

## Teachers' Attitudes toward the Integration of the Virtual World of Second Life (SL) into the ESP Classroom: The Case of English for Tourism Purposes Teachers

مواقف الأساتذة من دمج العالم الافتراضي SL في قسم تدريس اللغة الانجليزية لأغراض  
خاصة: دراسة حالة أساتذة اللغة الانجليزية للسياحة

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Received	20-03-2020	accepted	31-10-2021
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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate teachers' attitudes toward the integration of the Virtual World of Second Life (SL) in English for Tourism Purposes (ETP) teaching. This research paper strives also to find out whether SL is integrated into the ETP classroom or not. To this end, a questionnaire was distributed to eight teachers of English for Tourism from three Tourism and Hospitality institutes located in Algeria. The findings revealed that teachers have positive attitudes towards the use of SL and they need to be trained on how to integrate it into their teaching. In addition, teachers do not use the Virtual World of SL in their classes. Moreover, gender, age, and educational level do not influence teachers' attitudes toward SL integration into English for tourism teaching. The study recommends for the incorporation of SL into ESP teaching and learning.

**Keywords:** ETP; ESP; Teachers' Attitudes, Virtual World of Second Life

### ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى دراسة مواقف الأساتذة من دمج العالم الافتراضي SL في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض سياحية. كما نسعى من خلال هذه الورقة البحثية إلى إيجاد ما إذا كان العالم الافتراضي SL مستعمل في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية للسياحة أم لا. و تحقيقا لتلك الغاية، تم توزيع استبيان على ثمانية من الأساتذة الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية للسياحة في ثلاثة معاهد لتدريس السياحة والفندقة بالجزائر. كشفت النتائج المتحصل عليها أن موقف الأساتذة ايجابي تجاه إدماج الواقع الافتراضي SL في فصولهم الدراسية كما أنهم بحاجة إلى التمرن على كيفية استعمالها وإدراجها في عملية تدريسهم. كما كشف تحليل النتائج أن الأساتذة لا يستخدمون العالم الافتراضي SL في فصولهم الدراسية. علاوة على ذلك، الجنس، العمر و المستوى الدراسي ليس لها أي تأثير على مواقف الأساتذة. وقد خلصت الدراسة إلى أن تكون بمثابة دعوة واضحة لدمج واستخدام تطبيق العالم الافتراضي للحياة الثانية في تعليم وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية :** اللغة الإنجليزية للسياحة: اللغة الإنجليزية لأغراض خاصة: مواقف الأساتذة:

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### **Introduction**

Learners in this digital era need more creative ways to study a foreign or a second language. E-learning software platforms and Virtual Worlds such as SL have been identified as efficient and effective ways to develop interactive learning environments where learners can learn effectively. Educational institutions have started investing considerable amounts of money in technology resources to improve the quality of English language learning and teaching. Educators are increasingly looking for ways of successfully incorporating these tools into their teaching (Li, as cited in Munzo-Luna, 2018). Numerous projects which are concerned with foreign language learning in SL exist today such as AVALON project (Access to Virtual and Access Learning live Online), the NIFLAR project (Networked Interaction in Foreign Language Acquisition and Research) and the Kamino project (Hismanoglu, 2012).

However, the implementation of such technology devices into the ESP/EFL classroom is affected by many factors; including teachers' attitudes toward its incorporation. Not all teachers are willing to integrate such virtual environments into their instruction. This current situation raised our curiosity to investigate the following research question: "What are the attitudes of English for Tourism teachers toward the integration of SL into their classrooms?" Therefore, this study is an endeavour to examine the attitudes of ETP teachers toward SL integration into their classrooms. The results of the present study can provide insights into many aspects of education since exploring teachers' attitudes is very important to improve students' learning, teachers' development and teaching practices.

### **1. Literature Review**

The Virtual World of SL is considered as an effective tool to motivate learners, and help them promote interaction with the English native speakers (Wang et al., 2011). Furthermore, the benefits obtained from the application of the Virtual World of SL in foreign and second language teaching has resulted in an increase creation of SL campuses in many universities throughout the world (Sezgi Sarac, 2014).

Many studies have been conducted to investigate the benefits of SL integration into the ESP/ETP classroom. In a quasi-experimental study by Penfold (2009) on how SL has been used for teaching and learning in a hospitality and tourism school in Hong Kong, the data collected from teachers revealed that SL provides students with more interactivity and more enjoyment of their learning experience. In another study conducted by H. Sezgi Sarac (2014) the analysis of the results indicated that the Virtual World of SL helps learners to improve both their listening and their speaking skills. Moreover, Li (as cited in Munzo-Luna and Taillefer, 2018) in his study reports that more

than half of the students regard virtual learning activities in SL as being simulating, interesting and interactive.

