Designing Internet-based EFL Learning and Reconstructing Teacher-Student Interaction: A Case Study from the Course "Learning English through the Internet"

Rosa Hui-Ju Chen

ABSTRACT

Many studies have shown that applying the Internet to the instructional design provides positive impacts on EFL teaching and learning. While the numerous capabilities of the Internet were familiar by the EFL educators, the field concerning how to implement the internet to facilitate the classroom interaction is still being explored. The case study described in this paper is based on a new course "Learning English Through the Internet" which was conducted at the Yuan Ze University.

The instructional design of this course focuses on effectively engaging college-level students in participating within the Internet-based learning environment. The special features of this study include the renovated teaching strategies and processes, the electronic textbook, on-line testing and project-presenting, the learner-controlled lesson plan and teaching pace and, the most significant one, the reconstruction of teacher-student and student-student interaction. Besides, the course development was transformed into an instructional web-site which was collaboratively designed by the class members. However, the idea of designing this on-line English learning web-site can be a highlight of this study in terms of enriching the learning assessment and providing more guidelines to future learners. It is believed that the newly-generated interactive patterns from the Internet-based learning environment can entirely change the structure of EFL instruction and can easily promote more future use of the Internet in the classroom.

Introduction

Reasons why creating the course

This paper introduces and examines the instructional design background and the application of using the richful Internet-based learning environment to create a college-level English course for EFL students in Taiwan. The title of this renovated one-semester course is called "Learning English through the Internet". It was conducted at Yuan-Ze University in the 1997-1998 academic year and designed to be a two-credit elective course opened to all the junior and senior students. The first idea in creating this non-traditional course came to my mind when I was asked to write proposals for more advanced English courses to enrich the foreign language study fields in Yuan-Ze campus. Having been an English instructor there for three years, at that time, I deeply realized that the whole English curriculum was not welcomed so much and treated fairly by the students. In some way they agree English-learning is important, but in the other way, they often consider it a nightmare. In fact, according to my own and other EFL teachers' experiences, this conflict learning attitude toward English classes exists not only among students of Yuan-Ze University but most college students in Taiwan. Meanwhile, how to provide well-designed courses to make English learning more appealing to these college students seems an inevitable task for all the ESL/EFL teachers.

The Instructional Design of this Course

The objective of this course is to bring the Internet and Computer Learning Networks into the English language classroom to facilitate a communicative, collaborative and distance learning environment for ESL students. Like Sterim & Koch (1996) pointed out in their book, a teacher's role in the classroom is changing. Teachers are not the dispensers of knowledge but the facilitator of student learning. I deeply believe that a modern ESL/EFL teacher should use up-to-date information and student's interests to teach the lessons rather than just completely planning the curriculum by themselves and primarily guided by the textbooks.

Talking about the motivation in language learning, in recent years there has been a surge of articles re-examining the relationship of motivation to language learning. Here I would introduce Porter's(1997) words. He believed that effective means of sharing information and encouraging learning and skill development . Nevertheless, with an increase in the number of ways people can communicate and information can be transmitted and received, materials in

different format can enhance the learning and training process and better meet people's different needs and preferences. Therefore, I wrote the following words as the outline of this class:

"Based on the computer-assisted language Learning theories, the course will be designed to teach students how to use electronic communication tools(ex. E-mail, BBS, the internet and the WWW) to access learning resources and materials, enrich classroom activities, promote highly motivating international exchanges, and help students find their own learning materials."

Web-based learning

The Internet, a monumental new information technology widespread in the world, has brought about drastic changes in the nature of communications (Goro, 1997). The technology allows us to exchange multimedia information and messages on a globe basis. In order to gain the target information in a limited time, the powerful linking capability of networked hypertext is a major benefit. However, excellent reading skill is

much significant in exploring in the web-based learning. Therefore, I chose the interesting topic oriented materials to train students to skim and scan on those information. At the first beginning, I assigned them a web-site and ask them organize what they learn from it. Different from the traditional lesson, students were not told to read what the teacher wanted them to read. On the contrary, they had to report to me next time what they did and how many words they learned. Maybe it was confusing to them first, but soon they got the key point and enjoy it. Remember a team did an outstanding job in listing all the pets in While House over the past years. The chart was well-organized and welcomed by all other classmate. It proved that students could be self-learning conductor.

