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ReCALL Journal

The forthcoming issue of **ReCALL** (Vol. 22, Part 1) will be distributed to EUROCALL members in January 2010. Please send articles, software reviews, details of relevant events or other items of interest for future issues to June Thompson, Editor **ReCALL** d.j.thompson@hull.ac.uk.

The journal contents are listed at:

http://www.eurocall-languages.org/recall/r_contents.html

All articles are considered by an international panel of referees. Notes for contributors can be found at:

<http://www.eurocall-languages.org/recall/contribnotes.html>



Project

English for Social Sciences: development of language proficiency in a virtual learning environment

The two-part language course 'English for Students of Social Sciences (UNicert III)'⁽¹⁾ was developed in the period 2005-2007 within the framework of the Leonardo da Vinci project 'EUROVOLT via VLE'⁽²⁾. In the process, teaching and learning materials were created taking into consideration the specific experiences and requirements of German students of Political and Managerial Sciences and Sociology. The course aims at the requirements of the professional world of these students.⁽³⁾ A further important premise was compatibility with the existing UNicert training level and the levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The material was specifically developed for a teaching and learning concept which implements innovative approaches in the combination of online and offline language learning (Blended Learning or BL) and investigates their success. To this end, a test and control group enrolled on the UNicert III/1 level were available for each semester respectively; the test group had 2 sessions in the multimedia language laboratory and 2 in the classroom (contact sessions), and the control group had 4 contact sessions. Both groups used the same material and dealt with the same topics, the test group online and the control group as printed material.

One of the two Moodle ⁽⁴⁾ courses created in the virtual learning environment was evaluated both internally and externally by the ELIAS ⁽⁵⁾ international working group. In the external evaluation, the course was awarded the highest or second highest number of

points in all didactic and technical categories and was distinguished with a total of five out of five stars. The online learning materials won a nomination in the 'professional training and studies' category in the German training media award *digita 2008* (6).

The tasks from this course, which will be examined in greater detail in this article, must be assigned to the areas of grammar, listening and writing. The selection made initially reflects some criteria from the comprehensive proficiency areas: grammar as basic proficiency, listening as a receptive and oral proficiency and writing as a productive and written proficiency. Following the presentation of the examples, we shall focus on which e-learning specific tasks could be set and how these could increase effectiveness, learning success or motivation.

Example: grammar

Grammatical exercises have been effectively favoured as being easy to implement since the beginning of media-assisted foreign language learning; they can be created and corrected with great ease and are apparently perfectly suited to the patient establishment of grammatical forms which relate to tangible rules and areas of application which are relatively easy to limit. The reasons for the inclusion and emphasis on grammatical exercises which are principally classified as basic grammar are manifold and are mainly motivated by needs analysis: multiple choice type questions from the domain of basic grammar are often answered wrongly during assessment tests. Deficits in this area also lead to communication difficulties and the devalorisation of oral and written achievements. Furthermore, many mistakes are strongly reinforced and the cessation and conquering of this phenomenon, which is also described as fossilisation in specialist literature, (7) requires more time and work, as is generally known, than acquiring new knowledge.

The fact that such tasks are viewed as relevant to studies is ensured on the one hand by a thematic reference, for example on current social and political developments and daily life as a student and through the usage of specialist texts. On the other hand, the perceptive interest of the learner is fostered not only by justifying language usage with rules, but also trying out rules in the context of an inductive process and learning to deduce rules oneself. The following example involves one of four tense forms in the Present Tenses category, namely the 'Topic 03 C3 Tense Recognition Task' to the Present Progressive.

The article from which the following abstract was taken deals with the situation of women in Germany. In the introduction, the author **is referring** to Angela Merkel:

"Her diplomatic skills have already been credited with bringing European Union leaders closer [...]. Back home, the economy **is picking up**, and Germans are starting to shed the gloom that enveloped the country in the months surrounding its messy election. Watching Merkel, 51, and the five women - all experienced in state or federal government- she has installed in her new Cabinet, it's tempting to conclude that Germany, like its Scandinavian neighbors to the north, is enjoying the blessings of years of struggle for gender equality. Not so. The hard-won achievements of German women are limited, to a startling degree, to the world of politics."
Source: Andrew Purvis, *Time Europe Magazine*, January 30, 2006, Why Merkel is not enough, p. 20.

- What is the name of the tense printed in bold type? [...]
- Find more examples of the same tense in the text above. [...]
- What kind of text is it? Why is this particular tense used here? (If you cannot determine what kind of text this is, focus on the context.) (8) [...]

Submit your answers by clicking

Then take a look at the sample answers in Part 10 and compare them with your replies. If necessary, correct your answers.

Figure 1: Tense Recognition Task

In the subsequent task, 'Topic 03 C4 Focus on Usage', the learners are then inspired towards the correct, imitative usage of the individual Present Tenses:

Directions

In this exercise, you have to write some sentences of your own and apply the knowledge you have gained when you write about your personal situation. Model sentences will be provided so that you can compare your own sentences with these correct examples.

What is going on in the world around you?

We use a particular tense to tell others what we are doing at a particular moment (usually when they cannot see us, when we write a postcard or talk on the phone) and when we talk about what other people are doing.

Examples:

My friends are all looking for South American frogs as if there was no tomorrow. Does that mean something?

My wife went into labor this morning at five o'clock. I took her to the hospital at five-thirty. I just got a phone call from Casablanca and was told that she is giving birth to our first child.

On the phone: "What are you doing, your voice sounds strange?" - "I'm only eating some tortilla chips."

Think of some of the things that you and the people you know are doing right now. Complete the following sentences. Pay attention to the examples and use the correct tense.

After clicking the "Edit my submission" button below, copy and paste the sentences into the text field and complete them.

- I am ...
- The other students are not ...
- I think my friend is currently ...
- Our professor ...
- I suspect the German Chancellor ...
- All the grizzly bears in Alaska ...

Figure 2: Focus on Usage, Part C

Such semi-open exercises have the evident disadvantage of needing to be corrected manually. But at the same time they also offer a change from the conventional types of exercise such as multiple choice, classification or short answers and prepare for application in proficiency areas which are interlinked with grammatical exercises in a targeted manner. First and foremost, it relates to tasks for oral communication in the contact session (offline) and written tasks (9) (online and offline).

From the feedback provided by learners on a total of two courses, the online grammatical exercises have performed gratifyingly: in

the 'interesting and valuable learning experience' questionnaire, the grammar was graded (except for clarifications which were only linked to the platform in any case) 3.7 (week 5) or 3.8 (week 13), in each case marginally higher than average, where 1 signified not at all interesting and valuable and 5 signified extremely interesting and valuable. Following completion of the courses, independent rule deduction courses obtained the highest value: 3.9. The writing and reading tasks with feedback obtained the highest grade (4.1), and the online grammatical explanations obtained the lowest with 3.1 (10).

Grammatical instruction is frequently associated with negative ratings, first and foremost in schools, due to the repetitively coordinated exercise and consolidation phases (11). Raabe (2003) comments in relation to this that 'the communicative transfer phase frequently falls victim to a lack of time'. This leads to an 'onerousness of grammatical exercises which can have a strong negative impact on the enjoyment of foreign language exercises'. Many learners hold rather negative expectations of the learning of grammar which they fail to conceal from teaching staff during contact sessions. If it were possible to eradicate such unjustified prejudices and demonstrate independent learning possibilities by means of new forms of learning and alternative learning methods, the high cost of development of suitable materials would not only be justified, but forward-looking. In order to increase learning effectiveness simultaneously, more strongly adaptive programmes should be developed and tested in the years to come which not only ascertain mistakes but delimit the precise causes of the mistake, help to make a diagnosis and then provide the learner directly with relevant additional 'remedial tasks'.

Example: written tasks

The proficiency level of writing is distinguished in particular by two characteristics; firstly, written tasks offer diverse opportunities for the application of previously acquired vocabulary and terminology, procedural grammatical knowledge and knowledge of text construction. Secondly, in contrast to oral language usage, such tasks enable reflected language usage which always scrutinises the accuracy of one's own utterances. It is therefore plausible if store is not only set by the reflection and summarising of specialist knowledge in such tasks, but also by the conscious usage of the grammatical knowledge acquired, as in the example shown here, of the 'Topic 03 D1 Writing Task (Graded Assignment)'.

Write a short text of approximately 120-150 words, no more. Briefly report on your learning experiences in this semester. Focus on one particular course that you are participating in.

Use each of the four tenses that have been dealt with in this grammar unit (present simple, progressive/continuous, present perfect simple and progressive/continuous) at least twice. Please note that you may have to use other tenses as well, especially if you refer to a specific time in the past.

When you refer to facts which are generally true, events which are happening now, activities that have recently taken place or which have been going on up to the time when you write, you can usually use a form of the present tense.

When you have completed this task, submit it by clicking "Save changes". You can improve or edit your text until the submission deadline, Nov 20, 2007, 22:00 by clicking "Edit my submission" below.

You will receive feedback on the task from your teacher / online tutor within a week.

GRADING
Max. 20 points altogether, 10 points for content and structure 10 points for language / correctness.

19 = 1.3	18 = 1.7	17 = 2.0	16 = 2.3	15 = 2.7
14 = 3.0	13 = 3.3	12 = 3.7	11 = 4.0	

Figure 3: Topic 03 D1 Writing Task (Graded Assignment)

In the run-up to this task, the content and objects of social science-related specialities and the seminars relating to them were communicated beforehand, in addition to the key terminology of various social science-related subjects and their definitions. In the grammatical domain, oral communication tasks and further open exercises with the formats complete and translate followed the tasks for deduction of rules, practising and written application. Further task formats which can be performed with great ease on all learning management systems are chats and discussion fora.

The written learning achievements performed were submitted, corrected and returned online via the 'task' learning platform function. A colour code was used for correction which initially differentiates according to mistakes in the domain of grammar, vocabulary, text structuring, media, content, style and other mistakes. Incorrect methods of usage which relate to the previously communicated grammatical domain are penalised more strongly than others. The same applies to those in the domain of basic grammar. While the first text corrected also contains tips and clarifications in addition to the colour codes, such clarifications and therefore the time spent on correction is increasingly reduced in the course of the semester in order to strengthen the development of individual recognition and clarification mechanisms. This thus guarantees the intertwining of these two domains of proficiency communication, grammar and writing. In addition, this creates pre-requisites that these interdependencies are recognised as being of personal importance by the learners and the causes or mistakes and the possibilities of compensation of proficiency deficits can be better reflected upon.

At the same time, the aimless deflagration of the total effort put into study by the learners and the correction time of the teaching staff should be avoided at all costs. The students are asked to correct their own tasks and to submit an improved version which then amounts to 50 per cent of the evaluation of the respective task. This option is currently being appreciated by the bachelor students above all (12).

Finally, the following two written tasks on further specialist and grammatical themes aim to clarify how the intertwining of specialist and language training can be implemented at this level using simple means:

Write a short text of approximately 150 – 200 words, no more. Briefly outline the most important facts about one international or social conflict. Briefly introduce the main actors and their objectives, and describe at least one of the historical developments more in depth. Use each of the four tenses that have been dealt with in this grammar unit (past simple, past progressive/continuous, past perfect simple and past perfect progressive /continuous) at least twice.

Figure 4: statement of task from Topic 05 D1 Writing Task (Graded Assignment)

Write a short text of approximately 200 – 250 words, no more. Briefly compare the work of two NGOs that have similar fields of activities, such as Greenpeace and the WWF (both in the field of environmental protection), or Charter 88 and Human Rights Watch (both in the field of human rights). If you do not know any NGOs and or have no time to research them, you can also use your imagination and make some up.

Please note that you should use adjectives and adverbs to describe their work and to compare certain

criteria, such as budgets, membership, types of activities, structures, etc.

Figure 5: statement of task from Topic 05 D1 Writing Task (Graded Assignment)

The written tasks were also assessed very positively with a grading of 4.1. This was not only due to the prompt and useful feedback, but above all to the good thematic reference to the specialist knowledge dealt with and the linguistic categories of grammar, terminology and text construction.

Example: listening tasks

Online listening tasks demonstrate the greatest discrepancies in the learner evaluation between Week 5 and Week 13 mentioned at the beginning – at the end of the semester, these were assessed a whole grade higher and were thus perceived as being more useful and interesting after the first five weeks. The advantages which were not recognised until later must be classed in the area of the generally accepted median added value (13) according to subsequent verbal polls: repeated individual listening with stopping and repeated listening to certain parts of the text which were relevant to the task was already possible in the traditional language laboratory. Further advantages which could be attained more easily through the usage of electronic media could be found in the fact that the place and time of learning could be determined by oneself, that more texts, with various requisition levels or performance requirements for example, could be provided and that a comparison of the listening text, script and sample responses is more straightforward, whereby for example independent learning could also be better promoted through more efficient platform-specific functions.

Within the framework of the proficiencies to be learnt, two desiderata must be recorded in the domain of listening in many more traditional teaching and learning materials (14): firstly, listening to frequently superordinated learning objectives such as the communication of new vocabulary or structures /the practising of phonetics. Furthermore, many textbook listening exercises are designed in such a way that they are primarily suited to preparation for listening test-typical task formats and thus test listening comprehension. Such exercises are often not useful for a gradual and systematic development of listening proficiency. This can also be recognised from the fact that notetaking tasks tend to be the exception in such language course learning materials, while exercise formats such as MC, gap-filling or true/false strongly predominate.

In the following example, the 'Topic 06 E1 Listening Activity', both the contentual reference to the theme of the unit, 'NGOs' (non-governmental organisations) and the possibility of providing several degrees of difficulty and text types in a relatively short exercise without great effort become clear. As the exercises in the first pilot phase were performed in the multimedia language laboratory, it quickly became apparent that the online audio formats (see links inserted below, task 1 and 3) could not be played back on all computers. It was therefore necessary to also offer all texts offline in MP3 format. In the following semester, this task was then performed online outside of the contact session: the students surprised the teaching staff by the fact that almost all students voluntarily listened to more than one text and roughly 40 per cent also wrote a summary of at least two texts. Two learners even wrote a summary of all three texts, although the following work instruction in Figure 6 'Topic 06 E1 Listening Activity' clearly states that only one of the three texts should be worked on.

Listen to one of the following three audio recordings about NGOs and their activities:

TASK: Listen to the whole text at least twice without interruption, and take some notes while you listen. Remember that you can stop and rewind the recording at any time. Try to understand the main ideas and summarize the report you have chosen in approximately 100 words.

1. "Non-Governmental Organizations Influence Policy Around the World" (LEVEL: Easy – a short introductory text about NGOs and their role in society)
Original source: www.voanews.com/specialenglish/2006-08-13-voa2.cfm (Voice of America)
[MP3 version](#)
2. "The World Food Programme Warns it Is Running out of Money to Help Feed Refugees in Angola" (LEVEL: Medium difficulty – a UN radio webcast interview with the representative of the World Food Programme about the dire food situation in Angola)
Original source: <http://webcast.un.org/radio/english/mp3/2006/06071300-1.mp3> (United Nations radio webcast) [MP3 version](#)
3. "SINGAPORE : NGOs boycott major world finance meeting" (LEVEL: Difficult – an Australian correspondent reports from Singapore, and the line is not clear)
Original source: www.abc.net.au/ra/asiapac/programs/m1293987.asx
[MP3 version](#) (Australian Broadcasting Corporation, Sydney)

Click the "Submit or Edit my submission" button in order to hand your text in.

Figure 6: Topic 06 E1 Listening Activity

In addition, listening activities are perfectly suited to training in independent and reflective learning. A worksheet was developed to this end which learners can use in a special learning strategy workshop for the development of listening skills. As it is not suitable for a figure or a short excerpt, it is appended in its entirety below. It becomes clear that learners are not only incited to critically scrutinise their own learning success; they also become acquainted with new possibilities of the usage of these learning proposals, check the level of difficulty of exercises specified by the authors and try out the suggested strategies /learning methods. In this way, they become acquainted with different listening strategies which are classified, for example, in 'Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab' (15) in the individual, chronologically ordered work phases – before, during and after listening.

Results and conclusions

The learning outcomes achieved were first measured by means of the evaluation of oral and written texts; in the final test, also by means of short tests in the domains of listening and reading. The overall results must be rated as good following completion of the pilot phase in all test groups in the blended learning courses (average of all BL courses, approximately 2.3). However, they deviate only very slightly from those of the control groups who have used the same materials offline. Under the given conditions, no evidence has so far been found to prove that the usage of online materials in the blended learning courses produces significantly better learning outcomes than the usage of traditional materials or that learning occurs significantly more effectively in such a context. In addition to numerous interference factors such as differences in individual requirements, general learning and working conditions or the group dynamics in the contact session, there are also objective factors such as the short duration of the study – the course only ran for a semester in each instance – and the relatively small number of subjects – approximately 18 participants per course. A factor that could also have contributed to a 'distortion' of the results was that the dropout rate was considerably higher in two out of three comparative groups than in the test groups as, for the most part, the weaker students tend to drop out during the course.

A lower dropout rate in the blended learning test groups must be seen as an extremely positive sign with regard to the student's daily life and the optimum usage of available resources. At the same time, there is justified reason to assume that progress was

made in various areas which could only be proven indirectly through observing the learners and teaching staff. This affects the following areas of independent lifelong learning:

- simpler and more targeted training in critically dealing with one's own texts and the recognition of learning deficits,
- becoming acquainted with various learning methods and learning strategies,
- greater familiarity with the forms of reflective learning,
- independent development and usage of online learning sources,
- usage of forms of online cooperation and exchange,
- better and safer dealings with electronic learning media.

In addition to the observations cited in this list, which are to be evaluated as positive in every respect, a higher continuation rate in the test groups and better evaluations of these groups in the teaching evaluation at the end of the semester leads to the conclusion that the participating students are more motivated.

Although the results are often non-conclusive, important steps have been undertaken with the development and accompanying evaluation of the learning proposal which lead to a contemporary language lesson. This involves not only the intensive usage of electronic media, but also the exploration into ways of implementing newer didactic insights with these innovative learning media without forgetting about previously acquired, established knowledge. Both within the framework of the EU-funded 'EUROVOLT via VLE' project and through independent experts, it has been confirmed that the learning materials developed meet current standards and are indicative.

Such complex material requires great initial effort on behalf of the teaching staff in preparing and giving classes compared to 'more traditional' textbook-supported language lessons. Following a short induction phase which should not last longer than two semesters, similarly as for traditional teaching and learning media, the subsequent effort for longer term usage is thoroughly tenable. It is also feasible within the framework of the scheme which underlies teaching load evaluations in university language learning establishments –with equal or greater time expenditure for the preparation and follow-up of each class taught.

Within the framework of a longer-term usage of such learning proposals, finding ways and means of reducing the time-consuming correction of semi-open exercises and more complex tasks such as translations, global comprehension, notetaking or written tasks is envisaged in the near future. The usage of parsers in the domain of spelling and grammar and more advanced tasks for the reinforcement of learner autonomy (comparison with sample texts, the independent recognition of deficits in proficiency) are conceivable here. Further provisions for the improvement of blended learning proposals must be viewed in the targeted usage of diagnostic tools for the recognition of specific, individual deficits and the creation of special exercise sequences for their effective correction.

Anyone who wishes to become acquainted with the entire course after having read the offline examples for online tasks in this article can do so on the Moodle platform of the language centre of the University of Potsdam. To this end, the internet address <http://moodle.spz.uni-potsdam.de/moodle/course/category.php?id=3> can be called up and the course 'EUROVOLT for TEACHERS / GUESTS) English for Students of Social Sciences' viewed with restricted guest access. Alternatively, if you register with the Potsdam Moodle System, you will also have learner access to the sample units '(EUROVOLT) English for Students of Social Sciences Reference Units'. As the user categories 'GUEST' and 'STUDENT' do not allow you to look 'behind the scenes', in the domains of assessment of achievement or the usage of the learning platform for performing various types of task and forms of communication, for example, during the dissemination phase of the EU project you can easily request a complete teacher/lecturer access by registering your interest by e-mail (16).

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APPENDIX

Listening Workshop Handout

Autonomous language learning – your experiences

1. Listening comprehension
2. Learning techniques
3. Examples

4. Sources / how to find material

1. Make a list of your autonomous language learning experiences:

Skills	Listening	Speaking	Pronunciation
Materials used			
General impressions			
Positive experiences			
Negative experiences			
Questions			

2. Listening comprehension

- Top-down and bottom-up processes
- Pre-listening activities (brainstorming or reflection activities)
 - General knowledge about the topic of the text
 - Background knowledge – text type
 - Words and phrases
 - Expectations concerning the content of the text
- Listening activities
 - Step 1: General understanding (do not interrupt the tape or the video)
 - Step 2: Understanding the main ideas and the most important facts (do not stop the tape or the video, take notes)
 - Step 3: Detailed understanding (stop if necessary, take notes)
 - Step 4: Transcription / translation (stop and rewind as often as necessary)
 - Step 5: Listening for words, phrases and structures (in order to learn them - word lists, index cards etc.)
- Post-listening activities
 - Pronunciation and intonation exercises
 - Learning words / phrases / sentences
 - Writing a summary / report / position paper
 - Conversation and discussion activities

3. Learning techniques

- How do I get started (topic / degree of difficulty / text types)?
- What makes a spoken text easy / difficult to understand?
- When and how should I use transcripts or subtitles, if available?
- How can I check my progress?
- Are videos easier or more difficult to understand than audio recordings?

This space is provided for additional questions you may have.

4. Examples

1. Demonstration of the Cyber Listening Lab: www.esl-lab.com
2. Working with the Cyber Listening Lab: Do at least two exercises and then fill ou the following table.

Advantages	Drawbacks	Questions
3. Using material with transcripts (BBC weekly news for learners of English) available at www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/newsenglish/index.shtml		

How would you use these news recordings?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

5. Sources / how to find material

Where can I find suitable texts offline?

How can I find good listening texts online?

Which online directories can I use?

- www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/listening.html (ESL Independent Study Lab / Listening)
- <http://esl.about.com/cs/listening/> (English listening quizzes)
- www.eslcafe.com/search/Listening/index.html (Dave's ESL Cafe)

Techniques and Tips for Autonomous Learners

Developing your skills (2001-2008) University of Manchester , Language Center , <http://www.langcent.manchester.ac.uk/resources/online/support-advice/learning-guide/sheets/> and pages linked to this site, retrieved from the internet on March 26, 2008.

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Notes

- (1) The current offer of online language courses for students of social sciences and the reference courses can be found at: <http://moodle.spz.uni-potsdam.de/moodle/course/category.php?id=3>
- (2) EUROVOLT via VLE: the official and complete description of the project is: European Vocational Online Language Teaching and Vocational Online Language Learning Via a Virtual Learning Environment. A comprehensive description of the entire project can be found on the EUROVOLT webpages at www.eurovolt.net.
- (3) Cf. also observations on needs analysis in: Skowronek (2007), p. 305-308.
- (4) Moodle is a virtual learning environment/an open-source course management system in accordance with its own definition at <http://moodle.org>. Further information about Moodle in the German language is accessible at http://docs.moodle.org/de/Was_ist_Moodle%3F.
- (5) For the evaluation, see bibliography: Kranz/Neuhoff (2007). Here it is written: "The course which has been developed and supervised at the language centre of the University of Potsdam in the blended learning process can be applied as a model for the successful implementation of a modern teaching and learning methodology."
- (6) See also <http://www.digita.de/2008/beruf3.htm>.
- (7) For a more comprehensive description of this phenomenon, see Riemer (2002), p. 56 and 64.
- (8) This task cannot be checked by the system (Moodle) within the framework of the short answer exercise format because it leads to a complex utterance. This is why the answers to this question are initially a diagnostic medium which is dealt with by the teacher and will be further discussed, where necessary, within the framework of the contact session.
- (9) See *Figure 3: Topic 03 D1 Writing Task (Graded Assignment) further down in the text.*
- (10) It was initially assumed that sufficient clarifications were available on the grammar pages on the Internet, e.g. at www.englishpage.com or <http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/grammar.htm> (UVic ELC Study Zone) which only needed to be linked to enable the students to learn. However, these linked clarifications were viewed as inferior by the students and consequently poorly evaluated due to the external linking and the missing reference to their tangible learning experiences and the themes of the course. Due to the great expense which was hardly justifiable of a complete in-house development, the in-house development was dispensed with and reference was made to grammar books available in the media library which contained rules and exercises via the linked webpages.
- (11) For an explanation of the phase model in grammar, see Raabe (2003), p. 284
- (12) For bachelor students, the marks awarded during the course are added to the overall mark for the course, and these are, in turn, recorded proportionately according to credits obtained for key qualifications on the Bachelor's certificate; in contrast to Masters and diploma students from whom only proof of ungraded 'attendance certificates' was required/is currently required.
- (13) With regard to the term 'median added value' in the context of usage of the Internet for foreign language learning, see also Rösler/Ulrich (2003), p. 140-142
- (14) This means current and popular general language materials of all levels from Fairway 1 (beginners' material A1) to New Progress to Proficiency (for very advanced learners, C1 to C2).
- (15) See [Davis \(1998-2008\)](#). This online listening laboratory is distinguished thanks to an extraordinary breadth of topics and a demarcated attainment level, also thanks to numerous pre- and post-listening exercises and exercises relating to detailed comprehension and the words and phrases used. In any case, even the texts in the domain '**Listening Quizzes for Academic Purposes**' have a rather slight specialist reference and the identification of the attainment level (beginner – intermediate – advanced) is not always comprehensible.
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Article:

Can the teacher be taken out of the teaching?

