What Students Think Matters

Successes and Obstacles Related to Virtual Reality in World Language Learning

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Abstract

In the world language learning environment, research points to the importance of high-quality encounters with the language and culture as promoting linguistic and cultural competence (Kinginger, 2008). However, often inside the classroom, students' contact with the target culture and language is limited. The use of virtual reality, though, provides an avenue for these types of high-quality encounters due to its ability to transport learners to another place and time (Godwin-Jones, 2004). Considering the possibilities of virtual reality, then, this presentation seeks to answer the question surrounding what learners' opinions of virtual reality are in an advanced-level Spanish course, specifically, as related to the usefulness of virtual reality in providing high-quality encounters with the target language and culture. Using the online platform Seekbeak, participants (n=41) worked in groups to develop virtual tours of Medellín, Colombia, that demonstrated their content knowledge related to *narcofútbol* (the involvement of drug money in Colombian soccer).

Introduction & Literature Review

Need for study

The amount of contact with the target language and culture in the classroom setting is limited, but research shows high-quality encounters promote linguistic and cultural growth.

Considering the possibilities of virtual reality, then:

Research Question

What are learners' opinions of virtual reality in regards to providing high-quality encounters with the target language and culture?

Previous research focuses on VR use in FL education to:

View Parisian quarters (Mills, 2017)

Explore Gothic architecture (Miguel-Pueyo, 2016)

But there has been little to no focus on student-created virtual reality that promotes high-quality encounters with the language and culture.

The present study

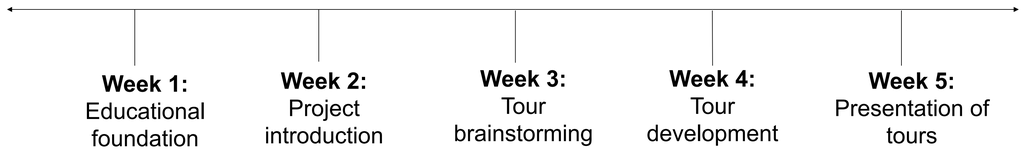
5 week content-based project with culminating VR tour

The effects of narcofútbol in past, present, future Medellín, Colombia

Documentary *Los dos Escobar* as a content source

The project

Five week timeline of project



Methodology

- Pre- and post-project questionnaires
  - Open-ended reflection
- Charmaz' (2006) Constructivist Grounded Theory
- Advanced Spanish grammar course
  - Focus on grammatical structures in context

Table 1 – Participant demographics

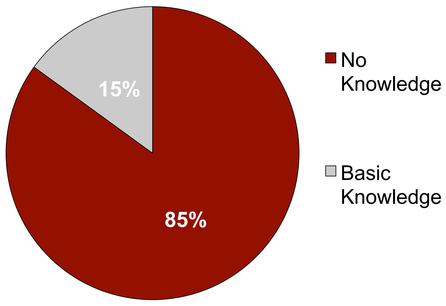
Category	#
Female	33
Male	8
3rd year	15
4th year	24
5th year	2

N = 41

Results

Based on your prior knowledge, list and describe what you know about virtual reality in foreign language learning.

Student Virtual Reality Knowledge

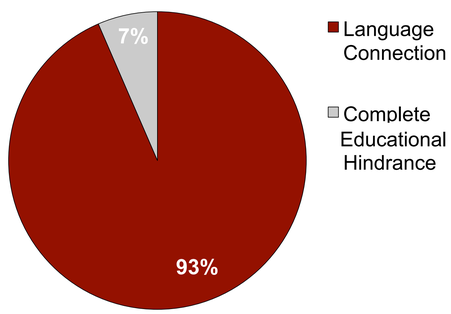


"I have never used virtual reality in a foreign language class before. I think it's supposed to make the learning feel more interactive and interesting rather than just a standard lecture."

"The only knowledge I have about virtual reality are the virtual reality glasses and the 360 degree panoramic pictures or videos on Facebook or other social media. I have never used the glasses or used a website like the one in our next project, so my knowledge is scarce. It seems like a fun way to learn about the Spanish culture."

What are your overall opinions about virtual reality in foreign language learning?

Expressed Virtual Reality Opinion



"I thought that this experience was really cool and creative […] The project was a little frustrating because […] I felt that I spent so much time trying to figure out how to navigate Seekbeak and way less time actually doing what was assigned. However, I still believe that this was a really cool way to learn the material."

"The concept of using virtual reality to learn about culture was really exciting at first. Overall it was a fun project and helped me learn a little more about the culture but there were definitely some setbacks. It was stressful trying to figure out how to use Seekbeak and get images and audio to work properly."

Conclusions

Multi-layered understanding of applicability of VR

- Found pedagogical focus of project to be useful and applicable to learning
  - Language in real-world context
- Intent versus impact
  - Intent of project was meaningful
  - High-quality encounters are possible but…
  - Impact was not practical
    - Steep learning curve in VR
    - Lack of literacy with technology platform

Students lack digital literacy

- Current assumption is that students have digital literacy
- Research shows educators should not make such assumptions
  - Problematic because it projects understanding and ability on students they might not actually have
- Despite lack of digital literacy, students still found VR to be an interesting and good pedagogical tool

References

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Acknowledgements

This project was a part of the Wisconsin Teaching Fellows and Scholars (WTFS) program and was also funded by a Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) grant from the Center for Advancing Teaching and Learning (CATL).

This project was conducted in and supported by the College of Liberal Studies, Department of Global Cultures and Languages, and the Language Resource Center at UWL.