

A mini-investigation on students' perceptions of Second Life and iGoogle

Introduction

Having taught a class of 45 first year foundation degree students in ICT with emphasis in the use of Web2.0 in Jan. 2009 I decided to take this opportunity to explore the students' views on how they experience playing computer and online games, in order to establish to what extent the Prensky 'Digital Native' hypothesis was applicable to them and how this could be exploited in the context of game-based learning.

The hypothesis was that students would show a preference to interactive game play over a standard Web2.0 tool such as the personal portal tool *iGoogle*.

Methods and Results:

The study compared the attitudes of students towards *Second Life* with *iGoogle*. A number of questions were placed on the local VLE which students were asked to answer online and anonymously. The findings are presented in figures 1 and 2.

A Opinions on Second Life:

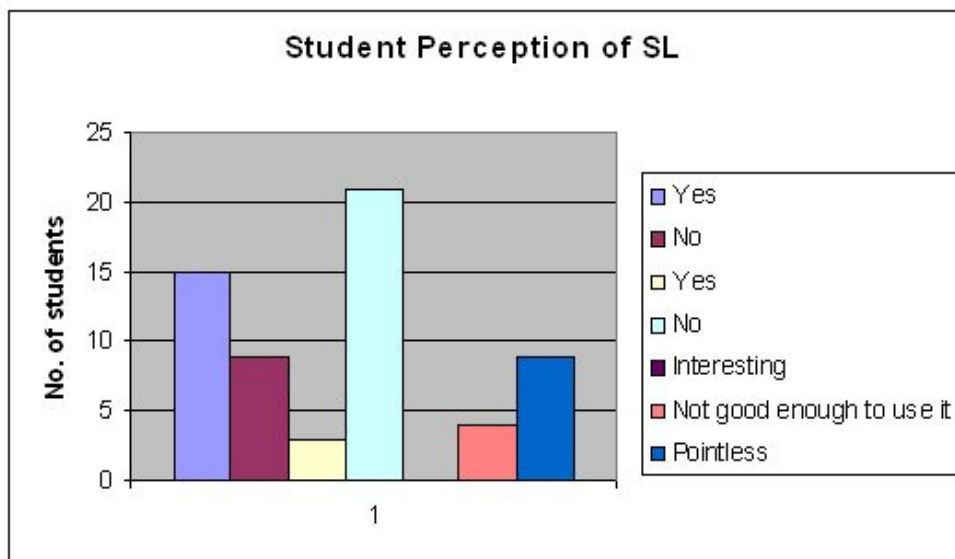


Fig. 1: the following questions were asked:

1. *Do you enjoy playing games?* (answers in light blue, brown columns)
About 2/3 of students enjoy playing games; further data showed that there was a clear gender bias: both first person shooting games and flight simulators were selected by males only whilst fantasy/role play and Arcade-type games were chosen by females only.

2. *Have you ever played Second life?* (answers in beige and light blue columns; those who played SL were all male)

In addition to the three who have played SL before an extra 11 students have claimed to have seen others play SL; these 14 students were asked the following question:

3. *If you played or having watched the game being played what did you make*

of it? (answers in the three right-most columns (the option 'interesting' scored 0)!))

B Opinions on iGoogle

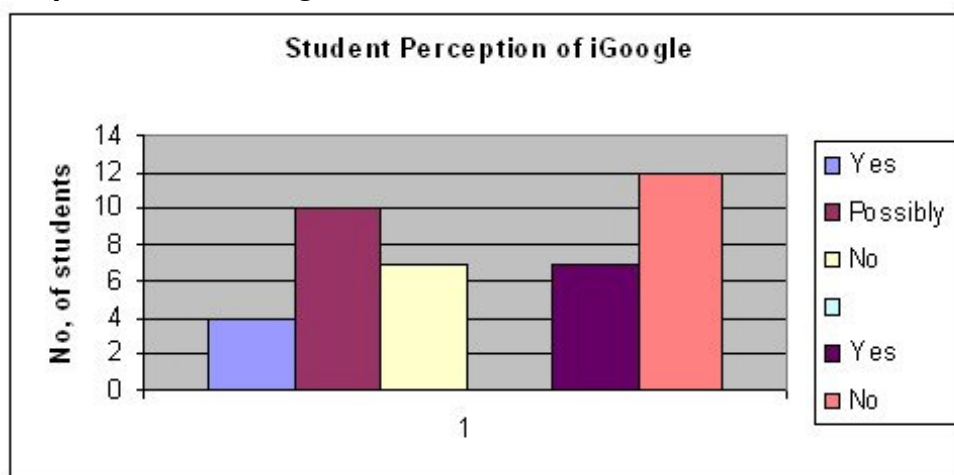


Fig. 1: the following questions were asked:

1. *Did you find iGoogle a useful tool for your needs?* (answers in blue, brown and beige columns)

2. *Are you likely to use iGoogle beyond this class?* (answers in purple, pink columns)

Furthermore the following question was asked:

What you do see as the best part of iGoogle (sample size 20)

9 stated 'ease of access to media' (YouTube, BBC iPlayer)

5 stated ready access to a variety of tools (dictionary, calendar, Google maps)

3 stated 'ready access to blogs'

2 stated 'ready access to games'; note there are a number of game widgets which can be run within iGoogle, most of which of simple arcade type nature.

Discussion and Conclusion

This is a very limited if not shallow investigation and it would be wrong to interpret too much into it.

Although *Second Life* has been known by 14 students, only 3 have actually played it. No student knew about *iGoogle* before and it was taught as a hands-on session during class.

The comparison between the two products could be seen as being not entirely fair as students should have been given the opportunity to also experience SL at first hand.

Overall I would have thought that there would be a higher perception of *Second Life* users amongst 18-20 year olds with more enthusiasm in evidence too.

At this point in time students appear to not recognize the potential of 'games' being used as a learning environment/tool (although it should be noted that SL is strictly not classified as a game).

Surprisingly students painted a more positive picture of *iGoogle*, although they are still reserved about its usefulness too whilst expressing some appreciation of its potential.