

INTEGRATION OF THE INTERNET INTO A LANGUAGE CURRICULUM IN A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The rapid growth of the Internet, the global collection of interconnected computer networks, is both stimulative and instructive. The Internet has become one of the most powerful resources in accessing information. It is used for entertainment, sharing items, collecting and analyzing data, conducting interviews, chatting, downloading, and so on as well as education. Among the users of the internet, there are the educational researchers who try to enhance exploring of this rich resource. Using the Internet in language teaching has been practiced for a while. Exploiting videoconferencing for teaching the language online, on the other hand, is relatively a new and exciting innovation in education. Using such tools as the skype or msn allows people or groups of individuals to see each other and talk to one another over the internet without a long distance telephone charge as well. It is almost inevitable to ignore the necessity of the Internet in educating the new generation who utilize it in every aspect of their life. In other words, technology lets us teach all the four skills –reading, writing, listening and speaking- simultaneously. This paper presents some examples on how language teaching practiced online at Uppsala University in Sweden with the students from different parts of the world and the importance of the integration of the Internet into the curriculum in such a multicultural society.

Key Words: Distant Learning, Distant Teaching, Internet, Teaching Language, Multicultural education

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about education in a multicultural environment and integration of the Internet into the curriculum, one of the ways to achieve multicultural communication and understanding. World is a country where many diverse populations live together. Although each nationality has its own language, culture, tradition, life style, habits and so on, the world is the hometown for all the humanity. The citizens in the world are all the same and all different. The difference and sameness in a multicultural virtual classroom can be an advantage when learning and teaching a language. Bullivant (1987) defines culture as a group's program for survival in and adaptation to its environment. The cultural program consists of knowledge, concepts, and values shared by group members through systems of communication. Culture also consists of shared beliefs, symbols, and interpretations within a human group. The key to defining multicultural education lies in the root word *culture* because everyone is born into a culture. Our experiences in life shape the beliefs that derive from ethnic and family backgrounds. As Tiedt and Tiedt (1990) state, multicultural education aims at awareness of the diversity that is characteristic of a national population and the source of that diversity.

Banks and Banks (2007) define multicultural education as at least three things: an idea or concept, an educational reform movement, and a process whose major goal is to change the structure of educational institutions. The goal is that male and female students, exceptional students, and students who are members of diverse racial, ethnic, and cultural groups will have an equal chance to achieve academically in school. As Carlson and Rabo (2007) discuss, Multiculturalism is a term used normatively to express important liberal and humanitarian values where difference is celebrated. Difference considered contributing to the richness of society and even to the development of global understanding. All the societies are multicultural and some see the multicultural society as a threat to the unity, and cohesion of the nation, while others see it as a recipe for solving various problems in societies.

In the same year as Carlson and Rabo, Banks and Banks (2007) discuss the vagueness of this term and claim that:

“Multicultural education is a process whose goals will never be fully realized. Educational equality, like liberty and justice, are ideals toward which human beings work but never fully attain. Racism, sexism, and discrimination will exist to some extent no matter how hard we work to eliminate these problems. When prejudice and discrimination are reduced toward one group, they are usually directed toward another group or they take new forms” (p.4).

Banks and Banks (2007) also claim that it is impossible to attain the goals of multicultural education, which requires continuous effort to increase educational equality for all students.

Schools inevitably reflect society. Students born in the 21st century are crazy about using technology and recently attention has turned to integrating technology into the curriculum. Wallace (2004) lays out the possibilities for teaching with the Internet such as using it as a source of information, a means of representing content, a means of communication, or a site for collaboration.

The Internet in Education

The Internet, together with its merits and defects, is widely questioned. It is criticized because it is claimed to depict various technological developments, such as electronic databases, computerized searches, and surveillance instruments, and so is seen as a threat to privacy (Etzioni, 2007). Although disputed to be a privacy-invading technology, the Internet is also valued for several conveniences it provides.

