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A First Approach to the Analysis of Student Motivation in the Trial Version of the Computer Based University Entrance Examination

Abstract

This paper investigates whether students would be willing to accept the use of a new testing platform that includes oral tasks similar the Computer Based University Entrance Examination (P.A.U.) in Spain (PAULEX project HUM2007-66479-C02-01/FILO funded by the Spanish Ministry of Education). So far in the Spanish history of education never a foreign language high stakes task has been included in any of the versions of the P.A.U. 183 students took the oral task of the P.A.U. which consisted in speaking freely for two minutes as a response to an audiovisual prompt. Students not only responded adequately to the question but also stated that they were more motivated to speak in front of a computer than in a human-to-human interaction. Possible explanations are also provided in the paper.

Short Paper

Introduction

In the last few years the Spanish Government has been researching the possibility to implement an Internet based language test for the national University Entrance Examination (PAULEX project HUM2007-66479-C02-01/FILO). Studies in the project have researched a number of issues: interface design, teacher training, scoring standards, platform architecture, student and teacher profiles and others. At their age for the University Entrance Examination, students have had to opportunity to interact with computers but technology is rather distant from some of the classes, especially in the human and social sciences (González, 2009; Jaen & Basanta, 2010). Thus, although students can manipulate information devices and computers, teachers may be reluctant to include activities with computers and, thus, students may lack the necessary skills to work with in the foreign language classroom without meaning incompetence in such task.

For the researchers in the project, it was self evident that one significant part of the current research was to find whether students would be motivated to use computers in language testing despite their lack of experience. Lack of experience has been seen as a major reason of rejection to new educational experiences. On the other hand, more skilled students may be more prone to accept educational innovation. As a consequence, the research looked especially to weaker students in language and computers skills in their motivation and acceptance towards the Internet based test. The paper also focused in the oral component for two main reasons: first, the oral component is intended to be introduced in the Spanish University Entrance Examination in 2012 and, therefore, students are relatively unfamiliar with an oral test itself; and, second, students have rarely been exposed to computer programs for speaking development.

The experiment

In order to achieve these goals, the researchers tested the students first and then, analyzed their attitudes towards the test, the platform, the task presentation and the overall motivation to use the same task type as in their university entrance examination.

Participants

Participants in the research were 183 high school students in the second year of Baccalaureate (their graduation year in Spain) from six different schools in the city of Valencia (Spain). Male students were 52.5% while female students were 47.5%. The mean age was 17.3 years old.

Experimental process and method

In order to measure their attitudes, the students took the oral tests though the computer platform (figure 1) and then responded to a 17 Likert items questionnaire. Items run from 1 to 4 in order to avoid central values. The questionnaire analyzed their use of ICT, their use of the internet, their satisfaction with the testing platform, their familiarity and intuition in the platform and task management and the platform's testing capability and expected benefits in their learning.

Figure1. Interface of the PAUER testing platform (García Laborda, 2009).

Results

The main interest of this paper was to explore some key factors in motivation in computer and Internet based language testing for the University Entrance Examination. The researchers considered that these factors ultimately shape the acceptance or rejection of the new testing system. The questionnaire first approached their expertise and interest in the use of ICT and the Internet and then their acceptance of the platform that included new skills (such as the speaking task). Additionally, these students had never taken a computer based language test although some of them may be currently using some software for autonomous learning included in many of the Spanish textbooks.

1) ICT use: None of the students considered itself as an expert in the use of computers. Almost all of them ranked high as Internet, and social web users (especially in both synchronic and asynchronic tools) but not so much as web processor users especially those related with free software.
2) The Internet use: Most of them mentioned that they use the Internet frequently especially to communicate with their classmates in out of school time and for their own leisure while the use of the Internet for school or education was rather limited.

3) Utility of the testing platform: The students considered that a computer based University Entrance Examination would be very useful and might address (diagnose) their language skills.
4) Learning ability and intuitive use: Students considered that they could learn to use it intuitively and immediately. Students found uncomplicated to use the platform.

To conclude, the last question intended to gather their overall satisfaction. In this sense students were rather happy with the application. As diagram 1 shows students considered that the application was good. Students would also recommend its use to other students and, very significant, the application fulfilled the students' expectations towards what an Internet based test should be.

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Average	Typical deviation
I think this is a good application	183	1	4	3,15	,553
Its operativeness is useful	183	1	4	3,10	,579
This application is fun to use	183	1	4	2,77	,712
This application Works as I expected	183	1	4	2,93	,700
I would recommend it to a classmate	183	1	4	2,97	,670
The application fulfilled my expectations towards what an Internet based test should be	183	1	4	3,21	,612
N	183				

Table 1. Overall satisfaction with the testing platform

Conclusions

Data obtained from this research reveals that students would be motivated to use this (and probably others) testing platform. Students thought that the operational system was easy to follow and the researchers also though that this platform would be very intuitive, and, afterwards, help their learning through the use of the Internet (Hannafin, Hannafin, & Gabbitas, 2009). Overall, the PAULEX research need to see whether motivation towards computer use would benefit the students' score as suggested by García Laborda et al. (2010), if teachers would be motivated to use the same platform and whether senior teachers would be able to adapt to using computers in their foreign language teaching.

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Keywords

testing, speaking, motivation, volition

Bio Data

Teresa Magal is a Full professor at Universidad Politécnica de Valencia where she teaches graphic design for educational purposes and the media. She has extensively researched in interface graphic design and educational computer testing architecture. She has published in Computers & Education, Eurasian Journal of Educational Research and Iberica The Journal of English for Specific Purposes.

Margarita Bakieva is a specialist in research methods. After graduating in Educational Psychology, she has been involved in research in low stakes testing and the University Entrance Examination. She has presented in some of the most prestigious conferences in Spain.

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