Enhancing Reading Skill through WebQuest in Collaborative Learning Environment

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Abstract

The methods of English language teaching and learning are getting changed with the advent of latest technologies. Especially in recent days, abundant online tools are being used in ESL classrooms for the effective teaching of English. Hence, this paper focuses on the effectual ways of using WebQuest (http://webquest.org/) to enhance the reading proficiency of the students in a collaborative learning environment. Most of the research articles stated that web-based learning created a positive impact in student's language learning process. But, they failed to envision the ways in which students accomplished the language and to project the limitations while using it. Therefore, the main aim of this paper is, to identify appropriate strategies to implement in the WebQuest based collaborative study mode. Further, the paper also suggests the need for using WebQuest to inbuilt language skill eventually in content area learning sessions.

Key Words: Technological Intervention, WebQuest, Collaborative learning, Reading skill, Strategy.

Introduction

English is an important foreign language which has attained the status of link language in most of the countries. The main aim of teaching English is to obtain practical command over the language. People considered the language learning process as an exigent task. Therefore, educationists espoused many methods to make the language learning process much easier. But they failed in achieving the expertise of the learners. In turn, they involved themselves in the search for better and more effective method. Meanwhile, 21st century confronts with the advancement of technology. As an output of this, the ESL/ EFL teaching has undergone an enormous change. In this way, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) started to influence ESL/ EFL classrooms.

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Beatty (2010) stated that CALL is a term which ensures creativity and collaboration among the learners with the help of social networks. In other words, Alshumaimeri (2008)acclaimed CALL by affirming its authentic learning resources and its scope to converse with native speakers. He also noted the opinion of researchers and educationist about CALL, as an interesting means for facilitating foreign language learning. There are several online tools in existence, for instance, Schoology, Edmodo, Vimeo, and WebQuest. They are of similar kind but all have slightly differed on the basis of cause and aim. Through CALL, it is convenient to boost up web-based learning in a virtual classroom. Penetration of internet supplements teachers for language teaching and it also promotes student-centered learning. Moreover, it guaranteed self-access learning. Thus, the present paper highlights the inevitable necessity of computers and the internet in ESL classrooms. The main objectives of this paper are,

> To achieve collaborative learning with the aid of webquest.
> To find the means of using strategies in a collaborative learning environment with webquest in ESL classrooms.
> To ensure the proficiency of reading skill and its sub-skills through webquest.

WebQuest in ESL Classroom

A WebQuest is one of the online tools (http://webquest.org/) which provide opportunities for authentic learning experiences. Dodge (1995) defines Webquest as "an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet, optionally supplemented with videoconferencing". Further, he classified Webquest into two types. They are; Short-term and Long-term. Short-term requires one or two class sessions and it is highly meant for acquiring information. In contrast, long-term expands for the week or even month which aims to improve the prior knowledge. Eventually, Webquest promotes students ability in evaluating, cataloging, stimulating, reasoning and scrutinizing. Webquest can be created by both teachers and learners with the help of tools like zunal, quest garden, and teacher Web. Generally, it consists of five steps. They are,

- Introduction

- Task

- Process

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- Evaluation
- Conclusion

Apart from these pages, we have welcome page and gaming page as an eyes breaking sessions. In the introductory part, the author/ teacher have to introduce the topic that helps the learners to attain the background knowledge of the topic (Dudeney and Hockly, 2007). The tasksection is mostly assigned with the suitable task. Process section is considered as the heart of Webquest page. In this stage, students involve in an action to complete the task while the teacher supports them by providing essential materials. The links of the resource page are already stored in the page for students ease (Dodge, 1995). In the evaluation section, teachers prefer rubrics instead of a traditional testing method. It can be helpful in self-assessment. Finally, in the concluding part teacher has to discuss with a student to learn their experience and receive feedback to promote the Webquest page.

Therefore, Webquests is a good platform for its accuracy. Students felt comfort when they use Webquest and they can also gain technical strength. Moreover, it increases curiosity in learning process (Goodwin-Jones, 2004; Marco, 2002; Snider and Foster, 2000). There are some limitations in Indian educational system to carry out CALL. They are Communicational barriers, lack of observation, uncomfortable learning environment, the burden of homework, lack of technical knowledge (Garrett, 2009; Golonka, Bowles, Frank,Richardson, &Freynik , 2012; Warschauer, 2004). As a solution to this controversy, educationists began to use collaborative learning method in Webquest class. It would help the learners to assist themselves with their peers and also lessens the financial aspects when the student began to work in the group with common computers instead of possessing individually.

Collaborative Language Learning

The term Collaborative learning refers to learning in the group. They tend to do discussion, analyze a problem, and argue with peers to prove their point of view and so on. Kessler (1992) in his research stated that collaborative learning is a societal mode of education where the learners gain the knowledge of different dimension through the interactive session. It also cultivates their vision in future learning aspects. Johnson &Johnson (1999) rightly quoted in their research that real cooperative learning happens when students try to increase their knowledge level in finding a solution to the common problem. It also

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promoted the knowledge of the group members. In case, if the contribution level of students in the group is invariably equal, it will be the high-performance collaborative group.

