INTERNET-BASED
LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

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Abstract. This article explores teachers and students benefits of using Internet-based Language Learning (IBLL) which includes teaching English Language. This paper presents advantages and disadvantages of using internet resources and computers to learn and teach English language. Until quite recently, Internet-based Language Learning was a relevant topic mostly to those with a special interest in that area. Recently, though, the internet has become so widespread in educational institutions and homes and its uses have expanded so dramatically that the majority of English language teachers have started the implications of the internet for language learning. This article provides brief overview of how internet resources can be used for language teaching. It focuses not on a technical description of hardware and software but rather on pedagogical questions that teachers have considered in using internet resources in the classroom.

Keywords: Internet resources; Online quizzes; Language learning; Language teaching; IBLL.
Short title: Internet-based learning.

Introduction

Nowadays *Internet-based Language Learning* (IBLL) is the most innovative area in the practice of English language teaching and learning. Keeping students interested and engaged in current topics or activities is a daily challenge for teachers in the classroom. One of the advantages of IBLL is that it provides new possibilities for assisting teachers to successfully meet this challenge.

In the last few years the number of teachers using IBLL has increased significantly. Although the potential of internet resources for educational use has not been fully explored yet and the average educational institutions still make limited use of computers and internet resources, it is obvious that we have entered new information age in which the links between technology and teaching of English as a Foreign Language have already been established. The development of the internet brought a revolution in the teachers' perspective, since teaching tools offered through the internet were gradually becoming more reliable [1]. Nowadays, the internet is gaining immense popularity in English language teaching and more and more educators and learners are embracing it.

Until recently a lot of research has been carried out on internet resources for language acquisition. Several authors have written various articles confirming the benefits of IBLL [2]. All the articles show how internet resources can be used and give their addresses but no author has ever explained how IBLL can be applied in a large class. The author of this article has tried to solve the problem of using IBLL in large class.

This article is structured as follows. The first section deals with the advantages and disadvantages of IBLL. The second section explains how computers can be used in class, learning the language. The third section shows the approaches of group division and finally, the last section presents the list of internet resources which can be used for English language acquisition.

1. Advantages and Disadvantages of IBLL

There are a lot of advantages and disadvantages of IBLL, but there are not so many disadvantages as there are advantages. There are a lot of challenges that teachers face while instructing classes because it is difficult to keep good discipline in class and teachers have to provide more students with different abilities who want

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to learn the language at different speeds and in different ways [3].

1.1. Advantages of IBLL

The advantages of Internet-based language learning are as follows.

1. IBLL provides students with a lot of genuine educational materials.

2. IBLL can lead to autonomy, as learners control exercises regarding the learning process and little dependent on a teacher.

3. Computers present materials in various ways [3]. Electronic things on the screen are presented in a way that they become more attractive and less indelible than traditional methods of learning languages.

4. IBLL provides students with a possibility to use online references allowing them to consult electronic resources beyond those of grammar-check, dictionary and thesaurus.

5. Computers use various colors, types and sizes of letters.

6. IBLL allows distance education [4].

7. Computers present a text word by word, phrase by phrase, line by line, question by question, page by page, etc.

8. Computers can scroll lines of text up the screen, or change screens on demand or after a set time.

9. Computers free students from the limitations of traditional writing tools.

10. Computers transform learning languages from a traditional passive exercise to an interactive experience of discovery and exploration.

11. Computers are flexible and untiring. Computers 'do not get tired' and can repeat the same thing again and again without complaining.

12. Computers help language learners to create, analyze, and produce information and ideas in an easy and efficient way [5].

13. Computers give immediate feedback if they are programmed to do so.

14. Computers confirm if the answer is correct, give the correct answer or a hint if the answer is incorrect, etc, if they are programmed to do so.

15. Computers rapidly and accurately check answers, if they are programmed to do so.

16. Computers' clocks can be used to time the students' work, limit the amount of time allowed to read a passage or do an exercise or a set of exercises, etc.

17. Language learning can be individualized using computers. Students study materials are related to their individual goals and what they need or are interested in with the appropriate difficulty level and at their own pace [3].

18. With the help of the internet, teachers and students can work wherever and whenever it is needed not only in class at a fixed time and place.

19. Computers keep records accurately [2].

20. Computers help students realize their full potential and collaborate as a team to accomplish tasks more effectively.

21. Teachers keep track of individual or class scores and times [4].

22. Computers enable students to electronically monitor and control the language learning process.

23. Computers enable teachers to quickly retrieve students' electronic writings for future analyses and grading as teachers can send assignments and notices electronically and monitor the progress of the student or the group.

