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FILILAB:

Creation and use of a Learning Object Repository for EFL

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Abstract

Background: Students at the Universidad de Alcala need batteries of learning objects and exercises. Although student textbooks tend to include a wide range of additional exercises, students in advanced linguistics and language courses require learning objects to obtain additional practice. Online repositories offer excellent opportunities for independent study and their creation, although expensive, is usually worth developing. Purpose of Study: This paper discusses the different aspects of the project FILILAB, which is aimed at developing a learning object repository. Sources of Evidence: The sources of information used are based on authors such as Isabel Pérez. Analysis and results: This paper presents the benefits, form and construct of the repository.

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Keywords: learning objects, online repositories,

1. Introduction

Students at the Universidad de Alcala need batteries of learning objects and exercises. Although student textbooks tend to include a wide range of additional exercises, students in advanced linguistics and language courses require learning objects to obtain additional practice (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000). Online repositories offer excellent opportunities for independent study and their creation, although expensive, is usually worth developing. Based on sources used in the project from previous ideas developed by authors like Isabel Pérez, this paper discusses the different aspects involved in the FILILAB project, which is aimed at developing a learning object repository for advanced students of English language, linguistics and translation.

This paper discusses three main issues: the Interface design, form and construct of the website project. In doing so, it intends to show the creation process as well as the expected benefits of the development of the FILILAB object repository for the self-managed study of English.

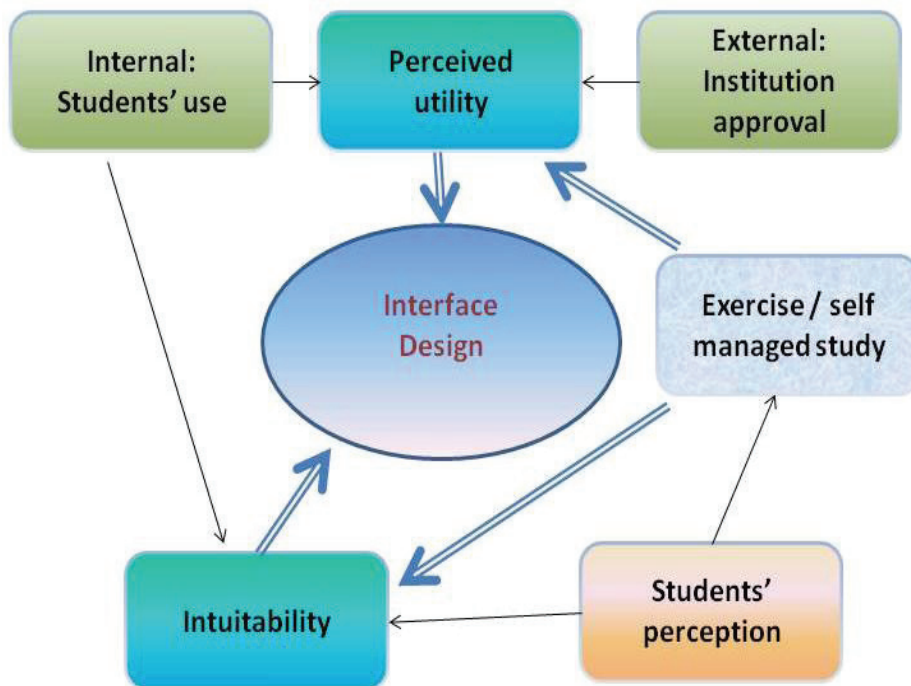
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2. The FILILAB project

Although a number of websites (for instance, isabelperez.com) can offer a wide range of materials, it is necessary to match students' proficiency and interests and the available materials (Richards et al., 2002; Kulasekara, 2011). In turn, this shapes the design of the interface (Figure 1). As opposed to Hong (2011), we perceive usefulness as a central role in the design of the interface and thus believe in its simplicity (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Interface design for the FILILAB learning repository