In the Algerian context, to the best of our knowledge, very few studies have been conducted on the benefits of SL integration into the ESP classroom. The main concern of ESP courses is to prepare learners for their professional life and enable them to function effectively in their future workplace. Moreover, learners need to be exposed to authentic situations where English is used for communicative purposes to help them develop their communicative skills. However, this cannot be done without the incorporation of appropriate tools and strategies. Hence, this research was carried out with the aim of investigating teachers' attitudes towards the use of SL into their teaching, and paves the path for an appropriate implementation of Multi-User Virtual Environments in the Algerian Universities.

### **1.1. English for Specific Purposes (ESP)**

Nowadays, English has become the language of international business and communication; English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), and learning English is no more considered as an end in itself, rather as a means to fulfil learners' needs and purposes. This paves the way to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) which is according to Hutchinson and Waters (1987, p.19) "...an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learners' reasons for learning". Hutchinson and Waters also emphasise that ESP is not limited to the teaching of specialized varieties and not related to a particular methodology nor does it comprise of specific materials.

Three main factors contributed to the emergence of ESP: a) The demand of the new brave world, b) A revolution in linguistics, and c) The developments in educational psychology (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). From its early beginning in the 1960s, ESP has undergone four main phases with a fifth one on the way: Register Analysis, discourse or rhetorical Analysis, Target Situation Analysis, Skills-Centered Approach and a Learning-Centered Approach (Hutchinson and Waters, 1987). Dudley-Evans and St-John (as cited in Zahedpisheh et al., 2017) identify phases in ESP development such as register analysis and discourse analysis, analysis of study skills and of learning needs, and they also question the need for and importance of authenticity of text and purpose.

English for Specific Purposes is 'an umbrella' term that envelopes many sub-divisions namely, English for Business purposes (EBP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Occupational Purposes (EOP), English for Medical Purposes (EMP) and many others. According to Swales (as cited in Hutchinson and Waters, 1987), EST (English for Science and Technology) is one area that has been particularly important in the development of ESP;

“with one or two exceptions...English for Science and Technology has always set and continues to set the trend in theoretical discussion, in ways of analysing language, and in the variety of actual teaching materials.” (p. 9). English for Tourism Purposes (ETP) has been also classified under ESP.

### **1.2. English for Tourism Purposes (ETP)**

The fact that English has dominated different fields such as business, technology, media and tourism, in this area of modernization and globalization, makes it necessary for people seeking for jobs in various domains to be fluent speakers of English and to be able to use it for communicative purposes. Travel and Tourism is one of the world's largest economic sectors that creates jobs and fosters growth and which represents 2.8% of total employment (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2018). This status makes learning English for Tourism of crucial importance for those who are working in the tourism sector.

Nowadays, training future professionals and preparing learners for their workplace is a priority. Learners should be taught those necessary skills that are related to the field of tourism industry in order to ‘fulfil different job requirements and responsibilities’ (Bekri, 2012). Furthermore, learning English for Tourism Purposes (ETP) is of vital importance for learners of tourism because it helps them deal with tourists' needs. Hence, developing learners' communicative skills in the English language becomes a necessity.

### **1.3. Multi User Virtual Environments**

Multi User Virtual Environments (MUVes) have existed since the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution in the 1970s (Inman et al., 2010). MUVes are computer-based, simulated and immersive environments where individuals can interact, communicate and engage in various activities through assuming ‘Avatar’ identity; personal representation in a 3-D form (Boulos & Wheeler, 2007; Penfold, 2009; Radford et al., 2011). Those researchers and educators see that MUVes are designed so that users can communicate and interact via their own graphical and personal representations in a 3-D form known as ‘avatars’.

Educators and researchers provide many definitions for computer-generated virtual worlds until Bell (as cited in Radford, 2011, p.2) combines the most important elements of the existing definitions and defines the Virtual World as “A synchronous, persistent network of people, represented as avatars, facilitated by networked computers.” In other words, a virtual world is a system or a group of interconnected and coexisting people known as avatars who can communicate through the use of computers.

The most well-known Virtual World (VW) is SL which was launched in 2003 by Linden Lab (Kruk as cited in Sezgi Sarac, 2014). SL is a 3-D virtual environment developed by the San Francisco-based firm ‘Linden Lab’. By

2013, SL had approximately one million users, and at the end of 2017 active user counted totals between 300.000 and 900.000 (Linden Lab). In the Virtual world of SL, people can meet other residents, communicate with them, participate in individual and group activities, do business and even travel (Boulos and Wheeler, 2007; Penfold, 2009; Czepielewski, 2011; Wu, 2012).

