



The Internet in Foreign Language Education: Benefits, Challenges, and Guidelines for Language Teachers

The Internet has become one of the most important teaching tools in recent years in terms of its power to change everyday practices in educational settings. In parallel with the expansion of Internet use in the classroom, both teachers and students have begun to accept the changes. However, some obstacles still need to be overcome before teachers can effectively integrate Internet-based activities into class practices. This paper presents a brief history of technology use in foreign language education, describes some basic benefits and challenges of employing the Internet through specific illustrations taken from the researcher's educational experiences in the field of English language teaching, and provides several guidelines for teachers regarding effective use of the Internet in the foreign language classroom.

Introduction

During the past 10 years, the Internet has emerged as a significant communication technology by altering how people communicate and access information. The effect of such a powerful technological innovation has permeated all aspects of everyday life in the modern world. Today, the Internet is viewed as a pedagogical tool to improve language teaching and the learning process. Since the Internet offers vital resources of up-to-date cultural information and authentic materials in the target language, it has attracted the attention of foreign language teachers, especially concerning how best to integrate this resource into their curricula and courses (Lee, 2000).

The reason I engaged in this investigation is that teachers in Turkey, though not many in number, have commenced focusing on online teaching of EFL to some extent, realizing the prominence of incorporating authentic materials in the target language into their programs and courses. I believe, however, that this synthesis will also be of great interest to those teaching in ESL environments. The paper presents a brief history of technology use in foreign language education, describes benefits and challenges of employing the Internet, and provides several guidelines for teachers regarding the effective use of the Internet in the classroom.

History of Technology Use in Foreign Language Education

Technology and foreign language education have always been interrelated. Language teachers following the grammar-translation method depended on the blackboard for the one-way transmission of information that method implied. The blackboard was later supplemented by the overhead projector as well as by early computer software programs that provided “drill-and-practice” types of grammatical exercises (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000).

In the audiolingual method, the audiotape was viewed as the perfect technological material. In the 1970s and 1980s, university language classes usually contained compulsory sessions at the audio lab, where students would perform the dreaded repetition drills. Owing to poor results achieved from expensive language laboratories, the audiolingual method fell into disrepute by the late 1970s. Whether in the lab or in the classroom, repetitive drills that concentrated merely on linguistic structure and disregarded communicative meaning produced poor results (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000). Although the language laboratory was a giant step in relating technology to language education, instructors and researchers alike noticed that stimulus-response behavior-pattern-oriented language lab activities were both uninteresting and monotonous for language learners. In addition to the pedagogical weaknesses, the audio equipment was cumbersome and liable to break down and its only function was the dissemination of auditory input (Singhal, 1997).

In the 1980s and 1990s, communicative language teaching, with special emphasis on student engagement in authentic, meaningful interaction, emerged as a general trend in the field of foreign language education. Within the framework of communicative direction, we may note two dissimilar viewpoints, both of which have their effects in relation to how to best incorporate technology into the foreign language classroom. These viewpoints can crudely be grouped into cognitive approaches and sociocognitive approaches (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000).

Cognitive approaches to communicative language teaching rely on the perspective that learning a language is an individual psycholinguistic act. From this viewpoint, language learners make up a mental model of a language system that relies on innate cognitive knowledge in interaction with comprehensible, meaningful language (Chomsky, 1986). Technologies that advocate a cognitive approach to language learning are those that offer learners a perfect opportunity to be exposed to language in meaningful context and to build their own individual knowledge. Text-reconstruction software, concordancing software, and multimedia simulation software are accepted to be examples of such technologies.

Unlike cognitive approaches, sociocognitive approaches emphasize the social side of language acquisition; that is, learning a language is regarded as a process of apprenticeship or socialization into particular discourse communities (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). From this viewpoint, students should be provided with perfect opportunity for real social interaction, not only to present comprehensible input but also to give learners practice in the types of communication they will later take part in beyond the classroom context (e.g., e-mail, YouTube, Facebook, FunWall). At this juncture, it is the

Internet that is an effective tool for adopting a sociocognitive approach to foreign language teaching and it is, in essence, this suitability of the Internet for a sociocognitive approach that satisfactorily explains the logic behind the present-day enthusiasm for employing computers in the foreign language classroom (Warschauer & Meskill, 2000).

