

Paper's Title: "Exploring the Process of Integrating the Internet into English Language Teaching"

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Abstract:

The present paper explores the process of integrating the Internet into the field of English language teaching in the light of the following points: the general importance of the Internet in our everyday lives; benefits of using the Internet in the field of education in general; reasons for, and benefits of, using the Internet in English language teaching in particular; how the Internet can be useful for developing language skills, with special focus on the reading skills. The paper details examples of many studies conducted in the field of using the Internet in English teaching in general and reading instruction in particular.

This period is marked by great changes occurring in every field and aspect of the human life. The information age in which we live, which is full of great innovations and technologies, has a great effect on our life conditions in general, and on the educational process in particular. As a result, the educational process has been greatly affected by what is going on. This effect is clearly depicted in the new instructional approaches and methodologies that have emerged and imposed themselves upon the educational stage.

There are so many approaches and methodologies which have emerged at the end of the past century, and during the third millennium, such as Content-Based Instruction, Inquiry-Based Learning, Cooperative Learning, Problem Solving-Based Instruction, Self-Paced Instruction, Individualized Instruction, Cognitive Apprenticeship, Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL), Task-Based Instruction, Multiple Intelligences (MI)-Based Instruction and Internet-Based Instruction (**Sayed, 2005: 2**).

The Internet is a remarkable contribution of the Information Age as it is regarded as a great invention that has affected nearly every aspect in our human life: it has been "reshaping nearly all aspects of society" (**Warschauer et al., 2000: 1**) and has come to be used in many fields for many academic and daily purposes. In this regard, Naughton, cited in (**Crystal, 2001: VII**), comments:

"The Internet is one of the most remarkable things human beings have ever made. In terms of its impact on society, it ranks with print, the railways, the telegraph, the automobile, electric power and television. Some would equate it with print and television, the two earlier technologies which most transferred the communication environment in which people live."

One of the fields in which the Internet is commonly used nowadays is the field of education. In addition to the communication benefits of the Internet, it can also be used as a teaching and learning tool (**Singhal, 1997: Online**). The Internet has become very useful for educators because it contains many resources which they can make use of without costing themselves any money. In this context, **Barron and Ivers (1998: 58)** say that "the Internet is a virtual gold mine for educators. Never before have we had such inexpensive access to so many valuable resources—most of which are free. In addition to files, databases, libraries, there are many resources and projects designed for teachers."

There are many benefits of using the Internet in education. **Davies (1997: Online)** lists some of these benefits: (1) the Internet provides us with an easy access to information and databases on the web extending over the boundaries of the classroom. In this way, it gives the learners many learning opportunities and resources; (2) using the Internet can promote improved learning when it is used properly as an instructional tool; (3) it enables teachers to adopt new instructional models based on the web; (4) the Internet enables Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) in its different forms to take place.

Consistent with this, many researchers found out that email, as an Internet facility that spread all over the world among people, had a great influence on students in their learning. For example, in their study that aimed at investigating the impacts of incorporating e-mail as one of the most accessible, convenient, and easy to use computer-mediated communications, into a classroom setting on student academic achievement and attitudes, **Yu & Yu (2002: 117-126)** found out that there was a statistically significant difference in student academic performance. They stated that the obtained results provided empirical evidence supporting the usefulness of email as a promising aid to promote student cognitive growth pertaining to computer knowledge and skills.

Based on this, we can say that the Internet is currently being used for educational purposes because it: is easy to use, cheap, available at any time, contains unlimited resources for many different courses and subject disciplines, provides so many facilities that facilitate teaching and learning, enables the student to search by himself/herself for any information s/he needs and facilitates communication for educators and learners.

In the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), there are many reasons for using the Internet in English classes. First of all, using computers in general, and using the Internet in particular, provide "a strong intrinsic motivation for learning English" (**Muehleisen, 1997: Online**). This means that when students are exposed to the Internet technology, it is likely that they will feel motivated for learning English, and consequently, their achievement will improve. Students may be familiar with the Internet at home, and therefore, when they are involved in using it in learning at school, they will feel more motivated. It is evident that motivation is always needed for learning during all the educational stages: "Most motivation theorists assume that motivation is involved in the performance of all learned responses; that is, a learned behavior will not occur unless it is energized" (**Huitt, 2001: Online**).

A second possible reason is that "learning computer skills is essential to students' future success" (**Warschauer, 1997: Online**). Using the Internet has been recently regarded as an important computer skill that should be mastered by students. English majors, as prospective teachers of English, need to master the computer skills in general and the Internet skills in particular, so as to be able to face many challenges in their future careers.

A third reason is related to developing literacy skills. In the 21st century, students need to develop their basic literacy skills, namely, "the ability to read, write, communicate, research, and publish on the Internet" (**Warschauer et al., 2000: 7**). This idea is supported by the study of **Kuntz (1995: 177-181)** who made a successful on-line model for teachers of Swahili called "Swahili-L". A fourth reason is that the Internet "places English in an international context" (**Muehleisen, 1997: Online**). Throughout the Internet, students find a great number of documents and texts written in English. This encourages them to read information written on many websites and communicate with other foreigners in English. As a result, they can develop their English language proficiency.

