

THE INTERNET FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract

Many English teachers recognize the potential of the Internet for long-distance communication. It enables English learners to communicate with others across the globe. However, many teachers fail to realize that the Internet can be of great benefit not only for long-distance exchanges but also for linking students in a single classroom. Three types of electronic communication are possible within a single class: teacher-student communication, out-of-class electronic discussion, and in-class, real time electronic discussion. This lesson plan focuses on integrating four different courses under my instruction: English Composition, Journalism English, Word Processing, The Application of Computer Software. It consists of several learning modules, each of which has two teaching aims: one is in the realm of reading and writing skills (content aim), whereas the other focuses on using the Internet as a tool (instrumental aim).

Introduction

In the last few years the number of teachers using Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has increased markedly and numerous articles have been written about the role of technology in education in the 21st century. Although the potential of the Internet for educational use has not been fully explored yet and the average school still makes limited use of computers, it is obvious that we have entered a new information age in which the links between technology and TEFL have already been established. The development of the Internet brought about a revolution in the teachers' perspective, as the teaching tools offered through the net were gradually becoming more reliable. Nowadays, the Internet is gaining immense popularity in foreign language teaching and more and more educators and learners are embracing it.

Why Use CALL?

The Internet has tremendous potential as a tool for teaching EFL. Sayers (1993) mentioned that network-based technology can contribute significantly to:

- **Experiential Learning.** The World Wide Web makes it possible for students to tackle a huge amount of human experience. In such a way, they can learn by doing things themselves. They become the creators not just the receivers of knowledge. Information is presented in a non-linear way and users develop more flexible thinking skills and choose what to explore.
- **Motivation.** Computers are most popular among students as they are often associated with fun and games. Student motivation is therefore increased, especially whenever a variety of activities are offered. This in turn makes students feel more independent.
- **Enhanced student achievement.** Network-based instruction can help pupils strengthen their linguistic skills by positively affecting their attitude towards learning and by helping them build self-instruction strategies and promote their self-confidence.
- **Authentic materials for study.** All students can use various resources of authentic reading materials either at school or from their home. Those materials can be accessed 24 hours a day at a relatively low cost.
- **Greater Interaction.** Random access to Web pages breaks the linear flow of instruction. By sending E-mail and joining newsgroups, EFL students can communicate with people they have never met. They can also interact with their own classmates. Furthermore, some Internet activities give students positive and negative feedback by automatically correcting their on-line exercises.
- **Individualization.** Shy or inhibited students can be greatly benefited by individualized, student-centered collaborative learning. High fliers can also realize their full potential without preventing their peers from working at their own pace.
- **Independence from a single source of information.** Although students can still use

their books, they are presented with opportunities to escape from canned knowledge and discover thousands of information sources. As a result, their education fulfills the need for interdisciplinary learning in a multicultural world.

- **Global Understanding** A foreign language is studied in a cultural context. In a world where the use of the Internet becomes more and more widespread, an English Language teacher's duty is to facilitate students' access to the web and make them feel like citizens of a global classroom, practicing communication on a global level.

Background/Motivation

Many English teachers recognize the potential of the Internet for long-distance communication. It enables their learners to communicate with others. However, what many teachers fail to realize is that the Internet can be of great benefit not only for long-distance exchanges but also for linking students in a single classroom. Three types of electronic communication are possible within a single class: teacher-student communication, out-of-class electronic discussion, and in-class, real time electronic discussion. Many students learn how to use the Internet as a tool in itself. However, I feel that the Internet can be better mastered as a means through which a content area can be taught.

Although more and more material is becoming available on the Internet in Chinese in Taiwan, most of the material on the Internet is still written in English. This can be a frustrating experience and a deterrent to someone whose native language is not English. Feedback from the students in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at Hsuan Chuang University indicates that students want to master the Internet and improve their English simultaneously. This has motivated me to implement this project. Through sponsorship by the Ministry of Education, this integrated curriculum project was conducted in the spring semester of 2001. There are 210 students enrolled in this course.

Course Structure

This project focuses on integrating four different courses under my instruction: English Composition (Sophomore), Journalism English (Sophomore), Word Processing (Freshman), The Application of Computer Software (Freshman). It consists of several learning modules. Each module has two teaching aims; one is in the realm of reading and writing skills (the content aim), whereas the other teaches using the Internet as a tool (the instrumental aim).