A pilot project on intensifying a course in English and its implications for results, motivation and workload

Abstract

The increasing number of master's degree courses taught in English has created a rising demand for English language courses at our university. These courses last one semester, which presents problems for exchange students, who sometimes arrive when the semester has already started, but also for regular students, who experience clashes in their schedules in the second quarter of the semester as most other courses are organized in a period of seven weeks. To cope with these problems we decided to change a 14 week-course into an intensive 7-week course with a prominent role for ICT.

In the new course we decided to use the standard digital learning environment at our university (Blackboard) for instruction and a wiki for interaction and collaboration, with both tools taking over part of the teacher's role. We ran two pilot projects with a total of 19 students. The course was also offered in its regular form to a group of 15 students. After the course, all the students were asked to fill in a questionnaire in which we asked their opinion about the use of ICT and the general usefulness of the course. The questionnaire showed that the students liked using the wiki and Blackboard but some indicated that they would have liked more time to practise their oral skills. Students from the pilot group on average reported to have spent less time on the course than students from the regular course, although they still thought of the course as having a heavy workload. When it comes to teaching hours, contact time in the classroom was decreased to 14 hours, but outside the classroom teachers put in just as many hours marking work and communicating with students as they did in the regular course.

Key words: English, wiki, e-learning, intensive course

1. Why this project?

In The Netherlands many master's degree programmes are taught in English, and as universities anticipate or already experience problems in students' knowledge of English, most of them offer English courses to prepare their students for English-medium education.

At Delft University of Technology (from now on: TU Delft) we offer several English courses to students. These courses last one semester (14 sessions), but most other courses are organized in a period of seven weeks, which presents problems for students, who experience clashes in their schedules in the second quarter of the semester. Exchange students experience another problem: they often find that they cannot join a course anymore because they arrive when our semester has already started, because of obligations at their home university. This results in students either leaving the course after one quarter, or not joining at all. For a number of reasons, among which are organisational and financial reasons, this is not a desirable situation.

A project initiated by the [SURF-foundation](#) gave us the opportunity to see if we could change this situation. Our goal in the project was to see if we could take one of our existing courses and adapt it in such a way that the course would last seven weeks. This would give us the opportunity to offer the course twice a semester. At the same time we had to keep in mind the aim of our regular courses which is to prepare students for English-medium instruction and we therefore also wanted to see if intensifying a course affected students' results.

In this article the project will be described so that teachers considering developing similar courses may benefit from our experiences. We will focus on how we adapted the course; i.e. what changes were made, what were its implications and what students thought about the course. We will also compare results between students from the new and the existing course.

2. What did we do?

We ran a pilot project from September 2007 until January 2008. An intensive course meant that we decreased teacher-student contact time from 28 to 14 hours, so from 14 to seven weeks, with one session of two hours per week, while the study load remained the same: 84 hours, credited with 3 ECTS. The objectives and contents of the two courses were the same to be able to compare if there were any differences between the two courses. Our approach was to see what we would normally discuss in class, and then decide if other media would be able to take over those parts of the course. We used two systems for this: Blackboard for instruction and a wiki for cooperation between students.

We used Blackboard because this is the system that is used at TU Delft so students were already familiar with it for finding information. We wanted it to represent the more formal aspect of the course, the place of instruction. The reason for also choosing a wiki was that we wanted to create an atmosphere of informal cooperation, to better reflect circumstances that occur in a classroom. We opted for a wiki, rather than scheduling unsupervised sessions at the university, as we thought that students of the 21st century are used to this form of communication and prefer this way of working over classroom attendance. There were also two practical reasons for choosing a wiki: with a shortage of classrooms at the university we did not want to claim four hours a week for our classes and we feared that fewer students would sign up for the course if it consisted of two sessions as they may have found it hard to fit these hours into their schedules.

In the next section we will elaborate on the use of Blackboard and the wiki by showing practical examples of how the different skills were offered in the course.

2.1 How did we use Blackboard?

The Blackboard environment was used for instruction: all documents with information related to the topics discussed in the course were stored here and became available to students on a weekly basis. Besides that, we stored mp3 files in Blackboard and made a Toolbox available to guide students to useful links. This toolbox was one of the outcomes of the national project mentioned in the introductory paragraphs; i.e. all the participating institutes contributed to forming a database with links to useful websites. The list was compiled in a file that could be exported and imported in the Blackboard environment, which all the institutes used. Exchanging information like this meant that we were able to benefit from each other's work and did not need to find out everything by ourselves.

The materials that were offered to the students were a mix of teaching materials found on the web and those we developed ourselves. Taking part in the SURF-project gave us extra time to develop these materials.

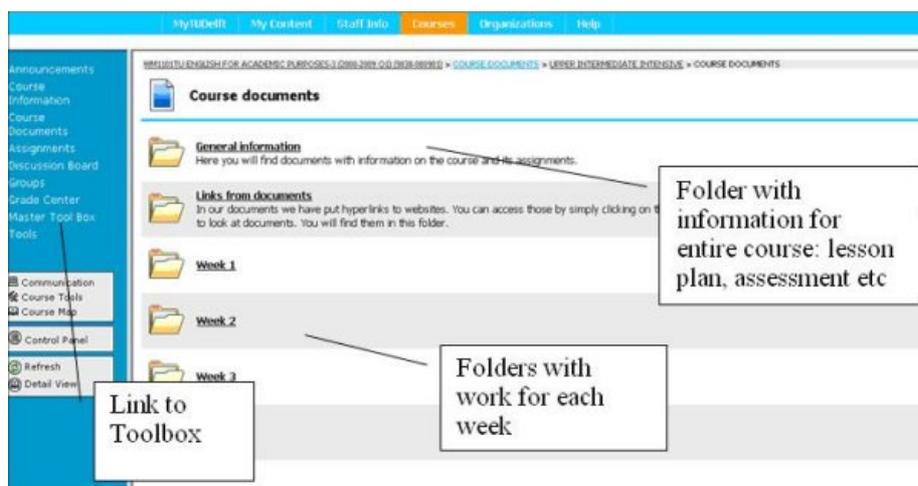


Figure 1: Example of structure of the course in Blackboard

Figure 2: Example of assignments in Blackboard

2.2 How did we use the wiki?

First we created a wiki through pbwiki.com, a site that apart from hosting wikis for a fee, also hosts free wikis. We made pages for separate topics discussed in the seven weeks. At the beginning of the course we asked students to create their own page in which they put recordings and exercises. The teacher also had her own page and there were pages where students could contact each other to ask questions (figure 3). One of the features of the wiki is that a chat plug-in can be inserted. We asked students to use this option to talk with each other outside the class room.

A disadvantage, however, of this free wiki is that there is limited storage capacity so that the students had to delete the files from previous weeks to make room for new assignments.

Figure 3: Example of Wiki page

2.3 What did we do in the sessions?

2.3.1 Presentations

In the regular course students do a warming up exercise on good and bad presentations and on why giving a presentation is usually such a nerve-wrecking event. In the following session they give a short presentation to a small group, after which they get feedback, especially on the overall structure, the use of PowerPoint or other visual aids and whether they used signposts or not.

In the intensive course the wiki takes over most of this: students add their ideas on good or bad presentations to a page within the wiki (see figure 4) and cooperate on making a list of useful signposts. In the session they give a short presentation, with group mates giving feedback on the aspects mentioned above. For the next session, they work in pairs and write signposts for each other's presentation, using the PowerPoint slides that they posted on the wiki.

Figure 4: Discussion on presentations in the wiki

2.3.2 Pronunciation

In the regular course pronunciation is a recurring aspect in the first quarter; each week a certain sound or phonetic phenomenon is discussed and briefly practised. After that time, pronunciation problems are discussed when and if relevant. In the intensive course pronunciation comes back each week in the preparation stage by using [Audacity](#), or another digital recording program; students record themselves reading a short text and do exercises from [www.shipsheep.com](#). This site offers a large number of minimal pairs and tongue twisters. Students hear the minimal pairs and tongue twisters and record themselves repeating these. They then put their recording on the wiki where the teacher can access them so she can feedback during the session. Apart from that, students listen to downloads from the BBC on linking and weak forms and do an exercise on this. Again, the completed exercise is posted on the wiki so that the students can look at each other's answers.

Giving feedback on pronunciation takes quite some time and although students appreciate the feedback and the fact that the topic is part of the course, it would take up too much time in either course if we practised pronunciation more.

2.3.3 Writing skills

In the regular course the theory of topic sentences, sentence constructions and overall structure is introduced in class. Practising this usually takes place during the session with students writing a number of assignments during the course. Doing exercises on formal writing, collocations and word families is also part of the course. This is brought to the students in a rather traditional way: after an introduction students do exercises, either in class or at home, and receive feedback on these in the session.

In the intensive course the theory is presented in the documents that are put on Blackboard. Students are then asked to write a short paragraph which they talk about in class with a partner. After that they also write a number of longer writing assignments. Collocations are introduced in a document in Blackboard and students read websites about how to make their language more formal. As this is a new topic for most students a class discussion usually follows. Just as in the regular course, an exercise on word families is discussed in class.

2.4 How did we assess them?

Students from both courses are assessed in the same way. They do a number of writing assignments, deliver a presentation and sit an exam. The exam consists of two parts; a text with comprehension and vocabulary questions, and cloze test, based on texts that students have to study on their own.

3. Did it work?

3.1 Did they work?

At the end of the courses we asked students to fill in a questionnaire to see how they had liked the course. Fifteen students started in the regular course, but only nine of them finished it, with six of them filling in a questionnaire. Divided over the two pilots, 19 students started the intensive course, but only eleven finished it and ten of them filled in the questionnaire.

We asked students about the number of hours they had spent on the course. Their answer was based on their own estimations; we did not ask them to keep a log in which they kept track of the number of hours they spent each week. On average, students from the intensive course indicated they spent 7.7 hours per week preparing for the session, while students from the regular course spent 5 hours on this. When adding the hours for the sessions (14 and 28 respectively), it turns out that students from the intensive course spent a total of 67.9 hours on the course and students from the regular course spent 98 hours in total on average. The estimated workload for the course was 84 hours, 3 ECTS.

Students in the intensive course wrote in the survey that they felt that the course was indeed intensive, but that they also knew they had not spent as much time on the course as they should have. This had to do with obligations for other courses. As one student wrote: "the preparations, texts, grammar and assignments are almost too much for 1 week; other lessons still ask attention too".

With such a small group it is very difficult to draw conclusions from the results. For these 20 students the following can be drawn. Students from the intensive course scored higher on the comprehension part of the test; on average 18.8 out of a possible 32, whereas the students from the regular course scored 10.7 on average. In the other three parts students from the regular course scored better; from the 25 points they could get for their gap-filling exam, they scored 13.6 on average, whereas the students from the intensive course scored 12.4. On average, students from the intensive course scored 6.4 out of a possible 10 for the presentation, with the students from the regular course doing slightly better: 6.7. The differences in the averages for the writing assignments were bigger: 5.9 out of 10 for the intensive course and 6.7 for the regular course.

It is interesting to see that from the four parts of the assessment, students in the regular course scored higher on three of them, but because the group was so small, it would be unwise to draw any conclusions from that, or to try to offer any explanations for this.

3.2 Did they like it?

We also asked students about the use of Blackboard and the wiki. Students in the intensive course gave higher marks to the statement "the information in Blackboard was sufficient". This seems logical, as they were more dependent on the use of Blackboard. As we did not use a wiki in the regular course, students in that course did not answer questions about this. Students from the intensive course thought the wiki was easy to use but most of them also felt that the wiki was not a good replacement for time spent with their teacher.

Only one student did not like working with the wiki, but did not mention why not. Some students indicated that they would have preferred the use of MSN over the use of the Wiki plug-in to talk to each other. When developing this course, we had considered using this program, but decided against using a third means of communication so as not to make things too complicated.

Students felt that the information offered to them in Blackboard and the wiki was enough to prepare them for the sessions. Before the project started, we were apprehensive that, just like in an ordinary classroom, some students would be more active in the wiki than others, but students did not experience it like that; in responding to the statement "Other participants had already added so much information that I couldn't add anything else", 8 out of nine (totally) disagreed with this statement with one of them writing: "you can always add something more".

When looking at the responses students gave in the exercises on good and bad presentations it seems that the wiki as a discussion board was a good replacement. Students mentioned the same aspects as students from the regular course and seemed at ease with working on each other's presentation outside the classroom. Naturally students from the regular course had more time to practise their presentation skills, but the students from the intensive course did not mind about this. They knew that an intensive course meant less time for practice in the class room. Both groups scored more or less the same on how useful they thought this part of the

course was. There does not seem, therefore, to be a major difference in the way students react to the teaching methods of the writing skills. Both groups thought the topics discussed for this skill were useful.

Students from both groups were given the opportunity to supply other comments on the course. Most of the students from the intensive course mentioned that they had chosen the right course for them. The reasons for this were for example not having much time in the other half of the semester or not needing a longer course as they thought their English was already quite good. Some also mentioned that this was the only course left, as they were too late to register for the regular course, or that this course was a good way to receive 3 ECTS in 7 weeks. Comments they wrote in this part of the questionnaire were for eg "I like the intensive course, it is more efficient" and "Right choice!" Regarding the contents of the course, some of the students in the intensive course mentioned that they would have liked to spend more time in class: "Next time I would choose the longer course, because there is more time for discussion with the teacher".

It is interesting to see what the students liked best about the course: "presentations", "oral presentations", "discussions" and "small groups", with two mentioning "Blackboard" and "self-study". When asked what they had missed some responded: "I missed more discussion and a teacher correcting my mistakes in speech" and "more discussions on topics in class; more discussions in class".

Students in the regular course were also asked to give additional comments. Most of them felt that they had chosen the correct course, even when they knew there was an intensive course as well, as they felt that an intensive course would have been too much work for them. As one student wrote: "Considering the schedule of the other courses, I think a longer English course it better".

What the survey did not measure, was the long-term effect of the two courses. It will be interesting to see how much retention there is and if there is a difference between what students from the regular course and students from the intensive course remember after a longer period of time. However, this will be very difficult to look into, as after the course our students move on to many different directions. This means that some of them may continue English-medium instruction, whereas others may not, which makes it very difficult to compare long-term effects.

3.3 Did we work?

Teachers are given a number of hours to teach the course, prepare the sessions and assess students' work. For the regular course this was 80 hours, for the intensive course this was 60 hours. The hours for developing the course were part of the SURF-project and are not taken into account here.

The teacher who taught the courses kept a journal in which she recorded the number of hours she spent on teaching and preparing the course. She also kept track of the number of hours she put into administration, e-mail contact with students and how much time she spent on the wiki. The number of hours was 78 for the regular course and 62 for the intensive course. This is fairly consistent with the number of hours that were anticipated, 80 and 60 respectively.

3.4 Did we like it?

The teacher noticed that more self-study for the students meant more, rather than less work for her. In itself that was not a problem, but the extra work involved checking whether the students had done their work, rather than communicating with them.

The students were not fully aware that they were supposed to have done all the work before coming to class, which made it necessary to repeat some of the information. One session per week was therefore hardly enough to elaborate on and practise the topics and to give feedback to the students. This made the course not as effective as it could have been, which was somewhat frustrating.

The fact that the course took only seven weeks meant that teaching time had to be used as efficiently as possible. This left little room for other aspects, such as talking about cultural differences, which, because there are many different nationalities in our groups, is usually a topic in the regular course.

From a more personal view point the teacher mentioned that she, probably like most teachers, has chosen her profession for the personal contact she has with students and this is exactly what this project has decreased.

4. What are we doing now?

At the moment of writing, September 2008, we are offering the intensive course for the fourth time and in the meantime we have made some changes to both courses. After the first two pilots, the exam for the intensive course was changed so that it now reflects the contents of the course to a larger extent. As this was perceived as a weakness in the regular course too, this change will also be made in the regular course exam.

Another change that was made was that we check more regularly if students actually do all the preparation for the intensive course by asking them to publish most of their work in the wiki. This makes the wiki less of the informal means of communication we intended it to be, but students do not seem to object to this. They take their own page seriously, even adding personal touches.

More time was spent on pronunciation in the preparation for the sessions for the intensive course than in the regular course. Because of the SURF-project, we had extra time to develop a new course, which was partly spent on finding websites that give extra information on pronunciation. To have students from the regular course benefit from this information as well, we have added the BBC programmes to the regular course.

We altered the way texts are used in the courses. Before, they were mainly used in both courses for self-study; students had to look up unknown words and had to sit a gap-filling test based on the texts at the end of the course. The texts are now more closely connected with the writing assignments in class; among other things we ask students to find collocations in the texts, to look for topic sentences and to indicate different kinds of sentence constructions to make them more aware of these. As no assessment has taken place yet, it is too early to see if these changes have improved the students' writing skills.

In the pilot project one session was scheduled for discussions, but it turned out that the writing and presentation skills took up too much time so that the time left for discussions was not sufficient, which left both the teacher and the students with a dissatisfied feeling. Discussions are no longer a part of the new course, which gives us more time for the other two skills.

In the first pilot the presentations were part of the course itself. The group of students was very small so we were able to listen to all the final presentations in the last session. It made us realise though, that we would never be able to listen to all the discussions if the groups had its regular size of 15. Besides this, we wanted the presentations to be more authentic, so we asked the students to send in a presentation that they had to give for another course at the University. Another reason for taking the final presentation out of the course was that this gave us more time to practise presentation skills.

At the moment half of the students send in a presentation that they give for other courses. The other students do not give a presentation (in English), so for them we make other arrangements; we make reservations for a room at the University and ask the students to record the presentation without a teacher being present. This puts less time pressure on the students, but it gives the

teacher extra work as watching videos and giving feedback afterwards takes more time than giving instantaneous feedback.

5. What still needs to be done...

The small number of students and the fact that only one teacher took part in the project affected the reliability of our findings. This makes it very difficult to draw conclusions from the results and further research is needed to see if the effects that were seen in this study are valid for a larger group of students. Any long term effects were not studied in this project and further research is needed in this respect too.

We used a wiki rather than unsupervised classroom sessions for students to cooperate. It would be interesting to see what the outcome of a project like this would be if we scheduled these sessions at the University and gave students instructions on what to do during these sessions.

With all the changes we made, for example limiting the number of skills in the intensive course, it could be argued that the one is no longer just an intensive version of the other. If we also consider the fact that students indicated that they did not spend the time required on the intensive course, we may need to rethink the credits the students get for the intensive course or make them more aware of the fact that an intensive course means double the work in half the time.

6. So, can the teacher be taken out of the teaching?

We seemed to have solved one of the two problems we were faced with; i.e. students leaving the course because of clashes in their schedules or arriving too late to enrol in our regular courses. The project also suggests that it seems possible to reduce the number of sessions by using Blackboard and a wiki page. Intensifying a course does not reduce the workload, especially not for teachers. Students need to do the same work in a shorter period, which makes them economise on the hours they are supposed to spend on the course and although there is less teaching time for the teachers, more time is spent on checking if students do the preparations, on communicating with the students in the wiki and on assessing the presentations that are sent in after the course.

Responses from the teacher and the students indicate that although they appreciate the effects of an intensive course, they prefer more and more frequent personal contact. So, although up to a certain point it looks as if the teacher can be taken out of the teaching, it remains to be seen if she wants to be taken out of it.

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Article

EasyEnglish – An Innovative System for Vocabulary Building based on Awareness Strategies

Abstract

Vocabulary is very important for language tasks such as reading, writing, and speaking. Many vocabulary learning strategies have been proposed by researchers: word lists, use of dictionaries and extensive reading. While these strategies are useful for learning new words, they are not concerned with whether students can accumulate the new words and build up their vocabulary continually. Many ESL learners find it hard to remember the new words they learned, and they are stuck with a certain amount of vocabulary. In this paper, we describe EasyEnglish, an innovative system for vocabulary building based on awareness strategies (Nguyen, Gillet, and Sire 2004). Students use an online dictionary to learn new words from reading, and words are automatically stored into a personalized library for future revision. Reminders are given to encourage students to revise the words again and again, so that they will not forget them. We conducted an experiment with 1683 students from eight secondary schools in Hong Kong. Results showed that students continued to accumulate new words in a period of six months, and maintained a high retention rate of over 90%. Results also showed that awareness is an important motivational strategy for this vocabulary building process.

Keywords : vocabulary building, awareness, motivation, space repetition, progress, ranking

1. Introduction

"How many English words do you know?" This is a question that few people can give a definite answer. "How many English words do I need to learn?" Teachers always encourage students to learn more, but they seldom offer a concrete learning goal, which is needed for students to benchmark their progress. "How can I learn these new words without forgetting?" Students learn words in class and from reading. Yet after days or weeks, they are discouraged that they keep on forgetting them anyway.

Vocabulary is very important for different language tasks such as reading (Witrock, Marks and Doctorow 1975; Laufer 1989, 1992), writing (Bachman & Palmer 1996) and speaking (Coady, Magott, Hubbard, Graney & Mokhtari 1993). It is agreed that people with large vocabularies are more proficient readers than those with limited vocabularies (Beglar & Hunt 1995). Nonetheless, many ESL learners are stuck with a certain amount of vocabulary at some stage, and are incapable to further expand their vocabulary.

Many researchers have proposed different strategies for vocabulary learning, for examples, the use of dictionaries (Lupescu & Day 1993), vocabulary cards (Tatsuya Nakata 2008), word lists (Tatsuya Nakata 2008), and extensive reading (Johnson, A. & Heffernan, N. 2006). All these strategies are useful, and it is shown that students who apply multiple learning strategies are more successful in vocabulary building (Chamot 2004). Still, many learners are not motivated to use these strategies as a lifelong learning practice. This is especially true for the use of dictionary. For example, many ESL learners seldom use a dictionary to learn new words, and when they read English articles, they focus on the meaning instead of expanding their vocabulary.

Being ESL learners ourselves, we understand the frustration felt by learners. We did try to use a dictionary to learn new words. We even tried to associate them with images, sounds, or other words. Yet after days or weeks, unless we met these words again and again (like terminologies in academic subjects), we were discouraged that we would forget them anyway. Soon, we would give up and were convinced that we would not be able to learn more words.

In this research, our focus is not on learning strategies. Rather, we focus on how to motivate students to continue learning new words. In the literature, it is discussed that awareness is an important factor for motivation (A.V. N-guyen, D. Gillet & S. Sire 2004). If learners know their pace of learning, as well as the progress of other learners, learners will be more motivated to learn and take actions to enhance their learning (Jermann, Soller & Muehlenbrock 1996). For example, if we know how many words we learned (e.g.,

2401 words), we may be more motivated to learn more words and increase our vocabulary to say, 2411 words.

