ABSTRACT

Motivation is an important and essential element in promoting student learning and ensuring student success. Educators have used various methods and materials in search of ways to motivate their students to be involved with their studies and to take control of their own learning. One currently used direction involves the use of technology and technological tools to provide motivation. This is due partly to the increased use of technology and computers by students themselves, but also due to technology's ability to deliver a more interesting and knowledge-rich educational experience. This study looked at using student-built virtual worlds as a vehicle for providing academic motivation and for enhancing constructivist learning in an English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom environment. Constructivist learning environments encourage students to actively participate in class activities, intensively collaborate with others, and deeply reflect on their own experiences related their own learning processes, and this study used virtual world building as the basis of course content and as an educational method for providing motivation towards learning English.

Thirty-five Taiwanese university students took part in a conversation course which blended virtual world building instruction with related conversation activities. Students constructed virtual worlds which were based on a story of their own choosing and performed conversation activities related to the building elements of their created virtual worlds. The study used a mixed methods research methodology to investigate the specific case and utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods and measures in course of the investigation. Qualitative data included surveys related to second language learning and computer motivation as well as a survey regarding the constructivist learning environment of the technologically oriented course. Qualitative data included in-depth student interviews and teacher observation journal information.

These data were collected, analyzed, and evaluated based on the mixed methods research triangulation design.

The pretest to posttest survey comparison did not show an increase in motivation towards English or in computer attitude over the timeframe of the course; however, posttest statements regarding motivation towards both English and computers were generally positive. In addition, quantitative and qualitative data indicated the favorable constructivist environment of the course and its activities. Students were motivated to put time and effort into their virtual worlds and reported that these activities not only helped them to think about their projects but also allowed them to use their English skills. Overall, this study showed that student-built virtual worlds can provide a motivating and intellectually stimulating constructivist environment in an EFL setting.