Reading Courseware Design and Evaluation: Learners’ Perception of its Usage and Implication

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Technologies in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) have been widely utilized and integrated in language classrooms to enhance learning. However, the application of CALL in the teaching of Indonesian as a foreign language is still scarce and relatively under-researched. This paper discusses the pedagogical consideration of designing an educational courseware material to aid reading comprehension for beginners. It explores learners’ perceptions of its application as a supplementary platform and how it benefits learners in their reading comprehension development. The interface design, content and structure of the reading courseware are also evaluated from learners’ perspective. There are five units of interactive reading materials in the reading courseware with different topics and reading tasks. A survey was conducted at the end of the semester to evaluate the effectiveness of the courseware. The feedback shows that the reading courseware is useful in providing additional reinforcement exercises that are motivating for learners to practice their reading comprehension skills due to its interactive nature. It is also an effective platform for self-assessment. Some limitations and obstacles in the process of integrating the courseware into the curriculum are also presented in this study.

Introduction

Technologies in Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) have been widely utilized and integrated in language classrooms to enhance learning. However, the application of CALL in the teaching of Indonesian as a foreign language is still considered scarce and relatively under-researched. The Indonesian Language Program at the National University of Singapore (NUS) has attempted to embrace the paradigm shift in foreign language teaching and learning by integrating multimedia courseware as a supplementary material to enhance students’ language proficiency beyond the classroom. The latest development completed in the program was the development of reading courseware for the beginners’ level. The project was funded by the Centre for Development of Teaching and Learning, National University of Singapore under the Teaching Enhancement Grant 2010/2011.

This paper discusses the pedagogical consideration of designing an educational courseware material to aid reading comprehension for beginners. It explores learners’ perceptions of its application as a supplementary platform to make reading practice more engaging and how it benefits learners in their reading comprehension development. This study involves obtaining learners’ feedback of the interface design, content and structure of the reading courseware and the effectiveness of it as a part of the curriculum.
Method

Participants
67 students participated in this study. They were enrolled in LAB1201 “Bahasa Indonesia Level 1” in the second semester of the academic year 2012/2013.

Procedures
The data was collected anonymously from the subjects through a questionnaire. The questionnaire, administered at the end of the semester, consists of two parts. In the first part, the participants were to respond—on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)—to 10 statements regarding the interface design and the content of the reading courseware. In the second part, the participants had to answer 7 open-ended questions on their perception of the integration of the reading courseware in the course. The questions pertained mainly to learners’ motivation to do independent reading practices using the courseware and the strategies they used in completing the assignments in the courseware.

Discussion

Reading Courseware Development Project and its Integration in the Curriculum.

Schitai (1998) mentioned that there are some instructional design principles that must be considered in courseware development to ensure learning. They are:

1. Define and implement learning strategies to function as information processors that would help students understand, retain and apply the newly learned material.
2. Provide individualized feedback for typical mistakes that students make while learning the new material.
3. Determine media combinations and appropriate interactivity level to fit the target audience and the selected learning strategies.

This online reading courseware was developed to supplement the authentic reading course pack used in the classroom that was developed under the same grant.

The objectives of this reading courseware are to

- provide additional interactive reading activities to supplement the core reading material.
- expand learners’ vocabulary and improve their reading skills
- enhance their cultural awareness of the target community.

In order to achieve the objectives, five interactive lessons were developed, as summarized in Table 1:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lesson</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Berbelanja</td>
<td>Finding items at the supermarket and writing the price of the items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Shopping)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Memasak</td>
<td>Reading and following instruction in the recipe.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Cooking)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Transportasi</td>
<td>Positioning the correct location in the map and choosing the correct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Transportation)</td>
<td>means of transportation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This reading courseware was introduced in the lecture in week six of the semester. The first two lessons in the reading courseware were assigned as a compulsory assignment after the students finished reading two chapters of the course pack in weeks 6 and 7.

