Chapter 4
The Effects of Second Life on the Motivation of EFL Student Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating the effects of using a virtual world, Second Life (SL), on the motivation of Turkish EFL student teachers. First, a 10-week real-life task syllabus was designed and conducted in SL. Focus-group interviews were utilized to enhance the quality of the tasks. Then, the effects of SL on motivation were tracked via qualitative research tools, namely semi-structured interviews, weekly evaluation forms, and observations. The findings showed that SL was effective in increasing motivation of the participating student teachers. The characteristics of the virtual world that were reported to have an effect on motivation were as follows: natural environment, realistic places, anxiety-free environment, excitement, and visual support. This chapter provides possibilities for those who are interested in employing virtual world technologies in foreign/second language teaching and learning and finally describes an investigation into the role of the virtual world in relation to affordances such technologies present across the globe.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last few years, we have witnessed a tremendous amount of time spent on the Internet for personal, educational, and business reasons. The growth rate of the Internet has encouraged educators to consider the integration of Internet in educational settings. This is no exception to language teaching pedagogy, for language learning/teaching is particularly relevant to the use of Internet technologies. As such, Internet technologies present language learners with situations similar to those found in the real world: a) they can lower the affective filter by engaging students in situations where their fears are bypassed, and; b) they offer opportunities to communicate in a target language by means of text/voice about their features, problem-solving, and language. To this end, researchers, teacher trainers, and teachers strive to integrate computers and the Internet into language classrooms to enhance the quality of teaching and learning. As a consequence of this, today, it is rare to find English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class in which only traditional teaching materials are used. To be more specific, the changes in technology direct EFL teachers to utilize emerging tools in the classrooms.

One of the most common problems faced by foreign language learners is the lack of practising the target language in EFL settings, especially outside of the classrooms. One way of getting learners to speak or participate in oral communications in the classroom is designing various oral classroom activities or conducting real-life tasks through the use of the target language. However, it may sometimes not be effective since some students may not have sufficient amount of meaningful input to communicate in the classroom. In this regard, Computer-mediated Communication (CMC) can be very significant because it helps to conduct real-class activities and meaningful input to communicate online. Recently, Web 2.0 tools have been used to promote online discussion and collaboration via CMC. Virtual worlds (VWs), one of the most common Web 2.0 tools, have aroused interest among educators as they provide constructivist educational tools, experiential and situated learning. Therefore, the level of discussion that is available in face-to-face conversations can be reached through the use of a Virtual World (VW).

BACKGROUND

A virtual world is a computer-simulated environment that simulates real or imaginary places. People can participate in learning communities and interact socially with others from around the world in a VW. Real people are represented by avatars, which they can use to interact, collaborate, meet, explore and form social groups. According to Zheng and Newgarden (2011), VWs are “metaverses where avatars interact with
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