2. Vocabulary Learning Strategies

In this section, we review some vocabulary learning strategies and their limitations. They are word list, extensive reading, use of dictionary, and memorization strategies. These strategies are useful for vocabulary learning, but they cannot guarantee that students will continuously use them. We then discuss how awareness can motivate students to use these strategies for vocabulary building.

2.1 Word Lists

Word lists have been used extensively to teach vocabulary. Teachers give a word list to students, and require students to learn their meaning and spelling. This approach is an efficient study method in which students can learn a large number of words in a short time (Meara 1995). However, in a word list, words are stripped of their context-based meanings. To remedy this problem, it was proposed that word lists should be based on reading articles. Word lists serve another purpose in a reading class. Shillaw (1995) offered to his students a corpus-based list of the 3000 most frequently used words, and observed a marked increase in interest in learning them. A word list can therefore serve as a motivation tool as well as a learning target for students to expand their vocabulary. We can have two kinds of word lists:

- Graded word lists – consisting of the basic words for students to learn. The objective is to encourage students to master a certain number of words at a given level.
- Personal word lists – consisting of the new words a user acquired through reading. The objective is to convert vocabulary building into a lifelong activity. Storing the new words allows learner to revise and master them.

2.2 Extensive Graded Reading

Studies have shown that learning through extensive reading is the most important means by which native speakers acquire the majority of their vocabulary (Sarag, Nation & Meister 1978). However, readers need to understand approximately 95% of the words in the text in order to infer its meaning (Laufer 1989). For L2 learners, linguistically graded texts are used to enhance their reading ability, and students can make gradual vocabulary gains through reading (Davis 1995). Still, the use of extensive reading for vocabulary learning has its limitation. Implicit acquisition can be time consuming and frustrating if learners have too many unknown words. On the other hand, readers usually focus on the meaning rather than individual words. As long as they understand a passage, they have no motivation to check the dictionary and acquire the new words. Students usually do not spend extra effort to learn new words unless it is required by the teacher. Teachers therefore need to make vocabulary building an explicit learning objective.

2.3 Use of Dictionaries

A dictionary is a convenient tool to look up meanings of words. Learning vocabulary through reading can be done by contextual guessing or dictionary use. Contextual clues surrounding an unfamiliar word can help determine the meaning of a word (Parry 1991). Still, a dictionary provides more comprehensive information and an accurate meaning for a word (Huckin & Haynes 1993:290). Mondria (2003) claimed that the meaning-inferred method is more time-consuming compared with the meaning-given method (e.g., from teacher or dictionary). Lupescu and Day (1993) found that learners who use a bilingual dictionary could learn more words than students who read without a dictionary. One major obstacle to the use of a dictionary is the memorization problem. The acquisition of a word after a single exposure in a reading context indicates a very low rate of retention (Coady 1997; Knight 1994). Without applying retention strategies, vocabulary building is not effective at all. Even though there are many online dictionaries on the Internet, few provide mechanisms to store and revise new words. We will show later that by storing new words and providing revision mechanisms, users will be aware that they are learning and retaining new words. As a result, students are more motivated to use the dictionary for vocabulary building.

2.4 Memorization Strategies

Learning new words is important, but to remember them is perhaps more important. Memorization strategies can be classified into two types: cognitive strategy and repetition strategy. Cognitive strategy refers to the identification of new words with certain features (sounds, meaning, word forms), and associate them with other words, meanings, or visual images. It is hoped that when we see the same word again in the future, we will be able to recall its meaning by identifying its features. Consider two new words: bark and bask. We can associate them with bark, a word we already knew:

- bark – to make a loud and explosive sound, possibly by a dog.
- bask – to warm oneself under the sun or by continual exposure to heat.
- balk – to leave, to foil, to quit.

We see that bask has an "s", we can associate the word with "sun". Balk has an "l", we can associate with the word "leave". We can then recall these words easily in future by identifying the "s" and the "l". Note, however, that identifying associations takes time and effort, and not every word lends itself to easy associations. And if one does not see the same words again in future, he or she will soon forget them.

Repetition strategy has been proved to be useful for vocabulary retention. Research shows that revision is more effective when distributed over a period of time (Stevick 1976). In addition, experiments (Bahrick and Phelps 1987) show that distributed practice with gradual spaced repetition can maximize vocabulary retention. In this paper we will study how to use repetition strategy to motivate users to continue learning new words.

2.5 Awareness Strategies

Awareness of individual progress is useful to motivate learning. Students should be aware of the learning objectives and progress towards these objectives. In Trude Heift's (2005) research, students were allowed to view their learning progress at any time. 70% of the learners repeated the exercises after viewing their results, implying that learners were influenced by their own progress. Group awareness offers opportunities for learners to learn from one another. According to Dourish & Bellotti (1992), group awareness, is defined as "an understanding of the activities and progresses of others, which provides a context for your own activities". Results show that awareness of group activities, group progress, and the social structure of the community benefited both the professors and the students in the learning process.

There is no doubt that awareness can motivate learning. We are interested to see if we can incorporate awareness in the design of CALL systems to enhance language learning. In doing so, we need mechanisms to measure the progress of language learning. We immediately see that some activities cannot be measured. Reading an article, viewing a flash card, listening to an audio clip, and watching a video clip are all good CALL activities. However, it is impossible to know whether students have really engaged in these activities instead of just adopting a "click and go" attitude. We need questions or assessments. These questions usually refer to the results of learning (whether a learner has understood a passage) instead of the process itself (whether a learner has read a passage).

In this paper, we focus on awareness strategies for vocabulary building. Note that it is easy to measure the progress – how many

words a student has learned so far. But we are immediately faced with the question of how to define whether a student has really learned a word. Should we define his/her receptive ability, i.e. a learner can recognize a word, or his/her productive ability, i.e. a learner can apply a word in his or her own sentences (Laufer, Elder, Hill & Congdon 2004)? We decided to focus on word recognition, that is, when a learner can recognize an English word and associate the word with its meaning. We believe that when a learner recognizes more words, he or she will be benefited with better reading capability. And when a learner becomes aware that he/she can recognize unfamiliar words in reading, he or she will be motivated to learn and use new words in various contexts. We believe that reading is the best strategy in mastering the use of new words. Vocabulary building strategies are meant to support reading activities, not replacing them.

3. Research Design

We design a CALL system, EasyEnglish, based on awareness and retention strategies. EasyEnglish is a software application that learners download and run in their own computer, but it is not a standalone application. Rather, it is an online client that allows users to logon to the server, and access all online functionalities and personal data. A client software can access to local files and functions (e.g., audio recording), and allows learners to access to his online personal data anytime, anywhere. A student can logon at school, learn new words, and then return home and revise them. In the following, we discuss its design in relation to our research objectives.

3.1 Online dictionary

The first facility is an online dictionary. EasyEnglish offers a bilingual dictionary with over 180,000 English words. Figure 1 shows that students can look up the meaning of words (in both English and Chinese) and listen to the pronunciation. The IPA phonetic notation is provided to aid the learning of pronunciation.

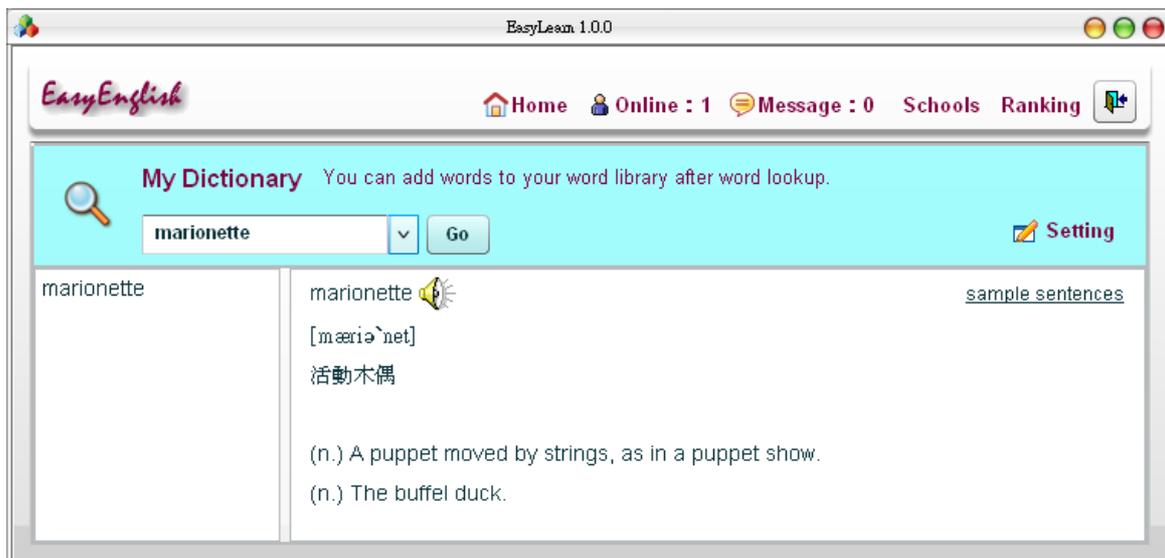


Figure 1: Online Dictionary

To support vocabulary building, EasyEnglish automatically stores new words into a personalized dictionary list (Figure 2). Learners will be able to refer to this list and revise the words accordingly. This feature serves two purposes – awareness and sustainability. A learner is aware of the new words he has accumulated so far, and his learning becomes a learner-centric, sustainable process. To aid the learning of a word within context, learners may add or refer to example sentences.

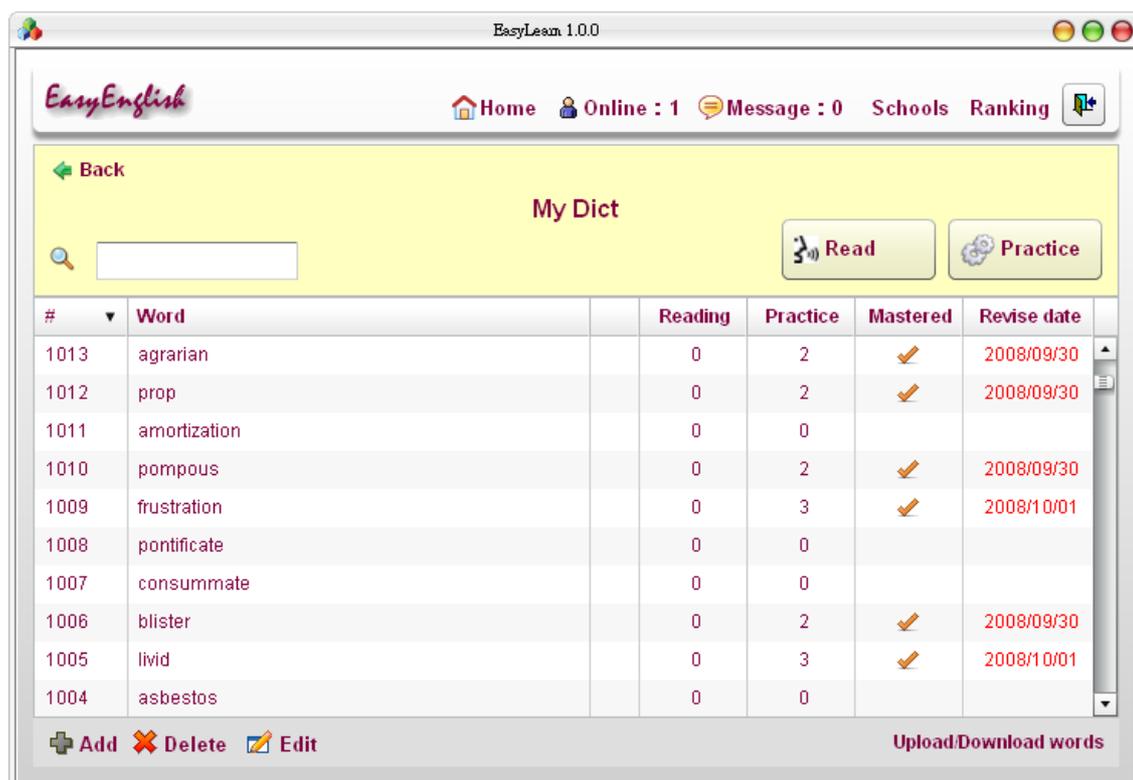


Figure 2: Word List of Online Dictionary

3.2 Word practice

The second facility is word practice. Note that there are many forms of word activities, from simple multiple choices to complex sentence construction. Table 1 shows some typical activities, each with a specific learning purpose.

System question	Requested response	Learning purpose
English word	Select a Chinese meaning from 4 choices	User can recognize the meaning of an English word
Audio of a word	Type in the English spelling	User can spell the English word
Chinese meaning	Select an English word based on the 4 meanings	User can recall an English word based on its meaning
Sample sentence	Fill an English word into a blank of a sentence	User can recall an English word based on a sample sentence
English word	Record a pronunciation	User can read out the word
English word	Construct a sentence based on the English word	User can apply a word by constructing a sentence

Table 1: Word practice activities

There is a temptation to include as many activities as possible, since (i) each activity seems to address a different perspective of learning, and (ii) activities of multiple dimensions may help consolidate understanding. But learners may feel overloaded with too many activities, and too much time spending on the same word implies a low learning efficiency. We need to confine the activities needed for learning new words. Note that the acquisition of a word develops in several stages (Laufer, Elder, Hill & Congdon 2004):

- Unknown – the word is new to the user.
- Recognition – the user can recognize the word and its meaning.
- Recall – the user can recall a word from a given meaning or a similar word.
- Productive – the user can use the word in his/her own sentences in speaking or writing.

When we designed our system, we tried various forms of exercises and gathered user feedback. We found that it was difficult for learners to learn new words by doing exercises that are "recall" or "productive" in nature. Learners found it difficult to write a sentence for words that they were not yet familiar with. To reduce the learning barrier, EasyEnglish provides three simple learning activities – word meaning, spelling, and pronunciation.

Figure 3 shows the word meaning activity in which the learner is required to recognize an English word given a Chinese meaning. Figure 4 shows the spelling activity in which the learner is required to spell an English word.

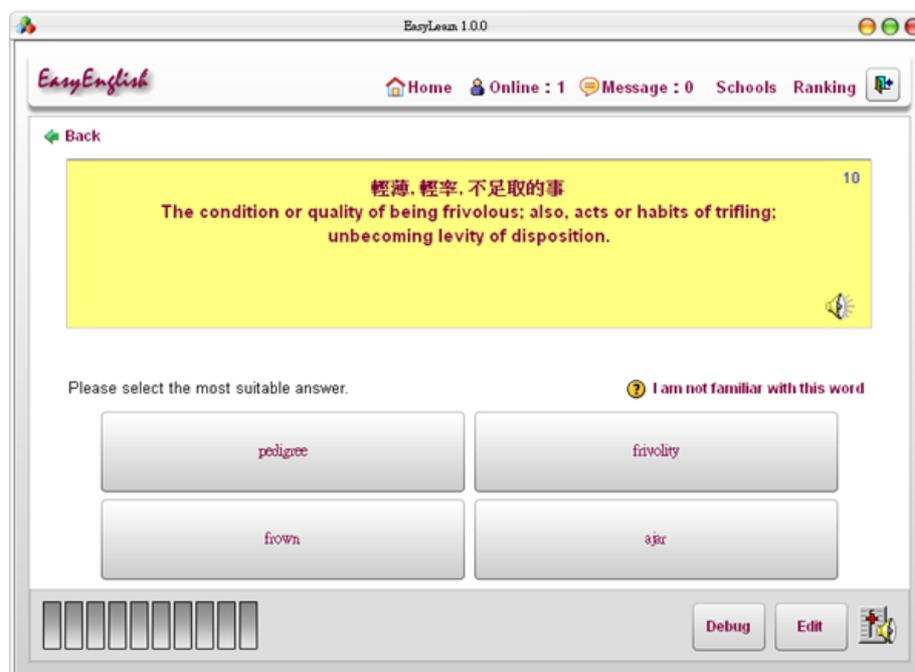


Figure 3: Word meaning activity



Figure 4: Word spelling activity

Figure 5 shows the pronunciation activity. The learner will hear the pronunciation of a word, and then record his own pronunciation. The two audios will be compared and displayed in the form of a timing diagram and a pitch curve. A score is calculated based on rhythm and pitch differences.

EasyLearn 1.0.0

EasyEnglish

Home Online : 1 Message : 0 Schools Ranking

Back

Word **adage** /e: dizh/

古話, 格言, 諺語
An old saying, which has obtained credit by

Reference

Me

#	Word	Score
1	abyss	1
2	acumen	5
3	adage	4.6

Please read after the first green light.

Record

Score ★★★★★☆

Figure 5: Word pronunciation activity

To further reduce the learning barrier, we provide a check-answer function. If learners are not sure about the answer, they can select an "I am not familiar with this word" option to view the correct answer. The system will show the correct answer immediately and ask the learner to type in the word in order to consolidate the learning.

3.3 Revision engine

Research shows that learners cannot really acquire a word unless seeing it again and again. It was found that it takes at least 6 to

8 times for a learner to retain a new word (Rott 1999; Waring & Takaki 2003). We implemented a revision engine as shown in Figure 6. When a new word is learned, it is put into the master list. The word is then associated with a "revise date". When the revise date is due, the word is listed as a "to-be-revised" word. After revision, the word is stored back into the mastered word list.

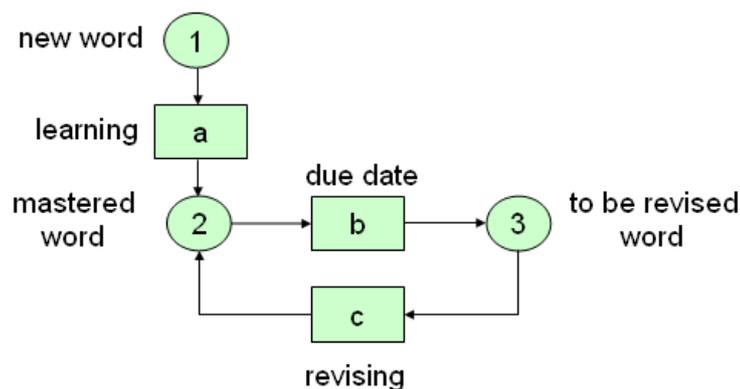


Figure 6: Revision flow diagram

Figure 7 shows that each word is associated with a learn date and a revise date. When the revise date is due, an alert will pop up to remind the learner for revision. Hence the learner will keep revising the words until they are truly acquired. Figure 8 shows a reminder that the learner has 157 words to be revised.

The screenshot shows the 'EasyLearn 1.0.0' application window. The main content area is titled 'Revise' and contains a search bar and a 'Revise' button. Below this is a table with the following data:

#	Word	Learn date	Revise date
158	yearn	2008/07/25	2008/08/13
157	vogue	2008/07/22	2008/08/09
156	vitriol	2008/06/01	2008/08/12
155	vigilant	2008/06/07	2008/08/14
154	vicious	2008/06/03	2008/08/09
153	veritable	2008/07/25	2008/08/13
152	unassailable	2008/01/19	2008/08/14
151	typology	2008/07/25	2008/08/14
150	trunnion	2007/11/23	2008/08/16
149	truant	2008/05/16	2008/08/12

At the bottom of the table, there is a 'Delete' button with a red 'X' icon.

Figure 7: Words with revise dates

Figure 8: Revision reminder

Figure 9 shows a typical memory forgetting curve proposed by [Hermann Ebbinghaus](#) (1885), who discovered the exponential nature of forgetting. The following formula roughly describes the relationship between memory retention with time:

$$R = e^{-ts}$$

where R is memory retention, S is the relative strength of memory, and t is time.

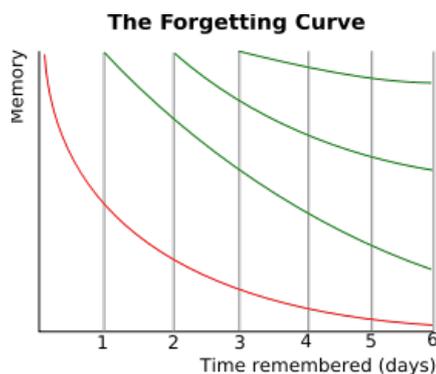


Figure 9: Forgetting Curve

We see that memory decays faster at the beginning, and slower as time progresses. Bahrick and Phelps (1987) showed that distributed practice with spaced repetition can enhance the retention of words. Sebastian Leitner (2006) proposed a system of using flash cards to revise words, allowing more frequent revision for newer words. We need to design a spaced repetition scheme for revising new words.

Let $D(1)$ be the date when the word is first learned. We schedule a revision date $R(1)$ and give a reminder to the learner. After the learner revises the word on date $D(2)$, we schedule another reminder $R(2)$, and so on. We define $G(1), G(2), \dots, G(n)$ to be the number of days lapsed before the next reminder. That is,

$$\begin{aligned} R(1) &= D(1) + G(1) \\ R(2) &= D(2) + G(2) \\ &\dots \\ R(n) &= D(n) + G(n) \end{aligned}$$

We considered the first spaced repetition scheme - Exponential Scheduling (ES), where $G(n)$ is increased in an exponential manner.

$$\begin{aligned} G(1) &= 1 \\ G(2) &= 2^1 = 2 \\ G(3) &= 2^2 = 4 \\ &\dots \\ G(n) &= 2^{n-1} \end{aligned}$$

Results showed that ES performed reasonably well if learners followed the revision schedule closely. Nevertheless, some learners could forget to do revision. Hence we need to shorten our gaps to make up for the lost time. The revised scheme is Fibonacci Scheduling (FS), in which $G(n)$ is increased according to the Fibonacci number series. That is,

$$\begin{aligned}
 G(1) &= 1 \\
 G(2) &= 2 \\
 G(3) &= G(2) + G(1) = 3 \\
 G(4) &= G(3) + G(2) = 5 \\
 &\dots \\
 G(n) &= G(n-1) + G(n-2)
 \end{aligned}$$

Let us use an example to illustrate the revision scheduling algorithm. Let us assume that a new word is learned on July 2. The system will then schedule revisions on the following dates, assuming that learners do the revisions on time.

- July 3 (one day later),
- July 5 (two days later),
- July 8 (three days later),
- July 13 (five days later), and so on.

Results showed that FS performed much better than ES. But we are faced with another problem. Some learners could learn a few hundred words on the same day. That implies that they would need to revise the same hundreds of words again on the same revision dates in the future. This could be annoying. We implemented a Modified Fibonacci Scheduling (MFS) scheme, by adding a randomizing function to the length of gaps. Words learned on the same day are randomized to be revised on different dates. User experience was thus greatly improved.

$$R(n) = D(n-1) + \text{Random} [G(n), G(n-1)]$$

3.4 Master word list

This is the most important facility in our design, keeping the number of words a learner has accumulated. Whenever a word is learned, the word is stored into the master word list. To encourage revision, words that are due for revision are moved to the "to be revised" word list. After revision, the words are moved back to the master word list. Figure 10 shows a learner who has accumulated a total of 6690 words. Note that some words do not have a "revise date". If a learner is already familiar with a word after 10 revisions, he or she can choose to disable the revision reminder.

#	Word	Learn date	Revise date
6690	zoom	2008/01/23	
6689	zooid	2008/06/01	2008/09/30
6688	zoo	2008/01/23	
6687	zone	2008/01/23	
6686	zippy	2007/11/19	2008/09/05
6685	zero	2007/11/21	
6684	zeal	2007/12/18	
6683	youth	2007/11/21	
6682	yourself	2007/11/17	
6681	yours	2007/12/08	

Figure 10: Master word list showing all the words

3.5 Word lists

It is important for ESL learners to master a certain amount of words in order to become proficient readers. As discussed earlier, word lists provide good learning targets, and were proved to be an efficient method in which students can learn a large number of words in a short period of time. EasyEnglish provides two sets of word lists – graded word lists and customized word lists:

Graded word lists

EasyEnglish provides four graded word lists as shown in Figure 11:

- Basic – 850 words (Designed by Charles K. Ogden in 1930, and was adopted as the base for Simple English)
- General – 1543 words on top of the Basic words (Proposed by John Bauman and Brent Culligan, 1995, as a vocabulary basis of material for learners of English as a second language)
- Intermediate – 1493 on top of the General words (Developed based on the five-level word list proposed by WordSurfing.com)
- Academic – 548 on top of all the other words (Developed by Averil Coxhead in 2000, covering most academic words for tertiary education)

The screenshot shows the 'My Word' section of the EasyLearn 1.0.0 interface. It features a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Online : 1', 'Message : 1', 'Schools', and 'Ranking'. Below the navigation bar, there is a search bar and a 'Back' button. The main content area is titled 'My Word' and includes a sub-header 'You can build your word library for reading, spelling and meaning learning.' There are two buttons: 'Read' and 'Practice'. Below this is a table with columns: '#', 'Word lists', 'Word', 'Reading', 'Practice', 'Complete', and 'To be rev'. The table contains five rows of data for different word lists. At the bottom, there is a summary: 'Mastered : 6692 To be revised : 157 Read words : 989'.

