



# World Journal on Educational Technology



Vol 7, Issue 3, (2015) 167-171

<http://sproc.org/ojs/index.php/wjet>

## Advantages of using webquests in EFL Classes in A Technical University

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### Suggested Citation:

Kuimova, M. V., Golousenko, M. A., Nikiforov, D. S. & Shcherbakov, V. V (2015). Advantages of using webquests in Efl Classes in A Technical University. *World Journal on Educational Technology*. 7(3), 167-171.

Received October 19, 2015; revised November 17, 2015; accepted December 21, 2015

Selection and peer review under responsibility of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Fezile Ozdamli, Near East University.

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### Abstract

The main purpose of foreign language teaching is to learn to communicate and overcome the language barrier. The article studies the theoretical background of WebQuest as a valuable tool and proves that it helps learners to acquire linguistic and extra-linguistic knowledge. WebQuests ensure a context-based learning environment, help to broaden learners' perspectives by widening ideas and concepts on different topics and acquiring creative, critical and problem-solving skills. The authors demonstrate positive outcomes of the work with WebQuest in foreign language classes at the Institute of Non-Destructive Testing, National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University.

Keywords: creative skills, foreign language teaching, Internet resources, Internet technology, WebQuest.

*"This article selected from 3rd Global Conference on Linguistics and Foreign Language Teaching Conference 16th to 18th November 2015 Istanbul, Turkey"*

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## 1. Introduction

Globalization, the knowledge-driven economy, rapidly evolving information and communication technologies are leading to profound changes in the preparation of university graduates. Nowadays, more and more attention is paid to personal qualities, which allow graduates to adapt to the changing conditions of life. Employers appreciate goal-orientation, teamwork and communication skills, problem-solving and foreign language skills when recruiting for their companies. Thus, university syllabi are aimed at developing professional competence and ability for lifelong learning. The use of powerful innovative teaching methods and technologies helps to solve these tasks. WebQuest is one of these technologies.

## 2. Related work

Researchers say that WebQuest is an effective, low-cost technology that provides a context-based learning environment and helps learners to learn in the real world (Chu & Chen, 2014; Cui, Tong & Bao, 2012; Nordin, Norainon Mohd, Zakaria & Embi, 2012). As a teaching strategy, WebQuest effectively combines inquiry-based teaching and network information technology (Yu, 2015; Diao, 2014). The use of WebQuest in EFL classes challenges students to think critically and use collaborative learning as a powerful instrument to discover knowledge, research an issue independently from multiple perspectives and find their own answers (Diniz, 2008; Timothy & Jacobson, 2005). Working with WebQuest promotes reading skills and vocabulary knowledge (Aydin, 2015). WebQuest cultivates critical and creative thinking skills that help learners achieve a higher level of language, experience the joy of new ideas and generate their own ideas and solutions to various problems in and out of a learning environment (Bazhenov & Luchaninov, 2014; Hartman, 2012; Sanford, Jacobs & Townsend-Rocchiccioli, 2010; Kuimova & Gaberling, 2014; Kuimova & Polyushko, 2015).

## 3. Research data

According to T. March, WebQuest is a learning technology that uses links to resources on the World Wide Web and a task to inspire learners to investigate an issue and acquire its wider understanding. It allows learners to explore the topic in a guided and meaningful manner (March, 2015). In addition, WebQuest:

- is appropriate for different topics;
- allows multi-level problem tasks;
- develops oral and written skills.

In the learning process, the technology of WebQuest provides:

- virtual socio-cultural environment of the country of the studied language;
- authenticity of the materials presented in the network;
- development of learners' information culture as an essential component of general cultural competence of modern individuals;
- learners' motivation to independent cognitive activity.

The adventurous features of WebQuest coincide with the need to develop learners' abilities to:

- compare;
- analyze;
- classify;

- think abstractly.

WebQuest may be suitable for learners of different language levels and ages. It is used to organize a purposeful search on the Internet. WebQuest activities engage learners in real life problems, help to construct new knowledge individually or as a part of a group and apply knowledge from various fields to achieve the goal. Working with WebQuest, a teacher becomes a facilitator. He should establish situations and authentic topics relevant to learners and the syllabus (Zlatkovska, 2010).

Researchers claim that the use of WebQuest:

- helps to capture learners' interest;
- enhances learning motivation;
- enriches learning resources;
- facilitates advanced thinking;
- improves information processing skills;
- triggers meaningful communication;
- develops a deeper understanding of the studied material;
- provides access to current and up-to-date research (Yo, Alshumaimeri & Almasri, 2012; Zlatkovska, 2010).

The work with WebQuest does not suppose ready answers and solutions. Thus, it follows that learners are free to make their own decisions. Moreover, WebQuest helps to:

- carry out an individual learning approach;
- train brainpower (explanation, comparison, classification, selection, induction, deduction, generalization, etc.);
- provide active, independent or group search activity.

Working with WebQuest includes three stages:

1) preliminary preparation. The teacher selects the resources of the Internet and defines:

- the type of WebQuest (short-term, e.g. 1-3 lessons or continuous, e.g. an academic quarter);
- topic (in line with the learners' background knowledge and the syllabus);
- task (clear, measurable and true to life);
- performance (individually or in groups);
- end result (retelling, compilation, design, journalistic and persuasion tasks, presentations, essays, etc.)

2) guidelines (additional advice, templates, timelines, etc.);

3) execution keeping to a particular structure:

- introduction;
- setting a goal;
- process of work;
- result of work;
- summary;
- assessment.

We decided to investigate the impact of using WebQuest on students' language learning achievements. We chose four groups (two control and two experimental) of forty-eight second-year students studying English as a second language at the Institute of Non-Destructive Testing, National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University. The experiment lasted for one entire semester. The students studied the following topics: "Education" and "Employment". During this time, students of the control groups were taught using traditional methods and techniques (course books, workbooks, CDs and computer programs available at the university), while the students of the experimental groups were given WebQuest in addition to the aforesaid educational materials.

While doing the semester assessment test, the students of the experimental groups showed better results than the control groups:

- reading skills (19%);
- speaking skills (14%);
- writing skills (11%).

Furthermore, the students of the experimental groups noted that the work with WebQuest helped to:

- become more computer-literate;
- find desired information resources;
- improve their skimming and scanning skills;
- analyze, compare facts and draw conclusions;
- develop critical and problem-solving skills;
- enlarge their awareness of foreign education and terms of employment;
- make informed decisions on the information obtained;
- promote group work.

#### 4. Conclusion

Internet resources and the authenticity of materials create a feeling of being in the language environment and the presence of real, "tangible" results of work, achieved in an atmosphere of cooperation and responsibility, increases learners' motivation, develops creative thinking and problem-solving skills. The work with WebQuest helps to provide active and independent individual or group search activity, extends and generalizes what was learnt, develops language competence and favors academic achievements.

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