#### **1.4. The Benefits of Second Life Integration into EFL/ESP Teaching**

Since its emergence, SL has attracted the attention of many researchers and practitioners including foreign and second language educators (Henderson et al., 2009; Chen, 2010). According to Michels (as cited in Inman et al., 2010), at least 300 universities around the world teach courses or conduct research in SL. Michels also mentions that Virtual Worlds such as SL are tailor-made for teaching and learning foreign and second languages as students can engage themselves in linguistically appropriate surroundings and conditions. In other words, Virtual environments help learners learn a foreign or second language since they afford them convenient and fitting environment to freely practise the use of the language.

Research has found that SL has many advantages on both learning and teaching in tertiary level. Virtual Reality (VR) and blended learning environments are welcomed with a growing interest and curiosity due to its huge benefits for both teachers and learners. According to (Czepielewski, 2011, p. 16) states, “tools available in Second Life are an imitation of the real world” which allows learners establish social relationships, communicate with voice or chat and even travel. This means that learners, in SL, can experience real-like situations and perform social life tasks as they can do in the real world.

According to Linden Lab (2011), there are many benefits of SL integration into the learning/teaching process. First, SL enables real life learning. In other words, learners can work together ‘synchronously’ and simulates complex processes in the physical world. Second, it helps learners to engage in the learning process and encourages social interaction because students feel as they are ‘there’ when they are in the Virtual World. In addition to, teachers and professors in the world of SL are able to share and create shared learning programs because ‘SL accommodates synchronous and asynchronous learning’. Finally, the virtual world of SL is appropriate for different kinds of learners: auditory, visual or experiential.

Moreover, in SL individual or group lessons can have much more interesting form than traditional classes. Czepielewski (2011) views a three-dimensional virtual world is also a place of cultural acquisition based on the communication context and the role of speaker. It is particularly important, as the development of correct language structures is determined not only by the range of vocabulary or the knowledge about grammar, but also by proper

understanding what, how, who and to whom something can be said (Juszczuk; as cited in Czepielewski, 2011)

Penfold (2009) mentions that the most important advantages of using SL in teaching and learning are those related to their ability to provide students with more interactivity and enjoyment of their learning experience. Additionally, Li (as cited in Taillefer & Munzo-Luna, 2018) argues that learners' academic achievement is advanced in a web-based learning environment because of the relaxation and freedom learners feel when they participate in various learning tasks. Accordingly, SL is a useful and motivating tool to enhance learners learning and teachers teaching.

Herold (2010) states that SL has five educational functions: 1) teaching, 2) learning, 3) assessment, 4) designing and 5) resources. Herold finds that the virtual hotel on the Virtual PolyU Campus allows students of tourism to cope with virtual clients. In addition, through the virtual world of SL, students of tourism can obtain a more profound level of learning, and develop their professional and life skills (ibid.).

## **2. Aims of the Study**

The present study aims at investigating the attitudes of English for Tourism teachers toward the integration of the Virtual World of SL into their classrooms in order to pave the path for an appropriate implementation of SL and other virtual worlds at the Algerian institutes and universities.

## **3. Research Questions**

The present study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of ETP teachers toward the integration of SL into their classrooms?
2. Is SL used in teaching English for Tourism?
3. Do teachers' age, gender and educational level affect teachers' attitudes?

## **4. Research Design and Methodology**

The researchers have chosen a quantitative approach for this study. Daniel (2016) asserts that quantitative research approach allows researchers to use statistical data. Moreover, making generalization is possible with this type of approach. Replicability is another benefit derived from the use of this approach as Brown (as cited in Daniel, 2016, p. 94) mentions "The research study using this research tool is conducted in a general or public fashion because of its clear objective and guidelines, and can therefore be repeated at any other time or place". Therefore, the present study adopted a quantitative research method that encompasses quantitative analysis of data.

#### **4.1. Participants**

Eight (08) teachers participated in this study. They were chosen among three institutes of Tourism and Hospitality teaching in Algeria: three (03) teachers from the National Institute of Tourism in Algiers, two (02) from INTH in Tizi-Ouzou (The National Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management) and three (03) from the National Institute of Tourism and Hospitality in Boumerdes.

