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An Exploratory Factor Analysis of Marginalized Youths' Access and Use of English Language Digital Contents

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Abstract

The notion of literacy is changing as youths today are living in an environment filled with digital contents that contain diverse multimodal forms. The ability to infer meanings presented and communicated through these diverse multimodal forms is an important factor to strengthen the language learning of marginalised youths as they access and use English language digital contents to support their inclusion in a knowledge based society. Moreover, to increase the access and use of English language digital content, it is equally important to investigate the digital content needs and preferences of marginalised youths. This article explains the use of exploratory factor analysis in extracting factors of personal preferences and perceived influences among marginalised youths in accessing and using digital contents. The quantitative study collected information on the participants' perceptions towards multimodal forms in digital contents as well as uncover their opinions on why they want to access and use digital content. Six factors about marginalised youths' perceptions of digital contents were extracted; these factors will contribute to the investigation of the dimensions of digital contents for English language learning enhancement. Finally, the association between the dimensions of digital contents and multimodal literacy will need to be further examined to strengthen marginalised youths' English language learning.

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Keywords: Multimodal forms; digital content; marginalised youths; factor analysis; language learning.

1. Introduction

The increased availability of web 2.0 applications and digital contents has impacted the notion of what it means to be literate. Youths often play online games, watch or upload videos on Youtube, or exchange messages and photographs on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram.

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Consequently, researchers (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; Gee, 2003; Evans, 2005; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008; Warschauer & Ware, 2008; Burnett, 2009; Serafini, 2011) are concerned with the impact of ICT on literacy. The traditional focus of literacy is the ability to read and write linear texts, but today there is an increasing need for youths to understand the different possibilities of meanings presented through varied texts associated with diverse multimodal forms, for instance; hypertext, videos, visual images, and graphic user interface elements along with written texts in digital contents. The primary motivation of this research is to determine the factors that could influence marginalised youths to use English language digital contents productively for information retrieval, taking into consideration the design of multiple modes in digital contents, and the collective needs and perspectives of marginalised youths. This study employed the use of exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to extract factors that influence youths to access and use English language digital content. The results of the factor analysis study, carried out among a sample of youths who live in an urban low cost housing scheme has created scales of digital content preference items derived from analyzing the empirical data with EFA (Maruyama, 1998; Meyers, Gamst and Guarino, 2006). The factors in this article are extracted based on the youths' perception of their experiences in accessing and using English language digital contents.

2. Literature Review

This study is informed by two different theoretical perspectives that lend themselves to the concept of digital content in which we were most interested.

2.1 Multimodal theory

Social semiotics serves as a foundation of the multimodal theory of communication. The perspective of social semiotics developed from the social linguistics view of Michael Halliday (1978). Halliday regarded language as a systematic resource for making meaning. In social semiotics, modality is defined as “an organized set of resources for making meaning (Jewitt, 2006:17). Modalities inherent in new technologies include image, colour, speech and sound-effects, movement and gesture, and gaze. The concept of multimodality is based on the use of sensory modalities by which humans receive information (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001). These modalities could be tactile, visual, or auditory. They argue that multiple modes play an equal role in creating a message, thus challenging the central position of written text as the only means of communicating and representing information or knowledge (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006).

Palumbo (2009) has defined multimodality as a term which refers to “the transmission of meaning through the composite deployment of different semiotic resources, or ‘modes’ (p. 77).” Examples of multimodal forms may include a video or graphic with complementary static information, an animation synchronised with spoken text, or interactive features that allow users to perform a variety of actions. All these multimodal forms allow users to access and obtain information in different ways for learning or other purposes. Based on this concept of multimodality, the term ‘multimodal literacy’ was first proposed by Jewitt & Kress (2003) to describe how meanings are made, distributed, received, interpreted, and remade through diverse modes of representation in an integrated manner (Jewitt, 2006; Jewitt and Kress, 2003). Further studies conducted by Walsh (2008, 2010) reaffirmed the view of literacy in the current digital environment as a set of abilities requiring individuals to recognize when information is needed, and to locate, evaluate and use effectively the information needed when they interact with multimodal forms in digital texts.

2.2 Theory of Technology Adoption

The second theoretical perspective applied in this research is the theory of technology adoption. Technology adoption will be examined in this research through the lens of “value added” literacy opportunities; focusing on how the technology, namely digital contents, has shifted the landscape of language learning due to the affordances of the technology. The two most prominent

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