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The Merits and Limitations of YouTube as a Method of Informal Learning

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Abstract

YouTube offers multiple channels for informal learning. Participants may learn from video content in the form of lectures, tutorials, guides, and even vlogs. YouTube also enables forms of incidental learning in which participants discover new information, content, or skills, while engaged in other activities. Informal learning on YouTube impacts participants' learning strategies and learners' progress. Selecting a new beginner of the Ukulele may help me to figure out some benefits and limitations of YouTube as a method of informal learning.

Keywords: informal learning, Youtube, online video system

1. Introduction

Boekaerts and Minnaert (1999) collected a number of attributes of informal learning, some of which seem to be applied in online video systems such as YouTube. Because of the feature of the YouTube, it has become one of the most popular online learning media. Though there are many people who prefer to enjoy entertainment on YouTube rather than learning, watching videos on YouTube as a learning method has grown in recent years. This kind of situation inspires me to explore what are the merits and limitations when YouTube become a means of learning.

Therefore, as a purpose of this essay, I will conduct a study which is related to YouTube as a means of informal learning and try to find out its strengths and weaknesses. I selected a 19-year-old female who was a new beginner of Ukulele as a participant in learning this instrument. Besides, my research question is:

• What are the merits and limitations of YouTube as an informal learning method for learning Ukulele?

In section 2, I will briefly introduce the Behaviourism theory and some concepts of YouTube. In section 3, I will present the methodology and some information about the selection of participants. In section 4, I will describe the learning situation. In section 5, I will critically discuss my findings. Finally, section 6 is my conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Behaviourism

Behaviourism is a kind of psychology proposed by John Watson and made more rigorous by B.F. Skinner, which occupied the main position in the mid-20th century. Its importance is on the practice of psychological therapy even continues today. Additionally, behaviourism is an approach to understanding human and animal behaviour. It combines elements of philosophy, methodology, and psychological theory. (Selwyn, 2011; Baum, 2005)

Selwyn (2011) defines the main content of this theory can be divided into three parts in his book: (1) Respondent behaviour is a kind of behaviour that can be occurred automatically by applying a stimulus to the subject. For example, a dog will run to the food once it sees. (2) Classical conditioning, which is also known as Pavlovian or respondent conditioning, refers to a learning procedure in which a biologically potent stimulus (such as food) is

paired with a previously neutral stimulus (such as a bell). (3) Operant conditioning (also called 'instrumental conditioning') is a type of learning in which the strength of behaviour is changed by the reward or punishment, or the behaviour is controlled by an experience called "discriminative stimuli" which come to as a signal to the subject.

Furthermore, there are two branches of this theory which are methodological behaviourism and radical behaviourism. (Selwyn, 2011; Kitchener, 1977) The former believes that all behaviours are learnt from the environment and behaviour is the result of stimulus-response. However, it is different from radical behaviourism which agrees with the view that internal events such as thinking and emotion affect behaviour. Nevertheless, both two branches believe that correlation between specific stimuli and responses is a key.

When we are watching videos, the learning process occurs and based on this theory that stimulus will come from the instructions of people in the videos and our own motivations. Therefore, in this assignment, I will strive to explore how does learning process happen via watching YouTube; in the end, discussing the merits and the limitations.

2.2 YouTube

Dabbagh and Reo (2011) define that social media as a 21st-century term used to broadly define a variety of network tools that emphasise the social perspective of the internet as a channel for collaboration, expression and sharing of information. For example, Media sharing tools such as YouTube that can be social tagging (Dabbagh and Kitsantas, 2011).

As for YouTube, since its inception in 2005, it has grown exponentially. Kruse and Veblen (2012) indicate that YouTube is categorized as a Web 2.0 application where users share videos that include entertainment (such as watching movies, listening to music etc.) and informative (Such as education, News etc.). As a media which is political, social and cultural, it is a great opportunity and challenge for educators and researchers to explore how to apply it to practical informal learning. (Burgess and Green 2009; Milliron et al.2008; Webb 2007;)

Nowadays, in this Information-explosion era, YouTube is regarded as a lifestyle that is full of unessential information wasting people's time, while others think YouTube is a new strategy and a way of developing themselves or enhancing their correlations with friends. Kellner and Kim (2010) point out directly that 'YouTube, which included the transformative critical pedagogy that informed as educational function now, could help enhance the democratization of the online informal learning system'. Additionally, November (2007) insists that educators should promote the positive aspect of YouTube in learning (both formal learning and informal learning). For instance, it is a good way for learners to learn a new language either as an interesting development or lifelong learning.