#### **4.2. Data Collection Method**

The questionnaire is a vital tool which allows researchers to find out peoples' thoughts, beliefs, experiences and attitudes (Bulmer; as cited in Bird, 2009). Moreover, Bulmer also mentions that by using questionnaires researchers can collect information from a large portion of a group quickly Mathers et al. (2009, p. 9) state, "questionnaires can be either devised by the researcher or they can be based upon some ready-made index". The questionnaire used in the present study has been designed by the researchers.

In this study, a questionnaire was used as an instrument to collect data. The questionnaire is made up of closed and open-ended questions gathered under four main sections. The first section deals with teachers' background information including: gender, age and educational level. The second deals with teachers' experience with the use of the virtual world of second life. The third section investigates teachers' attitudes towards the integration of SL into the ETP classroom. Section four is devoted for further suggestions from teachers. All the information gathered is converted into numerical data to facilitate the interpretation of the findings.

### **5. Results and Discussion**

This section aims to present and discuss the results of the statistical analysis carried out by the researchers on the data collected from the teachers' questionnaire. The presentation of the study findings starts with the presentation of the participants' profile as English for Tourism teachers because through this we can get an insight into their backgrounds and whether they have an effect on their attitudes which, in turn, can impact their acceptance to use Virtual Worlds. Furthermore, teachers' experience with the use of the Virtual World of SL is clarified, and the nature of the teachers' attitudes toward its implementation is highlighted. The analysis of data concludes with teachers' suggestions concerning ETP teaching in the Virtual World of SL.

#### **5.1. Teachers' Background Information**

To gather clear information about the informants' characteristics, they were asked to respond to questions related to their gender, age and educational

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level. The informants' answers to the three questions included in section one were gathered in one table (see Table 1). The table below replicates the detailed findings.

**Table (1): Teachers' Background Information.**

Educational Level	%	Age	%	Gender	%
B.A.Degree-Tourism/Hospitality	37.5%	23-29	25%	Male	62.5%
M.A.Degree-Tourism/Hospitality	37.5%	30-39	62.5%	Female	37.5%
Doctorate Degree	25%	40-49	12.5%		

The above table presents informants' personal information including: gender, age and educational level. As shown in the table above, the number of males (62.5% of the participants) outnumbers females (37.5% of the participants). The above table also reveals that the participants' age can be classified into three age categories or groups in the sample selected. The majority of informants' age (62.5%) range from 30 to 39, while the second category of the participants' age varies between 23 and 29 (25%), and then 40-49 years old which also represents 12.5% of the informants. Moreover, 37.5% of them said that they have an M.A. degree in Tourism and Hospitality, the same percentage of informants has B.A. Degree; whereas, 12.5% of the informants indicated that they have a Doctorate Degree.

### 5.2. Teachers' Experience with the Use of Multi-User Virtual Environments

**Table (2): The Use of MUVES in the ESP/ETP Classroom.**

Question	Yes	No
1. Do you use Multi-User Virtual Environments (MUVES) to enhance your teaching?	12.5 %	87.5 %
2. Do you support your students' use of Multi-User Virtual Environments in the classroom?	12.5 %	87.5 %
3. Are you familiar with the Use of Second Life?	12%	87.5%

The aim behind asking questions in this section was to find out whether the informants use MUVES in their teaching or not. As it is shown in table-2-above, the majority of informants (87.5%) mentioned that they do not use Multi-User Virtual Environments. Moreover, 87.5% of them said that they are not familiar with the use of the Virtual World of SL. The same percentage of informants (87.5%) mentioned that they do not encourage their students to use



MUVES in their classes. This is due mainly to teachers' unfamiliarity with the use of such virtual worlds, and the challenges they may face when using Second Life in their teaching. But 12.5% of the informants said that they use MUVES to teach English for Tourism and support their students' use of them. This indicates that they are familiar with the use of such virtual environments and find them interesting and useful tools which can facilitate the teaching and learning process.

The informants who said that they use and support their students' use of MUVES in their classes or not were requested to justify their answers. The results from table 2 show that 12.5% of the informants said that they encourage their students to visit virtual campuses because, according to them, virtual environments enhance students' communicative skills and allows them to practice English in Tourism communicative cognitions. But those who answered with 'No' (87.5%) justified their choice as follows: "...I am not familiar with the use of Multi-User Virtual Environments", "I have never used Virtual Worlds hence I cannot help my learners to use them" some of them said that "We don't have enough time to apply such environments in the classroom..." The informants' answers indicate that there are many challenges faced by teachers which prevent them from the implementation of virtual environments including; lack of time and the lack of adequate training.