24. Computers calculate quickly and accurately [2]. They help teachers to count total scores, averages, standard deviations and statistically analyze individual student and class results.

25. The internet gives an opportunity for shy students to have a forum for expressing themselves and asking questions.

26. IBLL offers students genuine educational programs, games, simulations, dictionaries, etc.

27. Using multi-media materials, computers display written texts and use sounds, still pictures, and videos. Students feel that things are more real and more easily understood.

28. The internet allows the teacher to quickly give all students certain information and to obtain information from the students quickly, too.

1.2. Disadvantages of IBLL

Besides having a lot of advantages of IBLL, there are several disadvantages. IBLL is not applied everywhere successfully because there are several barriers that do not let it be applied in the educational programs [2]. The barriers of IBLL can be classified in the following common categories.

1. Both students and teachers must be computer-literate because using IBLL means being good at computers in order for a user to give commands to a computer and respond to it [2].

2. Sometimes available internet resources are difficult to use despite the fact that a good manual is provided. No matter how simple computers and the internet are, students need to learn a lot in order to use them properly.

3. Internet resources have limitations regarding their memory, speed, methods of input and output, etc. Internet resources for language acquisition are still imperfect [5].

4. Processing information takes time.

5. Information is usually input by typing it in, so to use a computer efficiently, it is necessary to know how to type. Nowadays there are a few internet resources with voice recognition but they are not very popular for not being well-developed.

6. In general all internet sites do what they are programmed to do. All internet resources have some limitations. For example, some language learning resources show the final score after taking a quiz without any further explanation of mistakes.

7. Some internet resources may not be able to do exactly what a user wants them to do.

8. IBLL cannot handle user's unexpected requests and requirements as computers may perform the things they are designed to do.

9. Computers and access to the internet are expensive [5]. In addition, there is a great deal of additional equipment which is needed. Low budget educational institutions and low-income students usually cannot afford a computer.

10. A special classroom is also necessary, along with technicians to keep the computers and the network working properly [3].

11. Computers break down, and they may have technical problems [4].

12. It is also necessary to train teachers in order to make them ready to explain the things better and use Information Technologies [3].

2. How to Use a Computer in Class

Computers with internet resources can be used effectively in classrooms if teachers use the following structure of language learning.

1. Select computer materials that are going to be used i.e. a program or the internet resources.

2. Plan the lesson. Teachers can decide to use internet resources to explain topics or whether to take online quizzes. The plan of the lesson also depends on the following: the size of a class, student motivation and course learning objectives.

3. Make the computer class ready before lessons. This means loading the computer with the chosen material ahead of time.

4. Divide the class into several groups with at least one student who is good at computers and the language to be learned so that more experienced students can help the others.

5. Encourage students to use several online resources for the topic given and take quizzes.

6. If there is not enough of online resources or if students do not understand the topic, a teacher should be always around to explain it using the classical approach.

7. Make students take at least one quiz on each language learning part i.e. reading, writing, listening and conversation.

8. Ask students to submit their assignments electronically to your e-mail.

3. Need to use IBLL

Large classes are a big problem while teaching a language and keeping the discipline. Large class can be handled better dividing it into various groups. In order to divide a class into groups it is vital to consider the following factors: i) the size of a class; ii) intellectual maturity of students; iii) students motivation; iv) course learning objectives; v) instructor's preferences; vi) availability of technologies.

3.1. Different approaches

As soon as all the above-mentioned factors are defined, a class can be divided into groups using the following three well-known methods.

1. *Same-ability groups.* The students at the same levels can be grouped so that they will feel free working with others and teachers will not have to explain the things to each one personally. Such kinds of groups are really very good not only for teachers but also for students as the teacher can leave the groups of faster learners to get on with the work on their own. She can give extra help to individual learners in the slower groups. The teacher can just come around, give some instruction or tasks to do if the group is strong and give more time to the group consisting of students with lower level of the knowledge.

2. *Mixed-ability groups.* Such kind of groups can be organized in order to let the students at a higher level help the others. Learners with higher knowledge in the group can help others to master the work so that the teacher would not need teaching some parts. As the students work on their own, the teacher is free for other groups.

3. *Groups with leaders.* In same-ability groups and mixed-ability groups some students at a higher level can be appointed a leader of the group so that they can help others to understand the things better and faster. Some teachers appoint faster gifted learners as group leaders or monitors who can help slower learners.

After a class has been divided into several groups, the following approaches can be applied in teaching a language: i) classical approach (*Teacher + Students*); ii) ultramodern approach (*Computer + Student*); iii) modern approach (*Teacher + Computer + Student*).

