EFL Learners’ Implicit Theory of Intelligence and the Application of MMORPG in EFL Learning

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ABSTRACT

The present study aims to describe the application of Second Life (SL) to bring together EFL learners around the world and create a third place of learning. A group of 152 undergraduate students (n = 152) of colleges and universities in southern Taiwan were recruited for this experimental project for a period of two years. Within this two-year course they were investigated on their implicit theory of intelligence toward EFL learning. Among these 152 participants, 53 were randomly selected to be sponsored to take TOEIC four times to measure their English proficiency to establish multilevel growth model. Results of this study reported that SL did create positive effects to EFL learners’ developing incremental intelligence which was also significantly correlated to their performance on TOEIC. Multilevel growth model proposed by the present study also examined the extent to which the time individual spent on socializing in English through SL can significantly improve EFL learners’ performance on TOEIC.

Keywords: EFL Learning, Implicit Theory of Intelligence, Multilevel Growth Model, Second Life, Third Place Learning

INTRODUCTION

The use of instructional technology on students’ learning has been an appealing topic and both the academic and practical domains of education await more empirical evidence (Thompson, 2013). Language education is no exception and more works are still in need to explore the applicability of technologies in language teaching and learning (Terrell, 2011). As English teachers within the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), we always hear students’ comments about their lack of natural talent for learning a new language (Mercer, 2010) and such a feeling of helplessness occurs with many EFL learners (Hsu, 2010). It was postulated that EFL learners who believe that they do not possess an aptitude for language learning have negative expectations regarding their attainment, thus leading to learning failures (Bernat, 2007) and such a belief is coined as the implicit theory of intelligence by Gonida, Kiosseoglou, and Leondari (2006).

Furthermore, learners’ beliefs in their talent for language learning seem to be affected by different cultural influences (Mercer, 2010).
Learners with a Confucian-heritage culture tend to consider effort to be the most determinant factor that can compensate for a lack of talent (Wanga, 2012; Siebert, 2003). In terms of EFL learning, it is postulated that effort dedicating in contexts other than school and home, which is also known as the “third place”, enables language learners of various cultural backgrounds to undertake active learning which may be beyond the traditional EFL learning because of their new identity in the context (Li & Girvan, 2004).

Recently, with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies, various virtual third places emerged in the multi-user virtual environments (Soukup, 2006). The use of multi-user virtual environments in EFL pedagogy has attracted considerable attention (Wang, 2009). Among these virtual environments, Second Life (SL) is the most popular in educational EFL practice (Liou, 2012) because of its visual aesthetic attributes and immersive means of interaction (Bytheway, 2014; Gillen, 2012). Quite a large body of research has claimed the positive effects of SL in EFL learning (Aydin, 2013), although most studies only investigated its short-term effects. Furthermore, the role played by the individual’s implicit theory of intelligence on learning outcomes when SL is integrated remains unknown. In order to bridge the academic gap, the present study aims to explore the following research questions:

1. How is the learners’ implicit theory of intelligence on learning EFL changed by their experience of third place learning (TPL) in SL?
2. How does the learners’ implicit theory of intelligence associate with their performance on standardized English proficiency test (e.g. TOEIC)?
3. To what extent, does the time spent in SL influence the EFL learner’s performance on TOEIC?

In order to address the abovementioned research questions properly, the present study first reviews the pertinent literature on the proposed constructs. Research methodology, including the sampling technique, research procedures, and measurements of the constructs, are described before presenting the results of the statistical analyses and any pertinent findings. This article then presents a conclusion along with the limitations and implications of the findings.

THIRD PLACE AND LEARNING (TPL)

Drawing from the proposals of Oldenburg (1989), Levin (2007) and Halvorson (2011) which explain that members of a community should have three life circles: (1) home, (2) work or school, and (3) the informal space for social and leisure purposes that all community members are able to access. TPL thus emphasizes the various types of learning opportunities outside of the formal context and Gee (2003) supported this kind of learning activities although he did not directly use the term “TPL”. In addition, the relaxed atmosphere created by TPL can also facilitate learners’ self-regulated learning (Crump, 2011).

Within the realm of English language teaching, the environment has been confirmed as a pivotal factor (Dörnyei, 2009). Within the third place, learners would be comfortable enough to share their repositories or to interact with others (Oldenburg, 1991) since each individual’s repertoires of input and interaction are unique and different (Sockett, 2013). Moreover, an individual’s affective filter can be lowered whilst using the second or foreign language for social activities because one of the major characteristics of TPL is socializing with good company (Wu, 2007).

Additionally, applying TPL in the EFL teaching enriches learners’ knowledge of the target culture while learning its language (Ho, 2009), since culture and language are considered to be integrated (Jin, 2007; Thorne, 2009). Public discourse can be established and dispersed naturally in the third place (Wu & Chia, 2007), which is beneficial for EFL learning if learn-
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