The Internet as a Pedagogical Tool for Enhancing Language Learning and Teaching

In addition to being a technological tool, the Internet can also be used as a pedagogical tool for enhancing language learning and teaching. Before employing the Internet in the classroom, the language teacher can administer a questionnaire to his or her students to determine their needs and find out about their word processing, e-mail, chat, and online learning skills (see Appendix A for a sample needs and background knowledge assessment questionnaire). As Wilson (1995) states, teachers are employing the Internet to access libraries throughout the world; to communicate with parents and students; to acquire instructional materials; to share lesson plans, curriculum ideas, and courseware; to connect students from different cultures to let them share their views and concerns about the world; and to download current information beneficial in the classroom from the World Wide Web.

As a language teacher who teaches English as a foreign language at a university level, I use the Internet to communicate with my students, to acquire instructional materials, and to download data useful for my students from a wide variety of Web sites. (See Appendix B for a sample reading lesson plan on global warming. The lesson plan suggested here is based on an online reading text.)

Challenges for Internet Use in Foreign Language Learning and Teaching and Guidelines for Language Teachers

Although the Internet provides many benefits to aid foreign language learning, it is not without some obstacles and challenges. The first challenge that the Internet has brought to the public schools, especially those in rural areas, is that *some teachers, administrators, and students are inexperienced in e-learning as well as computer illiterate* and they need training to use the online tools. This challenge can be overcome easily by:

1. Providing training facilities, such as seminars, workshops, talks, and hands-on experience for each educational institution;
2. Incorporating personnel knowledgeable in computer technology into such schools and colleges (Kargbo, 2002);
3. Team teaching with less experienced teachers;
4. Encouraging teachers to join online discussion groups;
5. Stimulating teachers to subscribe to blogs or podcasts; and
6. Encouraging them to read online journals or magazines (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007).

The second challenging issue facing the application of the Internet in educational institutions is that of *telecommunication and power supply*. Although adequate high-speed Internet and computing equipment have been considered “basic infrastructure” in many schools for years, Internet services and computing equipment may be still lacking in some areas. At this juncture, private and government grants, as well as district funds, are already available to renew the infrastructure of telecommunication in the area where the school is situated and to buy computing equipment for those areas.

The third challenge for the application of the Internet to teaching a foreign language is related to *the use of a Web-based medium for conducting an online class*. Any Web-based medium used for conducting an online class may be problem causing for new users. This challenge can be solved by:

1. Including a type of metatraining in the course orientation or even in the first weeks of the course itself; and
2. Employing e-mail programs and course-management systems that provide new users with self-guided training help documents, often in many languages.

The fourth challenge for the use of the Internet in foreign language learning and teaching is its being viewed as *chaotic and disorganized*. The information lacks real organization. The teacher can overcome this challenge by:

1. Planning a lesson around a particular site or set of sites. However, students may become discouraged when trying to access sites that no longer exist or that have changed drastically, necessitating a need to redo work or figure out how a site works again (Chafe, 1999).
2. Using the technology-based resources that many course books provide nowadays. (Teachers can get free resources concerning grammar, vocabulary, and DVD transcripts by accessing the Web sites <http://www.cambridge.org/elt/face2face> and <http://www.pearsonlongman.com/totalenglish>.)

A final challenge with online foreign language learning and teaching is *difficulty of maintaining control over learner activities in a computer room*. This challenge can be overcome by:

1. Having the computers around the outside walls of the class to allow the teacher to view what is on each screen and to help the students if they need help;
2. Having a central table where the students can congregate for more communicative activities;
3. Using this table as a storage place for pens, books, and dictionaries to help keep the computers free of clutter and easy to use (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007).

Conclusion

Language teachers have given importance to online learning and teaching of EFL/ESL despite certain challenges. Internet activities help learners advance their linguistic, cultural, and educational knowledge relating to the target language through the use of a wide variety of resources available on the Web. The Internet, as Seguin and Seguin (1995) state, is the ultimate “virtual classroom” that can be used anytime, anywhere, with minimum equipment. On the Internet, teachers and learners have access to information and people resources that can easily be related to all areas of the curriculum. Learners use the Internet to access libraries all over the world, assist in research studies and cross-cultural studies, develop language skills in the target language, and share viewpoints and studies with their peers (Yuen, 1999).