As Cayari (2011) said, social media seemed like a virtual coffee house where people can share art, experiences, music, which was completely different from the last century. For example, in the back, if a person wants to learn a new instrument, he (or she) needs to go to the professional training centre and pay for it, but now, he (or she) just needs to click the mouse and search a teaching video on YouTube from tons of resources. It should be emphasized that learning from YouTube is a typical stimulus-response behaviour result.

3. Methodology and the Participant

3.1 Methodology

There are many strategies to do the related research, such as handout questionnaires to analysis data or conduct a case study. When I thought about how to do the research can make the most accurate result, providing a small case study was the first came to my mind. The reason was that, in the case study, I could choose to finish a complete observation to find out how the learning processed exactly happened to the participant and the interview would help me to understand the typical merits and limitations related to online informal learning depend on YouTube.

After reading some references, I realized that though my first thought seemed right, but there were still some deep reasons I should understand. It is significant to clarify the phenomenon and the reason for the inquiry approach, not just rely on 'feelings'. When it comes to qualitative research, the methods of data collection, ethical issues, analysis of the data etc. should be considered (Marshall and Rossman, 2014; Lewis, 2015). Since my research question is 'What are the merits and limitations of YouTube as a method of informal learning'. In order to achieve the inquiry aim, it is necessary to choose the most proper method to do qualitative research. As Croswell and Hanson(2007) point out five different qualitative approaches that most researchers chose to scope and explore in their field. They are (1) Case Study (2) Phenomenology (3) Ethnography (4) Narrative and (5) Grounded Theory. It is clear that the qualitative researcher's challenge is to try to guarantee that the views of the participants will not bias the study (Marchall and Rossman,2014). The author also argues that a case study probably is used to create a success story to demonstrate the effectiveness of the target program. Therefore, the

case study would be more proper and direct to give a response to the research question. Along this clue, because of the features of this case study, observation and interview will be a more correlated method to collect data (compared with the documents and audio-visual materials).

3.2 Participant

To give response to the research question, I selected a 19-year-old female, English speaker as the participant. The reasons are that she is my friend who is interested in learning a new instrument and she is very familiar with YouTube.

Before the study, I have to address that there are both advantages and risks regarding interviewing people who you are familiar with. On the one hand, the participant will be relaxed to talk about the research without burden (Blichfeldt and Heldbjerg, 2007). Nevertheless, the authors identify that to some extent, the relationship between interviewer and interviewee probably will affect the conclusion by the bias of the interviewee. Additionally, there will be some misunderstandings between them because they may assume that they know each other well. To reduce the stated risks, he indicates that the informed 'consent form' is a key point to clearly present how the process will be conducted and also to specify the participant's rights and responsibilities '. This can help to avoid some potential discomfort or misinterpretation.

In this case, according to Creswell and Hanson (2007) and Seidman (2013) the structure of my informed consent form will include the requirements for the participant, the aims of the study, the possible 'risks' related during the process, the right to withdraw whenever required, the data protection procedures, the way of presenting findings, and the contact information of the researchers.

4. Learning Situation

The research was conducted on the 27th of December, 2016 from 11 am to 1 pm and at the same time completed the observation and the interview. The participant and I both could not play Ukulele, so this was a good chance to conduct the research question without subjective factors of this skill. In addition, this case study was conducted at her home compared with my home because it was the most convenient, quiet and relaxing place for her to take part in this research. More details are presented below.

4.1 The Observation

There were tons of videos about learning Ukulele online, and as a beginner, the participant went to YouTube and searched the keywords 'Ukulele Chords'. After looking through the website, she chose a video named 'How to Play Ukulele Chords Part 1 | Soprano, Concert, Tenor' which was a nearly 6 minutes tutoring video. Though the video was just 6 minutes, the participant watched it twice and picked some important parts to watch and practice more than three times. At first, the participant only watched the whole video once without taking any notes but she did not skip any sections even though it seemed not very important. At present, she was very careful and patient.



Figure 1.

During the second time, the participant also watched the first 1 minute which mainly talked about how to hold Ukulele and some basic information. She tried to correct her gestures in comparison to the tutor. When the video stated teaching the chords (C, G7, Am, F), she watched quite carefully. The tutor would show and explain the fingering first and then she followed and imitated doing the same. After learning G7 chord which after C chord

(around 2 minutes later), she went back the video to review C chord again, and then, tried to figure out and remember the differences between these two chords. According to the explanation of the video, G7 chord was the most difficult one in these four chords that the participant could not perform it with a strong sound, and not felt comfortable with her gesture. Spontaneously, she came to a pause and attempted to find the right way. Thus, after few-times practice, she still could not fully acquire the key skill to perform, so that she skipped this section temporarily.

