ELEARNINGNEWS ARTICLE

Year 8 - number 29 Wednesday 29 may 2024

Visual Feedback in eLearning: how to provide effective visual responses

The visual feedback technique is an essential tool for providing students with feedback on their performances and learning prospects.

Receiving feedback on what has been learned is essential for every student. These indications not only help evaluate progress, but also act as a guide to improve performance and maintain high motivation. In the field of eLearning, visual feedback emerges as a powerful and innovative tool. Unlike textual feedback, **visual feedback** offers a graphical representation of student performance. This type of guidance can include progress graphs, heat maps, and visual annotations that make key information immediately understandable. Data visualization allows students to easily identify their areas of strength and weakness, promoting more self-regulated and conscious learning.

The importance of visual feedback in eLearning

Visual feedback is particularly useful because it takes advantage of our natural propensity to understand and interpret visual information more quickly than textual information. **Progress graphs, heat maps and visual annotations** are just some of the tools that can be used to provide effective guidance. These tools help students visualize their progress and easily identify areas where they need improvement.

The use of visual feedback in eLearning has been shown to have numerous benefits. First, it **improves student engagement**. When students can visually see their progress, they are more motivated to continue engaging in the course. In fact, visual feedback makes the learning process more transparent and tangible, thus increasing the motivation to achieve the set objectives.

Secondly, visual feedback **promotes self-regulation of learning**. Students can reflect on their study strategies and make changes based on the visual data they receive. This type of input helps students become more aware of their learning habits and develop more effective strategies to improve their performance.

Finally, visual feedback helps **improve the overall quality of learning**. By providing clear and immediate information, they help students better understand concepts and correct errors in a timely manner. This leads to deeper and more lasting learning.

Types of visual feedback

Visual feedback can take many forms in eLearning, each with its own unique benefits. Here are some of the most common types of visual feedback used to improve online learning:

- Progress graphs

- Heat maps

- Visual annotations

Progress Graphs: Progress graphs are a powerful visual tool that shows student progress against course objectives. These graphs can display various data, such as quiz scores, task completion times, and discussion participation. Progress graphs help students clearly see how close they are to achieving their goals, keeping them motivated and focused.

Heat Maps: Heat maps are another effective form of visual feedback that highlights students' areas of strengths and weaknesses. Using a color scale, heat maps show the frequency and distribution of errors or correct answers in a task or series of activities. This type of visualization allows students to quickly identify areas that need more attention and improvement.

Visual annotations: Visual annotations use graphical tools to provide direct feedback on documents and tasks. Instructors can highlight, underline or add comments directly on student work, making feedback immediately understandable and easy to follow. This method helps students understand exactly where they made mistakes and how they can correct them.

Each of these types of visual feedback has the potential to significantly improve the learning experience. Used appropriately, they can provide students with a clearer understanding of their progress and areas that need improvement, thus contributing to more effective and self-regulated learning.

Technologies and tools used for visual feedback

Implementing visual feedback in eLearning requires the use of appropriate technologies and tools that can support the creation and distribution of these visual responses. Below are some of the main tools and technologies used for this type of response:

- Learning Management Systems (LMS)

- Data Visualization Software

- Visual Annotation Tools

Learning Management Systems (LMS): Learning Management Systems are platforms that manage and facilitate online learning. These systems often integrate advanced visual feedback features, such as progress graphs and customized dashboards. Through an LMS, instructors can monitor student activities, provide immediate and personalized feedback, and create visual reports that help students better understand their learning journey. For example, an LMS can display student progress in a course through bar or line graphs, clearly showing the areas in which they excel and those in which they need improvement.

Data visualization software: These tools are powerful software that transform complex data into understandable, interactive visualizations. These tools allow educators to create graphs, charts, and dashboards that visually represent student learning data. For example, Tableau can be used to create heat maps that show students' areas of strength and weakness, while Power BI can generate dynamic reports that automatically update student progress in real time. These software help make data more accessible and useful to students, thus improving the effectiveness of feedback.

Visual annotation tools: Tools like Google Docs, Microsoft OneNote, and LMS-integrated annotation tools allow instructors to provide direct feedback on documents and assignments. These tools allow educators to highlight text, add comments and notes, and draw directly on student work. For example, a teacher can use Google Docs to add comments and suggestions directly to an essay, highlighting areas that need revision. This type of visual feedback is immediately understandable to students and makes it easier to correct errors and improve skills.

Challenges and considerations in implementing visual feedback

Despite the numerous benefits of visual feedback in eLearning, the implementation of these tools presents some challenges that must be carefully considered to ensure their effectiveness.

One of the main challenges is **avoiding information overload**. When students are presented with too much visual data at once, they can feel overwhelmed and confused. It is important to design visual feedback that is clear and concise, focusing on key points and presenting information in a simple and easily understandable way. Excessive use of complex graphs or detailed heat maps can be counterproductive if adequate context and explanations are not provided.

It is important to ensure that visual feedback is **accessible to all students**, including those with visual impairments. It is essential to use colors and contrasts that are easily distinguishable even for students with color blindness, and to provide text alternatives or audio descriptions for those with visual difficulties. Tools like audio descriptions and captions can help make visual feedback more inclusive.

The **accuracy and quality of the data** used to generate visual feedback is crucial. Inaccurate or incomplete data can lead to misleading guidance, which in turn can negatively affect student learning. It is important to ensure that data is collected and analyzed correctly, using reliable tools and appropriate methodologies.

Integrating visual feedback into Learning Management Systems (LMS) and other eLearning platforms can present technical challenges. You need to ensure that data visualization tools are compatible with the platforms you use and can be easily integrated into your existing workflow. This integration often requires specific technical skills and an investment in terms of time and resources. Teachers, then, must be adequately trained in the use of these tools to maximize their effectiveness. Without adequate training, there is a risk that these are not used correctly or are not interpreted correctly by students.

Methods for providing effective visual feedback

Providing effective visual feedback in eLearning requires the adoption of specific methods that ensure clarity, relevance and usefulness for students.

Being specific in feedback is essential to avoid generalizations that can confuse students. Visual feedback should focus on specific areas of improvement or success. For example, a progress graph can clearly show which modules or topics are best understood by students and which need further revision. This specificity helps students understand exactly where to focus their efforts.

Providing visual feedback regularly is key to keeping students informed of their progress and motivating them to continue improving. Frequent cues, such as weekly progress reports, help keep students engaged and aware of their performance over time. Regular attendance also allows students to make timely adjustments in their study strategies.

Visual feedback should be **constructive and improvement-oriented**, rather than just focusing on errors. For example, heat maps that highlight both areas of strength and weakness provide a balanced view of student performance. This type of feedback helps students recognize their successes and see mistakes as learning opportunities, rather than failures.

Using visual tools that make feedback **immediately clear and understandable** is crucial. Visual annotations on documents, for example, can highlight specific errors and provide correction suggestions directly on the text. This method makes the response more accessible and facilitates rapid understanding and application by students.