In educational settings, colleges, or universities, online learning and teaching of EFL affect how students learn and teachers teach to a great extent. Access to the Internet raises students’ motivation and participation and stimulates students to assume responsibility for their own learning. Students shape their own learning through describing their learning needs, finding information, evaluating the information they find, constructing their own linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge core, and exploring new areas of learning. Selecting, planning, organizing, analyzing, and evaluating the linguistic and cultural information on the Internet, learners develop their cognitive skills and hence promote their level of learner autonomy (Lee, 2000).

The pedagogical benefits of online teaching of EFL are numerous. Language teachers who wish to achieve maximum output from learners should be educated regarding the suitable use of a variety of tools offered by the Internet (i.e., e-mail, mailing lists, newsgroups, telnet, ftp, Internet relay chat [IRC], search engines, and the World Wide Web). Language teachers in the European University of Lefke, where I work, are encouraged to integrate online teaching of EFL into their foreign language teaching programs by university administrators so that language learning can become more appealing, inviting, lively, and colorful for language learners through opening the doors of new technology. For instance, in the course ELT 174 Advanced Reading and Writing II, I held a variety of online training sessions on environmental problems, American folk sayings and proverbs, famous pop singers of our times, Turkish oil wrestling, online shopping, fashion, and nonverbal communication in the spring term of the 2007-2008 academic year. (See Appendix C for the list of online training sessions for the students taking ELT 174 Advanced Reading and Writing II.)

At this juncture, the question to be posed by technology-friendly teachers and administrators is what percentage of an EFL class can be taught online. The answer to this question is not as simple as it seems on the surface given divergent opinions among instructors and administrators, as is the case with my university. However, my view is that instructors must begin to teach online EFL classes and school administrators must provide the necessary budget for implementing such a technology in their schools and universities if they really want to achieve meaningful, natural, and hence more encouraging language teaching for the students in their institutions.

Author

Murat Hişmanoğlu is the head of the ELT Department at the European University of Lefke, Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Gemikonağı-Lefke, NCTR. He teaches phonetics, phonology, language acquisition, and ELT methodology to BA students in the ELT Department. He is interested in educational phonetics, applied semiotics, and Web-based language instruction.

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Appendix A

A Sample Needs and Background Knowledge Assessment Questionnaire

Here is a sample needs and background knowledge assessment questionnaire that language teachers can adapt to their classroom contexts to determine their students' needs concerning the use of the Internet in the classroom and to find out about their word processing, e-mail, chat, and online-learning skills.

A) Using the Internet in the classroom

List six good reasons for using the Internet in the classroom.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____

B) Word processing skills

I know how to ... Yes No

1. ... open, save, retrieve, and print documents.
2. ... select text using the mouse.
3. ... select text using the keyboard.
4. ... drag and drop.
5. ... cut, copy, and paste.
6. ... search and replace.
7. ... use TrackChanges.
8. ... undo and redo changes made.

C) Basic e-mail skills

Yes No

9. I have my own e-mail account.
10. I use e-mail at home.
11. I use e-mail at work/school.
12. I know how to write, send, and read e-mails.
13. I know how to send an attachment by e-mail.
14. I know how to open an e-mail attachment.
15. I know what a virus is.
16. I know what to do if I receive a virus via e-mail.

D) Basic chat skills

Yes No

17. I know how to use text chat.
18. I know how to use voice chat.
19. I know how to use common abbreviations in text chat (i.e., “btw” for “by the way,” “brb” for “be right back”).
20. I know how to use common conventions in text chat (i.e., “using?” to ask for the floor, “...” to show that you have not finished a contribution).
21. I know how to use common conventions in voice chat (i.e., using a special phrase or word, such as “Over” or “Done” to show when you have finished speaking).
22. I know where and how to type comments in a chat window for text chat.
23. I know how to use a microphone and speakers or a headset for voice chat.
24. I can type fast in text chat.
25. I know how to use webcams with voice chat.

