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## **MODELING VIRTUAL CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT FOR TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE**

## **МОДЕЛИРОВАНИЕ ВИРТУАЛЬНОЙ КЛАССНОЙ СРЕДЫ ДЛЯ ПРЕПОДАВАНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА**

### **Abstract:**

*The present article discusses that in a traditional classroom the “bath” method is achieved through using all kinds of objects, games, and icebreakers that the teacher has prepared before class and uses throughout the lesson. Good examples are: a ball or other types of classroom materials (pens, pencils of different colors and dimensions, books, notebooks, sheets, cards, posters, and letters of the alphabet) in the foreign language that students use in their exercises and tasks. All of this requires hours of preparation, not to mention that you have to haul all of these items with you to every class... For those of us who have performed these types of activities in our classes we know just how tiring it can be.*

*The present article outlines approaches to researching language learning in on-line environments and survey research that has been conducted to date. Is it worthwhile to use the Internet in Language teaching? What is a virtual classroom? What is its purpose? How long have you used virtual classrooms at the university? How has your experience been with the implementation of virtual classrooms? What do you do in the virtual classroom as the teacher? What activities do you propose and what tools do you use the most? What tools from the virtual*

*classroom do you usually not use? Have you had any sort of limitations or difficulties to design or use virtual classrooms? How have you overcome the aforementioned difficulties? From our personal view, how effective is the use of virtual classrooms as a complement to classes in a physical space? We can use several approaches to learn about such issues. One is to talk to fellow teachers. Another is to try things out in the classroom and see how they work. And another is to conduct and share research.*

**Keywords:** *English Language Teaching, Education System, Network Communication, Computer Discussions, Modern Technologies, Virtual Classroom.*

## **Introduction**

In recent years, it has been particularly controversial to incorporate modern technologies into teaching process, concretely the use of the Internet in language teaching. Whether we like it or not, the Internet is already there and is increasingly taking over our lives. This is an irreversible process the refore we should find it an exact place in language teaching process.

As we know, the Internet is a worldwide network of heterogeneous information equipment with flexible structure. In the education system, fundamentally different situation has been created due to the emergence of the Internet. On the one hand, the network is full of negative information that adversely affects the spiritual, moral, and cultural development of adolescents. On the other hand, it has the unique opportunities for personal education and development, thus it should be used for a predetermined purpose. Before describing the possibilities and results of the internet as a foreign language teaching technique, let us take a brief look at the history of computer use in the foreign language teaching [1, pp. 25-27].

The use of computers in English language teaching began in the 1960s. This 40-year history can be conventionally divided into three periods: the behavioral approach, the communicative approach, and the integrative use. Each period corresponds to a certain level of technology and a particular pedagogical approach [5, pp. 11-12].

## **Chapter I – From the History of Virtual Learning Environment for Teaching English**

As we know, a virtual learning environment in educational technology is a Web-based platform for the digital aspects of courses of study, usually within educational institutions. They present resources, activities and interactions within a course structure and provide for the different stages of assessment. It also usually report on participation; and have some level of integration with other institutional systems [4, pp. 14-15]. For teachers and instructors who edit them, it may have a de facto role as authoring and design environments. Almost all higher education institutions in the English-speaking world have adopted them.

Behavioral use of computers was developed in the 1950s and was introduced in the 1960s and 1970s. It is built on a behavioral learning model and includes repetitive exercises where the computer acts as a mechanical repeater, allowing students to repeat the material as many times as needs to memorize. The next period involves the communicative use of computers, which was emerged in the 70s and 80s, when the behavioral approach to language teaching was rejected by many teachers. If the behavioral program included repetitive exercises, the communication program was designed to find the right answer. Programs have emerged that allowed students not only repeat pre-given phrases or exercises but also develop sentences and texts themselves. Communicative use is the consistent with the cognitive theory which defines that learning is a process of discovery, expression and development. Popular computer programs developed during this period are text assemblies and simulations.

In the 1980s and 1990s, many teachers shifted from a cognitive view of communicative learning to a more social or socio-cognitive view, which necessitated the use of language in the natural social context. This is how a new perspective has emerged in language learning technology called an integrative approach. New technology seeks to incorporate different skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) into the teaching process and makes greater use of technological capabilities. The use of techniques in an integrative approach is ongoing process of language learning and is no longer confined to isolated exercises (as opposed to communicative or behavioral approaches). The integrative approach is based on two key technical advances: multimedia and the Internet.