A report by National Center for Education Statistics - NCES (1998) presented that the use of the Internet in education is continually increasing. In just 3 years, the percentage of U.S. public schools with Internet access increased from 35 percent in 1994 to 78 percent in 1997. The same report concluded the advantages of using the Internet in education as such: The increased availability of Internet opportunities would enable teachers and administrators to employ the technology in many different ways, including record keeping, communicating with parents, distance learning, professional development, curriculum development, and as a classroom-teaching tool.

Another report by NCES (1999a) makes it clear that the traditional teaching method, which was conceptualized as the transmission of facts to students, who are seen as passive receptors, still seems to be regarded as safer. In classrooms where this type of teaching predominates, teachers typically conduct lessons through a lecture format, instruct the entire class as a unit, write notes on the chalkboard, and pass out worksheets for students to complete. In such classrooms, knowledge is presented as fact. On the other hand, in educational endeavors where students are encouraged to pose hypotheses and explore ways to test them, students “construct” a new understanding of subject matter. Constructivism advocates innovative instruction, which in return requires the use of educational technology. The survey in the U.S revealed that 80% of teachers did not feel well prepared to use educational technology in their teaching (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999a). However, a further study demonstrated that small percentages of students in equipped classrooms spent significant instructional time per week on the computer (National Center for Education Statistics, 1999b).

The comparison of these three surveys makes it clear that the Internet is regarded as important and necessary to keep pace with Information and Communication Technology. A recent survey on “educational technology in teacher education programs for initial licensure”, raised from this need, suggests that while institutions with teacher education programs for initial licensure were oriented toward preparing their teacher candidates to use educational technology, many reported a range of barriers that impeded these efforts within both program coursework and field experiences (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

The teachers’ not being equipped with enough information on how to use the Internet in teaching and learning efficiently puts forward the need for the use of the Internet in the didactics in teacher training curriculum, which will be discussed in detail in a further study.

Researchers (Chapelle 1998, Wallace 2004, Koeber 2005) have demonstrated several strategies for using Information and Communication Technology to ease learning and teaching in classrooms. They all suggested so-called Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) to provide the researchers with detailed information about learners’ interactions and performance. These technical capacities for collecting interaction data need to be accompanied by well-motivated procedures for describing and interpreting them in terms of their value for language development (Chapelle, 1998). Recently the route of the discussions changed from the focus on using computers in the classroom to the focus on *e-learning* (Wallace, 2004; Koeber, 2005; Oh, 2003).

Wallace (2004) in his paper entitled “A framework for Understanding Teaching with the Internet” investigated how teachers use their knowledge and skills to engage students with content through the medium of the Internet. In his paper, he points out that teaching with the Internet is a complex endeavor that varies widely in implementation and impact. Wallace (2004) discusses that the Internet can be good or bad depending on its implementation. He also defines the goals of education and the contribution of technology to those goals. However, the study also provides evidence that the Internet can be used effectively in a variety of settings, although he concludes stating that “Internet activities demand each teacher create new ways to cope with difference between teaching with the Internet and with conventional materials” (p.38). The introduction of new technologies into the educational arena is not a matter of a more efficient way of delivering the same, but a means of creating a new social context for learning (Bigum&Green, 1995). Regarding this issue, Muffoletto (1996) suggests that teachers need to adopt the processes and learn the new skills.

These ideas are far beyond the fact that the Internet plays a receptive and transformative role in education. With the growing population and advancements in technology, school is no longer seen as the only place to have the education. Lawson and Comber (2000) argue the transformative role of the Internet in terms of boundaries. The location boundaries, subject boundaries, traditional roles of teachers, and spatial and temporal boundaries are the basis for the Internet. They conclude that the use of the Internet has a transformative capacity and the potential for blurring the traditional boundaries within schools. However, the quality of online learning is also subject to questioning. Hillesheim (1998) and Garson (2000) claim that an authentic relationship is a necessary tool for sufficient quality in education. Oh (2003) argues that students enrolled in online courses across regions or nations may be less likely to feel that they indeed belong to a school. Regarding the perceptions of the teacher, a research carried out by Fish and Gill (2009) shows that teachers see value in using online availability to enhance the traditional classroom environment.