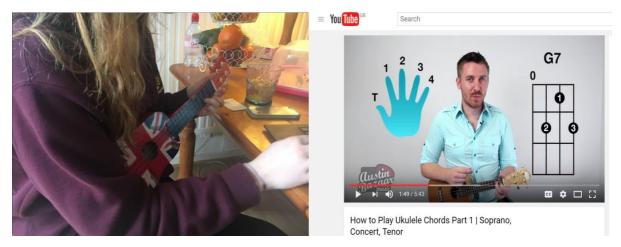


Figure 2.

Then she began to learn Am chord which was easy because it only needed one finger to press the String. The last chord was F, which also was a simple and basic one. The end of the video was a review of these four chords and teaching how to strum. She could follow most of the process but G7 seemed hard.

After first process (watching and following), the participant closed the website and practiced without leading. The sound was not as loud as we usual heard and judging by her facial expression, it showed that she could not remember Am chord as well as G7 chord clearly. Thus, she went to the same video and particularly picked the Am and G7 parts again in order to enhance her practice. As a result, it was better than before.

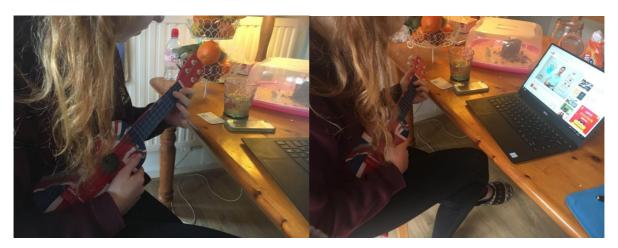


Figure 3.

It was not easy to perform Ukulele as she showed her fingers with impressment to me. So we had a rest for about 20 minutes with some simple questions regarding her performance process (just chat not the interview). After that, the participant decided to perform the four chords again to test herself. The result was that, she could play C, G7, F chord with a quick reflection, but when came to Am chord, she had to think about it for a few seconds. Finally, she did not finish watching and imitating the video review part until she could give a quick reflection on Am.

4.2 The Interview

According to the process of the observation, I divided the interview into 3 topics: 1) Selecting YouTube; 2) Watching and self-testing process; 3) The participant's View of regarding the merits and weaknesses of YouTube as a means of informal learning.

About the selection of the particular video, the participant showed a very efficient and decisive attitude. When asking her why she chose this one, she said: I chose the video because I think that chords are a good thing to start with when learning a new instrument, you get a better idea of how the instrument works and sounds. Also, the video was not too long which is good because you do not get bored. In addition, she also argued: I find YouTube is the best place to find these types of resources; it is very accessible to anyone because it is online and free. Because I found that during the process, she did not select the video according to the comments, she explained that the priorities were the content and how long the video is, which would maintain her interest in playing an instrument. Furthermore, due to her previous experiences searching on the YouTube, most comments were related to others learning results or difficulties, not the real critical comments on videos. Her further explanation is: I like the comment section below the videos because you can chat to people who have the same passion as you and ask them questions about the video or have a discussion, but as for the limitations, you cannot be sure that the quality of the teaching will be very good.

When talking about the watching and testing process. She mentioned: At first I was excited because I am learning a new instrument, then slightly frustrated because it isn't as easy as I thought. Luckily, she supported that the video was easy to understand because the person did not speak too fast and he also repeated what he had said a few times, step by step. So that the viewer has time to practice what he had taught. Besides, she told me that there were some pictures of the chords on the strings which helped when practicing. As she practicing more, she got more confident and therefore enjoyed herself more. In addition, she also point out that she would have to watch the video probably three times to remember all the chords and practice them. Switching to the self-testing process, the participant remembered and said: Though the person makes everything clear to understand...because there are a lot of chords to learn in the video, so it is hard to remember all of them at once. After the break, I can remember the chord of G7, C and F but I would need to watch the video again to remember the Am chord. She also showed her satisfaction with this performance: I found placing my fingers on the strings was quite hard and hurt the ends of my fingers! But as I practicing, it gets easier.