Considerations

There are many issues to consider when planning the implementation of this course.

- (a) Time zones
- (b) Student access to Internet
- (c) Prior student knowledge of Internet functions
- (d) Use of the Internet
- (e) Student participation

Approach

The Internet is a valuable tool for English teaching. Yet the Internet, like other forms of technology, will not itself solve problems. It will be up to us as instructors to develop the right ways of using the Internet based on our general goals, our teaching style and approach, an analysis of our students' needs, and the technological tools we have at hand. Given this, there are several steps to consider before using the Internet in my class:

Before the Class

1. Work with the school to make sure that computers are as accessible as possible. The most frequent access your students have to the computers, the more rewards they will get out of using the Internet.
2. Choose the hardware and software that are most user-friendly. An easy-to-use system is usually preferable to a powerful but complicated one.

3. Prepare a thorough and easy-to-read handout for the students that covers all the basic instructions.

During the Class

1. Arrange for a couple of assistants during the first class period.
2. Send a message to the students before they log on the Internet. They will have something there waiting for them, which can really motivate them.
3. Do a sample training session with one or two students first to see what types of problems may arise before attempting to train an entire class.

Framework of Collaboration

The first stage covers basic communication between individuals. Students will participate in on-line discussions, e-mail projects, and newsgroups. This will allow them to use the foreign language they are learning in real situations to communicate with either peers or 'experts' in a certain field. They can, for instance, contribute to group on-line discussions or ask questions themselves. Another possibility is to participate in pen-pal arrangements, which are numerous on the Internet.

In the second stage, students will use the Internet to do research and collect information and data. They will have to be taught how to use search engines properly and how to browse the Internet in an efficient way to find the best information in a short period of time. This stage includes most of the existing Internet use. Students will be able to access a wealth of authentic foreign language material.

The third stage comprises content production. Students will have to learn how to make and publish their own homepage using HTML and appropriate applications. Since web publishing tools are widely available and increasingly easy to use, this should not be a problem. This stage can be especially motivating and stimulating to students. First of all, they will have to set up a project and do research on a certain aspect of the foreign language, culture or

literature. They can use the wide variety of resources available on the Internet to do this. They can consult 'experts' and e-mail questions they might have to people all over the world. During this process, they are continually communicating in the foreign language. Finally, they will have to produce a publication themselves.

The last two stages are about collaborative work and project work. Students will use the acquired skills to work in collaboration. Eventually, they will use an interdisciplinary approach to project based work. For example, this could lead to literature projects that involve more foreign languages (e.g. exploring and comparing a certain literary theme in several foreign languages). Students will learn how to solve problems, carry out research and collaborate with others.

Integrated Course Syllabus

Course Title:	English Through the Internet
Level of Student:	Freshman and Sophomore
Instructor:	Dr. J. Lee
Time Frame:	One semester (Spring 2001)

Module 1

Content Aim: Basic writing assignment (self-introductions)

Instrumental Aim: Become familiar with the basic functions of E-mail & Internet

1. Practice the basic functions of the Internet browser, back, forward etc.
2. Practice the basic functions of e-mail, send reply, check inbox, take address etc.
3. Send a descriptive introduction about themselves.
4. Write to other members of the course relating to their introductions
5. Practice the reading skill of scanning for specific information in an introduction

6. Get to "meet" the Internet partner

Module 2

Content Aim: Beginning of more English writing, reading different genres, writing in an on-line discussion

Instrumental Aim: Guided surfing on the Internet

The students will choose a pair within their group according to their interests and complete the written assignment of the surfing lesson. This assignment will include an informal, enjoyable writing exercise. The compositions will be sent to the groups and basic peer evaluation will begin. (c.c. to the on-line instructor who will supply necessary assistance).

The final corrected compositions will be "published" on the web.

Module 3

Content Aim: Reading comprehension: scanning, skimming-writing, summarizing and peer correction

Instrumental Aim: Searching on the net and "mail document" function

The students will begin to surf on the Internet to find newspapers on line. Their task will be to scan and skim the newspaper to find articles that will interest their partners and send it to their partners who will read and summarize the article. This unit also includes a treasure hunt-for surfing the Net reinforcement.