A sixth reason is that the Internet "increases the personal power of teachers and students. It allows them to become autonomous lifelong learners" (**Warschauer et al., 2000: 7**). This is very important because one of the educational goals of adult education is to promote the students' ability of independent, lifelong learning. Such type of learning can be carried out with the use of many modern technologies, such as distance learning (**Cropley, et al., 2000: 28-30**).

Furthermore, there are many benefits that the Internet can have for English Language Teaching (ELT). One of these benefits is that the Internet enables the students to study any topic in the English language independently by doing a simple online search. There are many search engines that students can use in their searching processes. Search engines are used to help in locating information on the Internet. **Warschauer et al. (2000: 50-53)** lists many search engines which should be recommended for English learners, such as google, yahoo, dogpile and altavista.

Another benefit is that there are a lot of Internet-based activities that can be used with English learners' to improve their English language proficiency. **Muehleisen (1997)** lists some of these activities which can be used by English instructors inside the classroom. These activities are

represented in: surfing the net, using e-mail, doing research and making a class web site. In addition to these main activities, the author lists some minor activities underlying these main activities, such as: learning basic searching skills, downloading pages from the Internet, reading online magazines and newspapers and looking for related pages on the WWW.

Consistent with this, Nancy Sullivan, cited by **Richard-Amato (1996: 290-291)**, describes her two-year experience working in the computer-assisted writing laboratory at the University of Texas in Austin with both native and nonnative speakers of English. She reports that in normal sessions students were hesitant to speak in class because of shyness, insecurity about being misunderstood, or cultural reasons. However, in the computer networked setting, students took their time forming their opinions and interact more easily. In the electronic discussions, all the students were able to participate actively without feeling shy.

In this period, in which a large amount of material is available for students to read, learners of English as a foreign language need to develop their reading skills. It is worth attention to keep in mind that reading does not always mean just the oral reading (or the reading aloud) of a text. Instead, it extends beyond this stage to mean understanding a text as well. In this context, Gray (1960), **cited by Anderson (2003: Online)**, distinguishes three levels of understanding a reading text: (1) "Reading the lines" which implies the literal meaning of the text; (2) reading "between the lines" which refers to inferred meanings; and (3) reading "beyond the lines" which denotes the readers' critical evaluations of the text

Among the important reading skills which those learners need to develop is skimming in order to get the main idea of a certain text, scanning in order to find a specific piece of information, the ability to summarize a text in a few lines, the ability to predict what will be stated based on what is written and recognize the way the writer uses to develop his/her ideas. In addition, they need to read fast so as to be able to read as much as possible in a limited period of time (**Zukowski/Faust, et al., 1982; Munby, 1985; Wallace, 1999 & Anderson, 2003**).

The Internet has become a very useful tool for exposing learners to online authentic material (**Anderson, 2003**). This denotes the importance of using the Internet for developing the students' reading skills so as to be able to do many useful practices, such as skimming the text, scanning it and selecting the part which is closely related to the topic they deal with.

Oliver (2003: Online) states that according to researchers, computers in general, and the Internet in particular, "can have a positive effect on student reading achievement". In a computer-mediated environment, reading for meaning and comprehension is encouraged beyond reading for singular words in isolation.

McNabb, et al. (2002) reports a study which proves that there are many benefits of using the Internet in reading instruction. Teachers surveyed said that Internet-based learning activities make reading enjoyable for students, foster use of critical reading skills, and promote reading fluency. They also observe that these activities enhance understanding of content and require well-developed traditional literacy skills in the areas of vocabulary, writing, and comprehension.

In another study, **Mulholland (2002)** found out that the Internet provides authentic reading materials that, in turn, encourage students to read more. Another study, conducted by **the Education Commission of the States (1999: Online)**, aimed at investigating the effect of a CD-ROM and an Internet-Based Training Program on overcoming children's reading problems. It was found that the program and the CD-ROM were effective in developing a wide range of the necessary reading skills.

Also, **Leyva (2004: 137-157)** reports a study undertaken at the National Autonomous University of Mexico to explore the influence of the Internet on the reading habits of students. The study showed increasing familiarity with information technologies and the Internet and that reading practices are changing as a result. In this context, **Iacono (2004, 179-190)** presented a paper on the development of Internet-based assessment and intervention tools for improving reading skills in adults with complex communication needs. She states that there is evidence to suggest that appropriate and direct reading instruction can result in improved reading skills even in the face of these risk factors.

In conclusion, we can say that there are many ways through which the Internet facilities, such as email and search engines, can be used in English language teaching. The point here is that how the English teacher can utilize these facilities, whether inside or outside his/her class, to improve the learners' academic performance and sustain their future professional development.

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