



6.19 - Report on Use of the Internet for delivery of multilanguage learning: accessibility, flexibility, potential for inclusion in Qualification Networks

There has been an explosion of interest in, and information about the use of the Internet for delivery of Multi-lingual language learning over the last 18 months. Several new international conferences have been arranged and it is not within the scope of this slight report to describe them in detail.

For many years language learning has been based on tutor-led classroom based teaching and learning, with computer-based learning, e-learning, ODL digitised courses all faltering at the sheer enormity of teaching fluent oral communication without the human element. The Wikipedia definition of e-learning is particularly helpful in this regard, placing as it does the emphasis on e-learning as taking place without much personal interaction.

"Electronic learning (or e-Learning or eLearning) is a type of Technology supported education/learning (TSL) where the medium of instruction is computer technology, particularly involving digital technologies. E-learning has been defined as "pedagogy empowered by digital technology". In some instances, no in-person interaction takes place. E-learning is used interchangeably in a wide variety of contexts. In companies, it refers to the strategies that use the company network to deliver training courses to employees. In the USA, it is defined as a planned teaching/learning experience that uses a wide spectrum of technologies, mainly Internet or computer-based, to reach learners. Lately in most Universities, e-learning is used to define a specific mode to attend a course or programmes of study where the students rarely, if ever, attend face-to-face for on-campus access to educational facilities, because they study online".

However, the continuous development of new technology has provided new tools which allow interpersonal communication in both written and oral modes. Instant messengers such as Skype, MSN, Yahoo and Google Talk are beginning to be widely used in e-education. These tools offer good call quality and the flexibility of text and file sharing which is hard to beat for a basic communication between students and teacher. Calls can be easily recorded, so students can make an audio copy of their lessons.

Online whiteboards allow teachers and students to share the same workspace to draw, write and move items around. They are especially good for working with images and texts in a free and flexible way. They are also useful for easily matching words with meanings or images that represent those meanings. Whiteboard Meeting is an extra available for Skype, and there are other whiteboards available, either independently or combined with a messenger tool. There is a down side to these developments, of course, and it is the cost of acquiring all the hardware and software.

It is perhaps the invention and development of Web.2.0 (virtual worlds) which may have the most impact on language teaching and learning.

In 2007 Second Life (a commercial company) started to be used for foreign language tuition.



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But real life language educators have also begun to use the virtual world for language tuition, including the British Council (Teen Grid), Germany's cultural institute Goethe-Institut started a project in 2008, Spain's language and cultural institute "Instituto Cervantes" has also started a similar project. There is also an increased use of virtual classrooms (online presentations delivered live) as an online learning platform and classroom for a diverse set of education providers in the United States. Webex (another commercial company) is a Cisco Web Meetings and Collaboration Solution. The platform has worked for educational institutions because of real time collaboration using an interactive whiteboard, chat, and VOIP technology that allows audio and video sharing. In distance learning situations, while replacing the classroom with features, institutions have also looked for security features which are inherently strong in a Cisco powered collaboration environment. The downside is that Webex is not a free platform and fees are paid per 'host' of a classroom or a meeting.

Virtual worlds make language learning a much more social experience. They are very versatile and can be used for formal teaching as well as informal, independent learning. Virtual worlds allow students to use a foreign language in a social space with other learners and native speakers. Language learners can communicate using a voice system or with text chat. This means that students can now talk with native speakers around the world, just as if they were in the same room.

It would seem therefore that language teaching, and especially multi-lingual language teaching, is about to take off in a completely unexpected direction. One of the best ways of keeping up to date with all the new innovative technology is to register as a user in the EU elearning portal <http://www.elearningeuropa.info>. The portal is an initiative of the European Commission Directorate-General for Education and Culture that aims to promote the use of ICT for lifelong learning. It provides four basic services:

- 1) • Directory
- 2) • Community
- 3) • Newsletter
- 4) • eLearning Papers

1. The e-learning Directory provides a wide range of e-learning materials and information sources from across Europe organised by category and interest area, with articles, interviews, a database of projects undertaken by various European actors in all e-learning areas, publications related to e-learning, ranging from official documents and books to journals, newsletters and blogs. It holds important resources such as a database of online educational and learning resources for teachers, students and anyone interested in teaching and learning online, and a database of online universities, institutions, organisations and agencies related to e-learning that belong to the EC or EU Member States, a database of different initiatives, such as networks, associations, portals and platforms, all of which are relevant to e-learning communities and their resourcefulness.

2. Community

The e-learning Community is a place for e-learning practitioners to discuss and debate issues and post and search for information and ideas relevant to their day-to-day tasks and needs. It has some useful tools such as forums, boards and user-generated interviews.

3. The e-learning Newsletter is published monthly in 19 languages and has news about



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current issues, open calls, forthcoming events and e-learning resources.

4. e-Learning Papers, a digital publication on e-learning published 5 times annually, adds a new dimension to the exchange of information on e-learning in Europe and stimulates research. The articles provide views regarding the current situation and e-learning trends in different communities: schools, universities, companies, civil society and institutions. E-Learning Papers provides all those interested with an opportunity to have their texts published throughout Europe. Through these articles, the journal promotes the use of ICT for lifelong learning in Europe.

The eLearning Papers include an editorial, articles, interviews and/or reviews. An executive summary of each article is available in 19 languages. The full texts are available in their original languages. E-Learning Papers is available at www.elearningpapers.eu

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