Instrument

Classroom environment (Computer Lab)

The students were arranged in a networked computer lab. The capacity of this classroom is 65 seats. All seats were equipped a PC computer and facing to each other. There are two monitors on the teacher's desk. One is for the master station and the other is the controlling monitor which is used to broadcast and monitor the students' screen. By using this, projector and black/write board are not necessary. Teachers don't need to write anything. They just have to input the information in to the computer and students will get these immediately. The

lessons will be delivered in a non-traditional methods which also allow teachers to notice easily what are shown on each student's monitor.

Special features about the class

Textbook Revolution

Information stored on the web sites include hypermedia and hypertext in terms of documents, photographs, drawings, music, animation and even video clips. This richful and chunking information world offer enormous potential for enhancing the communicative approach to language teaching and learning. Therefore, the textbook pattern has changed into digitized one and the WWW certainly offers exciting opportunities to provide cost-effective access to information

Writing and Communicating with the Internet

In recent years, E-mail has been used a lot and proved an effective tool in teaching and learning. Because it can be used in-school to connect students via intranets or it can send messages across the Internet, this flexible communication tool help bridge the communication gap between teachers and students. Porter (1997) indicated in his book that E-mail sent through the Internet might be directed from one user to another, but it also might involve messages to and from mailing lists and bulletin boards. As we noticed, many web sites include hypertext links to a company's or an individual's e-mail. What I did in my class was trying to take advantages of these mailto. For example, all my students would get a "welcome letter" from their teacher before attending to the first class. The letter was sent out by the Teachers' Information System in YZU which provides the E-mail function. By this function, each teacher can select to send messages to every student in his/her class or any one of them. Porter(1997) said that group messages are an effective way to share course assignments, announcements, and core materials. Therefore, during the first class my students have to be forced to react to the letter through system which suggests they are going to have this alternative way to "talk" to their teacher and classroom. However, the results of sending this "welcome letter" assured me that E-mail certainly adds another dimension to the way that educator and learners interact and allows more interpersonal dialogue between students and teachers. My students wrote some words from their hearts to show me their expectations to the class,

especially for those who were afraid of speaking English in class. They not only received another way to express their ideas about the class but were encouraged to ask questions, request clarification, and receive additional assistance. It provides more opportunities for "conversation" outside the traditional classroom and it encourages the learning interaction to take place any time, any place. Besides, these feedback are the good samples to show their writing proficiency. They are just like the pretests of this class.

Once getting used to communicate through the E-mail system, students will be encouraged to explore more experiences through the Internet. For example, they might feel intimidated but excited to write a letter to Bill Clinton via the web-pages of the White House. I nominated a student and took his letter as an example to teach the whole class that how to write a letter to Mr. president. This is an excellent chance to teach "Letter Writing" or "Note Writing".

Integrating BBS into English Class

As we all noticed, writing on the BBS has been a required skill for college-level students in Taiwan. It was also found that students overall had a positive attitude toward using the BBS. However, my students still use their own native language while communicating on it. Since I am an English teacher, why don't I force them to write in English which combines instruction and pleasure together. Therefore, I designed an personal field called "Rosa's English Family" on YZU's BBS. There all the students can post their assignments on. For example, one thing I taught to them was writing a note of "asking for absence".

They were required to write this note if they couldn't come to the class. The messages would be open to everyone and there was a English writing contest for mothers on Mother's Day. For writing in the environment they belong to, most students did a great job and created the "Rosa's Family" the only English interactive field on the campus network.

Format of the Homework

Student-centered Assignment

In the traditional ESL/EFL courses, teachers used to assign written homework for their students. However, in the Internet-based learning class, assessment could be measured by self-chosen assignment. Students should be provided more in terms of having alternative opportunities to practice what they have learned in the class. According to the philosophy of

"Virtual Teaching and Learning Model" at the University of Sheffield (1998), assessment is part of the learning process and practices self/peer/tutor collaborative, ongoing assessment.　This is somehow difficult but interesting.　I tried to implement this valuable idea into my class and the activities I designed included collaborative projects, case studies, project presentation and on-line publication.

