

L₂O || Sharing Language Learning Objects

Project website: www.elanguages.ac.uk/researchcommunity/projects/l2o.html

Background

L2O is a JISC-funded e-learning Pilot Project. Led by the University of Southampton, a consortium involving 4 regional partner hubs have generated online re-usable learning objects (RLOs) from existing learning materials. These have then been tagged, stored and can be retrieved from the Projects customised learning object repository, CLARe, (Contextualised Learning Activity Repository) by learners and teachers for independent learning, classroom-based learning or blended learning according to particular need. In broad terms, L2O has aimed to evaluate the feasibility of re-using learning resources across the regional community and in different educational and teaching contexts, and for different purposes.

Purpose of the questionnaire

As a pilot project, it was essential to find out the extent to which the materials being developed were useful. This was done in two ways; through discussions at a series of workshops held in different university venues (including Reading, Southampton, Portsmouth and Sheffield), and through a questionnaire which was distributed to individuals in order to gain a more complete picture. The purpose of both the workshops and the questionnaire included testing the underlying principles behind learning objects, by attempting to find out the following:

- a) the extent to which resources are useful
- b) who would be interested in using them, and in what situations
- c) the accessibility of the materials and how the interface be could be improved

The structure of the questionnaire

This questionnaire was designed by the Southampton team, and discussed with the other participants. The final version consisted of 13 questions, many of which had subsections e.g a, b, c. In many cases a number of the questions were not completed, either because some individuals only completed half of the questionnaire,

mainly the first half, and others responded only to the main questions, rather than answering all the sub-sections. The layout of the questionnaire was not always clear, as there are 2 questions that almost everyone seems to have missed.

50 questionnaires were analysed A PowerPoint presentation which summarises the results is available: [Sharing Language Learning Objects: Analysis of questionnaire](#) (McCormack 2007).

The sample

This report analyses the data from 50 questionnaires which were distributed to participants, many of whom also participated in workshops which looked at the repository of language learning resources. The participants included individuals from universities and higher education colleges, the main representation being from universities (20 individuals). Departments represented were broadly either modern languages or EAP/EFL-related. 6 individuals held IT-related posts and the remaining people did not complete this section of the questionnaire (14 people).

The responses have been categorised broadly into three key areas according to the information being sought. This included the participants' opinions on:

- a) clarity of instructions
- b) process of accessing material/ease of navigation
- c) the usefulness of the metadata, in describing the resources

Clarity of instructions

The earlier questions dealt with evaluation of the information on the first page, and taking the user through the browse function. 34 of the sample population responded that the initial instructions were 'very clear' or 'clear'. However, many of the same people added suggestions on further information which they considered would have been useful. 9 people said they would have liked to have known who had access to the resources e.g could anyone use them?; could they just download what they wanted? 3 said

they wanted information about ownership, and an instruction on how they should acknowledge the resource. This issue came up again later, as within institutions there is serious concern over copyright issues, particularly in the area of online resources.

4 people from the sample said they would have liked more technical information – including information about the software required for accessing specific resources. 3 said they would have liked more information about the content of the resources, a view also expressed in response to a later section of the questionnaire.

Process of accessing material/ease of navigation

The respondents were also asked a series of questions relating to the steps they went through in downloading assets or learning objects, in order to get them to evaluate the process. A number of the sample did not respond to every question (23), but in general the problems identified by 16 participants fit broadly into the following categories:

- a) the need for clearer instructions; this reflected a similar response when asked about initial instructions in using the website. It was suggested that there should be a clear way of indicating the language of each resource
- b) difficulty not only in opening files, but in identifying what they should actually open; this is an issue of navigation; one suggestion was that there should be a 'model' process to follow before the user was expected to work autonomously. It was also suggested there should be more use of icons rather than text
- c) frustration some individuals felt in spending time trying out different steps, but too many of them leading nowhere. 3 individuals said they searched for some very common topics, but came up with no results

In terms of the content individuals in the sample choose to look at, listening material was by far the most popular, both in European languages (17 individuals), and in EAP (7 individuals). Within the modern language category 'Pancho and his family' proved to be the most popular choice! Study skills was the third main category, with 9 individuals opting for some aspect of this, including reading strategies.

Metatdata – description of resources

In questions 4 and 6, the respondents were asked to evaluate the description of the learning object/asset they had chosen to look at, in terms of whether it yielded enough information to decide whether it would be useful for their purpose. The responses in both cases suggest that the metadata was not sufficient; respondents suggested a range of information which they felt should be included. The extra information felt to be relevant included:

- a) the content, including information stating the size of the asset e.g length of video clip, the level of the resource, and more information about the kind of group this learning object/asset would be suitable for
- b) more technical information available. This included wanting to know the software requirements etc.
- c) the language of the learning objects needed to be made more transparent – whether they were in English or another language
- d) information about the extent to which they could edit any of the materials to suit their own purposes

Use of the resources

Concerning use the resources, most respondents said they would use them in classroom situations, as supplementary material to their core materials. Others said they would recommend the resource to students for independent study. In general, it was felt this would be a useful resource, as reflected in the following comment made by one participant:

“A shared e-repository is exactly what is needed; it would be wonderful to follow its progress, expansion, adding new partners to the project etc.”

But it was also felt that than in spite of the fact that the resources themselves were useful, the interface was not user-friendly. The need for more description of the content was also raised again.

Conclusions

This is a resource that people are keen to have available; in many cases they would be happy to contribute, once the issues of ownership and copyright are accepted within institutions. The whole area of copyright concerning online material is a grey area, and as yet no clear set of 'rules' have been carved.

There is no doubt that the instructions need to be looked at again, taking on board the suggestions made by the participants in the survey. Having clear instructions at the beginning is particularly crucial in order to keep motivation high, and avoid the frustration felt by a number of the participants.

The process and ease of navigation also needs to be looked at; there were in fact changes made during the course of the project, and this is an on-going area that will continue to be developed, informed by the comments of the people who filled in the questionnaire.

Concerning the metadata, more information about the resources is felt to be a priority. However, it is important to keep a balance between too little information, and information overload. Less text and more use of icons and symbols may be the way forward in this area.

In terms of the questionnaire, a shorter more focused version, with fewer sub-questions, might have yielded more results. However, the results as they stand certainly indicate keen interest in this kind of project, and a desire for participation, which ultimately suggests that the principles behind this project are very sound.

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