The discussions and research have mainly been on the use of the Internet as a source of information or as an assisting tool. It is possible to use the Internet as the main aid in teaching a language and as a basic source of communication in distance education. The advantages of learning a language in an actual classroom and using the Internet as an assisting tool would be an ideal way of teaching. The blended learning/teaching method has been widely used for this purpose. Yet, if the students want the education but cannot be actively involved in the educational settings, then the Internet can provide that opportunity and it is quite possible to teach a language with the assistance of the Internet.

The Internet as an Aid in Teaching a Language

The Internet can be efficiently used in teaching and learning a language. Recent studies show that the Internet can be a useful aid in teaching reading, writing, vocabulary activities, and some grammatical exercises. In addition, video recordings and so forth can provide listening activities.

One of the most important roles of the Internet in learning a language is having access to a large range of audiovisual materials. The Internet provides the learners and teachers with such materials as listening to the news, radio, and/or TV programs, by recording and playing them back to see how native speakers use the language, phrases, and idioms, which also facilitates practice of pronunciation

The advantages are not limited to this extent. It is very easy to find several reading materials in different web pages, and libraries are within reach to almost anyone who has access to the Internet. Teaching speaking with the internet through the real-time communication has not yet been so feasible and easy.

Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language in Sweden through the Internet

Sweden is a sparsely inhabited country, where it may not be always possible to learn a language by attending a school. Teaching Turkish as a foreign language is the focus in this study. The Turkic languages department is only available at Uppsala University in Sweden. Many people from different parts of the country want to learn Turkish in Sweden. However, because it is not always possible to be in school due to climate, distance, financial, political, or physical boundaries, some students prefer to have distance education. Uppsala University, Linguistics, and Philology department has provided language courses via the Internet since 2003. These distance language courses last 15 weeks each term. About 25-35 students attend the courses every year. Those who complete the course successfully earn 22.5 ECTS (Csato&Kilimci, 2008).

Some of the goals stated in the webpage (<http://www.lingfil.uu.se/afro/turkiskasprak/>) are:

- I. To use a web-based annotated corpus of a foreign language as the basis for learning grammatical patterns by comparing the structure found in the corpus with the patterns found in Swedish;
- II. To develop web-supported collaborative learning in grammar where a corpus of natural language material will form the basis for group activities, illustrations in lectures, and as part of the final examination;
- III. To use the web-supported collaborative method in regular courses in grammar in Linguistics and grammar courses in the curriculum for Swedish as a second language.

The same webpage further states that in the proposed method interactive practical training and corpus-based exercises comprise an integral part of the students' learning process, giving them the opportunity and incentive to participate more actively in their own learning process. Using IT as a tool for collaborative work allows the students to choose the problem-solving strategy that suits them best, as well as the time and place to work on the problem. Apart from the lecture sessions, the student-teacher contact in this context can either be in the classroom or virtual, i.e. by means of electronic communication.

The webpage also provides information about online course materials. The proposed training material has a modular architecture, composed of four types of modules:

- I. *'Encyclopedia'* module, containing descriptions of grammatical concepts and constructions;
- II. *'Text corpora'* module, containing an annotated corpus of a foreign language;
- III. *'Interactive exercise'* module which provides students with a set of exercises with basic tools for computer-mediated student cooperation in virtual workgroups (a 'spreadsheet' for problem-solving; optional 'step-by-step questions' for the grammatical topic covered), with hyperlinks to the 'encyclopedia', to the 'resources' and to the annotated corpus of a foreign language (which, in turn, will be hyperlinked to the dictionary) and
- IV. The *'Resource'* modules will provide a pool of resources for further reading and relevant links to other sites.