Bring the Global community to the class

First, I separated all the students into groups and chose the web-sites for them.　For example, the site of introducing the American Holiday.　Since the contents of the whole site is so vichful and they only got one-week to study and prepare for the presentation.　So each group can select any holiday they were interested in.　What they were asked to present to other classmates was introducing the target holiday and comparing it with any related one in Chinese.　This project engaged students involving in the awareness of different cultures.　According to the theory of communicative competence, it is also a significant part in language teaching and learning.　During the last class, I asked students to write some words to introduce what is "Learning English through the Internet".　From the their feedback, I found one student wrote like this:

Subject:　What is Learning English through the Internet

Date:　　Thur, 11 Jun 1998 12:12:34 +0800

From:　　Chang-lung Chen <s843063@moon.yzu.edu.tw>

Organization:　YZU

To:　s849023@moon.yzu.edu.tw, s843063@moon.yzu.edu.tw

What is Learning English from Internet?

1. Be familiar with popular network tool on Internet

2. Get into the habits of searching what you need

3. Contact with everyone in the world

4. Research customs everywhere

It is obvious that what he learned in the class has been beyond the linguistic competence and is exactly what I intended to teach to them.

Another good method to promote the "internationalization" to students is encourage them to have penpals through the Internet. Many articles have discussed the possibility that the culture of the Internet has the potential to become a global culture or it is already irretrievably Western. While enjoying meeting the panels on the Internet, students might not think this important issue. However, realizing the importance of English learning and intending to engage in learning it more is definitely one benefit of knowing penpals. By the way, students can easily post themselves on many web-sites (like Dave's Cafe) and receive others' feedback in a short time. This internationalized cross-culture communication is really amazing to my students. Through the process of expressing themselves in English, I do believed that they find their personal and cultural identification.

Web-site construction

All the students were asked to store and present their homework in their own way and to defend for their products. In fact, to prevent form making the whole class a web-site constructing course, students didn't necessarily have to turning their projects into web pages. What they did included Microsoft Words files, PowerPoint or even on papers. To my surprise, what I found interesting was the force of peer-pressure. After reviewing others' presentations, some students were amazed by those excellent jobs. For the above reason, they were encouraged to learn more computing and Internet-based skills which could be a bonus for them for taking this course. Near the end of the semester, I suggest them construct a class web-site which collects all their projects and homework since it had became a learning site for other students. It contained many useful information like how to write a resume in English, how to apply to the graduate school in other countries, the most economical travel plan for college-level students.....etc. This hypermedia web-site can be access to the Internet and expended even the class was over.

On-line Testing

Since all the activities in this course are conducted on the Internet, it is inevitable that the test should be designed into the on-line format. Although taking quizzes while connected to the Internet is motivating, there are also some drawbacks (Mello, 1997). One of these problems with Internet based quizzes is the Internet itself, that is, the connection is sometimes slow or down. Therefore, I tried to input the essay questions into the E-mail message first and

didn't send it out until the test began.　For considering the above problems and time-consuming, part of the questions belonged to short essays which means students had to give the answers in a limited time.　The rest of the test was given to allow them surfing on the Internet to organize and synthesize the information they want.　The testing time was within one and half hours. The test results should be mail back to the teacher via E-mail.

Using Internet based tests, teachers don't have to walk around in the classroom to monitor the students'.　They can just use the broadcasting system to monitor each screen and don't have to worry about any cheating behavior.　You can read exactly what he/she is typing or knowing what he/she is doing.

Extra Findings from the Class

Besides the facts mentioned above, the class dynamics and students' extra performance were beyond what I expected originally.　Being the teacher, I am often pleased by some extra findings for the class.　For example, a girl from business school kept journal writing for each class which recorded the special features each week and indicated that English writing had been part of her life.　On the other way, a boy tried so hard to present a poem on the BBS to his loving mother.　During this summer time, I got a E-mail from one of my future student who was attracted by the class's web-site and ask if he has to prepare anything for the class in fall term.　It was delightful to know that some students were waiting for this English class. Things really changed and my idea of constructing the learning site actually worked.　These could be a compliment for the teacher.　Moreover, their feedback to the class also revealed their changing attitudes toward English Learning which cope with my intention while designing this class.

