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Perspectives on Using the Internet in a College English Class

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大学の英語の授業におけるインターネット使用の考察

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情報時代である今日、英語教育現場においても、コンピューターやインターネットが果たす役割は大きい。英語教育、英語学習に関する膨大な量の resources をはじめ、世界の色々な情報がリアルタイムでアクセス可能である。このような多彩、多量な学習教材を教育現場でどのように効果的に取り入れていくのか、いろいろな研究が行われている。本稿では、インターネット検索を積極的に取り入れた英語の授業を紹介する。インターネット活動に対しての学生の意識調査の結果、授業でのインターネット使用が授業の内容理解を更に深め、いろいろな知識を習得する上で大事であるという結果が出た。また、英語の情報を理解するためには、高い英語力が必要であると考えられているが、理解を助けるためのタスクがあると、理解度は増すかどうかをアンケート調査とリレーディングテストによって検証する。

Key words: インターネット, 真正な教材, 学生のための語学教材, タスク, 学習者の自律

Introduction

The use of the Internet has a powerful impact on our lives at home, at work, and in education. Electronic mail has become one of the most common methods of communication in business or in private situations, and search engines, such as Yahoo and Google, have been used extensively to find information. A strong emphasis has been placed on learning computer skills in high schools and colleges today to better prepare students for their future careers. Students have access to computers in computer rooms, language labs, libraries, and at home, and, naturally, they are expected to use computers for course registration, campus information, and assignments in college.

Language teachers and researchers may also look for information on the Internet. There are numerous online journals available for language teachers. Finding articles on a certain topic can be

done easily, using search engines. For example, by entering “The Internet Journal” in the Yahoo’s search engine, I have found several entries. CESL Online Media Directory, made by Southern Illinois University, has a wealth of information on online journals and magazines for ESL teachers. The Internet TESL Journal, Reading in a Foreign Language, English Teaching Forum, The Language Teacher, TESOL Matters, ESL Magazines, TEFL Web Journal and many more are in this directory. Finding appropriate articles is much easier and quicker with the aid of internet search engines. As LeLoup and Ponterio (2001) note, “...the wide range of features and media (text, image, sound, video, multimedia) supported by the current crop of Internet programs makes them powerful additions to the foreign language teacher’s repertoire.” (p.1)

The Internet has become part of our daily lives and the effective use of the Internet can offer potential benefits to language teachers and learners. In this paper, I will explore the benefits and problems of utilizing the Internet in language instruction. In addition, I will report on one study of an English class in which the Internet was actively used as an integral part of the course. The students’ attitudes toward using the Internet will be examined, and the results of the reading tests will be analyzed.

Benefits of Using the Internet in EFL Instruction

Opportunities for Authentic Communication

One of the many benefits of the Internet suggested by researchers is that it is possible to engage in authentic communication with people in other parts of the world, or with a specific group of people, such as ESL teachers or learners, in distant locations. In countries like Japan, where there are very few chances for students to engage in communication in the target language, the Internet offers much-needed opportunities to communicate with people from the other side of the globe. Muehleisen (1997) reports that many of her students are interested in communicating not only with native speakers of English, but also with speakers of other languages. They are thrilled to find out that there are sites with information for keypals. Since English is said to be the most common language of communication on the Internet and since there are more non-native speakers of English than native speakers engaging in communication in English around the world, students should be encouraged to use English to communicate with people from non-English countries as well. Singhal (1997) cites a study conducted by Davis and Chang (1994) on “the potential effects of telecommunications on literacy acquisition.” In the study it was reported that through language exchanges by email which included questions, comments and jokes, the students’ writing fluency and organization had improved.

Singhal states that “without a doubt e-mail can provide authentic communication and can foster awareness of both the language learner and the languages they are learning.” (p.3)

McManus (2005) lists several sites for “real-time communication in the target language” such as Internet Relay Chat, Moo, and the enCore Consortium. Andrus (1999) suggests Dave’s Café and Exchange to find “keypals” or “e-pals.” In addition, there are other free English chat rooms such as ESL Chat and The ESL Chat room, English Club, About.com, ESL Partyland, Easy English.com, etc. Bulletin boards are also available for language learners to post questions and comments.