E) Online-learning skills

Yes No

26. I know how to do extra practice of what I have learned in class by using a CD-ROM in a self-study center.
27. I know how to do exercises on a language Web site on the Internet, either individually or in pairs in a computer room at school.
28. I know how to use an ICT tool, such as blogs, wikis, chat, or podcasts, for project work within or beyond the classroom context.
29. I know how to e-mail my homework or class assignment to my teacher.
30. I know how to use e-mail on the Internet.
31. I know how to use chat on the Internet.
32. I know how to phone on the Internet.
33. I know how to share activities on the Internet.
34. I know how to search for information on the Internet.
35. I know how to download software or music from the Internet.

Appendix B A Sample Lesson Plan

Global Warming

This is an upper-intermediate lesson focusing on global warming and what we can do to stop it. The language areas covered are asking and answering questions, analyzing information, and solving the given problems. Students will also collaborate with their peers. Using the URL address <http://www.nrdc.org/globalWarming/default.asp>, the class accesses the NRDC website and its section titled Global Warming.

A Short Description of the Site

This site belongs to the Natural Resources Defense Council, which works to protect wildlife and wild places and to ensure a healthy environment for all life on earth. On the site are categories divided into news, issues, policy, green living, green business, multimedia, blog, donate, and take action. It also features issue highlights including *video: Kyra Sedgwick urges action, global warming basics, consequences of global warming, and legislation to control global warming pollution*. The first issue highlight, *video*, is about how to join Kyra Sedgwick and take action on global warming before climate change gets 1 degree closer. The second issue highlight, *global warming basics*, is on what global warming is, how it has been caused, and what needs to be done to stop it. The third issue highlight, *consequences of global warming*, is related to the outcome of global warming. The fourth issue highlight, *legislation to control global warming pollution*, focuses on NRDC's evaluations and comparisons of current federal global warming legislation as well as policy papers on key climate-related issues.

Discuss “Warmer”

Ask your students if they know what global warming is, what causes it, whether the earth is really getting hotter, whether higher temperatures are causing bad things to happen, and what we can do to help fight global warming. Draw the following chart on the board. (The teacher may stick several photos related to global warming on the walls of the classroom.)

<i>What is global warming?</i>	<i>What causes global warming?</i>	<i>Is the earth really getting hotter?</i>	<i>Are warmer temperatures causing bad things to happen?</i>	<i>What can we do to help fight global warming?</i>
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At this level, a simple class discussion is desirable; however, be ready to help the students with some unknown vocabulary items.

Web

Have your students visit the site and find and open the file named Global Warming Basics under Issue Highlights. Ask them to read the text to check whether their answers for the questions written in the table above are correct or not. Put the students into pairs (Student A and Student B) and have them practice the technique of asking and answering questions orally. Ask them to make notes on important dates, numbers, percentages, and places dealt with, and to analyze how the information is given—how the answers are presented (see task below).

Sample Task Sheet

Read the text Global Warming Basics.

1. Check whether your answers for the questions written in the table above are correct or not.
2. Work with your partner and practice the technique of asking and answering questions orally.
3. Make notes on important dates, numbers, percentages, and places dealt with in the text.
4. How did the text writer present the answers?
 - Grammatical structures
 - Vocabulary selection
 - Specific techniques used (i.e., exemplification, using statistics, listing).

How to Fight Global Warming

Read the text Global Warming Basics. Check the correct sentences. Correct the false ones.

- () 1. Global warming is already causing damage in many parts of Europe.
- () 2. Although the ocean is getting warmer, tropical storms can pick up more energy and become more powerful.
- () 3. In 2003, extreme heat waves caused more than 20,000 deaths in Europe and more than 1,500 deaths in India.
- () 4. Scientists have found that the destructive potential of hurricanes has greatly increased along with ocean temperature during the past 35 years.
- () 5. Rising sea levels will lead to coastal flooding on the Western seaboard, in Florida, and in other areas, such as the Gulf of Mexico.

Read the article again. Find the answers to these questions.

1. How has the average global temperature changed during the past 50 years?
2. To what extent did higher temperatures affect many parts of the United States in the year 2002?
3. How do scientists regard the area of the Arctic's perennial polar ice cap's declining at the rate of 9% per decade?
4. In what way can global warming be considered as a complex phenomenon?
5. What are some steps to be taken to cut global warming pollution?