#	Word lists	Word	Reading	Practice	Complete	To be rev
1	My Dict	958	345	759	○	152
2	Basic	850	209	850	✓	0
3	General	1543	40	1543	✓	0
4	Intermediate	1493	0	1492	○	1
5	Academic	548	14	548	✓	0

Figure 11: Graded word lists

Our results showed that the graded word lists are really useful for vocabulary building. Secondary school students were invited to use the system, and within a month's time, most of the students expanded their vocabulary by learning a significant number of words. Some students even completed all the words in the graded word lists.

User word lists

English teachers were excited that our system could help build vocabulary. They suggested that teachers and students should be allowed to create their own word lists. This would thus allow them to produce customized lists based on curriculum needs. It was then incorporated to the system. Figure 12 shows an example word list for human body as created by a teacher. Additionally, teachers can share their word lists with other teachers.

The screenshot shows the 'Human Body' section of the EasyLearn 1.0.0 interface. It features a navigation bar with 'Home', 'Online : 1', 'Message : 1', 'Schools', and 'Ranking'. Below the navigation bar, there is a search bar and a 'Back' button. The main content area is titled 'Human Body' and includes a sub-header 'Human Body'. There are two buttons: 'Read' and 'Practice'. Below this is a table with columns: '#', 'Word', 'Reading', 'Practice', 'Mastered', and 'Revise date'. The table contains ten rows of data for human body parts. At the bottom, there are buttons for 'Add', 'Delete', and 'Edit', and a link for 'Upload/Download words'.

#	Word	Reading	Practice	Mastered	Revise date
1	abdomen	0	0		
2	ankle	0	0		
3	anus	0	0		
4	appendix	0	0		
5	arch	0	0		
6	arm	0	0		
7	armpit	0	0		
8	artery	0	0		
9	back	0	0		
10	beard	0	0		

Figure 12: User word list

3.6 Extensive reading

To aid the learning of new words, we provide reading articles at various levels. Figure 13 shows a sample reading activity with the

use of a dictionary. Learners can check the meaning of new words and store them for future revision. This simple arrangement facilitates vocabulary building when learners are engaged in reading.

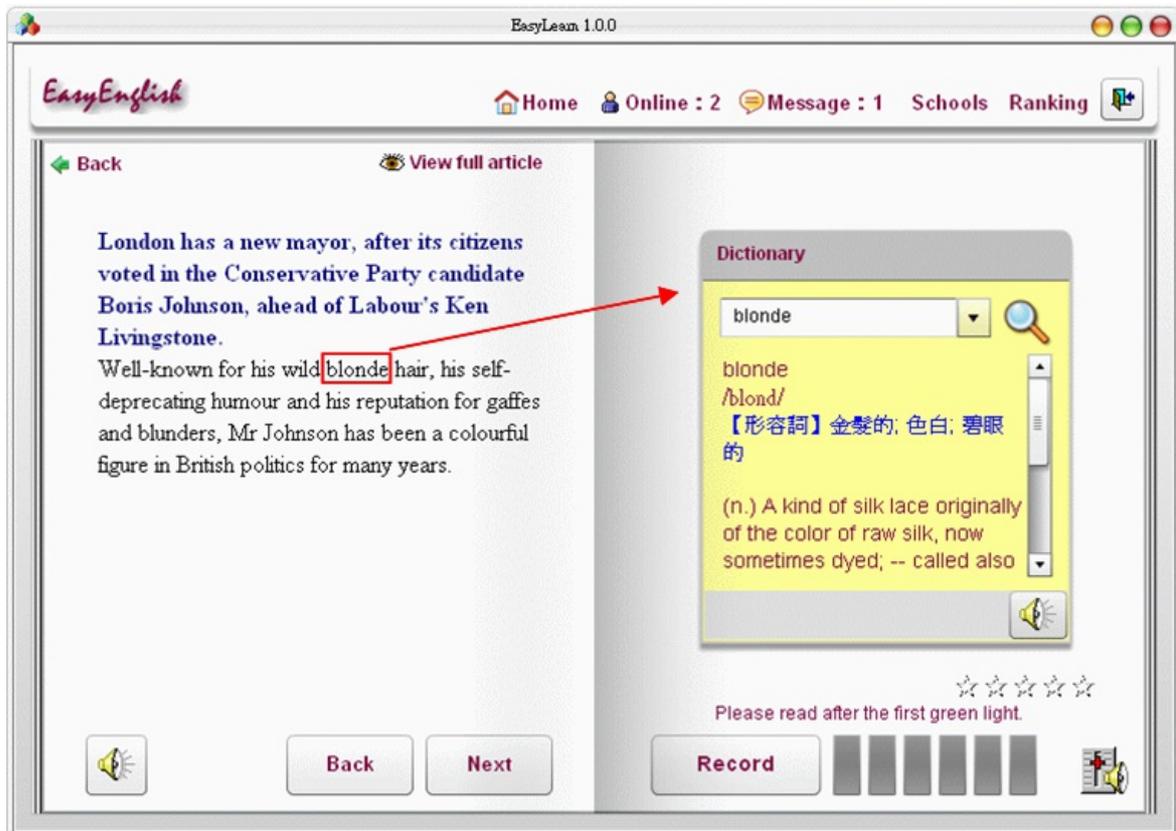


Figure 13: Reading with the use of dictionary

3.7 Progress ranking

Malone and Lepper (1987) identified that competition is a good factor to motivate learning. We implemented a ranking facility to show the progress of individual, class and territory as shown in Figures 14 to 16. Our results showed that many students keep checking their own progress and compare themselves with their classmates. Results also showed that there is a high correlation between learning and progress checking, hence confirming that awareness can contribute to learning motivation.

#	Class	Name	Online	Read wo	Learn word	Score
8	1R	譚均妍		1872	845	27170
20	1R	廖曉欣		865	757	16220
1	2B	麥翠婷		772	4621	53930
64	1R	吳婉怡		456	68	5240
13	1R	趙容儀		402	1580	19820
59	1D	陳穎琪		313	264	5770
2	Teachers	Yeung Yiu Wing		277	5024	53010
58	1B	蘇樂瑤		275	311	5860
83	1B	鍾曉宜		270	51	3210
29	2B	謝曉琳		209	827	10360

Figure 14: Individual Progress



Figure 15: Class Progress



Figure 16: Territory Progress

4. Results and discussions

Subjects for this experiment were 1683 students from eight secondary schools. All students participated voluntarily, and teachers do not give an explicit requirement of how many words students need to learn. Subjects used the system in a period of six months, from December 12, 2007 to May 12, 2008. Login accounts were distributed through their teachers. All activities were logged for data analysis.

4.1 Vocabulary building

Figure 17 shows the total number of words mastered by all students. From the figure, we see that the number of words steadily increases over 180 days. According to the data, we find that each student builds up 431 words on average. Our work is proved to

be useful for “vocabulary building”, that students can actually accumulate new words over a relatively long period.

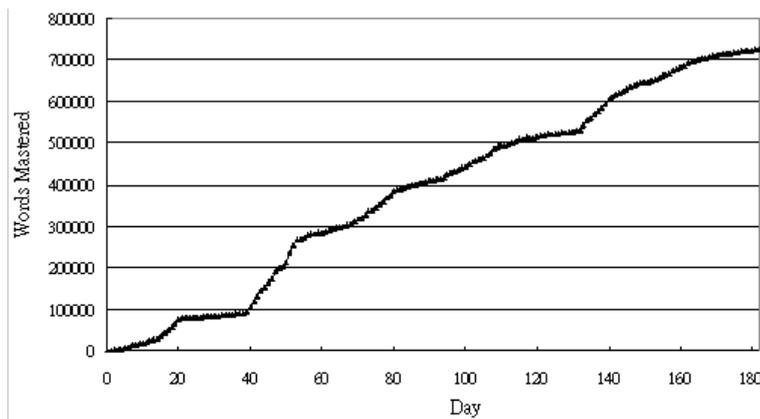


Figure 17: The total number of words mastered by all students

4.2 Individual learning

Figure 18 shows that some students learn better than other students. We see that a highly motivated student learned 3724 words, an average student learned 1839 words, and a weaker student learned 257 words. Since this is a voluntary programme, teachers have not required students to complete a specific learning target. Weaker students therefore have no other motivational factors to learn new words.

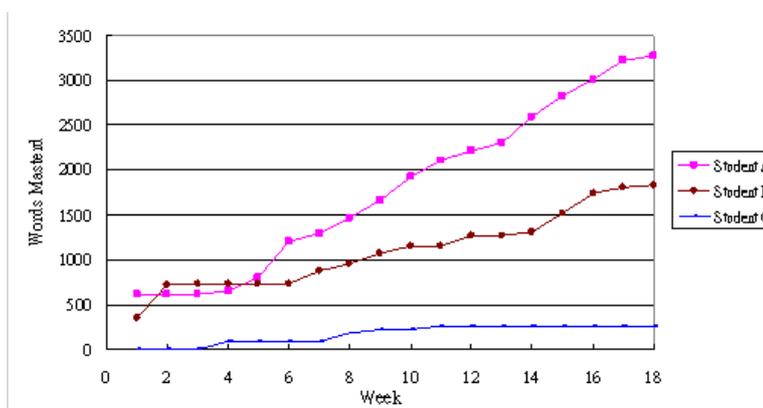


Figure 18: Number of words learned by individual students

4.3 Retention of words

Figure 19 shows retention rate versus the number of days after a new word is learned. We see that the retention rate remains close to 90% and it is high even after 120 days. This shows that our revision mechanism is very effective in helping learners retain the new words.

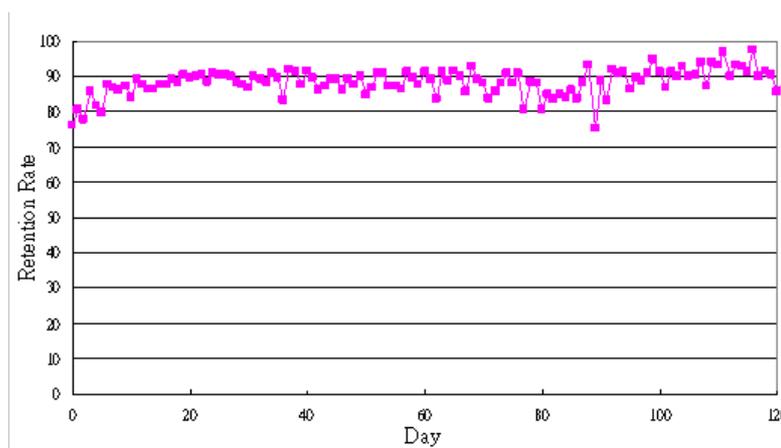


Figure 19: Retention rate vs. day after learning a new word

4.4 Delay in revision

Not all learners do their revisions on time. Figure 20 shows the retention rate versus the delay after the due date. It is clear that retention rate drops if students delay their revision. This also implies that our revision algorithm is pretty effective in defining the revision schedule. If learners do not follow the schedule, they will have a higher loss of retention.

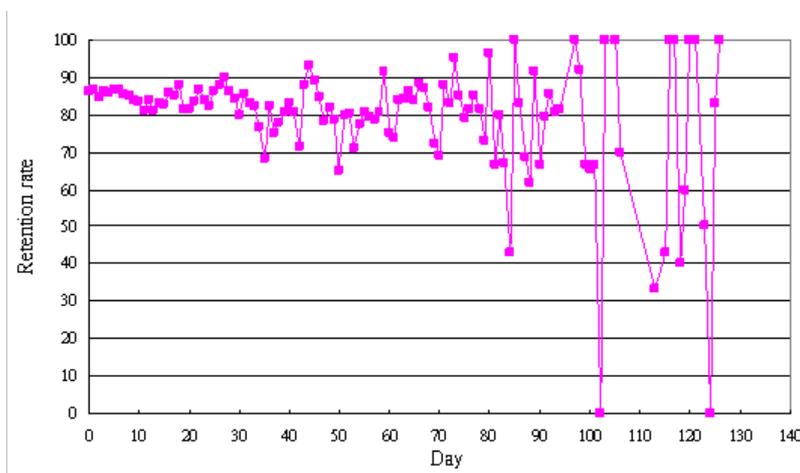


Figure 20: Retention rate vs. delay in revision

4.5 Number of Revisions

Figure 21 shows a very interesting result. A learner is not very familiar with a new word at the beginning (only 78% recognition rate). As the learner revises the words more, the retention rate increases at each subsequent revision. This result implies that simple word learning activities at the beginning are sufficient for vocabulary building. As learners are more familiar with the new words, they can then be engaged in more productive activities.

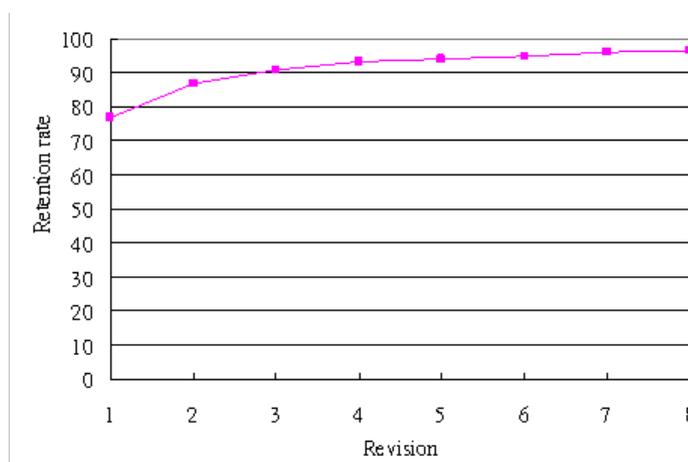


Figure 21: Retention rate at each subsequent revision

4.6 Awareness and motivation

Table 2 presents the correlation between the checking of progress and the learning attempts. We see that the number of attempts by a learner is highly correlated to his or her checking of individual, class, and territory progress. More checking of progress means more attempts. Teachers also confirmed that ranking tables motivate students to compete and learn at a faster pace. It confirms our conjecture that awareness strategies can motivate students to learn and expand their vocabulary.

Table 3 presents the correlation on the use of dictionary with the number of words mastered and the learning attempts. We see that the number of times a learner uses a dictionary is highly correlated to the words mastered and the attempts. That is, as a user learns and masters more words, he or she is more motivated to use the dictionary. It confirms our belief that learners are more willing to use a dictionary to learn new words if they can revise and master them.

	Significant	Correlation	df	p	t
Individual Progress	Yes	0.59	1466	0.001	28.12
Class Progress	Yes	0.67	1617	0.001	36.59
Territory Progress	Yes	0.57	1202	0.001	24.11

Table 2: Correlation on learning attempts with the checking of progress

	Significant	Correlation	df	p	t
Master	Yes	0.66	690	0.001	23.03
Attempt	Yes	0.3	690	0.001	8.4

Table 3: Correlation on the use of dictionary with the number of words mastered and the number of learning attempts

5. Conclusion

Vocabulary building is crucial for language learning. Most research studies are concerned about vocabulary learning strategies - how they can help students learn new words more effectively. Our study focuses on how learners can build up their vocabulary via using a dictionary, word lists, and reading, over a long period of time. Our approach does not specify a given set of words. Rather, we let

students read articles and use the dictionary to build up their own vocabulary list. Hence our approach is learner-centric, as each user can build a different set of vocabulary. It is hoped that users will develop a lifelong habit in using our system for vocabulary building. Our results showed that students are highly motivated to continue to learn new words over six months. Besides, students could recall 90% of the words over six months. Awareness is highly correlated to the learning attempts, the learning of new words, and the use of the dictionary.

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Article

WebQuest-based English Instruction

Abstract

As socioconstructivism has become dominant in the field of education, the concepts of learning by interaction, learning by doing, scaffolding and collaborative work have received intensive attention from the educators. This phenomenon also affects the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). For years, many teachers and stakeholders in this field have been trying to incorporate socioconstructivist concepts in teaching English. Various teaching methods have been developed and many of them are used in actual instruction. Technology is one such method that has been incorporated in ESL and EFL. There have been many studies on the benefits of technology in ESL and EFL settings and there have been actual positive effects in real teaching and learning contexts.

This paper examines the potential applicability of WebQuest in ESL or EFL classes. To validate WebQuest's effectiveness, the theoretical framework which underlies WebQuest activity is illustrated. Selected websites with brief descriptions are presented to give practical and specific examples of WebQuest. Moreover, actual steps to create WebQuest are described. A sample WebQuest is introduced, with specific steps for classroom implementation. Finally, this paper finds the WebQuest's potential benefits and limitations with pedagogical implications. Potential benefits are: increased authenticity, eliciting students' active participation and interaction, flexibility, reduced anxiety and higher motivation, scaffolding and collaboration, learner-centeredness, developing electronic literacy and promoting ownership and personal responsibility by webpublishing. However, affordances, practicality and heavy work-load for the teachers can be considered as potential limitations. Since the paper focuses on the practical use of WebQuest with descriptions of specific procedures of creating and implementing WebQuest, this paper will particularly benefit ESL or EFL teachers who engage in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and seek innovative CALL materials or activities in their instruction.

Keywords: WebQuest, CALL, SLA , collaborative language learning, task-based language learning, technology-related literacy

1. Introduction

As socioconstructivism become dominant in the field of education, the concepts of learning by interaction, learning by doing, scaffolding and collaborative work have received intensive attention from the educators. This phenomenon also affects the field of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). For years, many teachers and stakeholders in this field have been trying to incorporate socioconstructivist concepts in teaching English. Various teaching methods have been developed and many of them are used in actual instruction. Technology is one such method that has been incorporated in ESL and EFL. There have been many studies on the benefits of technology in ESL and EFL settings from the different perspectives with different tools. Several of these studies found positive effects in real teaching and learning contexts.

In this paper, WebQuest will be presented as one of the innovative teaching tools or materials which might satisfy both the current learning theory, socioconstructivism, and the use of technology. This is an attempt to examine the potential availability of WebQuest as an instructional tool in ESL or EFL context. First of all, the characteristics and types of WebQuest will be presented with specific examples. Then, useful websites showing some samples of WebQuest and guidelines for developing WebQuest will be provided. WebQuest task guidelines for ESL and EFL setting and multimedia CALL criteria will also be described. A sample WebQuest for ESL and EFL students will be presented with specific task descriptions and tips for classroom implementation. It is evaluated in terms of potential benefits and limitations. Finally, the pedagogical implication of using WebQuest in ESL and EFL context will be discussed.

2. Theoretical framework

There are several theories which seem to be appropriate to rationalize WebQuest activity.

2.1 Sociocognitivism

Sociocognitivism or socioculturalism is from the work of Vygotsky (1978) and his colleagues. Vygotsky saw the process of learning as socially mediated. According to him, children pass two phases of the learning process: first, children learn through interaction with adults (interpsychological phase) and then, they interact with themselves (intrapyschological phase). Thus, sociocognitivism emphasizes interaction as well as social and cultural features. There are several important concepts of sociocognitivism which illustrate language learning; this review focuses on the two concepts, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Scaffolding.

2.1.1 Zone of proximal development (ZPD) and scaffolding

Vygotsky defines the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as "the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (1978, P.86). Thus, ZPD is formed through interactions or relationships and emphasizes the negotiation of meaning between interlocutors as they come into a consensus or mutual understanding. ZPD usefully explains the process of L2 learning and is related to comprehensive input or $i+1$ of Krashen (1982, 1985). Under sociocognitivism, only when the learners are ready to learn, i.e., they are in their ZPD, can they learn.

Scaffolding was introduced by Bruner (in Wood, Bruner, and Ross, 1976), Ut argues that learning occurs as a result of the

interpsychological support coming from a more knowledgeable other leading learners to internalize what is being learned (Ko, Shallert, and Walters, 2003). Scaffolding is also helpful only when the learners are in their ZPD. Wood, Bruner, and Ross suggested six types of scaffolding functions: recruiting the learner's interest, simplifying the task, highlighting its relevant features, maintaining motivation, controlling the learner's frustration, and modeling. Negotiation of meaning naturally occurs in the process of successful scaffolding. In the field of L2 learning, Long (1980) introduced the idea of negotiation for meaning claiming that, when native and nonnative speakers do not understand one another, they modify their conversational structures through the use of repetition, confirmation and comprehension checks, and clarification requests. Thus, negotiation of meaning encourages learners to experience comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982, 1985), produce comprehensible output (Swain, 1985), and benefit from the feedback that occurs naturally in interactions (Long; 1996; Mackey, Gass & McDonough, 2000; Schachter, 1991) (Ko, Shallert, and Walters, 2003).

2. 2 Inquiry-based learning

Inquiry-based learning is a learning approach which focuses on students and emphasizes the development of critical thinking skills through complex problem solving. Frameworks and models of inquiry-based learning such as problem-, project-, and case-based learning are used in business, legal, and medical training (Luke, 2004). An inquiry-based learning approach might be helpful to enhance student's motivation because it elicits students' curiosity or interests. It also promotes students' active engagement, which may result in true learning by doing. In addition, since it focuses on the learning process of problem-solving, it may promote interaction between the teacher and students by giving and receiving immediate feedback. This could be an opportunity for teachers to monitor students' progress and give appropriate advice. However, the inquiry-based learning approach has a lot of limitations, especially in terms of assessment (D'Amico, 1999). Assessment measures and practices of a traditional classroom are hard to apply to inquiry-based learning classes. Even in inquiry-based learning classes, it is hard to match assessment with instruction.

According to Luke (2001), there has been little work with inquiry-based learning in the field of foreign language education. Schwarzer and Luke (2001) suggested multiple options for interventions, such as modifying the entire curriculum of a particular course or mini-implementations and curricular engagements that emphasize inquiry processes and student-centered learning. Sidman-Taveau and Bolotin (2001) used project-based Webquest to illustrate how project-based learning can make significant contributions to a language course. The overall responses were favorable but inquiry learning played only a minor, secondary role to more traditional instruction.

2.3 Task-based learning

In the field of second and foreign language education, some practitioners who were teaching on Content-Based Instruction (CBI) started to adopt Task-Based Instruction (TBI) with a desire for a meaning-focused approach that reflected real-life language use. Other practitioners adopted tasks because they believed that task-based interaction stimulated natural acquisition processes (Leaver and Willis, 2004). The beliefs of those practitioners were from the premises of TBI. They are: "Language learning does not proceed in a linear additive fashion but is a complex organic process (Long, 1985; Lightbown 2000)", "Language form is best learned when the learners' attention is on meaning (Prabhu, 1982)", and "In addition to exposure, learners need opportunities to use the target language for a real purpose in order to learn it" (Swain, 1985; Swain and Lapkin, 2001). In addition, in terms of defining 'task', several researchers have suggested definitions for the term, 'task', from a variety of perspectives (Nunan, 1989). Leaver and Willis (2004) suggested the six definitions from the literature on Task-Based Instruction: task as response, task as derived outcome, task as focus on meaning, task as goal-oriented activity with real outcome, task as workplan with content-oriented outcome, and task as focus on meaning with assessment of outcomes. Most of the six definitions include achieving or arriving at 'an outcome', or attaining 'a goal' or 'an objective.' they are also mentioning that tasks are 'meaning focused.' Thus, task-based learning fosters students' communicative language use while they are doing authentic, real-life tasks, and negotiation of meaning (Long, 1980) for language acquisition. Those are important objectives of second or foreign language classes.