The multimedia technology presented today by CD\_Rom allows different types of media to be stored in one computer. In addition, multimedia hypermedia, ie. multimedia resources is a link to each other and the learner can obtain additional information by simply pressing one hand. Hypermedia has many advantages for language learners. First and foremost, a more authentic learning environment is created that combines video, audio, and writing materials naturally, just like in the real world [4, pp. 134-135].

Despite the advantages outlined above, multimedia still does not allow authentic communication, this can only be achieved through the Internet. Only after this, it became possible to “Open classroom walls” and enters the outside world into a normally locked classroom environment. Using the Internet we are dealing with so-called co-operative teaching method that implies the organization of teaching in which work and activities are carried out in the small heterogeneous groups where students assist each other and are involved. In this way, the learners make much less mistakes in their work and learn on their mistakes. With the help of Internet, computers have been transformed from an information storage medium to the means of communication, language learners can get in touch with native speakers anywhere in

the world. This communication can be as synchronous (Chat), also asynchronous (email) [10, pp. 117-120]. Thus, through the Internet, language learners are given an opportunity to get into the natural language environment, speak to real people, receive authentic linguistic information, and transmit their information to an international audience. We discuss three key aspects of global network communication separately: synchronous communication, asynchronous communication, and the World Wide Web.

In the early 1990s Synchronous Communication, a new type of computer communication was introduced that allowed real-time text messaging. This new type of relationship is called Chat. This is a written (or oral) conversation in which each student sits at an individual computer, the screen is split into two sections, the student /pupil writes one message in one section, then sends it to the speaker and receives a response from him/her. It turned out that this form of foreign language speaking is more acceptable to the student/pupil than learning, as there is less control over the teacher, less complexity, anxiety and most importantly, learners' activities are equal. Besides, the language used in synchronous computer communication has become lexically richer and grammatically far more complete than it is in face-to-face conversation. In this case, the learner has time to type and organize the text, however, due to lack of time, language learners sometimes become paralyzed at all. According to Georgian Philosophers – Ibram Didmanidze, Zebur Beridze and Irma Bagrationi's work "On the Ethical Values of Business and Technology Education According to Erich Fromm's Social Pedagogy Views" "[...] Fromm will first show that in any relationship between two people, the learning of the two is crucial for such a relationship to last; and then he will expand on the different aspects of that learning. This analysis will then be applied to the organizational context as a basis for organizational decision-making, Second, it applies the previous analysis to the organizational ethics context as a basis for organizational decision making, showing how any decision in an organization needs to be analyzed on the basis of three criteria (short-run effectiveness, development of distinctive educational competence, and unity and identification with the organization business ethics) [...]" [7, pp. 55-57].

One of the processes to enhance the learning experience was the virtual resource room, which is student centered, works in a self-paced format, and which encourages students to take responsibility for their own learning. In virtual mode, the materials are available in the form of computer aided learning program, lecture notes, special self-assessment module. Another mechanism for student-to-student interactions in a form of simple discussion forum is by using a novel link cyber tutor. This allows the students with an email account to connect with course content and the staff with their doubts and related questions. The students are able to contact the staff without a face-to-face visit, which saves the on campus time. The staff remains anonymous,

which allows the several staff to act as a cyber-tutor during the course. The students do not remain anonymous although their email addresses are cryptic enough to mask their identity. Students can discuss about the exams, lab reports, posters, lectures and technical help with downloading materials. Surveys, focus groups and online feedback forms do the evaluation of the use of Virtual resource room. The students have 24 hours of access to the learning material in a day, which suits their life styles [10, pp. 162-163].

Observations have shown that 100% of students participate in electronic discussion, while only 52% engage in regular discussion, the written message is much more specific and compact in exchange than in oral speech. Furthermore, it is possible to save students' written messages, analyze and correct their mistakes that are only possible to stop and interrupt the speaker during the oral conversation; this interferes with communication and blocks the learner.

## **Chapter II – The Main Educational Technologies of the Modeled Virtual Classroom Environment for Teaching English**

To master the types of languages through the Internet, there is a need to have a 'train' language partner to communicate with. This requires from student/pupil to have some level of writing and reading skills [9, pp. 155-157]. Therefore, Methodists recommend using email only after mastering reading techniques.