Positive Effects on Student Motivation

Another advantage of using the Internet in language learning is that the Internet enhances motivation among students. (Fox, 1998, Kentera, 1997, and Siskin, 1997). Muehleisen talks about increased intrinsic motivation among her students using computers. Students see the benefits of using computers in everyday life or in their future jobs and they are eager to learn English skills for emailing. McManus outlines that the Internet in language learning provides “motivational power.” The students tend to spend more time on tasks and get a “sense of satisfaction.” (p.1) In one of my English classes, even a 15-minute interactive grammar exercise on the Internet seemed to capture students’ attention as something new and exciting. Perhaps, the interactive nature of Internet exercises offers students a new sense of challenge, satisfaction or accomplishment when they get their answers correct. The use of computers in language learning is still considered a “novelty” among students as Chafe (1999) states and this may be the reason students have more enthusiasm when learning with computers.

Authentic Materials as Teaching Resources

Another benefit, and perhaps the most important to many of us, is that an abundant amount of up-to-date authentic material is readily available anywhere as long as you have a computer and an Internet connection. In an introductory lesson using the Internet in my Culture class, students were amazed by the sheer amount of information available in English on the “World Wide Web.” One of the class activities was to read about “food” from around the world. Some students enjoyed looking at pictures of food served at restaurants in San Francisco or in New York and reading the menus. Other students looked at traditional food in the Middle East. After that, students searched for information about table manners in other countries. By entering “table manners” in Wikipedia, they found a variety of table manners, such as table manners in Afghanistan, The United States, Great Britain, China, France and so on. With some teacher guidance, students learned that table manners vary from

culture to culture, and some manners are considered rude in other cultures. This illustrates that teachers can use a variety of authentic materials on the Internet for content instruction by using a search engine and finding links related to the topic.

Encyclopeida.com provides teachers with hundreds of thousands of articles and visual information about topics of interest. Japanese Wikipedia is a very popular site for students, but students can also be encouraged to use Wikipedia in English at en.wikipedia.org. In TESOL Matters, Meloni (1999) outlined useful Web sites for language learning. The New York Times Learning Network (<http://www.nytimes.com/learning/index.html>), which was designed for grade 3 – 12 students in the U.S., contains a featured news story, detailed lesson plans, news summaries and news quizzes. In addition, there are lesson plans for history, arts, technology and social studies for teachers. NIE Online (<http://www.nieonline.com/>) is another site that provides lesson plans on current news stories. You can find lesson plans for specific grade levels and also for subject areas of interest. Although these sites have not been designed specifically for ESL students, Meloni states that they can serve as great learning resources.

Language Resources for Students

One of the most exciting developments with the Internet in language teaching is that there are countless sites that provide interactive activities for ESL/EFL students for free. Appropriate sites can be first found by entering a key word in the search such as “Internet English Resources,” and the results will show “Internet Resources for use in English as Second Language classes” (www.internet4classrooms.com/esl.htm), “Internet English Resources” (www.iei.uiuc.edu/student_internet_res.html), ESL Resources for Students (<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/esl/eslstudent.html>), ESL Web guide: EFL/ESL/ESOL/TEFL/TESL/ESOL Links (<http://www.englishclub.com/webguide/index.htm>) and many more. On close examination of the site “Internet English Resources” developed by the Intensive English Institute at the University of Illinois, there are related links for grammar, oral communication, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, pronunciation, etc. from which students can practice their English skills by engaging in interactive activities. Randall’s Cyber listening lab is a well-known site and it has been cited repeatedly in many other articles. Another example of a good ESL resource is found in “Activities for ESL students” at <http://a4esl.org/>, developed by Internet TESL Journal. There are grammar quizzes, vocabulary quizzes in three or four levels of difficulty, pod casts, and external links as well. (See Tice-Deering 2008 for more ESL resources for students.) These are great language learning tools for students, but none of my students knew that these Web sites existed until they were shown some activities in class. It is important to

raise awareness among students that there are abundant free language resources available on the Internet.

Initiating Learner Autonomy

Another advantage of using the Internet for language learning is flexibility. Students can choose not only the time, duration and the place to use the Internet but also the kind of activities that they feel will benefit them. To maximize the use of such extensive language resources, it is crucial to train our students to become autonomous or self-directed language learners who take control of their own learning. Wenden (1981) strongly advocates learner-directed learning and argues that teaching learning strategies alone would not be sufficient in the absence of learner incentives. Wenden writes:

...the fostering of learner autonomy will require that learners become critically reflective of the conceptual context of their learning. They must be led to clarify, refine and expand their views of what language means and of what language learning entails. They should also understand the purpose for which they need to learn a second language... learners will also need to learn to believe in their potential to learn and to manage their learning and to be willing to assume a more responsible role in the process. (p.12)

It should be one of the teacher's main goals to foster learner autonomy among students which will help them continue learning even after their language program is over. This is a skill that the learners can take with them and use throughout their lives. Therefore, one important thing is to train students to make effective use of the many language learning resources available to them. Perhaps teachers can suggest a few sites first, introduce some supplementary activities in class to get them started, and then let students choose their own activities and encourage them to monitor their progress. Students should be made aware that autonomous learning is crucial to the success of language learning, and that autonomous learners use a variety of language resources to their benefit.