The research carried out at Information Systems Management Institute, Riga, Latvia and Riga Business School RTU, Riga, Latvia has proved that the best way of learning English language is the 3rd approach (modern) as having been explained the topic by the teacher and a computer in class, students learned better and faster and they scored better marks in the tests. Within the research the teacher divided class into several groups depending on the score that showed their level of English language knowledge. The test consisted of 63 questions. The teacher divided class into several groups taking into consideration that in one group there were not more than 5 students. The class was divided into several groups, the topic was explained to half of the groups by the teacher and the internet and the students took online quizzes and for the rest of the groups the topic was explained only by the teacher and the students took the quizzes in paper. To our surprise the students who had taken the quizzes online scored much higher and faster. Having carried out the above-mentioned research, we have come to the following conclusion of students' benefit using IBLL.

3.2. Students' benefit using IBLL

1. Within IBLL students work with great pleasure on the computers as the language is given in different and more interesting, attractive ways through games, animated graphics and problem-solving techniques [1].

2. Students are well-disciplined as the use of technology inside or outside the classroom tends to make the class more interesting.

3. Students feel empowered and less afraid to contact others and realize their full potential as a team to accomplish their language acquisition tasks more effectively.

4. Students instead of a teacher become leaders in class

5. Students receive feedback immediately and they benefit from it.

6. Some online quizzes explain students' mistakes, which make students understand the topic faster [2].

7. Students are highly-motivated to use IBLL because they associate it with fun and games or fashion.

8. Students have time flexibility as they can use various resources of authentic materials either at school or from their home. They do not need to be at a fixed place at a fixed time to learn a language or to pass a test.

9. Students feel independent from a single source of Information as the internet provides them with thousands of information sources. For one particular aspect of any language there can be found a lot of different internet resources.

10. Students get greater interactions [4].

11. Students do exercises and learn faster with several windows open at a time and it helps them to better understand any language aspects explained by different instructors.

Fig. 1. Screenshot of web-site.

E-mailing among teachers and students or students and students make language teaching and learning job well-organized as teachers can keep all materials received in various folders in a proper way. It makes students feel closer to his/her language instructor which is the most important step towards a positive result.

4. Internet resources for the English language learning

The following sections will serve to give the endless source of material for teaching and learning the English language. I have created my own web-site [6] for IBLL with several links to test the knowledge of the English language on various aspects. Fig. 1 shows the screenshot of my web-site. This web-site provides English language learners with various internet resources. The language learning materials for all levels of learners' knowledge is included. By clicking on links learners can not only take different tests on various aspects of the English language with instant scoring but also can get the explanations. It also includes several useful internet resources as online dictionaries, games, a chat site, quizzes for defining the level of English language knowledge etc. It also provides a standardized format for a letter of application and CV writing.

4.1. Internet resources for grammar teaching and learning

Below is a list of the most common online grammar resources: the grammar guide for advanced users [7]; advanced English lessons [8]; English grammar online [9]; online English grammar [10]; study English today [11]; English grammar lessons [12].

4.2. Internet resources for online quizzes

Below is a list of the most commonly used online quizzes: English grammar quizzes [13]; grammar quizzes [14]; ESL grammar quizzes [15]; practice on points of English grammar [16]; nonstop English [17]; English grammar [18]; English grammar exercises [19]; English lessons and tests [20].

4.3. Internet resources for conversations

Below is a list of online resources for communication: ESL conversation online [21]; English daily [22]; practical American English audio course [23].

4.4. Internet resources for dictionaries and encyclopedias

Below is a list of the most common online dictionaries and encyclopedias: the Oxford Dictionary online [24]; Cambridge dictionaries online [25]; Merriam-Webster dictionary and thesaurus [26]; Lingvo online [27]; Encyclopedia Britannica [28].

4.5. Internet resources for newspapers

Below is a list of the most common online newspapers: Times online [29]; The New York Times [30]; Financial Times [31].

Conclusion

To conclude, the purpose of this article was to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of IBLL. There is no doubt that the availability of modern internet resources provides not only students but also teachers with exciting possibilities for innovative challenges in the teaching and learning of the English language. The conventional classroom-based instruction does not provide students with diverse knowledge because of the lack of authentic materials and time but at the same time IBLL can solve all these problems.

My own experience shows that students work better and more efficiently when there is something connected with the modern technologies in the classroom. In order to make students understand their teachers and actively take part in class activities IBLL is vital. By the way, the internet with its unlimited resources, will never replace language teachers, but it can make the English language teaching more interesting and fruitful for both teachers and students.

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