It is interesting for us to use the Internet purposefully during the learning process, specifically to obtain the necessary information and exchange it rapidly; a student should possess proficient reading skills and must be able to manipulate different types of reading for the critical purpose of reading. In reading skills it is meant to automate perceptual and thoughtful actions. The purpose of perceptual action is to form mechanisms of visual synthesis, while retrieving information from thoughtful action. A sophisticated reader should be able to read information of any character as needed and understand the reading with varying degrees of difficulty and accuracy for the purpose of reading.

Computer discussions help the learner to refine the language and overcome difficulties. Finally, Participation in computer discussions during one semester proved to be more effective for students than oral discussions, especially for the study of written speech. For this reason, this method is more used in writing than in oral teaching.

Asynchronous Communication - The most common and interesting type of asynchronous communication is e-mail. It is especially used in writing lessons. It can be used by both teachers and student as well as student of different nationalities. It is used at almost every level of language learning to create an authentic writing environment. However, observing the use of e-mail is much more difficult and important than synchronous communication because in e-mail

communication, compilation and sending is usually done in an extracurricular way, in less controlled conditions [12, pp. 81-82]. Practice has shown us that when communication between teachers and students is carried out via email during the teaching process, students become more open-minded, ask more questions, describe their problems and difficulties easily, most interestingly, lower-performing students were far more likely to contact the teacher than did face-to-face or telephone conversations [15, pp. 192-194].

In addition, online correspondence develops creativity and motivation to oral and written speech. Those students who seem less relevant and motivated, show interest when they are engaged in a foreign correspondence via e-mail, find new material necessary to write an interesting letter [8, pp. 5-7]. We will also notice that the students are gradually trying to make as few mistakes as possible in their writings, state their point clearly so that their correspondent understands what there are writing about and most importantly present themselves and abilities well.

The World Wide Web - The newest type of computer communication used in the language learning class is the World Wide Web, an international online database open to all users. The Web is one of the most revolutionary and diverse media in the history of humankind, as it simultaneously plays a part in the role of library, publishing house, telephone and interactive television [11, pp. 205-206]. The World Wide Web is a distinctly different type of computer communication. Unlike the previous two types, it is not a means of direct communication between two people, but rather a form of writing (or rather multimedia authorship) that is broadly defined over the editor.

WWW has many resources in English language teaching: authentic reading material, communication exercises, student discussions, publications. The WWW-based teaching process is more social and cultural in nature. When the students knew that their work had to go on the international network, they were more likely to try to create valuable texts, so they paid more attention to the work. The fact that the work is widely read by the public is a factor of improving production [13, pp. 174-177].

Through network communication, students will have the opportunity to learn about the culture of other countries and its civilization from foreign peers, will learn to respect their own and other cultures, will try to see the nuances that differentiate the civilizations and mentality of different countries. In this way, students of different nationalities learn from each other quickly, become interested in communication and language learning. In addition, traditional media are less flexible and serve one-way communication without the possibility of feedback, thus "promoting straight line learning". For the reason the degree of individualisation is minimal, the learner has less opportunity to be involved in the selection of materials. Many educators believe that only combined media, in our case, multimedia provides autonomy as it is flexible, offers a

choice of ways to get information and free communication. According to Georgian Philosophers – Ibram Didmanidze and Irma Bagrationi’s work “The Issue of Student Distance Communication and Collaboration (For Foreign Language Teaching)” “[...] there are several important technologies in the long-distance communication, which are important for successful development of foreign language education. It is known, that keyboard pen pals, or key pals, correspond with each other via e-mail. Key pal exchanges can provide motivational benefits for beginning- and intermediate-level learners, who get satisfaction from using their new language in authentic communication. Learners at all levels can benefit from key pal exchanges if these exchanges have enough structure to keep the students interested and active. However, key pal exchanges designed without a specific purpose or task may lose their appeal and benefits over time. Key pals can be found in partner classes or on Web sites where individuals signup for partners. Our students and we should decide whether we prefer other English learners or native speakers as key pals. Here it needs to be noticed, that in organizing key pal exchanges, keep in mind that not all key pals are equally responsive. It can be quite disappointing when a few students in a class have not received replies from their key pals” [6, pp. 15-17].