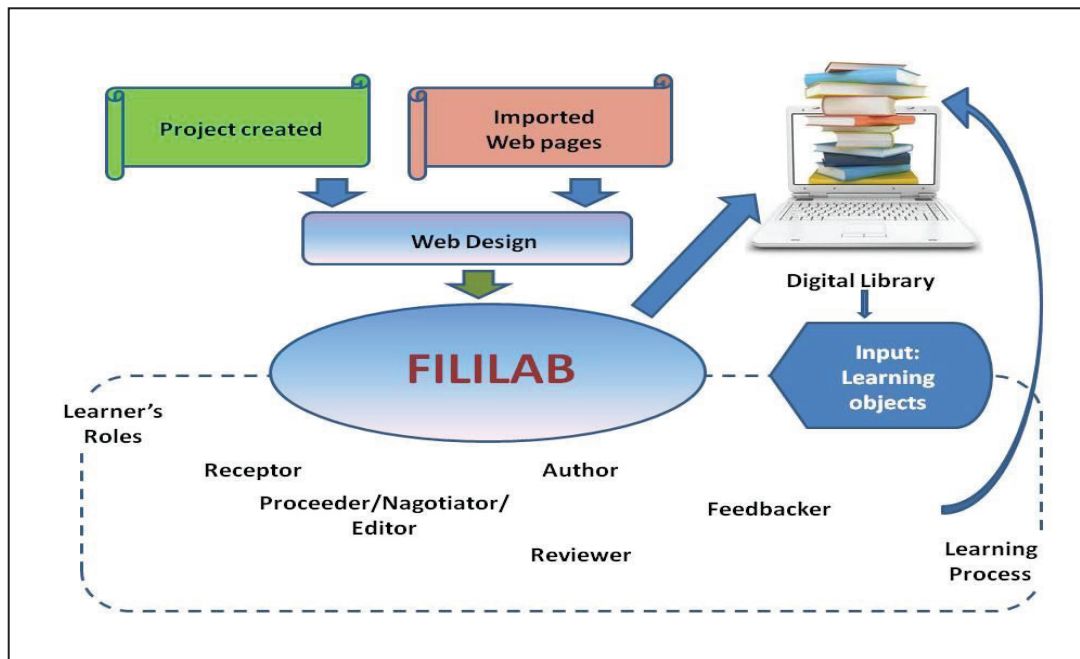
Our repository covers these needs. Through a simple interface, students access the exercises that they need. Even if they are not optimal users of technological devices, they can follow a simple and very intuitive interface (García Laborda et al., 2010; García Laborda, 2009; García Laborda and Navarro Laboulais, 2009; García Laborda & Magal Royo, 2007) (Figure 2).

Figure 2. FILILAB Interface



The website (as seen in Figure 1) is highly intuitive and provides access to regular web pages and ad hoc exercises specially designed for the students. The site permits access to links to full websites and to parts of websites that contain exercises, texts, background information and videos related to language, culture, translation and ELT literature.

Figure 3. FILILAB Processing diagram



The basic function can be divided into students' and administrator's (Figure 3). The main functions for the administrator is to incorporate, administer and design the learning objects. Learning objects can come from other websites or can be prepared by the working team of university professors and researchers. There is also a webmaster but FILILAB has been designed to require minimal maintenance due to the current economical situation. The designer also handles the metadata.

Students play an active role first as intakers and learners but they will also share other functions such as editors, self-managers and producers of their own learning. They will also need to negotiate internally what they need in their interaction with the software. This gives them the chance to review and write new materials. Finally, they will need to give feedback through questionnaires and through their personal interaction. In this sense, if little use of the application is observed, it will mean the need to revise the contents or design of the web page.

3. Tasks

The interface first presents students with the choice of focus. They can select work to be completed according to the subject that they are studying at the time (Academic English, English I, etc.), a level of language following the European Union Common Framework of Reference for Languages (A2, B2, B3, etc.), or a language skill (listening, reading, etc.). Within each of the sections they are then offered the option to work with exercises or to access an outside link. The different courses, levels and skills will be linked together to facilitate work for students who are less technologically savvy. The lists of links and exercises are undergoing constant revision and expansion by the FILILAB team. It is also hoped that students will add their favorite links and exercises in the future.

4. Expected benefits and impact

Thanks to the creation of the FILILAB project, it is hoped that the students at our university will be motivated to practice the target language more thanks to accessibility to the site through internet. In this sense, they will be able to work from their homes, the library, the language laboratory or any other location that they might choose. The simple-to-use design of the repository is also expected to help students manage their own learning outside the classroom. By being able to work through the different points of the syllabi included within each subject, they will be working with a useful tool and will be able to have the confidence to know that they are progressing towards their learning objectives.

5. Expected drawbacks

As the development of this project requires time, they students may become discouraged at finding few exercises in the early stages. In this sense, feedback on their part as well as the addition of students' favorite exercises and links will be encouraged. At the same time, only some of the subjects taught as part of the degree programs in English and Modern Languages and Translation at the university have been included at this point. More subjects will need to be added in the next phase of the project.

6. Conclusions

The FILILAB project will provide an additional, valuable source of exercises and background information for students working towards degrees in English Studies and Modern Languages and Translation at the University. The fact that the exercises can be completed online and remotely will provide flexibility for students who wish to manage their learning from outside the university walls. The ongoing nature of this project means that further subjects, links and exercises will be added, making this an even increasingly valuable tool. Student responses to the site will be fundamental in making modifications.

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