Follow-Up

A number of follow-up activities can be done here, including:

- Speaking activity: discussion
Divide the students into groups consisting of four or five members and ask them to discuss consequences of global warming. This discussion can be recorded or videotaped.
- Speaking activity: an interview
Ask the students to interview four other students regarding whether they are afraid of consequences of global warming and make notes on their answers.
- Writing activity: global warming survey
Ask the students to write a survey to find out whether other students give importance to the issue of global warming and whether they are taking some precautions to stop it.
- Writing activity: a biography
Ask the students to do research on the Internet and write a biography of a famous person devoting himself or herself to fighting global warming.

Appendix C
List of Training Sessions for the Students Taking
ELT 174 Advanced Reading and Writing II
in the Spring Term of the 2007-2008 Academic Year

Session 1

Aim: To find out about environmental problems

Focus: Greenhouse effect

Level: Upper-intermediate

Skill: Summarizing

Time: 60 minutes

Site: http://www.hko.gov.hk/wxinfo/climat/greenhs/e_grnhse.html

In this session, students use the Internet to get information about what greenhouse effect is, types of greenhouse gases, GWP, trends in greenhouse gas concentrations, and consequences of enhanced greenhouse effect, and then write a summary of the online reading text on a piece of paper.

Session 2

Aim: To learn about American folk sayings and proverbs

Focus: American proverbs

Level: Upper-intermediate

Skill: Guessing

Time: 60 minutes

Site: <http://www.brownielocks.com/folksayings.html>

In this session, the teacher writes some proverbs on the whiteboard and checks whether the students are familiar with them or not. Students try to guess as to the meanings of unknown proverbs. Then, the teacher asks the students to access the Web site to find as many American proverbs as possible. Students are expected to clarify what the proverbs they have found on the Internet express in real-life situations.

Session 3

Aim: To look at the famous pop singers of our times

Focus: Describing people, present tenses

Level: Upper-intermediate

Skill: Scanning

Time: 60 minutes

Site: <http://www.popmonk.com/music/index.html>

In this session, students list 10 famous pop singers from the present. After that, they discuss, compare, and contrast their lists with those of their partners by working in pairs. Students visit the Web site www.popmonk.com/music/index.htm to check whether any of their singers appear on its list. In pairs, students choose three famous pop singers they do not know and look at the singer profiles to learn about when the singers were born, what country they are from, and where they live by making notes on a piece of paper.

Session 4

Aim: To discuss recent news stories

Focus: Telling stories

Level: Upper-intermediate

Skill: Predicting

Time: 60 minutes

Site: <http://edition.cnn.com>

In this session, the teacher puts the class into groups consisting of four to five students and gives each group three headlines from the Top Stories section of CNN.com International. Students make predictions about what they think each story could be about. Then students visit the CNN.com International site and find the news stories. They read the news stories, make notes on them, and tell each other their stories.

Session 5

Aim: To find out about Turkish oil wrestling

Focus: Describing a national sport, wrestling vocabulary

Level: Upper-intermediate

Skill: Paraphrasing

Time: 60 minutes

Site: <http://www.allaboutturkey.com/yagligures.htm>

In this session, the teacher asks the students whether they have ever heard about oil wrestling or not, what the word “Pehlivan” means, and why wrestlers apply oil to their bodies. Then the students visit the Web site <http://www.allaboutturkey.com/yagligures.htm> to find out the answers to the questions posed by their teacher. After that, the teacher divides the students into groups with four members and expects each group to restate the original text, “Turkish Oil Wrestling,” in a simpler form to make the meaning clearer to the other students in the classroom.

Session 6

Aim: To discuss whether money can buy happiness

Focus: Reasons for Americans’ being unhappy despite the rise in living standards, findings of surprising research on how to spend one’s way to a sunnier outlook on life

Level: Upper-intermediate

Skill: Making an inference

Time: 60 minutes

Site: http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/moneymag_archive/2006/08/01/8382225/index.htm

In this session, the teacher puts the class into groups consisting of four to five students and asks them whether money can buy happiness or not. Then the students visit the Web site http://money.cnn.com/magazines/moneymag/moneymag_archive/2006/08/01/8382225/index.htm to find out the answer to the question their teacher posed. Students make an inference about whether

money can really buy happiness or not by considering viewpoints of famous psychologists and economists and by evaluating the findings of the 2005 Happiness Study based on the GfK NOP Roper Reports Worldwide survey.