2. 4 Collaborative language learning

As socioconstructivism emphasizes scaffolding, collaboration in learning as well as language learning becomes important. Collaboration encourages students:

- To lean about learning, to learn better and
- To increase their awareness about language, and about self, and hence about learning;
- To develop, as a result, metacommunicative as well as communicative skills;
- To confront, and come to terms with, the conflicts between individual needs and group needs, both in social, procedural terms as well as linguistic, content terms;
- To realize that content and method are inextricably linked, and
- To recognized the decision-making tasks themselves as genuine communicative activities (Nunan, 1992, p.3)

Slavin (1983) summarized the theoretical, empirical and practical advantages of cooperative learning as contrast to competitive learning:

...the research done up to the present has shown enough positive effects of cooperative learning, on a variety of outcomes, to force us to re-exam traditional instruction practices. We can no longer ignore the potential power of the peer group, perhaps the one remaining free resource for improving schools. We can no longer see the class as 20 or more individuals whose only instructionally useful interactions are with the teacher, where peer interactions are unstructured or off-task. On the other hand, at least for achievement, we now know that simply allowing students to work together is unlikely to capture the power of the peer group to motivate students to perform. (p.128)

There are several studies on collaboration in instruction which have positive results. The results are:

- Working together to achieve common learning goals (Slavin 1983; Sharan *et al.* . 1984)
- Outperformance of cooperative groups of students in reading comprehension, reading vocabulary, language mechanics, language expression and spelling (Stevens, Madden, Slavin & Farnish, 1987)
- Outperformance in writing sample and oral reading measures (Stevens, Slavin & Farnish, 1991)
- Cooperative small-group method significantly outperformed the whole-class method in academic achievement (Bejarano, 1987)

2. 5 Electronic Literacy

The development of literacy and communication skills in new on-line media is critical to success in almost all walks of life (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000). The internet becomes one of the primary media of literacy and communication practices. Moreover, within the industrialized world, virtually all academic and professional writing now involves computer use, and, according to some predictions, most reading will likely take place on computer screens within a few decades (Bolter, 1991). Literacy is a shifting target, and teachers have to prepare students for their future. In other words, teachers nowadays have to consider not only how to use information technology in order to teach language, but also how to teach language so that learners can make effective use of information technology (Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000).

Shetzer and Warschauer (2000) define electronic literacy as the combination of information literacy -the ability to find, organize, and make use of information- and how to read and write in a new medium. They divide electronic literacy skills into three areas:

communication, construction, and research. Communication includes CMC. Construction includes hypertexts combining texts and other media, and strong focus on collaboration. Research includes on-line sources, hypertexts, and critical reading. And these aspects contribute autonomous learning.

WebQuest can satisfy above the theoretical framework. By definition, it is designed to foster collaboration or scaffolding among students while they are fulfilling inquiry-based tasks using various kinds of technological tools. In light of previous research, these qualities enhance students' technology-related literacy.

3. WebQuest

3.1 Definition

According to Dodge (1998), WebQuest is "an inquiry-oriented activity in which some of all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet, optionally supplemented with videoconferencing." WebQuest promotes students' problem-solving skills through the use of technology, since most of the work consists of web-based research and developing a final product using technology with group members. WebQuest characteristics are:

- It is a task-based language learning.
- It uses of authentic language materials.
- It consists of group activities with an end goal.
- It is student-centered.
- It requires collaboration among group members. (Godwin-Jones, R., 2004)

3.2 Component of WebQuest

Although WebQuest has different formats, it generally has seven core components: Home, Introduction, Task, Process, Evaluation, Conclusion and Teacher's page (Dodge, 1998). 'Home' is the first page of a WebQuest which contains the information of the developer and the title of the WebQuest. 'Introduction' shows the overview of the WebQuest. 'Task' describes the activities of the WebQuest. Sometimes the developer includes websites which are necessary for the accomplishment of a task. The developer may also insert the list of websites as another component. 'Process' describes all the procedures which the students are supposed to follow. 'Evaluation' consists of tables and sheets of evaluation forms. The developer can include various kinds of evaluation forms depending on the purpose, such as peer and self evaluation and the product evaluation. 'Conclusion' usually tells students what they have accomplished throughout the task or the objectives that they have achieved. 'Teacher's page' is a guideline for the teachers. It usually contains suggestions or recommendations for efficient use of WebQuest. Sometimes the developer includes about the technological assistance.

3.3 Examples

There are two kinds of tasks. Simple short tasks, taking one to three class periods, are for knowledge acquisition and integration. An example is ordering a meal from on-line menu. Other tasks are more complex and long-term. These tasks aim to extend and refine knowledge. They usually take one week or a month such as planning a semester abroad at a university in the target culture (Dodge, 1998).

• Short-term WebQuest [1]



Figure 1. Short-term WebQuest Homepage

The title of this WebQuest is "Short Story"; it is developed for 9-12 grade English or Language Arts classes. In this WebQuest, each team will be comprised of four members. The members will do individual research in one of the following areas:

- Race relations of the 1990's
- Economics of the United states
- Family Structure
- Socio-Economic Status

Upon completion of each member's individual research, the team will meet to process the information and write a final report. It will take approximately three class periods. Time may vary depending on the class. This WebQuest builds knowledge on the life of Maya Angelou, the author of the book that the students will read, regarding the historical and social contexts of the time when she lived.

• Long-term WebQuest [2]



Figure 2. Long-term WebQuest Homepage

The title of this WebQuest is "[We Belong: Immigration in the United States](#)." It is for intermediate to advanced ESL students from 9-12 graders to college and adult learners. The class will divide into four groups. Each group will look at a different aspect of immigration. Three of the groups will look at the history of immigration in the United States. One group will look at current immigration laws and policies. Each group will be assigned three tasks relating to immigration. Finally, after the class has shared the information, they will form groups to write letters to senators and the congressman expressing their concerns about immigration today. The WebQuest consists of 10-day project and the students will not only get knowledge on immigration, but will also seek ways of solving problems related to immigration.

3.4 Useful Websites

There are several useful WebQuest websites for teachers. Many include actual samples of WebQuest, as well as guides for creating WebQuest. For example, [The WebQuest Page \(http://webquest.org/index.php\)](http://webquest.org/index.php) from San Diego State University provides developers or teachers samples of WebQuest -not only for language learning but also for subjects specific-and guidelines for creation. It also provides pre-made templates which are free of use. Thus, even teachers with limited technological knowledge can follow the guidelines to develop their own WebQuest. Other websites provide a general picture of WebQuest and hint for developing WebQuest to specific purposes. Those are: [Talengquest Dutch for LanguageQuest](#), [Webquests for language learning](#) links from the University of Pittsburgh, and [Webquests on LanguageQuests](#). Teachers can get articles on WebQuest incorporated ESL classes or other articles related to WebQuest and technology use from [Articles on ESL Learning, WebQuests and Computer Technology](#) by Nellie Muller (Godwin-Jones, 2004).

3.5 General strength and weakness of WebQuest

According to Halat (2007), the strengths and the weaknesses of a WebQuest are categorized as follows:

Strengths

- It is an alternative teaching technique that enhances students' motivation in class
- Serves as an alternative assessment tool of students' learning
- It gives teachers an idea of the students' degree of acquisition of knowledge and implementation of knowledge
- It provides teachers an opportunity to see and assess students' ability in using technology for learning
- It enhances teachers' creativity in thinking and writing, such as finding interesting and funny stories or scenarios and combining these with math or other subjects
- It enhances teachers' higher-order thinking skills, such as finding topic-related Web sites and examining and selecting professional, well-prepared, and reliable Web sites
- It requires students to be active learners
- It allows students to use the Internet as an important tool

Weaknesses

Halat states that (2007) students are expected to follow the directions on the WebQuest and visit the reliable links selected by the teachers to get new information. Therefore, students may not return to the WebQuest portals to complete their work if they are distracted by other Web sites that they find more appealing. Furthermore, students may not want to work on the WebQuest or do the tasks required if they do not like the scenario or the topics, or if they find the tasks difficult (pp.110-111).

3.6 Steps in creating a Webquest

In this section, I will briefly explain the process of developing a WebQuest using pre-made template and Dreamweaver.

- 1) Go to www.webquest.org, and click 'Create WebQuests' on the third of the table at the left side of the website.
- 2) Scroll down to 'WebQuest Template'. There are three main templates: [The original one-page template \(1999\)](#), [Classic framed templates from SDSU \(2000\)](#), and [Templates by Dan Schellenberg from the University of Regina](#) (more modern, using css and xhtml). Take a look and select one of the templates. For example, if you click '[Templates by Dan Schellenberg from the University of Regina](#)', you can see several templates.
- 3) Choose one (let's say you choose the first template under 'New Framed Versions with Graphic Text Rollovers') and then save on the desktop.

4) Extract the zip file on the desktop and open them up in your favorite web editor (Dreamweaver, Composer, FrontPage, etc.); Open 'Dreamweaver' and click 'Open' under the 'File' menu. You can see the HTML files at the top.

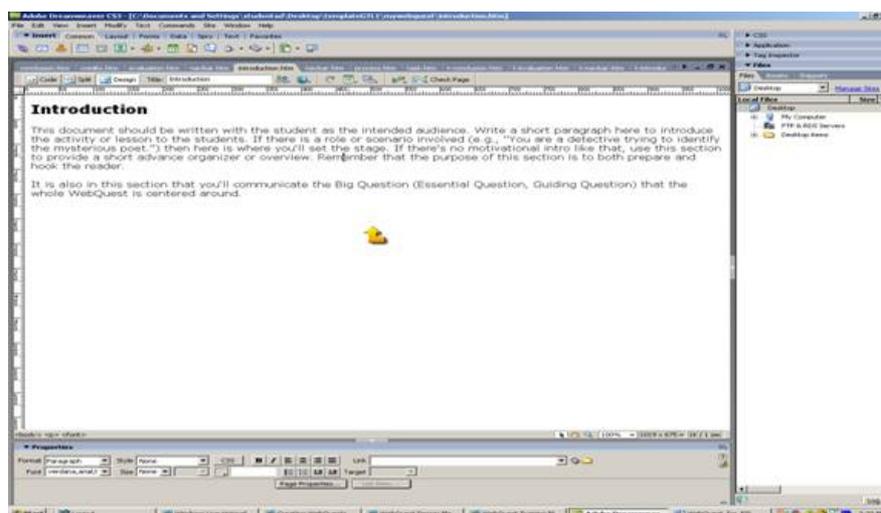


Figure 3. Creating WebQuest 1

5) Copy and paste the contents of your WebQuest on each page, and 'Save'. You can save each page at a time or, you can save all the changes once by clicking 'Save all' under the 'File' menu. You can also insert images by clicking 'Insert' and 'Image'. You can insert website links by clicking 'Hyperlink' under the 'Insert' menu. You can change the fonts, colors, and size by clicking 'Text' menu, or under the 'Properties' at the bottom.

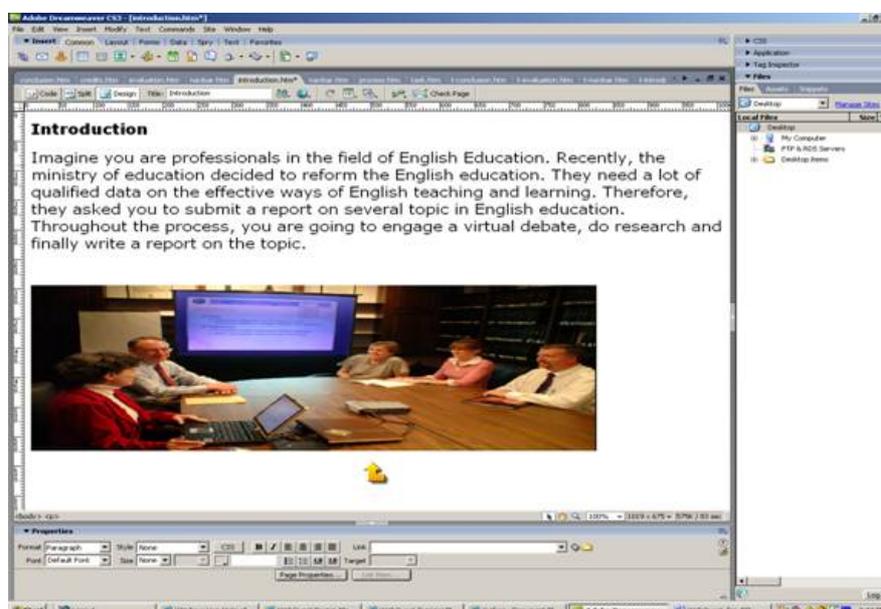


Figure 4. Creating WebQuest 2

6) Click 'Preview in Browser' under the 'File' or click the earth-shaped icon on the middle of the top for a preview. Then, you can see the page in web browser. This is exactly what the students will see when you upload it to web.

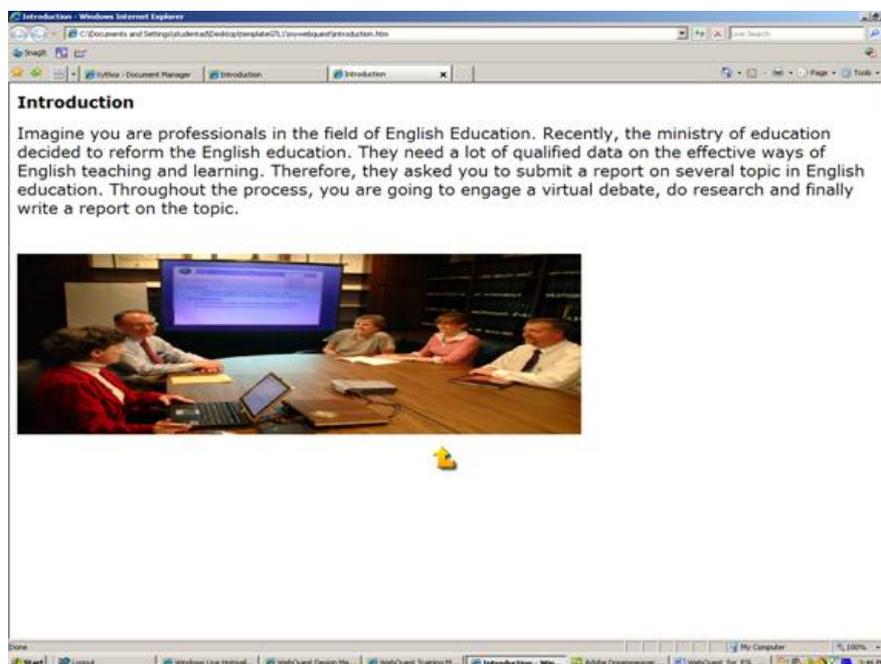


Figure 5. Creating WebQuest 3

Check whether every link works well, and then upload it into a web server. Use the 'Index' or 'Introduction' page as the main page and use its URL as the WebQuest's URL.

4. Task development

Since WebQuest consists of tasks or activities that students should complete, guidelines for developing tasks for WebQuest are important. There are two task guidelines which can be critically considered in creating WebQuest tasks.

4.1 Task guidelines for ESL and EFL

Koenraad, T.L.M. & Westhoff, G.J. (2003) suggested WebQuest task guidelines especially for ESL and EFL:

- It should promote the use of target language.
- Material should be authentic.
- It should be attractive and student centered.
- It should be flexible and provide possibilities for differentiation.
- It should be an exchange of real information and expertise.
- The product should be from the meaningful communication.
- It should provide opportunities for interim reflection on the process and the product.

4.2 Multimedia CALL Criteria

Chapelle (1998) suggested criteria for multimedia CALL task design:

- Making key linguistic characteristics salient.
- Offering modifications of linguistic input.
- Providing opportunities for "comprehensible output"
- Providing opportunities for learners to notice their errors.
- Providing opportunities for learners to correct their linguistic output.
- Supporting modified interaction between the learner and the computer.
- Acting as a participant in L2 tasks.

5. WebQuest Project: English Education Reform [3]



Figure 6. Homepage of the project

5.1 Brief description of the WebQuest

This is a sample WebQuest for ESL and EFL classes which shows actual implementation of WebQuest in an ESL or EFL class. The title of the WebQuest is 'English Education Reform' and the objectives are:

- To enhance English proficiency
- To develop research skills
- To practice writing report
- To enhance technology-related literacy
- To learn collaborative learning

The levels of the students are high-intermediate to advanced college ESL and/or EFL students. The main activities are:

- Out of class debate on Second Life (SL) or MSN
- In class research
- In class and out of class writing
- In class presentation

It is designed as a long-term WebQuest.

5.2 Task and Process

The following is the assignment that the students are required to do in this WebQuest.

A situation is given to the students: "You are professionals in the field of English Education. Recently, the Ministry of Education requested a report on effective methods for English learning and teaching. They need your opinion on the following sub topics: Face-to-face English learning vs. Distance English learning, Self-study vs. instructed English learning, Native speaker instructor vs. Non-native instructor."

After each group chooses a topic, your group is going to engage in a debate to compare and contrast two different methods. Additionally, you will seek ways to improve your countries' educational situation. After a consensus, your group will research various sources using the internet, write a report, and upload it to the classroom Wiki. After you finish the report, your group will make a PowerPoint presentation in the class.

The following is the specific process.

Activity 1: Group debate on Second Life or Blackboard/Classroom MSN 1)

1. Make a group of 5
2. Choose roles: 2 people in 'Pro' team/ 2 people for 'Con' team/ 1 moderator
3. Choose the topic (if your team has another idea, you may choose the topic.)
4. With the help of the moderator, the Pro and Con teams debate on the each topic (if the class is not familiar with the academic debate, the teacher may have a practice section. The 'Moderator' may need a guide.)
5. Try to come to an agreement
6. Save the script for the future use

Activity 2: Research

1. Assign each member to one or two website and search for information
2. Compile the information with references
3. Get the teacher's feedback

Activity 3: Writing a report

In class writing with teacher instruction

1. Brainstorming
2. Write the first draft

3. Get the teacher's feedback

Out of class writing

1. Based on the teacher's feedback, write the second draft (you may choose MSN or SL for communication.)
2. Peer editing (if students are not familiar with peer editing, teacher can model how to do peer editing.)
3. Upload the second draft on the Wiki and edit it whenever you want
4. Get the teacher's feedback
5. Write the final report
6. Upload the report on the Wiki to share with other team member

Activity 4: PPT presentation

You may work collaboratively to prepare the presentation. Each member should take a part when you present the final report in class.

5.3 Technological Tools and Functions

Since one of the objectives is to enhance students' technology-related literacy, students will use various technological tools. The following table shows the functions of specific technical tools that are used in this WebQuest.

Tools	Functions
Class Website	Course management
Second Life/ Discussion Board/ Class MSN	Free communication in their preferred time and place, Group Debate
Wiki	Collaborative Online Writing
Blog	Reflection Journal, Close relationship
E-mail	(optional) Giving and receiving Q&A to peers and the teachers
Power Point	Class presentation

Table 1. Tools and functions

5.4 Tips for classroom implementation

As one of the advantages of WebQuest is flexibility, teachers can combine WebQuest activities to the regular class instruction as on-line and off-line classes. Teachers can also use the WebQuest activity as the main instruction in a distance learning context. In any case, it is important to have demonstrations or practice periods before actual implementation, because as with other technology-incorporated classes, students might not be familiar with the technological tools as well as WebQuest activity itself. To reduce the potential chaos, and to maximize the benefits of WebQuest in ESL and EFL contexts, teachers should carefully design the practice period. A simple in-class WebQuest activity with teacher demonstration might be helpful. It would be better if the sample WebQuest includes all the technological tools that will be used in completing the WebQuest. In addition, depending on the technological assistance or class environment and teachers' knowledge on the tools, teachers can modify some of the activities in terms of tool use. Teachers can also modify the activities depending on the class objectives and students' level of language proficiency. Consistent and immediate help from the teacher is also critical in terms of technological problems as well as content knowledge. Immediate feedback on students' achievement is also beneficial to encourage and motivate them for the successful learning.

5.5 Potential Benefits

There are several potential benefits to using WebQuest in ESL and EFL classes.

- **Authenticity:** WebQuest tasks use authentic materials with vivid audio-visual aids and also encourage students to use various technological tools for their learning.
- **Active participation and interaction:** students are learning by actively doing the task and it helps long-term memory.
- **Flexibility:** students can choose subtopics, the mode of communication, and the content of the report depending on the tasks. Teachers can design tasks depending on the students' needs and class objectives.
- **Scaffolding & collaboration:** WebQuest itself is designed to foster collaboration, which gives the students opportunities to learn from each other.
- **Learner-centeredness:** students have control of their learning.
- **Reduced anxiety and higher motivation:** as other computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) tasks, students will have less anxiety and higher motivation while they are communicating in CMC environments.
- **Electronic literacy:** by reading and writing online and using various technological tools in the process of goal accomplishment, students will enhance their electronic or technology-related literacy.
- **Ownership and personal responsibility:** by webpublishing on the Wiki and a blog, students can have ownership and personal responsibility for their writings.
- **Meta-cognitive skills:** by writing reflection journals on their blogs, students can enhance meta-cognitive skills on their learning process as well as critical thinking skills on the topics.
- **Easy to create with pre-made templates.**

5.6 Potential limitations

There are also limitations in terms of affordances and work load for teachers and administrators.

- **Affordances (Hampel, 2006) & practicality;** as other CALL classes, teachers should consider the affordances in terms of tool availability and internet access. Moreover, since it requires a lot of time and effort, the teachers also should consider practicality and pedagogical effectiveness in designing and implementing a task.
- **A lot of work for teachers;** it is the teacher's main job from designing a pedagogically sound task to implementing it in an actual class. To be successful, the teacher should be very knowledgeable not only on the SLA theories and task design, but also in technical skills. It is also recommended that teachers be aware of students' needs and their individual characteristics.
- **The possible lack of access to the Internet via a fast and reliable connection**
- **The time needed by the teacher to develop a WebQuest not always available**
- **Finding reliable links for resources for the WebQuest is not always easy (Halat and Jakubowski 2001)**

5.7 Pedagogical Implications

In terms of tasks in general, WebQuest can be applied to other disciplines such as math and science as well as other second or foreign language classes. Moreover, WebQuest can be useful in Content-Based Language Teaching, since the main task is research on specific topics. Students can build content knowledge while they are using and learning the target language. WebQuest fits well into Task-Based Language Teaching. Teachers can develop various tasks depending on the class objectives, and students can learn the target language while they are completing the tasks.

Concerning technological tools, blogs can be used as a self-learning center. Students can make website links for the target language learning to their own blogs and access those websites whenever they want to study. Students can choose the websites which satisfy their needs. Students then write reflection journals on what they have learned and teachers or other peers can give feedback. Control on learning websites and immediate feedback would motivate students to continue learning. Blogs can also be used as e-portfolio if students are required to upload their writing drafts. They actually can see their writing progress through the blog archives. Teachers can use wiki as a management tool as Class Wiki for more interaction with students. They can also create a learning community in SL. This might be beneficial for working students who do not have time to attend classes. Moreover, learning in a virtual world could give both teachers and students a special experience which might be different from traditional classroom learning.

6. Conclusion

This paper examines the potential applicability of WebQuest in ESL or EFL contexts. Since the paper is focused on practical use of WebQuest with descriptions of specific procedures of creating and implementing WebQuest for ESL or EFL, this paper will particularly benefit teachers who engage in CALL and seek innovative CALL materials or activities in their instruction.

Considering the speed of technology developments, it seems that technology use will be a practice rather than a norm in ESL and EFL in the near future. In other words, there will be many efforts to develop materials or task to maximize both technology use for electronic literacy and students' language proficiency. WebQuest could be a good option, which is worthwhile to implement with current technology. Beneficial features of WebQuest, such as promoting collaboration and learner-centeredness, are enough to foster students' language proficiency and technology-related literacy to prepare them to do valuable work in the future.

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[1] The homepage is: <http://questgarden.com/45/48/8/070106112014/index.htm>

[2] The homepage is: <http://www.webelong.bravehost.com/PROCESS.html>

[3] The homepage is: <http://teachnet.edb.utexas.edu/~ypark/orange/>

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Article

Enhancing Blended Language Learning: Development of a New eLearning Template

Abstract

Improvements in dedicated e-learning tools and the new insights provided by CALL research are at the core of a new course for Business Language. The course incorporates an innovative eLearning template as the key element of its main mode of delivery. A number of authoring tools have been integrated in order to provide a user-friendly, flexible and effective online learning medium for both teachers and learners. This paper describes the background for the design of the course and discusses the needs it aims to meet. The study also outlines the objectives informing the development of the eLearning template and examines the main features and parameters of the pilot module developed in order to test this template within a blended learning setting. Finally, the paper addresses the issues encountered during the pilot trial and the main findings from the student feedback.