Module 4

Content Area: Extensive reading

Instrumental Aim: Learn how to use various search engines based on lesson 3 of the pilot course. They will then use the search engines to practice searching on the net

Task: In class work on the different search engines and complete the exercise, with their partners, search for a short story on the Internet students and their partners would like to read.

Agree on a writer or a topic before they search. Read the story and then choose one of the following:

- a. role play the story with their partners
- b. change the ending of the story - send to partner and comment/correct
- c. student teacher suggests a different assignment
- d. set each other search for assignments.

Module 5

Content Aim: Reading editorials, writing agreeing and disagreeing

Instrumental Aim: Listserv

Task: Join a listserv for EFL students or teacher trainers and become an active member . Join another listserv on a topic that interests them.

Go to an editorial and write an article agreeing or disagreeing. Send it to your partners who will write the opposite. Exchange, peer correct and combine into one article using sentence connectors. Each student is responsible for the article he/she chose.

Module 6

Content Aim: formal and informal reading and writing

Instrumental Aim: IRC and MOOS

Write a very informal "slangy" letter to another member of their group who will return it to them in as formal a style as possible. Try joining an IRC group discussion and then discuss the language and style of on-line writing with the group.

Extra Material

Content Aim: Areas of difficulty and self-improvement

Instrumental Aim: Down loading files and programs

Students will try out some of the EFL games on the Internet, for example The Virtual English Language Center.

Assessment (Informal)

The on-line teachers will assess the writing and reading assignments in the group and pair work. Each module includes a reading and writing assignment

Requirements

Module 1

1. Write a biographical introduction about themselves
2. Correspond with other members of the group, send copies to on-line instructor
3. Dialogue journal with on-line instructor

Module 2

1. Join the on-line discussion on their experience "surfing" the Internet and what they think makes a good site
2. Work with their on-line partners to complete and publish the writing assignment.
3. Dialogue journal with instructor

Module 3

1. Complete the search exercises
2. Do the treasure hunt with their partners
3. Find links on their chosen subjects for the mini project
4. Write a summary of the links and exchange with partners- they will be responsible for collecting the information on the topic from their partners and writing up their findings including links and pictures
5. Dialogue journal

Module 4

1. Complete the on-line newspaper assignment
2. Write a summary of the article they receive from their partners and on-line instructor
3. Discuss the advantages of their newspaper and write up a summary of their discussions.
4. Present their newspaper to their class explaining why they included different categories and how this can help improve their English
5. Complete the treasure hunt exercise and come up with criteria with their partners and colleagues about what makes a good web page
6. Dialogue journal

Module 5

1. Complete the listserv class exercise.
2. Join 3 listservs; one connected to their research project, one their joint project and one that interests them.
3. Send their online instructor details as set out in the assignment
4. Write a letter to one of the groups, and send a copy to their instructor
5. Supply their partners with information about the listservs to put on the webfolio
6. Dialogue journal

Module 6

1. Complete the assignment on IRC and Moos
2. Put on their webfolio suggested IRC's to visit
3. Meet with their partners on-line if possible to finalize the webfolio

4. Write up a summary page including links and pictures of the mini project
5. Dialogue journal

Module 7

1. Download interesting games and programs
2. Supply their partners with the details to add to the homepage
3. Dialogue journal
4. Presentation of webfolios to the class
5. Fill in feedback form

This project is being conducted in the Spring semester of 2001. The data and follow-up research regarding students' attitudes and accomplishments will be analyzed following completion of the semester. Once complete, an overview of the findings will be provided.

The New Role of Teachers

The Internet is one of the most powerful tools for teachers to help students collaborate, interact and participate actively in the learning process. However, the wealth of available resources may cause confusion among students and discourage them from participating, if they are not given the necessary guidelines. When students are faced with thousands of Internet sources they cannot effectively handle such large amounts of information. One of the most important tasks for teachers is to assist their students so that they can discover what they enjoy most according to their level of linguistic competence. Teachers are also responsible for the evaluation of all the web tools offered.

In an Internet-based lesson, rather than being a single omniscient source of knowledge himself, a teacher is a facilitator helping students build their own learning strategies. What learners acquire with the Internet is less under the control of the teacher. The teacher's role includes planning, analyzing, organizing, coordinating, and problem-solving in a student-centered environment.

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