Learners’ Perception on the Effectiveness of Integrating the Reading Courseware as a Supplementary Platform to Aid Reading Comprehension.

Chapelle (2001) proposed to evaluate CALL applications using some general criteria, also mentioned by Jamieson, Chapelle, and Preiss (2005). They are:

1. **Language learning potential**: The degree of opportunity present for beneficial focus on form;
2. **Learner fit**: The amount of opportunity for engagement with language under appropriate conditions given learner characteristics;
3. **Meaning focus**: The extent to which learners’ attention is directed toward the meaning of the language;
4. **Authenticity**: The degree of correspondence between the learning activity and target language activities of interest to learners out of the classroom;
5. **Positive Impact**: The positive effects of the CALL activity on those who participate in it; and
6. **Practicality**: The adequacy resources to support the use of the CALL activity.

The results show that learners are generally satisfied with the interface design of the courseware (see Table 2). However, we note that some users found the navigation buttons to not be user-friendly. The students also commented in the second part of the questionnaire that they had difficulties gaining access to the page and finding the correct exercises assigned to them, and became less motivated to use this courseware to practice their reading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The welcome screen which offers an overview of what the courseware is about is informative and helpful.</td>
<td>0 4 11 47 5</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The instructions are concise, clear and easy to understand.</td>
<td>0 2 9 42 14</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>0.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The available navigation buttons and icons are user friendly.</td>
<td>1 9 7 37 13</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>0.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The graphics and animation in the exercises are colourful and attractive.</td>
<td>0 2 5 31 29</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The type and size of fonts of the reading text is suitable, clear and readable

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statements</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The general presentation of the reading content is well-organized and structured</td>
<td>0 3 6 43 15</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The exercises are interactive and fun.</td>
<td>0 2 9 33 23</td>
<td>4.15</td>
<td>0.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The selected passages are interesting.</td>
<td>0 3 11 40 13</td>
<td>3.94</td>
<td>0.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The vocabulary used in the reading passages and exercises are appropriate to your level of proficiency</td>
<td>0 3 7 47 10</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The glossary link provided is informative and helpful.</td>
<td>0 2 16 27 22</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With regard to the reading content, 86% of the population agreed that the content of the courseware is well organized and structured. We also observe that the glossary link provided needs to be improved to facilitate learning (See Table 3).

**Table 3. The content of the reading courseware**

Pertaining to whether the reading courseware can motivate students to practice reading on their own, 46 respondents agreed that this platform helped them to increase their motivation. Due to its interactive nature, the courseware makes learning fun compared to typical traditional reading lessons they had in class. The other 21 respondents feel that this reading courseware did not have an impact in increasing their motivation due to technical problems, time constraint and no mark incentive was given to do the exercises in the courseware.

In terms of reading strategies, the results show that previewing, predicting and reflecting are the most common strategies used by the respondents. It is interesting to discover that 23 respondents mentioned that they were still unaware of using any reading strategies to improve their comprehension while they were completing the exercises in the courseware. Therefore, it is necessary to provide extra tasks to raise students’ consciousness of different reading strategies available in this courseware material.

**Conclusions**

The findings suggest that the integration of the reading courseware as a supplementary material provide additional reinforcement exercises for learners to review what has been discussed in class at their own pace. The majority of the population agreed that due to its interactive nature, the courseware make them more motivated to practice further on their own and be in control of their learning to improve their reading comprehension. However, there are some issues that need to be considered and evaluated further to ensure the effectiveness of CALL application to facilitate learning. Design is fundamental in CALL application when theory is put into practice in the structuring of CALL tasks and programs (Levy & Stockwell, 2006). In addition, there should be sufficient support provided to prepare the students prior to the application of CALL. They should be aware of the purpose of using
CALL as a platform to enrich their learning experiences. In this context, the teachers should ensure that the learners are aware of what reading strategies are so that the online reading courseware can be used effectively to support learners’ reading skills development.

Acknowledgements

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