Keywords: blended e-learning, business languages, learning technologies, students' experience.

1. Introduction

The 1990s witnessed the development of e-learning for a range of educational purposes, from online materials as additions to face-to-face teaching, to virtual universities offering stand-alone courses and degrees entirely via the Internet.

Despite all the interest and discussions generated, various studies have indicated that a substantial number of learners do not feel completely fulfilled by courses taught entirely online (Everhart, 1999; Felix, 2001 & 2003). One of the major drawbacks was that users had to deal with multiple systems, each with their own passwords, interfaces, and navigation, leading to some frustration (e-Learning Framework, 2003). Equally, the need for Web-development specialists and the time needed for developing e-learning materials together with time-management issues were significant concerns that appeared regularly in the research and reports (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000).

Commercial e-learning training projects also appear to have moved on from simple distance learning models to more complex blended solutions (audio/video/web-based conferencing) and an increasing number of courses in HE are designed using a combination of face-to-face and online methods (blended learning). However, there is still little understanding regarding how these methodologies and activities integrate with each other in addition to the degree of success in achieving the desired outcomes that correspond to each of them (Neumeier, 2005).

2. Background to the course design

In an attempt to solve some of the drawbacks mentioned in the introduction and taking advantage of improvements in authoring tools as well as new insights provided by research on independent learning (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000; Hurd, 2003), an innovative Blended eLearning Business Language Course was designed and piloted at Coventry University in 2006-2007.

The aims and target audience for this course were based on a study of new trends in student mobility facilitated by Leonardo's funded work experience and on a fact-finding exercise, regarding language skills and intercultural awareness in the UK (the latter conducted in 2005). Several regional and national surveys coincided in pointing out that trade was being lost due to language and cultural barriers (LNT0, 2001-2003; Sector Language Skills Analysis Report, CILT, 2003). Consequently, the course aims were defined

as providing targeted language training and business cultural awareness to learners who were planning to gain work experience in a European country and, consequently, needed some competence in the country's language and/or were already working in companies that have encountered language and cultural barriers while dealing with international business clients.

Considerable thought was given to the course design and structure in order to accommodate learner's needs, preferences and styles. In the author's experience, travelling and variable working patterns in the case of business students or the increasing engagement in paid-work because of financial pressures upon undergraduate students are examples of needs which are often mentioned as the main reasons for not being able to complete more traditional language courses.

Learners engaged in courses delivered completely or partially online have expressed their preference for some personal contact with the tutor and fellow students (Felix, 2001; Ayles, 2002; Matheos, Daniel, McCalla, 2005). Style is also an important factor in course development as the use of technology and/or working in a distance setting may lead to students' anxiety (Skehan, 2003). Accordingly, the following design principles were adopted:

The design should include a flexible mode of delivery including face-to-face, web-based conferencing and online distance learning. Such a blended approach would contribute to making the studying of a language more compatible with busy and variable professional schedules or study/paid-work choices. This would also support learning needs and preferences including those of learners who prefer some personal contact with the teacher (to be achieved through web-based conferencing in the case of students unable to attend some or all face-to-face sessions because of distance or work commitments).

In order to provide an attractive and enjoyable learning environment, the online courseware should consist of well designed interactive materials based on the selection of the e-learning applications appropriate for the medium and the pedagogical approach or approaches selected in order to produce effective learning outcomes (Salaberry, 2001). This could be achieved by the use of different types of interactive tasks and quizzes which should promote learning in a more engaging and pleasant manner.

The face-to-face sessions should provide students with the opportunity to meet their trainer, to be introduced to the course and on-line course resources and to start networking with fellow students. Group skills practice and role-playing should reinforce the learning acquired on online sessions of study by simulating real life interactions before transferring this new knowledge into their own working environments.

The decision was taken that the course should be structured as a cluster of short self-contained modules which could be studied as 'stand alone' or as part of a programme of study depending on the needs of companies and/or sectors or, individual learners.

Another key issue informing the design of the course described in this paper was the application of the concept of active learning within a constructivist pedagogy (Felix, 2005) and the role that cross-cultural awareness has in underpinning language competence in achieving successful business practices in an international business environment (Hagen, 1999).

3. Development of an innovative eLearning template

An important aspect of the design for this course was the selection and integration in an e-learning template of the most appropriate technological tools for the purpose of online language learning. This development was pursued with several objectives in mind. These were:

- to provide teaching staff having a standard knowledge of computing at user level with a highly sophisticated and innovative eLearning solution which they could master in very little time and without the need for a specialist in Web-design and development.
- to improve learners interface by facilitating access to online resources and providing easy to use navigational controls.
- to offer students, a more intuitive, fulfilling and enjoyable learning environment by providing and engaging subject content in an attractive seamless format that would motivate and encourage learning

The design phase of the eLearning template took place in 2006 which, in addition to matching the objectives described above and the pedagogical approach selected, included a thorough analysis of the e-learning resources available at Coventry University in order to keep technology costs to a minimum. This analysis culminated in the selection of two authoring tools for materials' development: Course Genie (v. 1.6 -Campus Edition) from Horizon Wimba and StudyMate (v.1.5) from Respondus. They offered an attractive layout via automatic formatting, several ready-made templates which offered a high degree of flexibility and a good range of question types into which video footage, flash items and audio files could be easily inserted. Both authoring tools provided publishing wizards that dealt with the process of exporting the materials produced to course management systems such as Blackboard (WebCT) in a simple and straightforward manner.

From the perspective of materials' development, Course Genie represented an improvement in relation to previous authoring tools because it dealt directly with course materials written in 'Word' format. Features such as navigation controls, table of contents, hyperlinks, pop-ups, flashcards, movies, streaming audio and video, self-test questions and IMS metadata could be easily added using the special styles and dialogue boxes inserted by the Course Genie's software into the Word settings. Furthermore, the process of transforming the Word format into HTML pages was performed by the programme quickly and without the need for laborious processes and the mastery of other specialist tools like Dreamweaver to make them more accessible.

StudyMate is an authoring tool that facilitates the creation of up to 10 Flash-based activities and games using three simple templates. As in the case of Course Genie, existing materials in Word format can be easily imported in order to transform them into interactive activities.

Immediate feedback in web-based learning courseware is now a common feature and generally considered to assist language learning (Ayles, 2002; Felix, 2003). Both Course Genie and StudyMate produce automatic computer-generated feedback. In the case of Course Genie, the feedback can be customised with comments and/or explanations by the lecturer.

The possibility of adding hyperlinks to Course Genie pages was subsequently explored in detail in order to ascertain whether narrated and animated Power Point presentations could be easily integrated and so provide a more effective presentation tool. Power Point as a learning tool is commonly used in language teaching because it facilitates the acquisition of key sentences by sequencing the presentation of each sentence and/or their translation and by utilizing colour to highlight key features regarding gender, number and/or verbal endings (Fig. 1). The result was that integration was easily obtained by first compressing the PP file and thus optimising it for streaming by the Course Genie application. The software used for this purpose was Impatica for PowerPoint, BlackBerryEdition.

A pilot module was subsequently developed in 2006-07 in order to test this template within an e-blended learning setting incorporating collaborative learning facilities in order to respond to new learning trends "to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration." (EU eLearning Action Plan-2001) and, also, provide a flexible mode of

delivery to support students learning needs and institutional requirements. This module focused on Business Spanish at beginner level and its design was informed by principles of active learning within a constructivist pedagogical approach.

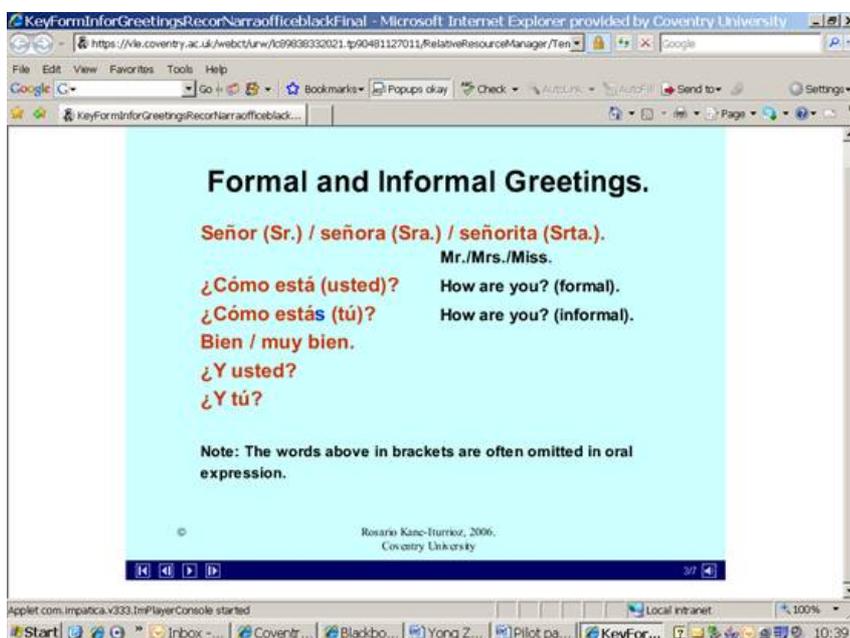
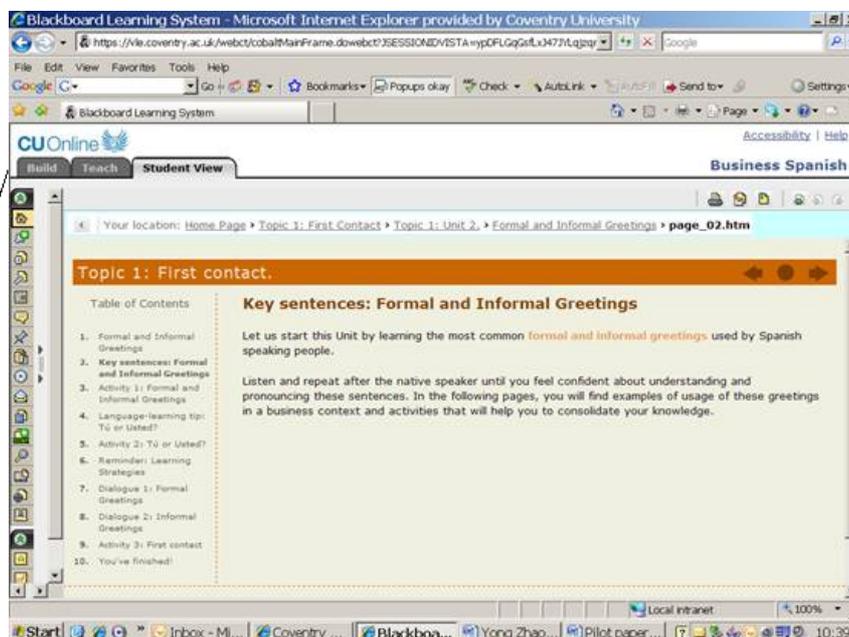


Figure 1. Integration of a narrated and animated Power Point presentation of key sentences and their translations

4. Development of a Pilot module

The Pilot module was intended for learners who wanted to learn Spanish in a professional context for two main reasons: a) they were planning to gain work experience in Spain and, consequently, needed some competence in the language and, b) they were already working in companies that have encountered language and cultural barriers while dealing with Spanish-speaking business clients. The aims were to provide the language skills and basic cultural awareness necessary to deal with everyday business situations common to all business environments, e.g. introductions, telephoning, etc.

The next step was to define clear objectives in order for students to gain confidence in engaging with foreign language speakers in every day working exchanges with callers, colleagues and visitors. Three objectives were established:

- Development of language skills (reading, listening, writing and speaking) for international markets by means of a variety of learning tools and realistic work-based activities and exercises.
- Introduction to relevant intercultural business contexts.
- Development of personal language learning strategies for further independent learning.

The pedagogical approach applied was mainly grounded in constructivist theories of knowledge acquisition (McLaughlin, 1987; McGroarty, 1998; Mayes & de Freitas, 2004). The teaching methodology followed was underpinned by the principals of active learning which in an online setting requires that the tutor takes the role of facilitator in the learning process both at personal and group level by organising the learning, moderating the interactions and promoting reflection and creativity in support of learners' motivation and progressive autonomy.

The Pilot module was designed as a 7 week-long module (50 learning hours), which integrated online learning with three, 2-hour, face-to-face sessions in weeks 1 (induction session), 4 and 7 (review sessions).

The e-learning phase consisted of directed independent study by means of reusable learning objects (LOs) accessible through the University's VLE (WebCT Vista/Blackboard) and complemented by folders containing further study links and selected learning items from the LOs in order to facilitate revision work. Online language-learning support was provided in the form of a discussion room and bookable tutorials – both via the VLE's. The former was introduced to foster collaborative learning and, the latter, was targeted at solving individual student's difficulties; 30 minutes online contact on average per student (Fig 2.). Additionally, a work-based learning portfolio was also envisaged for those learners studying from their work places.

Furthermore, collaborative learning facilities were integrated (blogs and discussion rooms, e-mail, and online voice -mail) so that the interactive nature of the tasks offered opportunities to negotiate meaning, a central process of language acquisition (Salmon, 2000).

Horizon-Wimba voice e-mail was introduced into the mix in order to test whether this tool could help in overcoming one of the more important limitations of online technology in the past, the lack of interpersonal oral communication between learner and teacher and between learners. Web-based conferencing was also piloted for a few students who were unable to attend the introductory session in week 1.



Figure 2. Pilot module's home page

4.1 Pilot content

The module content was organised into five topics identified through a needs analysis as important and realistic business environments. Each of the five topics was structured according to the following organizational scheme:

- Topic's learning outcomes and learning strategies guide.
- Four units, each of which contained a presentation of the functional and linguistic components by means of listening and reading activities, language learning tips, relevant key sentences and vocabulary and, practice exercises set in professional contexts (interactive tasks designed to promote reflection on what had been learnt and application of the knowledge acquired).
- Quizzes (interactive games designed to promote acquisition of the topic key sentences and vocabulary).
- Cultural briefing (presentation and quizzes of cross-cultural items related to each topic).
- Topic Progress Test.

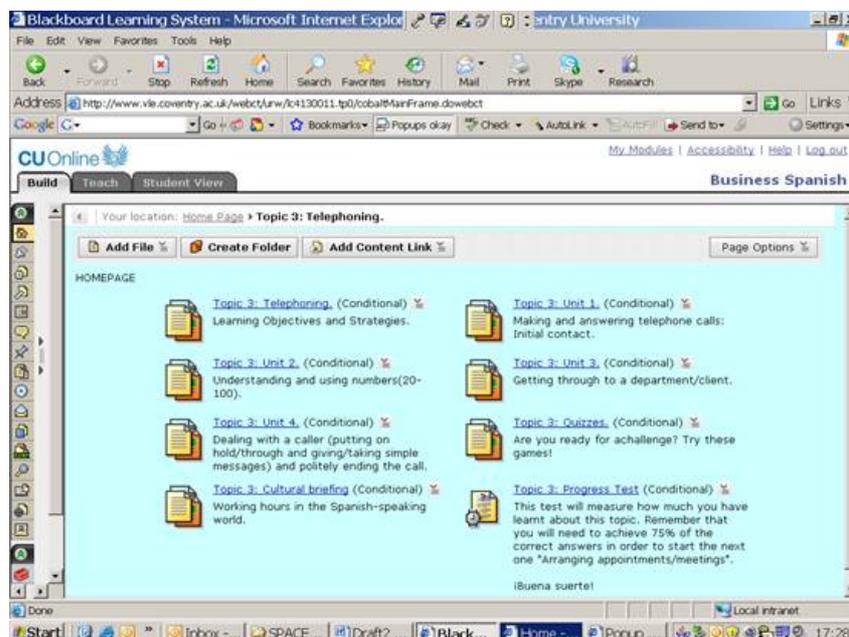


Figure 3. Organizational scheme applied to Topic 3

The Topic Progress Tests were designed to ensure a good understanding of the online language content (learners had to achieve 75% of correct answers) before moving on the next topic. This was considered an important design strategy in order

to guarantee that students would have achieved by the end of each topic the necessary knowledge, understanding and language skill development that would facilitate a more productive engagement with the communicative activities to be performed in the Review sessions. These Progress tests were delivered using the assessment tool provided by the University's VLE (see example in figure 4).

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying the Blackboard Learning System. The page is titled 'Business Spanish' and shows a 'Student View' of a test. The test question is 'B. Topic 5: Question 4', which asks the student to prepare an oral presentation for a company named 'Casa, S.A.' and record it using Wimba voice-mail. The student's response is 'Oral presentation to be assessed and graded by tutor.' The score is 24 out of 25. The comments for the student are 'Excellent work! Be careful with the pronunciation of the following words: especializada, automóviles and planes.' The total score is 71.5/100 = 71.5%, and the student is prompted to 'Please send the oral presentation for question 4 and try again Question 1 in order to complete this test. Let me know'. There are buttons for 'Update Grade', 'Reset Attempt', and 'Cancel'.

Figure 4. Example of Progress Test and question feedback

4.2 Language learning materials

The online language learning materials were designed applying principles of active learning within a constructivist approach and developed as learning objects (LOs) by using the e-learning template referred to previously.

In order to support learners' confidence and motivation in an online learning environment, clear explanations regarding the learning objectives were given for all the topics in addition to each language learning unit within each topic (Fig. 5). Short organisers were also introduced in order to facilitate the understanding of activities and exercises.

The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a 'Learning Module' for 'Topic 2: Exchanging Information'. The page has a table of contents on the left and a main content area on the right. The table of contents lists 10 items, including 'Giving further personal details', 'Key sentences: Asking for further personal details', 'Activity 1: Asking for further personal details', 'Reminder: Learning Strategies', 'Dialogue: Giving further personal details', 'Key vocabulary: Numbers from 0 to 20', 'Activity 2: Working with numbers (0 to 20)', 'Activity 3: Giving further personal details', 'Activity 4: Your personal details', and 'You've finished!'. The main content area is titled 'Giving further personal details' and contains the text: 'This unit will prepare you to deal with questions about your name, address and telephone number. You will also learn how to count from 0 to 20 in Spanish.' The footer of the page reads '(c) 2006 Rosario Kana-Itumua, Coventry University.'

Figure 5. Interactive table of contents and learning objectives

Figure 6. Short organizers help to clarify the context of the activity and the steps to take in order to complete the exercise

Learning strategy guides were added to each topic and prior to skill-based tasks in order to support independent learning development. Careful sequencing of item presentation, activities and language learning tips was also pursued with the aim of facilitating confidence in what is for many students a novel way of learning. The language learning tips were closely linked to the presentation materials in order to help the development of linguistic competence. Finally, formative and immediate feedback was the main method used in order to promote learning (scaffolding). Figures 7 and 8 provide examples of language learning tips and interactive materials used in the Pilot module.

Figure 7. Example of a language-learning tip



Figure 8. Example of interactive activities and feedback

5. Students' feedback

a) Methodology

A small case trial was conducted in the summer term of 2007 in order to investigate the feasibility of using the e-learning template for language learning of non-linguist students within a blended learning setting.

The Pilot module described in the previous sections was run with a group of 20 full-time university students; three post-graduate and 17 undergraduate, who had passed the selection process for a work placement in Spanish companies starting in September/October 2007. These students were invited to participate in the study by completing two short questionnaires in the first and last week of the trial via e-mail. No incentive was given to complete these surveys.

The initial questionnaire was intended to ascertain the students' level of confidence in using computers and also their pattern of general use of technology and the University's VLE. Questions regarding student's subject disciplines and their knowledge of further languages in addition to their native language were also included.

A five-point Likert scale was utilized for the questions on students' confidence in using computers. Open-ended questions were also used to elicit reasons for the usefulness or otherwise of online learning and students positive as well as negative past experiences.

At the end of the trial, participants were also asked to complete and send via e-mail a survey that sought information about the students' views of the online materials developed using the e-learning template referred to in this paper.

A categorical scale was employed for the questions about the point reached in their online study and the time needed to complete each topic studied and whether they attended the face-to-face sessions. A five-point Likert scale was utilized for the questions related to their perceptions regarding the skills learnt and about the activities, revision tasks and links forming part of the online courseware. Each of the questions using the Likert scale was followed by the opportunity to explain in a free format the reasons if the answer was neutral, disagree or strongly disagree.

b) Results

Of the 13 students who returned the initial questionnaire, three were female (33%) and 10 were male (77%). The gender distribution of the whole group of 20 students was 12 male (60%) and 8 female (40%). The data also showed that 8 students were native speakers of Polish, and the remainder spoke Bulgarian, English, Greek, Slovak and Yoruba, respectively. All of them were beginners in Spanish and had knowledge of, at least, one other language in addition to their native language to varying levels from A1 to C2, mainly English, German and French. There were no mature students in the trial group.

In terms of the subject discipline, the three postgraduates (23% of respondents) were studying Automotive Engineering (n=2) and Strategic Marketing Management (n=1). The range of degrees studied by the undergraduate respondents was categorized as follows: 46% were studying Engineering, 14% Business and Technology, respectively and, 7% Computing studies. The sample should therefore be seen as skewed towards students with a strong engineering background. This was an unavoidable consequence of the type of companies interested in participating in the Leonardo Programme at the time.

Regarding their computer literacy, 85% of the respondents strongly agreed and 7% agreed that they felt confident about using computers and only 7% reported themselves as neutral. When asked about their use of technology (computers, laptops, iPods, MP3), all students actively engaged in study, entertainment and social networking via one or more of these devices and access the University network both on and off campus. One student reported using technology for paid work and another for his research.

The University's virtual course management system (VLE) was regularly visited by all students both on campus and off campus, the highest activity being to access lecture notes (100%) followed by undertaking practical exercises (69%), using internet links (46%) and online discussion (46%).

The end of trial questionnaire was completed and returned via e-mail by 6 students. Most students finished the five topics forming part of the trial and the time needed to complete each topic varied from 5 to 8 hours. Some students found it easier than others to adapt to an online learning format.

Because of the small number of respondents, the information indicating that the 3 students with knowledge of 1 or more languages in addition to their native tongue and English needed less time to completed the topics can only be considered as anecdotal. Additionally, all three were of Polish origin and, in informal feedback, they pointed out that Spanish was for them an easy language to learn because of the phonetic similarities with Polish.

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree

Q2. Vocabulary	50%	50%		
Q3. Listening	17%	50%	33%	
Q4. Reading	33%	67%		
Q5. Writing	17%	67%	17%	
Q6. Speaking	17%	33%	17%	33%

Table 1. Students feedback on skills learnt

- Q2. The topics studied have increased my knowledge of vocabulary regarding Business Spanish.
- Q3. The topics studied have increased my ability to understand spoken Business Spanish.
- Q4. The topics studied have increased my ability to understand written Business Spanish.
- Q5. The topics studied have increased my ability to write in Spanish (Business) at a basic level.
- Q6. The topics studied have increased my ability to speak in Spanish (Business) at a basic level.

Table 1 shows that all respondents found the module effective in increasing their vocabulary knowledge and reading skills. The majority of students expressed strong to moderate agreement with the statements regarding increased ability to write in Spanish (Business) at a basic level' (84%). Whilst two-thirds noted a strong to moderate agreement about an increased ability to understand spoken Business Spanish (67%). However, when increased ability to speak in Spanish (Business) at a basic level was concerned, the results were more mixed with 50% who strongly agree/agree, 17% were neutral, and 33% disagree with the relevant statement.

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Q7. Instructions	33%	67%			
Q9. Revision tool	17%	67%		17%	
Q10. Links	17%	67%	17%		

Table 2. Students feedback on instructions, revision tool and useful links

- Q7. The activities instructions were easy to follow.
- Q9. I have found the 'At your finger tips' folder a useful revision tool.
- Q10. I have found the links in the 'Further Learning' folder useful.