Many scholars agree that in the future the computer will be used not only for learning foreign language, but also as a means of learning new types of writing that has emerged in the online age. This new type of writing is called electronic skills and comprises four main components: computer skills (knowledge of techniques and software), information skills (online information retrieval, analysis and criticism), multimedia skills (interpreting and writing) Documents that combine text, voice, graphics and video output By consulting) and computer communication skills (synchronous and asynchronous communication pragmatics art). In Georgian Philosopher Irma Bagrationi’s opinion [in her work “For the Issues of the World-View Online Foreign Language Learning”] “Research that investigates the linguistic features of on-line communication might ask questions such as these: Is e-mail communication more similar to speaking or to writing? What are the lexical, syntactic and functional features common to on-line communication? A growing body of first language research has begun to address these questions. [...] Here it needs to be noticed, that the types of educational research fall along the following main continua, among others: experimental versus natural, quantitative versus qualitative, etic versus emic and product versus process. Experimental research is based on the goal of trying to find generalized answers to specific questions. To achieve that, as many variables as possible are held constant so that one or two specific questions can be addressed in tightly controlled experimental situations” [3, pp. 499-501].

The online era and information age is only in its infancy, and as it grows and spreads, not only the question of language teaching methods and technologies are raised, but also our conception concerning speech is being changed.

### **Chapter III – E-learning and Virtual Environment in English**

E-learning is an innovative direction in education that implies learning and teaching process using modern information technologies. Teachers can not only access the Internet for finding resources for their classes but also supply their own materials, knowledge and ideas for other teachers via the Internet (Warschauer, Shetzer & Meloni, 2000). For example, they can create homepages for the purpose of their lessons and put their materials on-line (Meagher, 1995). Muehleisen (1997) recommends ESL/EFL teachers to utilize the Internet in their classes for motivating students to use the English language outside the classroom and to make the language a part of their daily lives. Kern and Warschauer (2000) indicate that language learners with access to the Internet can potentially communicate with native speakers of English all over the world. They can communicate either on a one-to-one or on a many-to-many basis any time they need from school, home or work. Therefore, it is not surprising that many ESL/EFL teachers have embraced Internet-assisted language teaching (IALT) and have developed new ways of using the Internet with their students. When defining a virtual learning environment, we base our definition on a complete teaching and learning infrastructure designed to enhance a student's level of knowledge using computer technology and the Internet.

It should also be noted the use of mobile applications in the learning process/mobile learning (Pollev everywhere; Goosechase; Seasaw; Kahoot; etc). Lessons leave the boards and take place at the table, giving students more control over it. It is contextual, instant, and accessible everywhere. About 35 students are participating simultaneously, offers live instant feedback; Provides the audience with text questions in real time. It can be used to stimulate the brainstorming activity and generate new ideas, consequently encourages students' discussion. It is convenient for all students/language learners as it is easy and important for them to demonstrate their abilities, even for the weakest student in the group.

As it is known, when planning and organizing any educational process special attention should be paid to such important factors as: Who teaches (teacher education; field competence; qualification; experience; general competencies); What they teach ((study material, volume, content, purpose). How they teach (which methods and technologies it uses, organizing and planning). Who do they teach (age of students, cultural-historical background, educational and social role, education censorship, purpose, tasks, needs) [16, pp. 65-66].

First of all, the e-learning course in English should be accompanied by the description, a guide (guide) outlining the aims, objectives and outcomes of the course. E-course descriptions

should be easily accessible. It is desirable that the course description should be given in both the study and some international widely used languages.

The general English language course should specify the level of proficiency achieved by the course (According to the European or American system) and this information should be available. If the course covers all levels of language proficiency (European or American classification), at the end of each level, the student/pupil should pass the exam (tested, online survey, etc.) After exceeding the minimum competency threshold (information should be given in advance) student should obtain the permit of rest before moving on to the next level. The learner is fluent in the language when he/she can master all four aspects of language-writing, reading, speaking and listening. The translation-grammar method of language learning somewhat used to neglect listening and speaking, according to modern theories these four skills are needed to achieve maximum results. One course should ensure the development of all four competencies [2, pp. 42-43].