Session 7

Aim: To plan the perfect wedding ceremony

Focus: How to plan a wedding

Level: Upper-intermediate

Skill: Expressing ideas, making a guess

Time: 90 minutes

Site: www.howtoplanawedding1.blogspot.com

In this session, the teacher gives a simple questionnaire to the students on a wedding ceremony. She or he gets feedback from the class and gives students the opportunity to express their ideas about ways of planning a perfect wedding ceremony.

The teacher tells the members of the class that money is limited and that they should spend their money carefully. They have one month to organize the wedding. They must decide what they are going to buy, how they are going to buy, what they will do after the wedding ceremony, and so forth.

Students form small groups and tell each other about their dream wedding ceremony. They can also make guesses as to how much money they will spend on food, beverages, the cake, and service, bride's dress, headpiece, veil, hair and makeup, and so forth.

A sample questionnaire on a wedding ceremony. Think about these questions, and then get into groups and discuss them.

- What would your dream wedding ceremony be like?
- Where would you like to have your wedding ceremony?
- Would you hire a consultant to organize your wedding ceremony?
- How would you hire your consultant?
- Would you keep a low budget?
- Where would you go for your honeymoon?

Session 8

Aim: To shop for a new car online

Focus: Describing cars

Level: Upper-intermediate

Skill: Describing

Site: www.NexTag.com/cars

In this session, the teacher gets the students to talk about whether they have a car or not and what they think are the characteristic features of a good car. The teacher gets feedback from students. Each student should imagine that he or she is going to Dubai to work as an English teacher in a well-paid job. The teacher should tell the students how much money they have and what kind of car they may buy with that money over there. The students' task is to find a suitable car to buy. They must try to find a car by which they can

go to work easily. The teacher should get the students to work in small groups to tell each other what they have found and to describe their new cars.

Session 9

Aim: To find out about fashion

Focus: Describing things, giving opinions

Level: Upper-intermediate

Skill: Understanding details

Time: 40 minutes

Site: <http://www.urbanbody.com/mens-fashion-trends/2008/spring>

In this session, the teacher asks the students whether they are aware of fashion trends in spring 2008 or not. Then students visit the Web site <http://www.urbanbody.com/mens-fashion-trends/2008/spring> to find out about trends in spring 2008 relating to accessories, denim, outerwear, pants/shorts, shirts, swimwear, and underwear. After that, they try to *mark the sentences below as true (T), false (F), or does not give the information (?)*.

- _____ 1. A Dragon army cap costs \$19.
- _____ 2. A biker jacket costs costs \$ 399.
- _____ 3. Models of shorts are belted cargo short, belted check short, vintage military short.
- _____ 4. Models of caps are Chief Hawk cap, Dragon Army cap, Battle Axe trucker cap.
- _____ 5. Models of long-sleeved shirts are Klone, Shield Crest, Make Up.
- _____ 6. Floral board short is more expensive than tropical fish board short.
- _____ 7. Asian board short is the most expensive of all the shorts designed by Energy.
- _____ 8. Cashmere sweater designed by Z brand is as expensive as multistripe zip sweater designed by 4 You.

Session 10

Aim: To find out about nonverbal communication

Focus: American head gestures

Level: Upper-intermediate

Skill: Using a chart

Time: 30 minutes

Site: <http://www.csupomona.edu/~tassi/gestures.html>

In this session, students visit the Web site to get information about gestures and complete the chart below with information from an online article.

<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Gesture</i>
yes	
	shaking the head side to side
thinking or confused or skeptical	
	direct eye contact
sharing a secret or flirting	
	eyebrow flash (raising the eyebrows)
incredulity or amazement	
	cupping the ear
someone or something is crazy	
	wrinkling the nose
smells bad or stinks	
	whistling
disapproval	