Concerns for Using Authentic Materials

Internet use is an exciting part of language teaching, but a large amount of authentic materials available on the Internet may not be readily accessible to students unless they have the language skills to understand them. Martinez (2002) points out that difficult vocabulary and complicated sentence structures in addition to cultural bias in texts make it very difficult for low-level students to understand authentic materials. Guariento & Morley (2001) think that authentic materials may be more appropriate for post-intermediate level students who have a wide range of vocabulary and better

understanding of structure.

This does not mean that Internet use has no place in language classrooms. Special care and consideration must be taken when using authentic material from the Internet. Kilickaya (2004) claims that learners can still benefit from authentic materials if the teachers give them necessary “pedagogical support”, and goes on to suggest using “cultural content” found in authentic materials in language teaching. Kilickaya says that it is important to help students “notice that learning a language is not just learning its grammatical rules, vocabulary items and so on,” but it also entails learning its culture. (p.4). The importance of choosing appropriate sites has also been mentioned mainly because some information found on the Internet may be wrong or inappropriate for students. Siskin (1997) suggests that materials should be previewed and that the students need support to deal with authentic materials. Martinez (2002) points out the importance of designing an appropriate task for the level of students when using authentic materials. Martinez writes:

The task...is what often makes all the difference. There is material that can be used for beginners, intermediate or advanced students, provided the task that comes with it is suitable.

(p. 3)

LeLoup, Ponterio, & Cortland (2000) also assert the importance of creating appropriate tasks for the student's language level. They adopted the model devised by Shrum and Glisan (1999) for creating classroom activities with online materials. This model has the following five steps:

1. Preparation phase
2. Comprehension phase
3. Interpretation phase
4. Application phase
5. Extension phase (as cited in LeLoup, Ponterio, & Cortland, 2000, p.11)

Such a model gives the teacher a guideline when preparing challenging tasks that are meaningful and suitable for the course objectives. Lynch (2008) also gives useful tips when adapting authentic materials into the classroom. He suggests “adjusting the length of the materials, simplifying the key language elements and converting authentic materials into a variety of exercise types.” (p.2)

Using the Internet in the College English Class

I have integrated Internet activities into the Cinema English class designed for junior and senior students at a university. In this class, as a pre-viewing activity, students used various sites on the Web to search for background information on the four movies chosen for this class. In the introductory

lesson, students were introduced to Yahoo movies, The Internet Movie Database, and English Wikipedia. This previewing activity may be considered a “Preparation phase” activity because it oriented the students to the topic of the movie and the use of Web sites. There were also simple questions to check how much students knew about the social or cultural issues of the movie. When the students were oriented with the format of these movie Web sites, then, a “comprehension phase” activity followed. In this part of the task, the students read the movie sites and extracted information for these questions:

1. When was the movie released?
2. Who was the director of the movie?
3. Who was the producer?
4. Who were in the cast?
5. What other movies was each actor/actress in?
6. What reviews did the movie receive?
7. Did the movie win any awards?
8. What did some critics say about the movie?
9. What was each character like?

Since these questions are more or less generic in nature, they can work with any movies. Once students learned how to find information using the Web site of their choice, they had no problem completing the movie information activity sheet for other movies.

Following the initial movie information task, an additional task was given to find some cultural or historical information in the movie. For example, with the movie “Witness”, students were asked to search for the following information using yahoo.com or google.com:

1. Where did the Amish come from?
2. Where do the Amish live today?
3. What language do they speak?
4. What do men wear?
5. What do women wear?
6. What are their rules of marriage?
7. What are their beliefs on education?