The aim of the course is to teach the Turkish language both in theory and in practice. The learner can get access to learning Turkish via the Internet at any time, anywhere, and on any subject provided by the web site. Apart from the grammar exercises, reading comprehension, listening exercises, translation activities, vocabulary exercises, dictionaries, texts etc, which are mainly followed on the Internet and e-mail communication, the students are also provided with some speaking exercises (Csato&Kilimci, 2008).

The students are provided guidance on how to study and which page they should follow but they are also free to choose, repeat, and/or skip the activities they would like to. They are not obliged to follow a certain route between the pages. They can get access to the activities provided whichever way they want.

An Example for Speaking Courses on the Internet

The speaking exercises on the Internet give the learner and the teacher the opportunity to engage in an online, simultaneous, class-like atmosphere with the help of applications such as Messenger and Skype. Skype provides a real-time speaking opportunity with a group of students in a virtual classroom. Twenty-four students can get involved in these virtual classes at the same time, where they can listen to and speak with the teacher and each other, write on the same window, and see what the others and the teacher write. While the communication with the teacher and the other group members is going on, the students follow certain materials, such as the course book or the materials previously sent via e-mail by the mentor or the teacher. The teacher is the administrator who leads the activities and guides each class member on what to do next.

The teacher can open a pop up window to write messages, to show the spelling of certain words or to follow the track. Everyone in the group has the opportunity to write something on the message box (similar to a chalkboard). Moreover, the students have the opportunity to write on a separate window individually. This is a chance for the shy or timid students who are hesitant and do not want their comments or questions to be seen by others. Such students can open a new private window and get into communication with the teacher personally. This totally free facility is used in certain times of the week. A course book and several other materials are used for this purpose. The materials are carefully chosen especially to reflect the culture of each participant. The teacher is responsible for monitoring the course and guiding the students to do the activities.

The repetition, substitution, word formation, sentence formation, sentence completion, story telling, drills, and various other exercises are used. Although four basic skills are practiced, improving listening and speaking skills of the learners is the main goal, which has been achieved in these courses. To improve writing, e-mailing is also used. The students are supposed to send five sentences in target language (Turkish) to the teacher and virtual-class mates every night. The students write five sentences before going to sleep and e-mail them to the teacher. The aim is to construct sentences with the new vocabulary or structure and to give some information about their own culture using the target language (Turkish). All students get feedback from the teacher the following morning. The issues are then included into the course on Skype as a discussion. This activity significantly facilitated to improve writing and speaking skills of the participants. Another important achievement has been the multicultural understanding and communication that provided the participants the possibility to learn more about each other in our virtual classes and to provide the sense of "cultural understanding."

Suggestions on How to Tackle Problems in Teaching with the Internet

The mishaps or restraints of teaching speaking with the Internet are many: However, some solutions could be suggested to overcome certain obstacles, one of which is the limited opportunity for the teacher to see what exactly the student is doing. If a book or a written document is the material then the teacher might have difficulty in following the students. In this case, it might be necessary for the teacher to repeatedly remind the students and emphasize what is being carried out to make sure everybody is on the same track. It is also important for the

teacher to learn the names and recognize the voices very well. Guided activities are best during the speaking courses on the Internet.

Another important disadvantage of teaching with the Internet is the lack of the students' and the teacher's facial expressions. Facial expressions, gestures, and body language that are important elements in teaching must be replaced with intonation and careful tones in the voice in order to overcome this defect. It is also important to follow a route among the students not to cause any confusion. In other words, the students should know whose turn it is to do the activity and follow the others accordingly. Otherwise, the teacher might announce the name of the student that s/he wants to take turn.

Synchronous (real time) teaching can be interrupted due to unexpected circumstances such as bad or instable connection. Having a high quality connection is necessary during the courses.