Here are some examples:

Subject:　832010 感言

Date: Thu, 11 Jun 1998 12:05:33 +0800 (CST)

From:　cycle.bbs@bbs.yzu.edu.tw

To:　s849023@moon.yzu.edu.tw

當初是因為好奇才來選這堂課, 現在覺得選這堂課真是值回票價！！

Subject: 感想

Date: Thu, 11 Jun 1998 12:04:42 +0800 (CST)

From: 林朝厚 <s842100@moon.yzu.edu.tw>

To: S849023@moon.yzu.edu.tw

CC: s842100@moon.yzu.edu.tw

第一次在選課中看到這門課時，總覺得，英文已經讓我夠頭疼了，更何況又要上網學習，這對一個很少上 Internet 的我來說，可又增加了一點挑戰性己，但是，基於對自己的期許……:)，我還是毅然決然......選了。完全出乎意料地，老師輕鬆的教學，讓我們自由地在英文網中閒逛，(逛歸逛，可還要有些結果，要做 Homework 的。)像……我們有到白宮的網站，看到總統的兒子女兒啊…..養的寵物啊……..；還有萬聖節南瓜燈籠的由來喔……..；還有………。我想，上這門課你努力的越多，得到的也就越多。

所謂 No Pains, No Gains

Subject: 感言 834033

Date: Thu, 11 Jun 1998 11:40:46 +0800 (CST)

From: sigh <s834033@moon.yzu.edu.tw>

To: s849023@moon.yzu.edu.tw

Through the class of "Learning English through the Internet", We can enter a lot of websites that are interesting and knowledgeable.

What I learn most is getting international panpels, which can enlarge my vocabulary ability. It's very interesting to learn knowledge from western websites.

Conclusion

Although there are many benefits in using computerized materials, there are some possible drawbacks too. Tuzi(1997) pointed that possible drawbacks to computerized materials are cost and time. From my own experience, it is not necessarily to have enough funding to establish an Internet-based learning class. Having well-designed lesson plans and innovative teaching methodologies are important to educators. They must understand how to make the paradigm shift "conventional" teaching and learning to teaching and learning in virtual environment.

And it is surely a complex cultural change.

Just like Goro(1998) pointed out in his paper, the key to access of English education are

1) how we can make students learn English on a daily basis

2) how we can enhance and maintain their motivation in and outside of the classroom

and , 3) how we can develop their personal communications in an authentic language context.

I deeply convince that these are the essential criterions which most ESL/EFL teachers in Taiwan should follow.

References

Mello, Vera.   (1997).   Online Quizzes -- Are they Worthwhile?

http://www.aitech.ac.lp/~iteslj/Articles/Mello-Quizzes.html

Porter, L. R. (1997).   Creating the Virtual Classroom.   Distance Learning with the Internet.   New York, NY.

Strim, F & Koch, M (1996).   NetLearning: Why Teachers Use the Internet.   Sebastopol, CA

The NODE: networking

Http://node.on.ca/netwoking/july1998/feature2.html

Tuzi, Frank.   (1997).   Using Microsoft Word to Generate Computerized Tests.   The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. III, No. 11

Virtual Learning Environments Program (1997, Auguest).

First World Conference, Denver, Colorado

Http://www.sit.edu/dole/program.html

Warschauer, M. (1995).   E-mail for English Teaching.   Alexandria, VA.

運用網際網路建構學習環境和師生互動
"上網學英文" 課程實例研究

陳惠如

摘　要

　　運用網際網路的豐富資源和其强大的互動特性來創造新的學習環境，已逐漸被廣泛運用在英語教學上．而其中絕大多數都是在强調技術方面對教學的應用，作者認爲如何充分且有效地利用網際網路的特色、從而發揮在轉變師生互動關係上、並進而改進教學品質，亦是值得探討的議題。

　　本文將介紹與展示的是來自作者在元智大學所開設的一門新課程——上網學英文，此課程的教學設計著重在以網際網路爲主體的線上學習並且利用它作爲師生間的互動媒介，課程特色則包括打破傳統教科書型態、以學生爲主體的內容與進度安排、電子作業報告、線上考試、建構超媒體學習網站等。結果發現此一創新的教學方式頗受學生好評。其中尤以老師與學生間互動關係方面的改善最爲顯著，此種新的教學方式除了促進教學品質與學生的學習興趣外，更讓人了解日益成熟的網際網路環境，的確替未來英語教學帶來新的希望。