When the students showed good understanding of the information, a more challenging activity followed. This may be considered as an “Interpretation phase” activity, in which the students compared cultural information of the movie with their own. For example, they answered the following questions:

1. How is the Amish lifestyle different from yours?
2. What do you think about the way the Amish live?

Information given on these sites has been written for native speakers and is, therefore, by no means simple. However, a task such as the one above with guiding questions can act as scaffolding for language learners, so they can focus on retrieving the information they need from a large volume of text. Vorland (2003) also says that selective questioning helps learners deal with authentic materials. He expresses this view clearly by saying:

There are benefits using any kind of authentic materials. Students come to realize that they do not have to read or understand materials in their entirety in order to extract personally useful information..... Students learn how to navigate up-to-date sites and gain experience and confidence in using the English language Web. (p.4)

After the pre-viewing Web activities, the following activities followed:

A. The while-viewing activity

Watch the movie with the English subtitles

Complete a comprehension worksheet which included True/ False questions, wh questions, and listening exercises

B. The post-viewing activity

Go over the comprehension questions

Write a short summary of the movie in English (or Japanese)

Complete the character explanation activity and comment on a favorite character

As an “Application phase” activity, the students were assigned a short presentation of the movie. In this stage, the students consolidated all the information they learned from the Internet materials and the movie, and used their own words to analyze the important message of the movie. An “Extension phase”, according to LeLoup, Ponterio, & Cortland, refers to the stage where the student applies the skill and knowledge acquired from the previous activities to a similar situation. An “Extension phase” activity has not been introduced in this course yet, but a possible activity may include:

1. Search the Internet to find about other small ethnic group such as Mennonites
2. Compare and contrast the culture of this ethnic group with yours

The Study

Encouraged by some positive remarks on the use of the Internet in ESL/EFL language learning, I wanted to investigate students’ perceptions on the use of the Internet in the Cinema English class.

More specifically, I was interested in finding out:

1. if students held favorable views toward using the Internet in the Cinema English class
2. how students felt about reading authentic materials
3. whether or not the comprehension questions aided their understanding of authentic materials

Subject

A total of 11 students participated in the study. Two of the participants were from Malaysia, one from China, one from Korea and the remaining students were Japanese. This was a year-long elective class for both juniors and seniors, but the study was conducted at the end of the first semester. This was a mixed level class, so some students' English proficiency was rather limited as compared to the Malaysian students who have had so much more English exposure since childhood.

Material

A. Questionnaire

A 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire was constructed to examine students' Internet use and their views toward reading authentic materials with or without comprehension questions. The questionnaire contained four statements and the participants were asked to choose from "strongly agree" (5 points), "agree" (4 points), "don't agree or disagree" (3 points), "disagree" (two points), and "strongly disagree" (1 point.) The following were the actual statements:

1. Reading authentic material on the Internet is difficult.
2. I read English articles on the Internet.
3. The comprehension tasks on authentic materials help me understand the content.
4. The Internet gives us a chance to learn more about the topic of the movie.

In addition, one open-ended question was included to find out how they felt about using the Internet in the Cinema English class. For this last question, the participants had a choice of answering either in English or Japanese.

B. Reading test

Two authentic reading materials were downloaded from the Internet and printed out. Article A was about having a "budget wedding", taken from <http://blog.newsweek.com/blogs/tipsheet/archive/2008/06/14/family-brides-go-on-a-budget-in-this-lousy-economy.aspx?print=true>, and Article B was about "dieting", taken from the Internet at <http://www.thehindu.com/holnus/008200805261322.htm>. Article A originally contained 3870 words, while Article B had 1740 words. To make these articles

more comparable in terms of their text lengths, some paragraphs were omitted from Article A to make its word count 2544 words. A test was constructed to examine the participants' comprehension of each article. The test consisted of writing a simple summary worth two points, giving two examples of the main points worth 1 point each, and answering two true/false questions worth 1 point each.

Procedure

Following the questionnaire, the participants read the first article with accompanying reading comprehension questions. Since the two articles were not completely equal in terms of the word count and, perhaps, difficulty, 5 participants read Article A with the reading comprehension questions and the others read Article B with its reading comprehension questions. The participants had ten minutes to read the articles with the comprehension questions and understand the gist by answering some of the reading questions. After that, a test was administered to examine their understanding of the articles. They were allowed to refer to the articles while answering the questions. After the first reading test, the participants then read the other article without any reading comprehension questions for 10 minutes. The participants were again tested on their comprehension of the articles under the same conditions as in the first test. The writing section was graded by the following guidelines:

- 2 points - shows good understanding of the gist of the article
- 1 point - shows some understanding of the gist of the article
- 0 point - shows no understanding of the gist of the article, including no answer