The last part is mainly about the views of YouTube as a means of informal learning. When she was asked: Will you review this video again if you want to continue learning or would you prefer to go to a professional training centre? She replied directly: I would prefer to continue using the video because you can look at it whenever you like, what's more, it is more flexible than a training center or having a teacher. In addition, the participant agreed with the new informal learning ways would make sense, but she also presented some limitations. 'We cannot deny that it is easy to find the proper video and learning process is flexible, especially for music learning.' she mentioned, But it is good for me, because I could pause the video when I wanted to, and go back if I did not completely understand something the tutor had said,' As the limitation, she proposal that if she did not understand something, she could not ask a professional teacher. Besides, It was hard to find the right way to play the instrument at the beginning and once the difficulty could not be solved, the learners would get bored.

5. Discussion

As an earlier introduction, gradually, YouTube has become a cultural force that alters the behaviors and reflections of individuals to interact with others and has grown as mature cyberspace of entertainment and education (Waldron, 2013). As a new way of informal learning, the tendency over the world is getting popular, which we gain a lot of benefits from. However, we cannot deny there still are some limitations that we have to face and deal with. In this case, this small case study mainly explores the merits and limitations of YouTube as a means of informal learning. Although this case study is not conducted with a large number of participants, it also can indicate some issues to some extent.

5.1 Teaching Style: Easy to Understand

As for the personal characteristic and way of teaching, the first positive perspective is that the images on the screen and sound provided in the video were clear and easy to understand. According to the participant's reflection: 'The person does not speak too fast and he also repeats what he has said a few times so that he will have time to practice what he has been taught. He also shows a picture of every chord on the strings which helps when I practicing.' Our case study is based on the behaviorism theory, so it indicated how Operant Conditioning worked, which is one of the main points of behaviourism proposed by Selwyn, (2011). During the process, we can see a step-by-step teaching method that the teacher taught every chord in detail and between every chord he gave a few seconds to the participant to digest previous chords. It probably can be explained as giving orders then receiving the orders and reflecting. Another one is about the frequent self-testing; the teacher reviewed all the chords at the end of the teaching and then asked the viewer to strum strings with him when he raised the speed. In fact, as informal learning, it was a signal to tell the learner that you must complete or pass this tiny test

before moving on to the next stage.

5.2 Feature: Flexibility

The other positive perspective is that Biggs et al. (2013) analyze shows YouTube is one of the largest sources of freely accessible video content, which stand for the word 'flexibility'. Flexibility means you can watch the video whenever you have the access to the Internet. Moreover, as a free video-sharing community, it will be more convenient to follow directions compared with books. Additionally, according to this case course, the posted on YouTube, could enhance musical understanding for the learner especially in some situations where the economy or geography was restricted (Kruse and Veblen, 2012). The participant strongly agreed with this point of view (flexibility). Not only it is easy to find this resource but also when she watched the video, she was relaxed, concentrated and felt free to do anything. Even when she met some difficulties such as the low sounds, wrong way of pressing string etc. she would not feel shy or get bored. However, if we extend the scope of this merit, it will become a drawback. Too much flexibility will decrease the final outcomes. For example, self-control is really a big issue for either formal or informal online learning.

5.3 Comment Section

Furthermore, there are some useful ways to enable people to make the right choice in YouTube, such as comment and feedback, which make YouTube more complete as a means of learning method (or social sharing media). You can use like, dislike and some comment to show your feedback. Although the participant did not considering the comments below the video during the research process, she talked about her experiences of reading comments to make decisions during the interview. She argued that it is necessary to contribute a comment zone for every video, 'because you can chat to people who have the same passion as you and ask them questions about the video or have a discussion', but no one can guarantee the quality of every video is high. In addition, the interactions of informal online learning can be seen as a necessary experience for the learners, which enables them to value their learning effects and extend their social engagement with others.

5.4 Less Help from Teachers

Positive side and negative side cannot be apart. 'Blended learning' has been asserted by Mathur and Oliver (2007) defined as 'an amalgam of text based, online technology with face-to-face learning '. It aims to combine the advantages of both formal face-to-face classroom learning and online and virtual learning. However, this small case study indicates that there is a most important problem that may have not be fixed.