Modern technological means allow teachers and students to create a simulated or modeled virtual classroom environment. For instance, listening and speaking can be developed and evaluated using an internet forum, videoconferencing, chat, internet seminar; various video/audio material should be prepared for educational purposes. Each lesson (topic, single group of records, depending on course format) should be accompanied by a video/audio or electronic dictionary integrated into the course and a printout texts [14, pp. 117-118]. An evaluation system (testing, content delivery, etc.) is required, according to which the teacher will determine the student's further needs.

The vocabulary and grammar can be taught in two ways, either integrated with the language aspects, or given in a separate section. All grammar units that are integrated into a given lesson are separated. The grammar part can be integrated into the course, ie. as a separate electronic guide and incorporates the principle of moving from simple to difficult. Language learners are provided with grammatical categories departing from the principles of communicative grammar. The vocabulary section includes vocabulary issues that are scattered throughout the lessons [11, pp. 129-130].

It is especially effective to use video/audio materials in vocabulary learning process. There are much software available today, both paid and free, that allow you to create a variety of video/audio material. The inclusion of video/audio material in the e-learning course provides a productive learning environment.

People learn English for different purposes. We learn one particular aspect of English (for example, the business language, or the press language), and we must clearly distinguish it from other aspects of the language ( politics, jurisprudence) so as not to distract students. language is

an integral part of the culture, and the acquisition of each new language adds to a person's new socio-cultural competence. In a traditional classroom setting, the teacher works with a familiar audience and directly controls the students' emotions, reactions, evaluations, and thus selects the appropriate materials and instructional strategies for the situation. The situation is somewhat different in terms of e-learning. In terms of cultural values, neutral texts and teaching materials should be selected so as not to provoke a "cultural" conflict [14, pp. 112-114]. Since any learning environment (including virtual ones) involves the development and recognition of certain rules and procedures, the course designers should take into consideration, that the developed rules and procedures are acceptable to the potential audience and should avoid introducing such rules that the audience cannot or do not complete. In case of violation of rules, we believe that there is a need for appropriate course administration and teacher feedback, give students appropriate response and remind them their responsibilities.

The most convenient and effective virtual learning environment is provided for English language learners, that will help students to overcome existing obstacles and challenges which naturally accompany the difficult and prolonged process of language learning.

### **Conclusions:**

Overall, from the foreign language teachers' perspectives, we could identify how despite the fact that they have been using virtual classrooms for several years now, they still perceive the need to be trained in how to use virtual classrooms and exploit this educational tool much more. Besides, they see that the use of this virtual environment is a current educational demand; they show awareness of the importance of being open to the range of learning opportunities virtual classrooms might offer as a complement to what they regularly do in their physical classrooms. Furthermore, this study has shown how teachers have built weak perceptions of what promoting autonomous, collaborative, and meaningful learning through a virtual environment means. Likewise, teachers' work evidences an absence of encouragement of collaboration among students. The use of technology in education is a current demand and, as such, we teachers are being called to integrate them in our everyday practices. The use of a virtual classroom is just a way of accomplishing this goal. However, as this study has shown, the use of this tool represents some extra-challenges of a different nature (pedagogical, technological). This can be present in the following educational aspects:

- Teachers assuming an active critical role. When using virtual classrooms in an institution. It should not be a responsibility of just a reduced number of teachers or administrative staff; instead, all teachers involved should take responsibility towards it, get engaged in proposing activities in the virtual classroom, and be critical towards the ways in which these virtual environments can effectively be used and fully exploited to enhance language learning.

- Seeing the virtual classroom as maximize of learning opportunities not just as a requirement of the university. The implementation of virtual environments, like the one being discussed here, demands a change in terms of how language learning takes place; virtual environments can also play an important role in this endeavor.
- Really enhancing autonomy, collaboration, and interaction. Virtual classrooms are tools that can be manipulated in order to take advantage of them as much as possible to enhance students' academic development. Therefore, processes such as autonomy, collaboration, and interaction could be gradually integrated to the action being done in the virtual classroom specifically in the setting in which this study was carried out since these concepts are part of the cornerstone of the Educational Project. This gradual integration could be enhanced, for example, by grounding decisions and actions in the outcomes of further research reflection.
- Integrating the use of the virtual classrooms in the curriculum. The very act of including and articulating the use of virtual classrooms in English language teaching and learning practices might consequently imply a need to make this part of the curricular guidelines of the educational approach of a given institution.

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