Suggestions on how to Build “Cultural Understanding” into the Curriculum

Before giving examples and suggestions, it might be a good idea to identify the four-approaches introduced by Banks (2006). The *Contribution* Approach, which we mainly used in our courses, to integrate ethnic and multicultural content into the mainstream curriculum, suggests that ethnic content should include special days, weeks, and months related to ethnic events and celebrations. The *Additive* Approach is the addition of content, concepts, themes, and perspectives, without changing the basic structure, purposes, and characteristics, usually by the addition of a book, a unit, or a course to the curriculum without substantial change. In both approaches, ethnic content is added to the mainstream core curriculum without changing its basic assumptions, nature, and structure. The *Transformation* Approach, on the other hand, aims to change the goals, structure, and perspectives of the curriculum. The *Social Action* Approach is similar to the Transformation Approach in which all the elements are included. It furthermore adds components that require students to make decisions and take actions related to the concept, issue, or problem in the unit (pp. 140-144).

Banks (2006) argues, “It is unrealistic to expect a teacher to move directly from a highly mainstream-centric curriculum to one that focuses on decision-making and social action” (p.143). He agrees that integration of the multicultural contents should be gradual and cumulative.

In our courses, we mainly used the Contribution Approach. We inserted ethnic heroes/heroines, writers, novelists into the curriculum. In addition, we involved the discrete cultural elements such as music, dance, food etc. We also included the special days, weeks, and months related to ethnic celebrations. Each student was actively involved in these discussions. This approach together with the help of the Internet has so far eased not only the cultural understanding but also the language learning for the students who come from diverse cultural background at Uppsala University in Sweden.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With the facilities the Internet provides, it has become unavoidable to use it in the education system as well. This rapid growing technology seems to make it burdensome for some teachers to keep pace with the use of the Information and Communication Technology as they find it difficult to carry it out in their classrooms or in distance education as an aid to teaching and learning. Using the Internet as a part of the curriculum in teacher training courses would help solve the problem of coping with the difference between teaching with the Internet and with the conventional materials. Technology-based methodologies in the teacher training courses should be the starting point for the prospective teachers being competent in their teaching.

Going far beyond the discussion on the positive and negative aspects that the Internet provides, this study aims to show how the Internet can be used in education actively. It is evident that the introduction of the Internet has made it possible to create a new social context for learning. With the inclusion of synchronous Internet speaking courses into the program, a noticeable improvement was realized in the students' speaking skills. We believe that with the development of technology there will be more facilities gained in the educational arena.

Traditional concepts and methodologies are no longer sufficient in the changing learning environment. Although there are still many restrains in using the internet in teaching and learning process, the participants obviously take the advantage of the Internet tool in learning a new language.

When carefully and aptly used, the Internet can enhance students' engagement with the course and help them to learn a language. As more materials become available in digital form, users of the Internet can get easier access to the information from different parts of the world. The Internet is a perfect aid to teach cultural understanding

since it represents the most diversified mass medium in the world and a great number of people can put forth their ideas through it.

The integration of the Contribution Approach and the Internet into the curriculum enhances the cultural understanding as well as learning a foreign language. The Internet is not only a convenient tool for teaching a language but it also provides the learners with an excellent opportunity to become familiar with different cultures, and facilitates different learning styles to the students in diverse population. It also provides the opportunity to achieve a multicultural understanding and respect to the citizens of the world. It offers students an opportunity to know each other and learn how to exchange ideas, opinions, and contributions by using the Internet. This, of course, promotes intercultural understanding and raises awareness of common values for teachers and students, practicing and improving a foreign language.

Since the knowledge of how to use the Internet, together with the Information and Communication Technology and the teacher's level of expertise in the subject influences the positive effect of the technology in classrooms, it seems to be mandatory to include this subject into the curriculum of teacher training departments as well. Therefore, making strategies for effective course management, preparing the instructors to be more qualified in using the Internet in education should be the basic step. The instructors in such courses need to be more struggler in articulating strategies for course management, motivating the students to get involved in the courses and competent enough in the knowledge of cultural differences in the students' background.

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