Based on the participant experience, 'blending learning' (at present) could not provide a professional teacher to answer and help with her difficulties. Because the online environment did less function as a community than real community, the findings indicate that online learners' self learning motivations or internal stimulus should be stronger to finish the course. Furthermore, Selwyn (2012) asserts strongly that 'Respondent Behaviour is behaviour that can be produced automatically by applying a stimulus to the subject'. When relating this limitation to behaviourism, it will be clear that when the participant was learning on the YouTube, the lack of enough 'stimulus', such as encouragements or corrections from teacher or classmates or the atmosphere of Ukulele learning. Also, though she accepted the signal, which tells her that she had better to perform these four chords fluently (self-testing), before moving on to the next stage, she won't receive any reward or punishment from real teachers or surroundings. In that case, the result probably is that it might decrease her motivation and passion in this way.

5.5 Time Matter

The findings also suggest that people, who organized the video played a significant role in enhancing the functioning of studying results, especially should pay attention to the time matter. The online community (such as YouTube) provides a huge virtual space where people can engage in what they want to know and learn, not only for entertainment but also for learning (Gray, 2004). Time matter can be regarded as one of the most important factors when people select or watch videos. As we can see from the interview, the participant said that the video was not too long which was good because people would not get bored. This reply shows the great importance that the length of time should be considered. Although the video that the participant watched was just 5:43 min, which is really short for an instrument course since she is just a beginner who would better maintain interest in learning Ukulele. In addition, it is a short video but the participant spent at least 25 minutes watching and imitating carefully. Therefore, this issue was a key factor determining her decision of dropping out or keeping the idea of watching it again and again when she felt the need to correct her fingers on the strings and how to acquire the fingering of G7 chord.

6. Conclusion

The case study shows some merits and limitations of learning from YouTube based on the experience of an individual. According to the observation and interview, it indicates that the learning result is affected by many

factors, such as the teaching styles (explanation from teachers), the length of the video, the feedback, etc. It is true that these factors can be the advantages of YouTube. However, to some extent, they also can become disadvantages if we do not make good use of them.

This essay just tries to explain 'how did learning occur?' conducts with the behaviourism theory, which focused on the result of 'stimulus – response'. As for Further research, it is necessary to assume other learning theories conducted with the empirical research. Besides, this just is a small study that cannot contain all perspectives, but it also reports some significant issues, which can help the development of informal learning through YouTube.

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Appendix A

Interview Record: The Questions and Answers of the Interview

Q: Why did you choose that video?

A: I chose the video because I think that chords are a good thing to start with when learning a new instrument, you get a better idea of how the instrument works and sounds. Also the video wasn't too long which is good because you don't get bored.

Q: Do you think it is convenient to get access to the resources and find the proper one? Why?

A: I find YouTube is the best place to find these types of resources; it is very accessible to anyone because it is online and free.

Q: When you watch the video, do you think it is easy to understand and follow?

A: According to the person's speaking, the pictures and the behavior he shows. I think it's easy to understand because he doesn't speak too fast and he also repeats what he's said a few times so that the viewer has time to practice what he's teaching. He also shows a picture of the chords on the strings which helps when practicing.

Q:If you did not fully understand or follow the first time, how many times' watching do you think will be better? Or is there any other learning strategies?

A: I would have to watch the video probably three times to remember all the chords and practice them.

Q: How about your mind and mood changing during the process?

A: At first I was excited because I am learning a new instrument, then slightly frustrated because it isn't as easy as I thought but as I practice more, I get more confident and therefore enjoy myself more.

Q: How much of the skills can you remember and perform?

A: I can remember the chord of G7, C and F but I would need to watch the video again to remember the other chords.

Q: I remembered that you said after watch the video for the first time, you cannot remember the Am clearly, what are the reasons are you think probably?

A: I think because there are a lot of chords to learn in the video, so it's hard to remember all of them at once.

Q: Is there any other difficulties that makes you feel confused?

A: I found placing my fingers on the strings was quite hard and hurt the ends of my fingers! But as I practice, it gets easier.

Q: Will you review this video again if you want to continue learning or would you prefer to go to a professional training center? And Why?

A: I would prefer to continue using the video because you can look at it whenever you like, so more flexibility than a training center or having a teacher.

Q: During the whole process what were the positive and negative perspectives of learning the Ukulele through this video?

A: The positive aspects were that I could pause the video when I wanted to, and go back if I didn't completely understand something he had said. The negative aspects are that if I don't understand something, I can't ask a teacher.

Q: What do you think are the advantages and limitations of YouTube as a means of an informal learning method?

A: I like the comment section below the videos because you can chat to people who have the same passion as you and ask them questions about the video or have a discussion. Limitations are that you cannot be sure that the quality of the teaching will be very good.

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