The section on perceptions on instructions, revision tools and links revealed that all students agreed or strongly agreed that the activities instructions were easy to follow, and 84% did the same regarding the usefulness of the revision tools, with only one student (17%) disagreeing. The majority of students (84%) found the courseware links useful.

Half of the respondents attended the first revision session (face-to-face) and all stated that this session was very useful because of the focus on interaction through group practice and role plays had helped them improve their speaking skills. The online surgery session bookable during the first revision week was requested by 6 out of the 20 students engaged in the pilot. Of the former 6 students, only one completed the end of session questionnaire and he found this session very helpful.

When asked if they would like to take another blended learning module/course based on their experience with the module under study, 33% strongly agreed, 50% agreed and one student (17%) disagreed.

The last section of the questionnaire gave students the opportunity to make comments or suggestions. Two of them reported persistent technical problems with their PC's browser regarding the opening of courseware audio files. Another respondent would have preferred "traditional essays to memorize vocabulary and basic grammar". Finally, the student who disagreed about taking another blended learning module gave as a reason that "it is difficult to learn something without frequent contact with the teacher and the other participants of the module". He also requested a greater emphasis on grammar.

6. Discussion

The most important aim in designing and developing a course is "creating a learning environment that works as a whole" (Kerres, 2001 cited in Neumeier, 2005). The latter author points out that the dispositions, aptitudes and attitudes of learners and teachers have to be taken into account in order to make blended learning work appropriately.

The course described in this paper represents an attempt to create such a learning environment by providing teachers with clear and explicit rational regarding the choice of a blended learning approach in order to equip learners with an effective learning process. A key element of this course is the integration of dedicated authoring tools into an e-Learning template in an attempt to facilitate a trouble free interface for students and teachers as well as offering attractive and effective online learning materials.

The two software systems described in section 3 were found to be very user-friendly by this author and, subsequently, by those colleagues interested in using the e-Learning template described. Immediate benefits reported were that specialist programming skills were not required in order to achieve a HTML format for the materials developed and these could be quickly and painlessly exported to the University's VLE by the publishing wizards in both systems. Other welcome features were the clear, step-by-step, guides and hands-on tutorials, the ready-made templates and the easy-to-develop questions and quizzes which could be enhanced by a large variety of media. Furthermore, the time needed for materials' development was greatly reduced through teachers being able to recycle existing materials written in Word and the innovative incorporation of PowerPoint presentations into the Course Genie generated materials.

This synergy of tools was very well received by students who found the integration of these set of materials within a single interface setting easy to navigate and provided a better understanding of key language features. The reason for the latter was the greater conceptual clarity afforded through the use of colour, audio narration and sequencing animation encapsulated in the Power Point presentations and the seamless progression to the practice materials within the coursework. The students expressed in informal exchanges that the module e-template had facilitated their learning because of the attractive presentation, ease of use, clear instructions (motivation) and the organization of tasks and sequencing of key learning points (scaffolding of learning). These findings are in agreement with Felix (2003:124) recommendations regarding the provision of user friendly sites, clear guidelines and objectives.

Language learning objects (LOs) are a recent addition to the repertoire of e-learning tools. LOs are gaining popularity, in spite of requiring a time-consuming development process as reported in a number of studies. The popularity of LOs is due to their self-

contained nature, discrete and concise content and the possibility of sequencing learning according to a well established pattern in language teaching, namely, presentation, practice and guided production by using interactive materials. These multimedia based-objects could be easily reused in other learning settings or be modified in order to adapt them to changing objectives. The integration of dedicated authoring tools into an e-template has been found to contribute greatly to reducing the time needed to produce well presented and organised materials including immediate and customised feedback.

Students were invited to exchange learning experiences and tips through the VLE's discussion forum but after an initial interest in exchanging personal information including the details of their work placements in Spain and their expectations regarding the achievement of some basic knowledge of Spanish, the frequency of exchanges diminished after the second face-to-face session. Informal comments made by students during the trial pointed to the lack of problems navigating the online coursework, the clear topics and activities' goals and also the effective feedback provided. One reason for this as suggested by Ausburn (2004 – cited in Sharpe, R., et al. 2006:64) may be that the students in a blended-learning context have more opportunities to meet face-to-face on campus, thus, reducing the need for online contact.

The results of the initial (pre-module) questionnaire which was designed to obtain a better understanding of the students general use of technology and their earlier experiences of online learning, indicated that the majority of the students were confident computer users and that they used technological tools for a range of non-study activities such as social networking and entertainment. These findings seem to indicate an increasing level of technical competence among students as compared with previous studies (Ayres, 2002).

However, regarding the experience of using technology in their studies, this appears to be mainly focused on accessing lecture notes followed at a distance by performing practical exercises. Use of the internet and participating in online discussions seems to be less widespread.

Although students reported that they regularly accessed the University network both on and off campus, two of the six students who returned the second questionnaire, reported frequent problems accessing the audio online materials because of technical difficulties experienced with their personal PC/lap-top settings and their reluctance to download the required Java programme.

Exposure to online learning prior to this trial was not extensive and mainly involved accessing lecture notes with only two students having participated in more substantial online learning; one within a blended provision and the other through a distance course. Despite minimal involvement in the last two modes of learning for most of the students, all asserted that online learning was useful with the main reason for this judgement being that information and /or resources were available all the time, including grades and announcements. A further key feature shared by most was the importance of learning at their own speed and time.

The preponderance of students with online learning limited to accessing lecture notes and module information reflects the findings of previous research studies (see Sharpe, R., et al., 2006:24). Only the two students who had experienced a blended and a full online course respectively indicated the convenience of easy access from anywhere. As the only student having participated in a fully online course stated, 'It is very comfortable, you can undertake your course at any free time, without necessity to leave your home'.

The gender distribution seems to indicate that there is still a greater number of male than female students attracted to courses involving e-learning even though the three female respondents were engaged in engineering related studies at undergraduate level. Their input indicates that only one felt very confident using computers while the other two were confident and neutral respectively. All three used technology for their studies, entertainment, social networking and accessing the University network. Regarding the latter, two of the 3 female respondents had used this facility to access lecture notes and practical exercises, while only one of them used internet links and the online discussions available. She had also experienced online learning within a blended setting, the only one of the 13 respondents and stated that she liked the 'easily available learning resources', but disliked the fact that, 'sometimes [it was] difficult to get the necessary support one would normally get from the classroom'.

On the whole, students liked the benefits usually associated with online learning, namely, own speed/time, range of available resources, anywhere access and convenience. They expressed their perception that this was a good resource very often underutilised by teachers.

Regarding the e-learning materials, students were very positive about the benefits on their vocabulary and reading skills and, generally agreed that their listening and writing in Spanish had improved. Speaking was the least successful with only 50% in agreement or strong agreement about their role in increasing their ability to speak the language. A higher percentage might have been achieved if the integration of the voice-mail tool had been more extensive.

Immediately before the trial, the University piloted the Horizon-Wymba voice tools within its VLE and as a result of initial technical drawbacks, the voice-mail tool was only implemented in the last three weeks of the study when students were requested to write and record several tasks involving dialogues as collaborative activities and presentations with a more individual learning aim. Students were very appreciative of the effectiveness of voice-mails in supporting their oral language development through online practice and the benefit drawn from the customised tutor oral and written feedback facilitated by this software.

Similarly, the short test of the VLE-based conferencing conducted with two students who could not attend the first face-to-face session revealed this application as an appropriate way to provide effective learning despite the need for some basic students' training prior to the event.

The student who reported a neutral judgement in the last two categories (in addition to being unwilling to take another blended module/course) mentioned that he would have liked more detailed grammar information than that provided in the pilot. The pilot grammar support consisted of specific grammatical information regarding the language studied for each unit in the form of language learning tips (see section 4.) and a description of the Spanish verbal system which was available from the folder 'At your finger tips'. Students were advised at relevant points of the online study to expand their grammatical knowledge by visiting this folder and the relevant links housed in the Further Learning folder. A possible interpretation of this student's requirement is that he had come from a country with an educational system less inclined to foster student autonomy and still needed a more traditional teacher led instruction.

As mentioned previously, all the key sentences/vocabulary and language learning tips were housed within the 'At your finger tips' folder which was designed as an easily accessible and useful revision tool. All the students but one found this part of the provision useful or very useful. The same opinion was extended to the Further Learning folder.

7. Conclusions and future plans

In this study, a new blended course for language learning is presented which incorporates an innovative eLearning template as the key element of its main mode of delivery. A pilot module was designed for Beginners Spanish and trialled with undergraduate and postgraduate students in order to test the effectiveness of this template. This experience and the initial students' feedback revealed that the e-learning template was an effective way of harnessing the potential synergies of the authoring tools selected through their integration into a single and user-friendly interface for both students and teachers.

Furthermore, the template helped to reduce the cost and time needed to produce well presented and organised materials including customised feedback. Students also found the courseware easy to navigate and highly intuitive. The online language materials were structured as learning objects and were judged by students as attractive and well designed. The clear objectives and organizational scheme of the learning components, together with careful sequencing of activities and tasks and, the formative and immediate feedback described in this paper was greatly facilitated by the multimedia nature of the authoring tools integrated in the eLearning template. Furthermore, they helped in providing students with a variety of realistic business scenarios which were instrumental in fostering learning and supporting motivation.

The questionnaire-based feedback from students participating in the pilot module revealed that they were computer literate to a higher level to that reported in other studies and also highly experienced in using technological tools for their everyday life. However, this was not the case for study-related use of technology for which their experiences were mainly related to accessing lecture notes and general course information. Despite this lack of extensive contact with online learning, all the respondents asserted that this approach was useful because of benefits such as learning at own speed/time, convenience and greater availability of resources which confirm the findings of previous studies on student's perception of e-learning.

Because of the small number of replies to the end of trial questionnaire, the findings can only be taken as indicative of the experiences and perceptions of the whole group engaged with the pilot. Within this proviso in mind, the analysis of the data shows that students were highly appreciative of the role of the e-learning materials in their progress in the areas of vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension and generally agreed that the courseware had contributed to improving their listening and writing skills. These findings are in agreement with other studies reporting similar results. The general positive attitude regarding the pilot module was further confirmed by the 83% of the respondents stating that they would like to take another blended module/course based on this learning experience.

The potential of this innovative language learning course derives from its clear and well balanced mix of resources and scalability. The course could be adapted to a variety of students' needs and preferences and/or different languages, levels of competence and business scenarios. As an example of its adaptability and based on the successful trial of the pilot module, the University's Employability Programme commissioned a blended e-learning course for Business Languages to be adapted to their specific programme framework for undergraduates in the summer of 2007.

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Article

“Integrating the Year Abroad” an integrative approach to Language Learning supported by WebCT ePortfolio [1]

Abstract

This paper presents a case study on the role of ePortfolios in enhancing Integrative Learning within the context of the Year Abroad program. The Centre for Integrative Learning at the University of Nottingham has funded the project “Integrating the Year Abroad” which involves the creation and the development of a computer based portfolio template, the Year Abroad ePortfolio, to assist the students of Modern Languages who spend the third year of their studies in one or more foreign countries. The purpose of this paper is to outline how the ePortfolio created for the project takes the role of a learning and reflective tool promoting Integrative Learning within the context of a Year Abroad program and language learning.

Key words: year abroad, integrative learning, WebCT, ePortfolio

1. Integrative Learning

Integrative Learning enables students to connect their academic experience with other life dimensions increasing their learning process as well as enriching their personal development. The underlying assumption is that an integrative approach to higher education “is essential to prepare students to deal effectively both with complex issues in their working lives and the challenges facing the broader society today and in the future.” (Humphreys 2005) With this in mind, institutions of Higher Education are moving consistently towards Integrative Learning in order to enhance the students' experience and “to give them the habits of mind needed to make informed personal, professional, and civic decisions throughout their lives.” (Flower & Rhodes 2005)

According to Huber & Hutchings (2004), ePortfolios feature as tools for self-assessment within Integrative Learning practices. [2] Although this paper places the Year Abroad ePortfolio within the context of an assessment procedure, it also highlights the authors' view that “more explicit rubrics for self-assessment, sometimes connected with portfolio development, may also serve powerful integrative purposes by making students more self-aware, self directed learners.” (ibid: 8) More precisely, the Year Abroad ePortfolio has been designed not only to serve the purpose of formally assessing the linguistic competence and cultural awareness resulting from the Year Abroad experience, but, most importantly, to be a student-centred platform for reflective learning leading, ultimately, to self-assessment.

This paper will be structured as follows. Section 2 gives an overview of the rationale behind the project “Integrating the Year Abroad”. It gives details of the Year Abroad Certificate in Language and Cultural Awareness and briefly outlines the content of the learning portfolio on the basis of which the certificate is accredited. Section 3 offers a general introduction of the project and section 4 is concerned with the methodology applied. Section 5 looks specifically at the Year Abroad ePortfolio focusing on its aims and objectives and section 6 gives a closer look at the structure of the ePortfolio, providing several illustrative screenshots. Section 7 deals with the main issues that have arisen as the project progressed and, finally, section 9 clarifies the outcomes of the project and concludes this paper by highlighting the central role of the Year Abroad ePortfolio within the University's plans to improve the quality of the students' learning experience.

2. The Year Abroad Certificate in Language and Cultural Awareness

Students on Modern Language degrees spend their entire third year abroad on a variety of exchange programmes, formal courses and work placements. The School of Modern Languages and Cultures at the University of Nottingham has no means of formally assessing the Year Abroad within the 360-credit framework of undergraduate degrees and has for some time been considering a way of connecting the Year Abroad experience with students' academic activities.

In conjunction with the Institute of Linguists (<http://www.iol.org.uk/>) the School has designed an assessment procedure that provides students with The Year Abroad Certificate in Language and Cultural Awareness additional to their degree. The certificate is awarded by the Institute of Linguists who in conjunction with the Language Centre of the University of Nottingham is involved in the marking process of students' final work. The staff of the Language Centre are the principal markers and the Institute of Linguists acts as moderator. The students are assessed and accredited the certificate on the basis of written reports and a log-book on their learning progress (see below).

The School has agreed with the Institute of Linguists that the assessment is through a learning portfolio, which tests the ability to reflect upon the inter-cultural and language-learning experience. Clearly, this procedure emphasises the significance of reflective learning and aims at facilitating the integration of the Year Abroad experience more explicitly into students' personal portfolios and CVs.

The learning portfolio consists of the following three components:

- One essay in English (2000 words) based on research into an agreed intercultural issue. [3]
- One report in English (2000 words) based on self-evaluation and reflection on the learning process and methods.
- A log-book which divides into a section that deals with aspects of language acquisition and a section concerned with reflections on language and culture.

The new assessment procedure is being piloted for the first year with 22 students and will be extended in the second pilot year to approximately 60 students. Eventually, it will be extended to all 500 students of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures who are required to spend a year abroad.

Having briefly described the certificate and the requirements for its accreditation, the next sections look in detail at the project “Integrating the Year Abroad” and its Year Abroad ePortfolio.

3. The project “Integrating the Year Abroad”

The project “Integrating the Year Abroad” and its Year Abroad ePortfolio were developed in support of the Year Abroad Certificate described above. It is felt that the adoption of an online portfolio best suits the distance learning nature of the work required for the accreditation of the certificate.

The core aim of “Integrating the Year Abroad” is to promote Integrative Learning through the support of a bespoke electronic learning Portfolio. More specifically, it aims at raising students' awareness and understanding of the connection between their experience abroad and their subject studies by creating a portfolio template specific for the students of the School of Modern Languages and Cultures and specific for the assessment procedure proposed by the School.

Corollary to its main concerns, the project also provides the School of Modern Languages with its individual departments with a unified online tool that facilitates the administration and assessment of the work of students during their year abroad.

Last but not least, the project provides guidelines for the creation of learning ePortfolios constituting a case study which could be transferable to academic areas other than language learning.

The next session is concerned with the methodology adopted to carry out the project.

4. Methodology

As mentioned earlier, the project is being piloted with a first cohort of 22 students, and will then be extended to a wider group. The project involves several working phases:

- Contextualizing the work by examining several case studies.
- Liaising with all units involved, i.e. the individual administrators and Year Abroad directors of each department of the School to ensure uniformity of the structure of the portfolio template; the University's dedicated eLearning team for technical support; the staff of the Centre for Integrative Learning for pedagogical issues.
- Designing the template based on the documentation of the certificate provided by the School as well as on information obtained from Year Abroad administrators and directors to ensure suitability with the new assessment procedure and the needs of the staff and students involved.
- Identifying several key tasks to increase the students' familiarity with the ePortfolio and prepare them to use its main tools before their departure.
- Assisting students and the administrative team with trouble-shooting during the pilot years through training sessions and through the development of guidance materials.
- The evaluation procedures. One involves keeping a reflective commentary of the creation of the portfolio, a second one involves monitoring its use.
- Compiling a reflection report to assist the School of Modern Languages and Cultures in the evaluation of the pilot years of the project.
- Compiling an evaluation report which provides guidelines for further development of the portfolio and a case study to ensure its transferability.

The ePortfolio integrated with the VLE supported by the University of Nottingham (Blackboard/WebCT) has been chosen to benefit from the familiarity of the students and members of staff with the interface. This has helped to reduce staff and student resistance to its use.

Having introduced the project "Integrating the Year Abroad", the next section turns to Year Abroad ePortfolio created for it.

4. The Year Abroad ePortfolio

The ePortfolio Portal (2004) gives the following definition of ePortfolios: [4]

An eportfolio can be a web-based information management system that uses electronic media and services. The learner builds and maintains a digital repository of artefacts, which they can use to demonstrate competence and reflect on their learning. Having access to their records, digital repository, feedback and reflection students can achieve a greater understanding of their individual growth, career planning and CV building. Accreditation for prior and/or extra-curricular experiences and control over access makes the eportfolio a powerful tool.

In view of this definition, the following objectives were aimed at, in creating the Year Abroad ePortfolio template:

- The ePortfolio improves the students' awareness of the connection between their Year Abroad experience and their subject studies.
- It facilitates the students' process of writing their final essays and keeping records of their achievements during the year spent abroad.
- It provides the students with a tool to share their achievements with guests, i.e. family, employers and friends.
- It provides the students with a personal environment to collect reflections on their experiences in the host countries.
- It provides students with a platform for the formal submission of their work.
- It encourages independent management of learning resources, helping the students to complete the work required for the accreditation of the certificate.
- It facilitates the administration and the academic supervision of the proposed assessment procedure.

In the section that follows the ePortfolio template is described in more detail.

6. A closer look at the Year Abroad ePortfolio

The structure of the Year Abroad ePortfolio reflects closely the guidelines and criteria compiled by the School in the documentation related to the certificate. Figure 1 below illustrates the homepage of the ePortfolio:

- **How to use the portfolio** and **The Year Abroad Certificate in Language and Cultural Awareness** contain informative documentation. Here, as throughout the ePortfolio, informative documents have been placed in the header of the page as these, with the footers, are the only sections of the portfolio that cannot be edited by the students. All other sections of the ePortfolio are exclusively student-controlled.
- The **LANGUAGE ACQUISITION LOG-BOOK** and the **REFLECTION ON LANGUAGE LOG-BOOK** are those specified by the certificate under the heading of a single log-book (see section 2).
- The **SUBMISSIONS** folder contains information about formally submitting the final essay and reports.
- The **Language Learning NOTES** provides room for informal note-taking. This section is not evaluated.
- **Record of achievements and skills** functions as a repository of documents such as reference letters by employers, study certificates, etc.
- The **Before you go** section contains seven tasks that have been designed for the students to complete before their departure. The purpose of this section is to train the students to use the main tools of the ePortfolio. This section also contains a questionnaire to survey the students' attitude towards the ePortfolio. The responses have been overall positive.

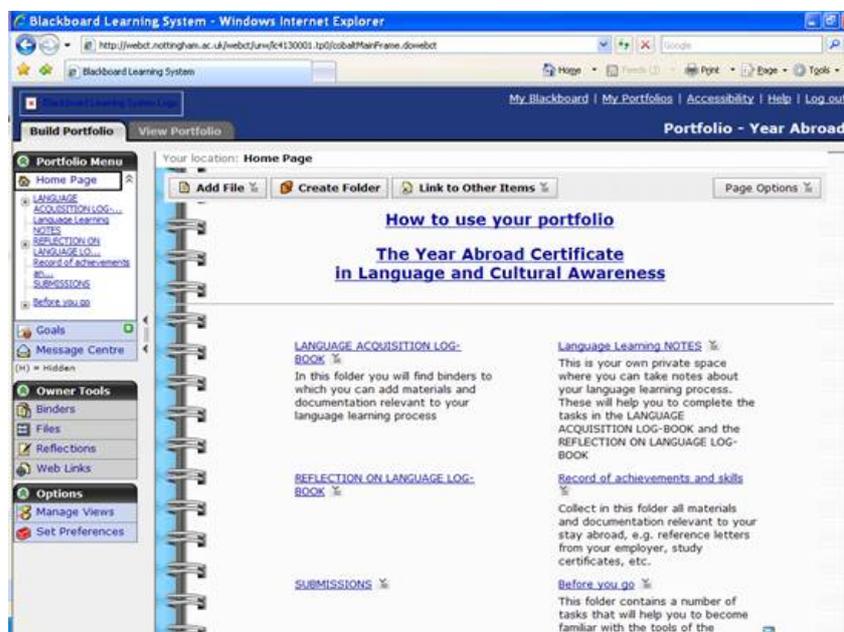


Figure 1 : The Year Abroad ePortfolio homepage

The folders listed in Figure 2 reflect the main skills involved in language learning. **INSTRUCTIONS AND EXAMPLES** links to a document containing hints and tips for populating these sections and sub-sections of the template.

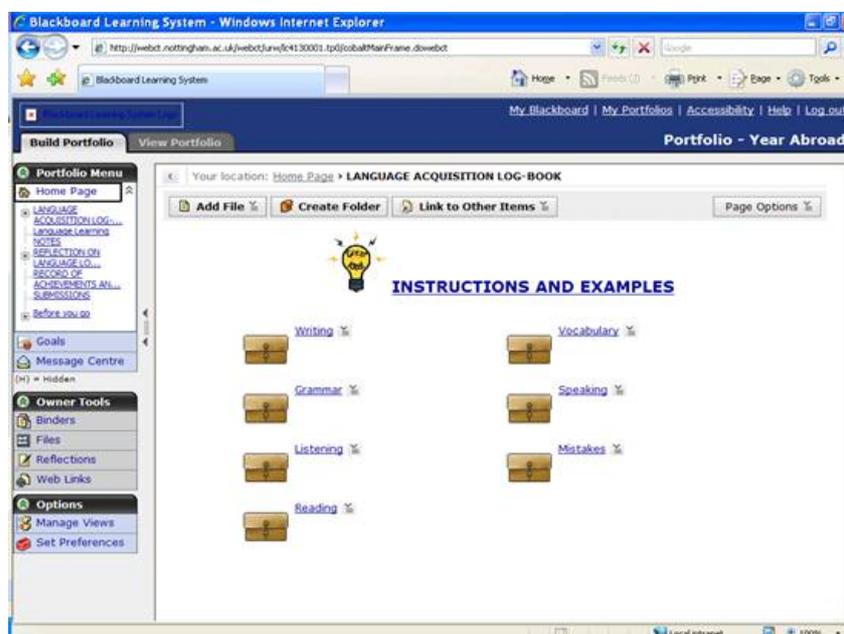


Figure 2 : Inside the **LANGUAGE ACQUISITION LOG-BOOK**

As Figure 3 shows, in this section, as throughout the ePortfolio, students are given clear instructions on what to do as well as **IDEAS** for populating the template with their own materials.

