended-Learning; a learning style of face-to-face lecture plus practice on ICT. After reviewing backgrounds of the system constructed in National Colleges of Technologies in Japan, we will present an overview of what was done in our institution.

Keywords: iPod Touch, LMS, EFL, Blended-Learning

Introduction

Since portable music players like iPod or Walkman became very popular among young students, several attempts utilizing such devices in classrooms have been proposed in the field of Educational Technology. According to the survey by *ishare inc*. in 2008, close to 60 percent of the young people have any kind of portable music players (mp3 players, hard disk players, memory-stick players). This, however, has not led to the fact that they are using these multimedia tools to learn a foreign language. Since importance of linguistic input was emphasized in Krashen (1982)'s Input Hypothesis, increasing the frequency of linguistic input inside and outside the classroom is essential for EFL learners. Our belief is that mobile tools in the non-CALL classroom are of great help for both learners and teachers. In what follows, we will have a look at how mobile LMS was utilized in the EFL classroom.

1. Backgrounds

1.1 Importance of Input and Output

The development of practical communication skills with L2 (second language) was determined as the goal of English Education by the Ministry of Education in Japan in 2002. However, it is very difficult to offer listening or speaking instruction individually in the class because of the class size and the limited class time ([4]). The fundamental problem is the lack of time and frequency for input. ICT offers a solution and takes the part of language teachers, exposing learners to the target language in and outside the class. It is also argued that Input Hypothesis alone leads to problems in some aspects of target language grammar, especially in morpho-syntactic areas (see [5]), which means that learners must have a lot of opportunities to produce output. ICT has an advantage here again. Most Learning Management Systems are equipped with small quiz, short essay, questionnaire, etc., which

will facilitate some of learners' feedback activities. For details of the input hypothesis, see [2] and [3]. The importance of output is well described in [5].

1.2 Preference of Mobile-Based Training

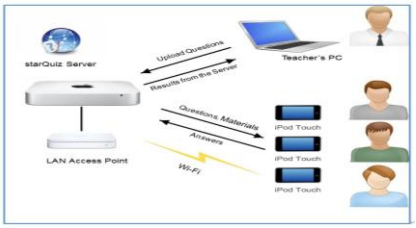
Compared with PC-based WBT, mobiles have an advantage for both teachers and students. For learners, the greatest advantage is its friendliness. According to our project survey conducted in our institution, 48.6% of the students chose cellular phone and 17.1 % smart phone as the most important communication tool, while 27.1% chose PC (*n*=80). On the part of teachers, the situation is that the CALL system is becoming much more complicated and requiring much more detailed skills to control the system, which leads to teachers' unwillingness and anxiety to conduct a CALL class ([4]).

2. Outline of Our LMS

The hardware and software of our system will be shown below in (A) of Figure 1. The class usually consists of around 40 students in our institution. We prepared 50 iPod Touches for the class, and built up the LMS server where the software "StarQuiz" was installed. The rough conceptual sketch of our system is illustrated below in (B) of Figure 2. (C) of Figure 1 describes the classroom we used in carrying out our project, where there is a starQuiz server in front of the classroom. And two access points are located as indicated in the figure. Each student has an iPod Touch on his/her table.

CPU	Mac Mini Server	Intel Core 2 Duo 2.53Ghz / 4GB Memory / 500GB×2 HDD / Mac OS X Server Snow Leopard
Back-up HDD	Buffalo HD-CL1.0TU2	
Wireless LAN(×2)	AirMac Extreme base station	
Software	StarQuiz Server	
USB Hub	ELECOM U2H-Z10SWH	10 port ×2
iPod Touch (×50)	iPod Touch 8G	

(A) The hard and software



(B) Conceptual Image

(C) The classroom

Figure 1. Outline of our system

3. Class Management

Figure 2. QuickTime

In logging in the server, students write down their name on the log-in display. After logging in, we gave three kinds of test with the use of iPod Touch; questionnaire with multiple choices, multiple choice questions with sound materials, and short essay. In the case of listening test, students push the play button and the QuickTime appears on the display. Unfortunately, while listening to the sound, students can't see or answer the questions as shown on the picture of the right hand side of Figure 2. All the answers from the students are collected and analyzed statistically soon after the test is done.

4. Results and Implications

On multiple-choice grammar questions they worked on their device very smoothly. For about 5-8 minutes, the server received all the answers from the students, and the instant feedback was made possible during the class.

In listening questions, however, there arose a few difficult problems. Some of the sound players (QuickTime) didn't work well. In addition, students can take advantage of the same listening strategy as they do in TOEIC or TOEFL test, since they can listen and answer at the same time (Figure 2).
On the essay-writing questions, the students wrote down their English or Japanese into iPod Touch. I was afraid that students might have more difficulties to type English words in T9-text way as adopted in mobile phones in Japan than normal keyboards of personal computers. Our anxieties, however, were unnecessary, and students typed their English very smoothly. We are surprised to see young people writing on mobile phone quickly.
A brief questionnaire research was carried out after the course. The questions are (i) "Do you feel that iPod Touch is very friendly?" (ii) "Do you feel that iPod Touch is very useful in an English class?" and (iii) "Do you feel that iPod Touch motivates your English study?" As to the first questions, 60/79 students answered affirmatively. Actually, 60/79 students have a digital music players. 8/79 students are carrying iPhone as a mobile phone. It is, thus, highly reasonable that they get accustomed to handling iPod Touch very easily.
More than half the students answered that iPod Touch is useful in learning a foreign language. This, however, doesn't necessarily motivate students to study English more; only 38/79 students answered that this motivates the students for further study. One reason might be that they have experienced learning in more elaborated CALL rooms.

5. Conclusion

We have shown that our project of iPod Touch in the EFL classroom is so far successful. This result leads to two different possibilities for further research. One is toward development to Tablet Computes like iPad. Intuitively, it seems to me that iPad is less friendly than iPod Touch for students, but its large display is very attractive. Large displays might solve the problem like as noted in Figure 2. The other way is that the class improvement or faculty development will be enhanced by using iPod Touch in the classroom, ranging from EFL to other subjects. In either way to go, our current research is worth pursuing as a fundamental project in the field of TEFL and educational technology, including evaluation of the system and effects of this learning method.

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