Results and Analysis

Table 1 shows the results of the questionnaire. Many participants felt reading authentic materials was difficult with the mean score of 3.9 out of 5. This showed a strong negative correlation with the second item which asked whether or not they read English materials on the Internet. (Pearson correlation was -0.8.) This seems logical, because those who rarely read English materials on the Internet probably feel that authentic materials are difficult to understand or because they feel that authentic materials are too difficult to read, they don't read them. The third item referred to the reading activity the participants engaged in. The mean score was 3.9, which showed that many of them felt that the comprehension questions aided their understanding of authentic materials. As for question #4, the results showed that most participants viewed the use of the Internet very positively as shown by the mean score of 4.27.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of students' perspectives on the use of the Internet

Questions	Mean	SD
1. Reading authentic materials is difficult.	3.9	3.33
2. I read English materials on the Internet.	2.45	1.12
3. The exercise used with the article helps me understand the article.	3.9	0.54
4. The Internet gives us a chance to learn more about the topic.	4.27	0.65

The open-ended question about their views toward using the Internet in the Cinema English class showed that it was a valuable part of the course. Below are some of the actual responses by the participants:

- I think it is a good way to get more information from the Internet, but at the same time the teacher must manage the students to get true information.
- It is very useful to get more information about movies. I especially liked to compare the movie reviews by English critics and Japanese critics.
- I feel that my world has expanded after reading some of the English sites on the Internet. I find this really interesting.
- I enjoyed reading what other critics on the Internet said about the movies and then writing my own.
- It is very useful. However, unless the teacher provides a task sheet to work on the Internet, I don't think many students will search the Internet for fun (including me.)
- It is really useful as we can search for the movie information as well as historical facts in the movie.
- I think it is very good. I often use it to find information on movies.
- There is so much information on the Internet, so that helps us understand the content of the lesson better.
- I find reading about each character in the movie very useful, and it helps me understand the movie with the English subtitles.
- I have avoided reading English sites before, but this has given me a chance to learn how to search for information on English sites.
- I find the Internet more convenient than books to find information.

Table 2 shows the results of the two reading tests. The mean score for the first reading test with the reading aid was 2.9, and it was higher than the second test without the reading aid. Median and mode were also higher on the first test than on the second test.

Table 2. The descriptive statistics of the reading tests

Statistic	Test results with the aid	Test results without the aid
Mean	2.90	1.90
mode	3	2
Median	3	2
Min	1	0
Max	6	4
variance	2.09	2.49
SD	1.44	1.57
N	11	11

(t = 1.45)

Next, a t test was done to examine the results for any statistical significance. This was a t test for paired means since the sets of these scores came from the same group of participants. The alpha level was set at .05 and the critical value for t for a one-tailed matched t test was 1.812. However, the observed t score was 1.45 and the results failed to show that the mean score difference was statistically significant.

In the future more extensive reading tests might be appropriate to test the participants' understanding of the authentic material. For those with low proficiency, reading those articles with or without the comprehension questions was very challenging as shown by the low scores. Perhaps, writing a simple summary was quite difficult as well and may be replaced by multiple-choice questions.

Conclusion and Implications

In this paper, many uses of the Internet were examined and the study was conducted to investigate the students' attitudes toward Internet use in the classroom. The study showed that the students had positive attitudes towards using the Internet to gain more insights and information about the movies they were studying in the English class. Because of the structural and lexical complexity of authentic material on the Internet, reading comprehension worksheets were provided to help students understand the materials. Tests were conducted to examine whether such support may help students understand articles beyond their linguistic competency. Even though the mean score of the test with reading aid was higher than the test without it, the result failed to reach the significance level. However, the results of the questionnaire indicated that the students felt that they benefited from comprehension tasks provided in class.

Since implementing the Internet into language instruction is said to be very valuable, more research

is needed to investigate ways of using the Internet effectively with all levels of students. Kilickaya (2004) states “at any level authentic materials should be used to complete the gap between the competency and performance of the language learners, which is a common problem among the nonnative speakers.” (p.6) After all, one of the jobs of the language teacher is to train students to be able to deal with authentic material or communication outside the classroom. A good language program should include practice searching on the Internet, skimming and scanning skills to quickly find information and practice reading information for the gist or for specific questions. Some of the information requires careful reading and thinking, so depending on the level of the learner, various tasks should be prepared to engage students in the authentic reading. (See Kelly, Offner and Vorland 2002 for more tips.) As with any good teaching resource, using the Internet in language teaching takes careful planning. Various levels of student computer literacy, technical difficulties (Warschauer & Whittaker 1997), difficulties that students may have with reading text on the Internet (Tseng, 2008), the extra time taken that might upset the lesson plan should all be considered and alternative plans should be prepared. Even with excellent Internet materials, if they are used without specific teaching objectives, the use of these materials may not be very effective.

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