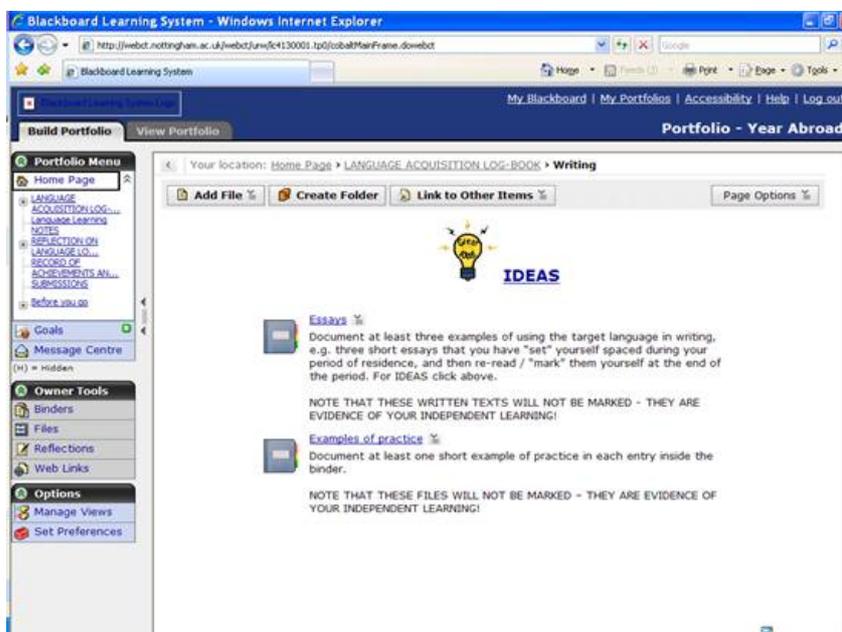


Figure 3 : Inside the **Writing** folder

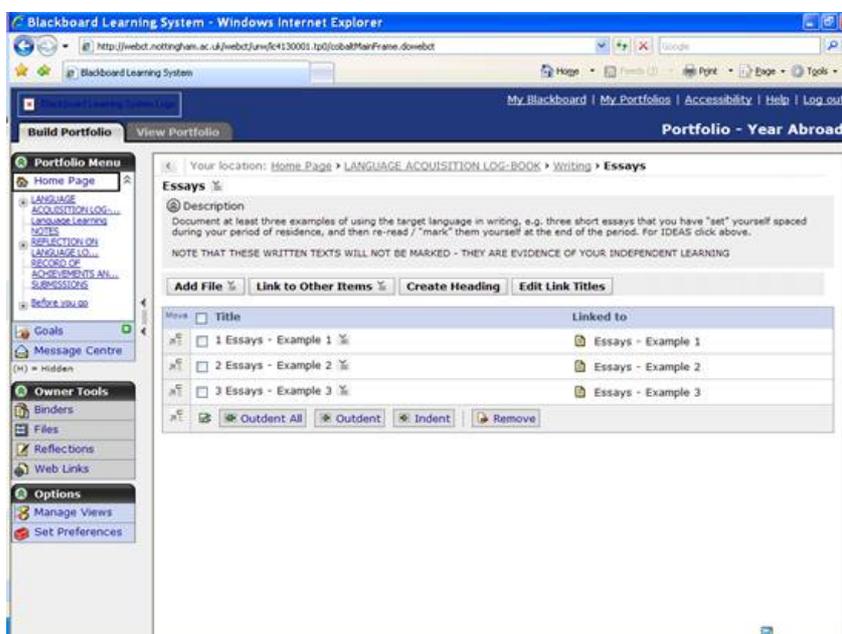


Figure 4 : Inside the **Essay** folder

To complete satisfactorily this section of the **language acquisition log-book**, the students are required to present at least 3 examples of written work in the target language. As shown in Figure 4, the **ESSAY** section of the template reflects this requirement by containing three preset entries.

All the other sections of the template have been designed following a similar format, as the illustration of the **Vocabulary** section shows (Figure 5).

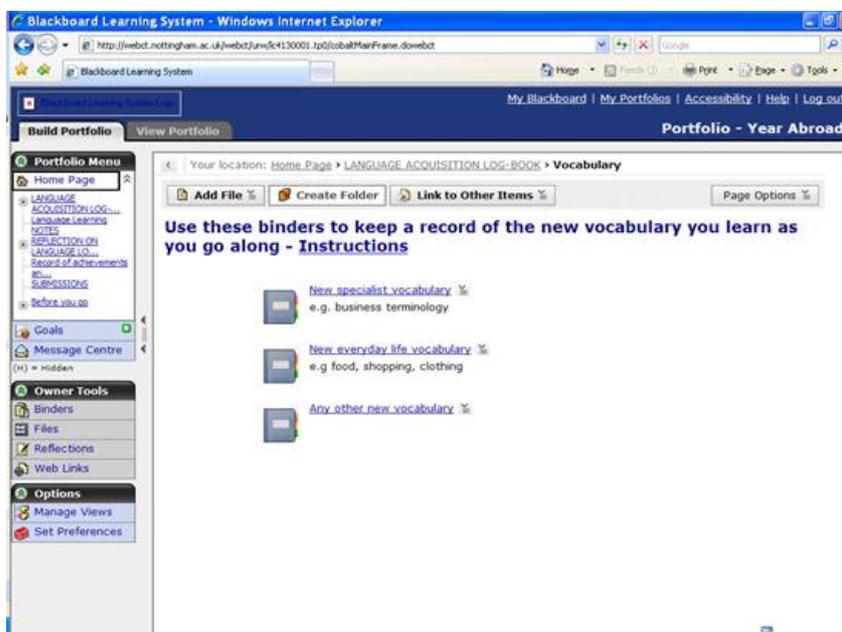


Figure 5: Inside the **Vocabulary** section

Figure 6 below illustrates the **Before you go** section. Here students have been assigned different tasks to be completed before leaving the UK and the University. This section also contains tasks related to activities such as adding links to personal spaces, for instance Flickr or Facebook. It was felt that students would benefit from a less strictly academic aspect of the ePortfolio, one which plays nowadays an important role in students' life and experience at the University.

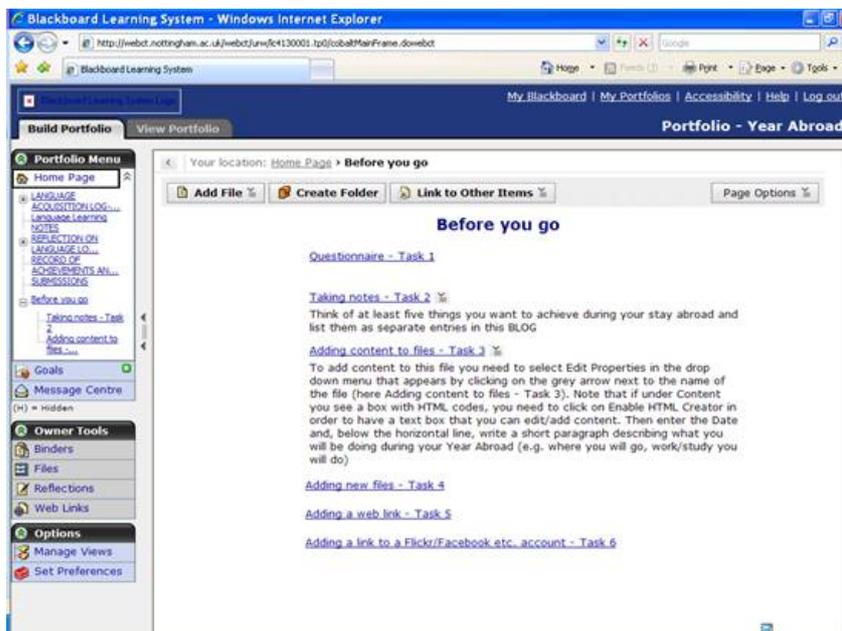


Figure 6: Inside the **Before you Go** section

The **Goals** section (Figure 7) lists several goals related to linguistic skills, professional skills and cultural awareness. The students can link each of these goals to each activity or task performed and recorded in the ePortfolio. The reflective learning approach underlying the ePortfolio is explicitly emphasised through this section.

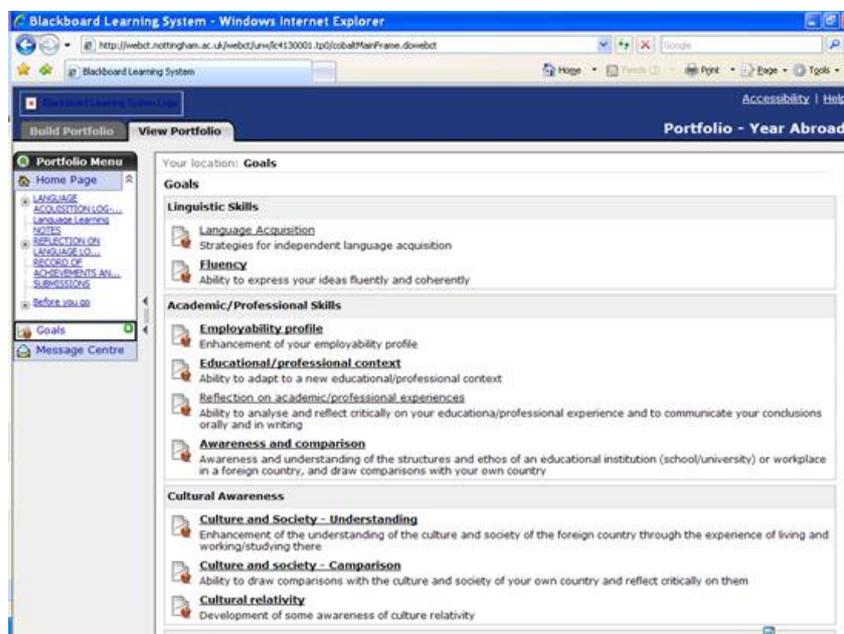


Figure 7: Goals

7. Issues

A number of issues have arisen so far in relation to the Year Abroad ePortfolio. In particular, although more than 50% of the students have performed the tasks in the **Before you go** section and submitted their report proposals, there has been a slow response of the students to the procedure as a whole. This is due to several factors. First, as the new assessment procedure is being piloted this year for the first time, it has not been made compulsory weakening students' motivation to carry out the additional work. Second, the infrequent contact with the relevant departments due to the distance and to students' commitments has had a negative effect on their participation. Third, the majority of students are involved in work experience or other activities which are less strictly academic. This tends to divert students' attention from their academic duties. Last but not least, a handful of students have delayed the use of the ePortfolio due to limited access to computers and the internet. Especially students in remote areas of Russia have raised such a problem.

A possible line of development, which would significantly improve the Year Abroad ePortfolio enhancing the students' motivation and participation, is the addition of a Collaborative Learning component. Although the ePortfolio offered by WebCT includes facilities for interaction, such as sharing and reviewing each others work, collaboration is limited. For this reason, the Year Abroad ePortfolio template does not include tools for collaborative tasks. Thus, a path to explore is that of promoting team work and collaborative activities based on tools such as wikis, blogs and online discussions. These practices would complement the activities carried out individually, increasing students' engagement and stimulating a sense of responsibility towards the learning community.

Another significant issue, one that concerns directly the structure of the ePortfolio template, is the inflexibility of some of the WebCT tools. For instance, the several layers of the template and the diversity of the tools have made it difficult to write instructions and guidelines for students as well as to find an efficient way to deliver them. In addition, the WebCT ePortfolio offers no facility to create non-editable sections within the template, with the exception of the header and footers of each page. It is felt that, without weakening the control of the students over their artefacts, the template would benefit from non-editable preset sections.

Furthermore, another problem encountered during this first pilot year is related to the monitoring of the use of the ePortfolio. In fact, due to the totally student-controlled nature of the ePortfolio, it has been difficult to have access to students' work and evaluate their progress before the submission period.

The process of assessing and evaluating students' work has proven particularly difficult in that the ePortfolio software that was chosen does not offer the students the possibility to compile their work and submit it as a package retaining the structure of the original portfolio. This has consequences for collecting students' work to be delivered to the language specific markers. In fact, in order to access the students' work assessors are required to browse through each section of the portfolio which is not only time consuming but also problematic unless the assessors are familiar with the structure of the portfolio. The same problem also extends to those cases where the students wish to give access to their ePortfolio to guests, such as employers.

Finally, the *elearnspace* (Siemens 2004) section on ePortfolios mentions, among others, the following issues:

- Faculty and learner resistance to eportfolio implementation and use.
- Who has ultimate control – the learner or institution?
- Life long access, separate from institution – a concern impacted by limited eportfolio software options.

These have arisen at different degrees in relation to the Year Abroad ePortfolio. In particular, the question of accessing the ePortfolio beyond the students' period at the University is a concern that has implication for the students' commitment to the work involved. A solution to this problem would be to adopt commercial ePortfolios software. Not without complications, the financial costs would be borne by the institution initially and by the learner later.

Having paid a closer attention to the ePortfolio, the next section returns to the overall project listing its outcomes and making some concluding remarks.

8. Outcomes and Conclusion

The outcomes of the project are several. The first result is the creation of the portfolio template specifically designed for the Year Abroad assessment proposed by the School. Second, it develops a tool that helps administrators and Year Abroad directors to deal respectively with the administration of the new assessment procedure and the evaluation of students' work. Third, it generates an evaluation report of the pilot year. This focuses on the benefits of the ePortfolio for the students and on its use by the administrative and academic staff involved in the Year Abroad scheme. As a consequence of the evaluation process, the fourth result is the compilation of guidelines for further improvement of the portfolio. Finally, it provides a case study to ensure

transferability to other areas, including guidance materials for other tutors and administrators.

To conclude, the project "Integrating the Year Abroad" with its Year Abroad ePortfolio falls centrally within universities strategy to improve the quality of the learning experience of their students. It reflects the ongoing changes in the approach to learning and meets students' expectations at different levels. As Siemens (2000) points out: "The growth of eportfolios is fuelled by three broad factors: the dynamics of functioning in a knowledge economy, the changing nature of learning, and the changing needs of the learner."

With this in mind, the project enhances employability fostering skills such as time management, evaluating resources, ability to display one's knowledge effectively, all highly regarded by future employers. Thus in this sense, the project meets the expectations of most students, who come to university not only to pursue their academic interests but also to improve their employment opportunities.

Furthermore, the project, encouraging journaling, reflective learning and creating connections between the diverse aspects of life and subject studies, supports the Integrative Learning approach widely promoted at university level. Under the assumption that "Integrative Learning does not just happen [...], [it] requires work, [it depends] in large part on commitment and creativity from everyone involved." (Huber, Hutchings & Gale 2004:6) the project contributes significantly to the making of learning as "a process of living" (Siemens 2004).

Finally, in the era of "growing up digital" individuals (Brown 2000), the Year Abroad ePortfolio created for the project meets the students' expectations in the use of technological tools. Students are used to the "online domain" (Siemens 2004), and "eportfolios may be as familiar to many of today's learners as writing pads were to previous generations." (ibid). In this sense, the Year Abroad ePortfolio plays an important role in implementing computer mediated learning

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Notes

[1] I thank the Centre for Integrative Learning, University of Nottingham, for the financial support and thank Emma Crawford, ePortfolio Development Officer, University of Nottingham for her invaluable technical and pedagogical advice.

[2] See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Integrative_learning for a clear concept map describing the activities offered by university to encourage Integrative Learning.

[3] The choice of written reports in English rather than in the target language was forced by the availability of tutors for the marking of students work.

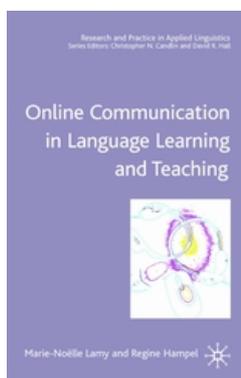
[4] For additional definitions of ePortfolios see <http://www.elearnspace.org/Articles/eportfolios.htm>

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Book review

Online Communication in Language Teaching and Learning



Lamy, Marie-Noëlle & Hampel, Regine (2007)

Online Communication in Language Teaching and Learning

Series: Research and Practice in Applied Linguistics

London: [Palgrave MacMillan](#)

ISBN: 9780230001275 (280 pages)

The main purpose of this book is to examine the theories, pedagogies and tools which contribute to online communication. 'Online' essentially means through the medium of the computer - although there is a very brief section on mobile devices - hence the book's central theme is CMCL. Although it appears constantly, this acronym is never explicitly defined. It is clear, however, that 'CMC' stands for *computer-mediated communication*, while 'L' stands for *language teaching and learning*. To put it another way, as indeed the authors themselves do (p. 112), CMCL can be taken to be what Levy (2000) called 'CMC-based CALL'. In general, this is a book which takes some time to warm up but improves considerably as you get past the first two chapters and into the real meat of CMCL.

Part I, of the four parts the book is divided into, discusses "the major concepts that underpin the field of computer-mediated communication for language learning" (p. 2). Thankfully, both the rather densely-written first chapter (Historical Background) and the somewhat superficial (perhaps necessarily so!) second chapter (Learning Theories) soon give way to concepts the authors write about in a much more interesting way. Chapter 3 (Mediation, Multimodality and Multiliteracies) discusses some of the field's major concepts such as mediation, affordances, multimodal and multiliteracies, while Chapter 4 (Lines of Enquiry into CMCL) examines qualitative and quantitative research methods and contrasts ways in which online discourse and conversation can be analysed. The chapter ends by speculating on ways in which CMCL practitioners could research the notions of online interculturalism and identity.

Chapters 5 and 6 look, respectively, at teachers and learners. Chapter 5 explores the roles of the teacher and the skills they need in online settings and goes on to examine the design of socio-collaborative tasks and problem-based learning activities for CALL. Building on the work of Richards and Rodgers (2001) and Hampel (2006), the authors introduce a model for task development applicable to CMCL environments. The chapter ends with some guidelines on how teachers can reflect on their teaching as well as on their use of online teaching tools. The learner is the focus of Chapter 6 (Learner Experience), which discusses aspects such as motivation, anxiety, cognitive load and participation. The final Chapter in Part I (Assessment of CMCL) examines a number of issues in the assessment of online language learning in communicative settings. One final point to note is that each chapter in Part I concludes with useful suggestions for further reading related to the topic of the chapter from both CMCL and other fields. For each book or article they suggest, Lamy and Hampel give a brief (and much appreciated) summary so that the reader may identify whether the item is of interest or not.

In Part II, Lamy and Hampel provide a literature review in which they examine the relationships between research and practice; that is, how theory has been applied and in what ways empirical findings have fed back into research. Chapters 8-12, therefore, each compare two studies which are based on a specific technology. In order these are: Asynchronous Fora, Synchronous Chat, Multiple Object-oriented Environments, Audiographic Environments and Virtual Worlds, Videoconferencing. In the absence of a sufficient number of published research studies, the final chapter in Part II (Chapter 13, Emerging Technologies) discusses the potential for language learning of blogs, wikis and mobile devices.

Chapters 8-12 follow the same format. Each begins with a brief Introduction to the specific technology, followed by a description of the two studies. For each study, Lamy and Hampel first describe the research frameworks informing the study and then the setting in which the study took place. They then explore some of the insights (positive or negative) gained from practical applications and finally discuss how the findings may feed back into further research and practice. The conclusions which close each of these chapters (as well as the previous sections describing the studies) are brimming with useful ideas for anyone interested in research or increasing the relevance of their teaching.

The four chapters which make up Part III are aimed specifically at readers who wish to carry out small-scale research in communicative environments. Chapter 14 (An Overview of Practitioner Research) uses case studies to identify and demonstrate three broad organising principles for any practitioner research project, and provides an overview of methods and instruments. Chapter 15 (A Practical Guide to CMCL Practitioner Research) looks at some of the human factors to take into account such as technical competence and ethical concerns. Chapter 16 (Dealing with Data in Small-Scale Practitioner Research) discusses some of the practical and methodological requirements involved in collecting and managing data. It suggests a classification of different types of data and introduces some automatic tools which can be used for data analysis. Chapter 17 (Some Possible Practitioner Research Projects) provides templates for six research projects on different aspects of CMCL: videoconferencing, learner identity, collaboration, emerging technologies, teacher training and online tasks. The templates cover aspects such as procedures to follow, the identification of research questions, methodology, data collection and analysis.

Chapter 18 (Resources), the final chapter and Part IV of the book, begins with the words: "This final part offers a list of mainly online resources". However, Lamy and Hampel do not provide a mere list and to call it such does not do it justice. They have organised the resources based on the main function of each site and provide a resources map for ease of reference. Moreover, each item on their 'list' is described in terms of who it is aimed at and why it might be useful.

With this book, Lamy and Hampel provide teachers and researchers with some stimulating approaches to carrying out research as well as ways to develop their practical teaching skills in, and awareness of, online environments. I particularly like the way they build on previous findings to explain the potential uses and challenges of specific technologies for language learning and suggest areas and procedures for research which can be carried out by individuals or small teams.

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Report on the EUROCALL CMC Special Interest Group Regional Workshop at the University of León - April 2009

Researching Computer Mediated Communication in Foreign Language Education: Issues and Methods

The second regional workshop of Eurocall's Computer Mediated Communication Special Interest Group (CMC SIG) took place between 23-25 April, 2009 at the University of León, Spain. While our first workshop last year in Padova, Italy, looked at both research and practice in computer-mediated communication and language learning, this year's workshop dealt in more detail with the issues and methods involved in researching CMC in the foreign language classroom.

The workshop was attended by 55 researchers and students of CALL from various European countries as well as by participants from Russia, Canada, the USA and Taiwan. A further 20 Foreign Language Education students from the local university also attended and were awarded 2.5 credits for participation in the workshop.

The decision to organise a workshop on the theme of researching CMC was taken due to the many significant changes which have taken place in the field in recent years and the challenges that these are posing for researchers of online learning and virtual student communication and collaboration. An ever-growing number of language learners are regularly engaged in new types of learning activities such as telecollaborative exchange with members of other cultures using synchronous and asynchronous technology, the development of Web 2.0 documents (e.g. blogs, wikis and podcasts) in the target language as well as participation in virtual worlds (e.g. Second life) and social networks (e.g. Facebook etc.). A great many educational institutions have also adapted Virtual Learning Environments such as Moodle to organise and administer their online learning activities. These activities and tools imply a complex array of challenges for researchers of online foreign language learning who are seeking to understand a learning environment which has multimedia and multimodal dimensions, alters traditional discourse structures, introduces new notions of authorship and has a distinctly multicultural populace.

The workshop involved a combination of plenary presentations, interactive workshops, round-table discussions as well as presentations by participants. All of these dealt with how CMC in foreign language education can most effectively be researched and the speakers explored the practical, theoretical and ethical issues which emerge when researching online student communication and collaboration. The plenary sessions by Françoise Blin (Dublin City University, Ireland) and Andreas Müller-Hartmann (Paedagogische Hochschule, Heidelberg, Germany) provided insightful overviews of recent developments in research methodology and both argued in favour of Activity Theory as an effective tool for understanding the complex array of factors which influence the impact of CMC in foreign language education. Interactive workshops (carried out by Marie-Noelle Lamy and Regine Hampel and by Mirjam Hauck together with Regine Hampel) provided participants with first-hand experience of the challenges involved in analysing multimodal data and developing effective research questions, while the workshop offered by Melinda Dooly and Randall Sandler offered an introduction to conversation analysis as a tool for researching online environments. Their workshop also demonstrated to learners through a session in Second Life the ethical and practical problems in researching Virtual Worlds. A round-table discussion with all the invited speakers dealt with the do's and don'ts for getting published in CALL academic journals. The individual presentations during the workshop dealt with various themes of interest including intercultural aspects of CMC, voice-based interaction and issues in researching Web 2.0 applications. Finally, the workshop sessions were brought to an end by a tour of EuroCALL's headquarters in Second Life by Graham Davies.

During the SIG meeting on the final day of the workshop various issues were addressed. It was agreed that a further workshop would be held in 2010. Possible venues are the University of Surrey/Guilford (UK) and the University of Umea (Sweden). Sarah Guth and Fran Helm from the University of Padova informed the SIG that a finished version of their book based on the first SIG workshop is expected in July 2009. The book will be published in the Telecollaboration in Education series by Peter Lang publishers. Melinda Dooly and Robert O'Dowd mentioned they plan to edit a book on the theme of the León workshop and deadlines were set for abstract submission. Sarah Guth announced that the powerpoint presentations from León workshop will be published online in the slideshare application with the tag: CMC_SIG_LEON.

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Events Calendar

For information on events, EUROCALL members are requested to refer to <http://www.eurocall-languages.org/resources/calendar.html>, which is regularly updated.

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