### **5.3. Teachers' Attitudes toward the Integration of SL into the ETP/ESP Classroom**

**Table (3.1.): Teachers' Attitudes.**

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I would like to visit Second Life sites	62.5%	25%	12.5%	0%
2. I am motivated to learn how to use Second Life in my classroom.	37.5%	25%	25%	12.5%
3. Adequate training on how to use the Virtual World of Second Life is needed.	87.5%	12.5%	0%	0%

The questions included in section two were addressed to teachers to identify their attitudes toward the integration of SL into the ESP/ETP classroom. The findings in table-3-above illustrate that the majority of teachers' attitudes are positive, and they are motivated to explore the Virtual World of SL and learn how it can be used. This proves their enthusiasm and interest towards implementing the Virtual World of SL. Furthermore, the majority of informants' answers are varied between 'strongly agree' (87.5%) and 'agree' (12.5%) concerning the need for training on how to use SL in their teaching.

**Table (3. 2.): Teachers' Attitudes.**

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I will teach English for Tourism through Second Life.	50%	12.5%	25%	12.5%
2. I am not concerned with Second Life.	12.5%	0%	50%	37.5%

The informants in the last two questions of section three were requested to say whether they will use SL in their future teaching or they are not interested in it. The results presented in table 3.2. above show that the majority of the informants (50% 'strongly agree' and 12.5% 'agree') are willing to incorporate SL into their teaching, whereas 12.5% of them mentioned that they are not concerned with the use of SL. The results may justify the fact that the non-users of the Virtual World of SL lack knowledge of how to integrate it in ESP/ETP teaching and also lack access to virtual worlds.

#### **5.4. Teachers' Suggestions**

Informants, in section four, were requested to feel free to add any suggestions related to the use of Multi-User Virtual Environments in teaching English for Tourism. The analysis of data revealed that 12.5% of the informants believed that the incorporation of appropriate tools and materials such as Virtual Worlds into the ESP/ETP classroom depends mainly on students' readability to learn in such environments because some students may feel stressful when learning in virtual reality. In addition to that, some of them (37.5%) mentioned that the use of MUVES should be supported by a firm decision of the administration. It can be concluded from the informants' answers that the implementation of virtual worlds depends also on students' readiness to learn in such environments and the decision of educational policies to create virtual campuses in SL and encourage research in virtual campuses.

#### **6. Pedagogical Implications**

Before the discussion of the study implications, some limitations of the study need to be mentioned. The current study was conducted among a fairly small group of teachers which may not explore the issue at a profound level. Hence, further research should be conducted on a broader sample of ESP/ETP teachers. Additionally, Qualitative research approach through the use of interviews and classroom observation would provide more in-depth analysis of ESP and ETP teachers' attitudes. Because "Qualitative data instruments [...] are used to collect data from participants in their natural settings. The methods employed in data collection give full description of the research with respect to the participants involved" (Daniel, 2016, p. 92). More comprehensive investigation into how teachers' attitudes influence teacher readiness to use Multi-User Virtual Environments in their teaching is also needed.

Therefore, under the light of the foregoing reported results and the limitations discussed, some pedagogical implications and suggestions are to be put forward:

- Virtual campuses should be set up in the Algerian universities and higher education institutions.
- ESP programs in the Virtual World of SL should be implemented and enhanced.
- The virtual world of SL should be integrated into the ESP classroom.
- Teachers and learners should be encouraged to explore and use the Virtual World of SL.
- Adequate professional development training should be provided for teachers on how to create and build virtual campuses.
- Teachers should have the required technical skills to be able to facilitate virtual courses. (Penfold, 2009)
- Learners should be encouraged and supported to visit virtual environments and use it in their learning.
- In the Algerian context, much more studies should be conducted to explore the advantages and challenges of using Virtual Worlds in ESP teaching and learning.

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## **Conclusion**

The research study aims at investigating the teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of SL in ESP/ETP teaching at tertiary education. The results indicated that although the majority of teachers are unfamiliar with the use of the virtual world of SL and that the majority of them do not use it in their teaching, they held positive reactions toward the implementation of SL in their classrooms to facilitate the process of teaching and learning. This proves teachers' readiness to use SL in teaching English for Tourism Purposes. Further, the informants' responses show no significant difference between teachers' age, gender and educational level and their attitudes. Almost all teachers from the different age categories expressed positive attitudes toward the virtual world of SL implementation. Therefore, teachers should be adequately trained on how to use virtual environments. Price (as cited in Penfold, 2009, p. 157) states, "Virtual worlds also have the potential to enhance and enrich education. Such technologies can bring learning to life in a way that is not readily matched by other digital media." It is necessary, then, to encourage both teachers and learners to visit and use virtual campuses in order to facilitate learning as well as teaching, and prepare learners for their professional life.

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