ABSTRACT

Second Life (SL) is a 3D virtual world which was opened to the public in 2003 and has grown explosively to more than 13 millions of users from around the world. Shops, parks, galleries, brothels, schools, embassies, restaurants, universities and libraries all appear in SL. They have every kind of activity. There is likely virtual representation of environment that one finds in the real world. For education, SL provides a platform for interactive experiences that bring a new dimension to learning, an active education community. More than 300 universities and colleges around the world have set up virtual campuses where students can meet, attend classes and create content together. The platform of learning resources in SL is interesting. With the 3D environment, students can create their avatar, explore the learning resources, search online databases, and gain experiences with fun.

The researcher was interested in studying the opinion of the students toward Second Life as the dimension of online learning resources using the pilot project. The objective of this study was to investigate students perception of Second Life as an online learning resource. The pilot study involved 5 undergraduate library and information science students. The researcher taught students how to integrate themselves into SL. The student were given a series of educationally related tasks which involved searching for information within SL, viewing and downloading information and communicating with other students and other residents. Then they were given tasks without assistance which involved going to university libraries and museums, using reference service, searching the special databases and exploring the events in SL. Data collected from the focus group and from the indepth interviews. The research result shown that students think SL is a good learning resource and is fun to use. Students can communicate with an electronic barrier. Students think if they had more interesting things to do on computer which related to study, they would spend more time and focus more on it.

Keywords
Second Life, e-Learning, Online Information Resource

1) INTRODUCTION

Second Life (SL) is a 3D virtual world that was opened to the public in 2003. It was developed by Linden Research, Inc., at www.secondlife.com. It caters to users aged over 18. Users (referred to as “residents” in SL) create their own “avatar” that appears to be human. “Residents” can modify their avatar to represent themselves in any way that they choose. Second Life allows residents to explore, meet other residents, socialize, join interest groups, build a house, create and trade items. The internal currency used in SL is called the ‘Linden Dollar’ (Linden Research Inc., 2008). Everything in SL is created by its residents. In 2008, Linden Research, Inc. launched a direct Second Life URL. This is an improved tool that enables visitors to arrive directly at a specified location within the Second Life virtual world simply by clicking on the URL (Official Second Life Blog, 2008).
Second Life has grown exponentially to attract more than 13 million users from around the world. Shops, parks, galleries, brothels, schools, embassies, restaurants, universities and libraries all appear in SL. They offer every kind of activity. It provides virtual representation of the social environment that one finds in the real world.

In the field of education, Second Life provides a platform for interactive experiences that bring new dimensions to learning, thus creating an active education community. More than 300 universities and colleges from around the world have joined the community, including Harvard, Princeton, New York and Stanford Universities. ABAC University in Thailand has also set up a virtual campus where students can meet, attend classes and create content. The platform of learning resources in SL is of particular interest. In the three dimensional environment, students create their avatar, go to libraries, explore learning resources, search online databases, and gain experience with a sense of enjoyment. There is a wide variety of information offered in SL by residents including objects, animations and software. The Second Life Terms of Service ensure that users retain copyright to any content that they create. The server and client provide simple ‘Digital Right Management’ functions. Content may be given away or sold (Cate Cohen, 2008).

The field of library and information sciences is well represented in Second Life. They work together in a consortium called ‘alliance virtual library.’ They also have an official website at www.infoisland.org. They purchased virtual “land” in SL, where many universities have helped create the buildings and objects, including the establishment of an online open access collection. “Infoisland” functions as a center for information and events from around the island, offering links to libraries and other
places of interest. Every library has a reference librarian on duty to answer questions in case users have problems with library materials.

The information explosion and growth of the virtual community in Second Life is very significant for those in the library and information science field to teach students to discover information resources.

2) RESEARCH INSTRUCTIONS

The researcher was interested in studying students’ opinions towards Second Life as a new dimension of online learning resources using this pilot project.

2.1) Objective
The objective of this study was to investigate students’ perceptions of Second Life as an online learning resource.

2.2) Research Process
The researcher taught students how to integrate themselves into SL. The students were given a series of educationally related tasks that involved searching for information within SL; viewing and downloading information; and communicating with other students and residents. They were then given individual tasks that involved going to university libraries and museums, using reference services, searching special databases and exploring events in SL.
2.3) Data Collection
Data collected from the focus group and from in-depth interviews.

2.4) Research Results
Research results show that students consider SL to be a good learning resource and fun to use. Students can communicate without electronic barrier. Students expressed the opinion that if they had more interesting tasks to do on computers that were related to their fields of study, they would spend more time and focus more intently on it.

Below are some insightful quotes from interviews with the students who participated in the research project.

“There are many university libraries, I can get whatever information I want.”
Charinrat Jingjit

“I visited libraries and museums, the objects are like in real, I like it”
Petchwalee Komrondetch

“I met a reference librarian there; she guided me to various places and how to search, just like in real life.”
Nattha Gerdmanee

“I tried searching the library catalog; it pops up to library websites.”
Sirinapha Supromin

“It is easy to use and interesting.”
Suriyo Wadeesirisak

“The objects are just like in real life, and a note card that contains useful information is sent to me when I click on it.”
Petchwalee Komrondetch

“People don’t talk at all when they’re together in real life, but I didn’t feel like that when I was in SL.”
Suriyo Wadeesirisak

“What I find most exciting about SL is the chance to interact with others without the space gaps”
Charinrat Jingjit

“When I talked with the reference librarian, I didn’t feel shy about my English.”
Nattha Gerdmanee

“It’s like a game; I don’t feel like I’m studying, but I gain a lot of experience from many information sources. I love it so much”
Sirinapha Supromin

2.5) Conclusion
Based on this study, the conclusion can be made that Second Life is a valuable online learning resource that can link social life and school life together, with the added bonus that students have fun using it. This is good way for students to learn and gain experience from exploring SL materials and to be familiar with information. Further, it gives users an opportunity to develop their research skills. SL is a large virtual community; information literacy skills are needed to evaluate the quality of information and activities.

REFERENCES
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