On other hand Crookes and Schmidt (1991) assured that collaborative learning is helpful for the average learners. The advanced learners of the group help their peers to know the hidden ideas of the concept. They also help them in a better understanding of the critical concepts. With the aid of technology collaborative technique can be executed even more effectively in ESL classrooms. According to Nguyen (2008), Computer helps learners to adapt suitable material and situation to learn with peers. To add proof to this Tang and Austin, (2009) declared online learning environments (OLEs) like social medias and other means of technology pave way for discussion with peers as well as to the university professors of overseas. Therefore, collaborative learning is acquainted well in the technological world comparing to the conventional learning style.

Means of Incorporating Collaborative Strategy in Webquest Page

Inquiry mode of study in Webquest is a good means to frame a collaborative learning situation. Students in different group involve themselves in answering a similar question or solving a common problem. It helps to attain the multi-dimensional aspect of concern topic.Further, the special features of Webquests like assimilation of technology into a learning experience, stimulating creative thinking, using information instead of looking for it, authenticity and collaborative learning situations endorse language learning progression. Moreover, in Webquests, there are number of pre-framed lessons available for all subjects. Therefore, it can be directly utilized in language learning classrooms. (Jones, B & Godwin, 2004).

The most interesting part of Webquest is generating competitive approach in completing a given task with the group. Since, it is an inquiry-oriented study where student involves themselves in sharing experience, taking quick decision and leading a group smoothly. Even though teachers play a facilitator role, they have to observe and guide students to move on the right path. Here language teacher has to teach the approaches that students have to take over. In other words, it can be called as Strategy instruction. Strategies are techniques or procedures which are consciously selected by the students to learn target language or to assist learning. It concerns more about the situation of employing the particular strategy (White, Cynthia, 2008). Therefore, teachers are responsible for introducing

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such strategies to the student in Webquest page. The following table clearly projects the means to execute the strategic instruction in collaborative circumstances by using Webquest.
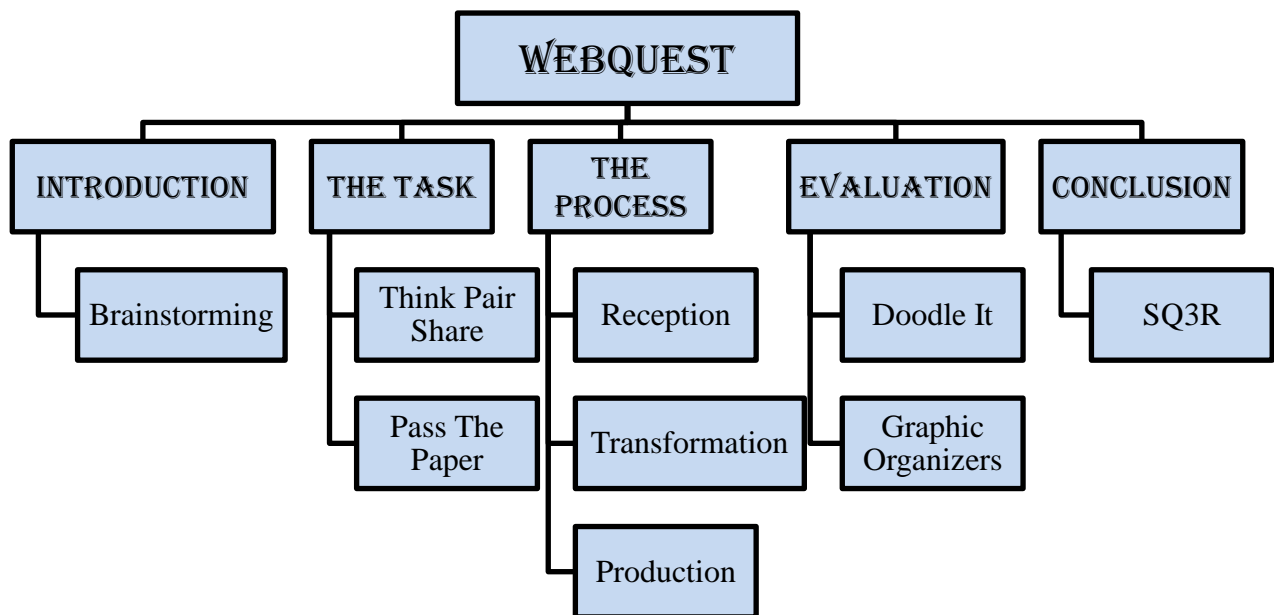
In the introduction section of the WebQuest teacher has to introduce brainstorming strategy. The teacher has to explain what is Brainstorming and then makes the students involve in discussion to come across the first level. In the second level, students are assigned with the task which they are going to complete with the help of a group. Process stage is the risky and important stage where students themselves engage in completing the tasks. In this section, they receive the information from the resources that already selected by the teachers to answer the questions appropriately. From the preselected websites, students have to observe the learning content and they have to modify it by their own understanding and recreate it with the new dimension. During this stage, students are executing the strategy.

For instance, in think pair share strategy students think about the issues individually. Then they explain that to their peers and they share it with a larger group. In this process students are analyzing, interpreting, summarizing and sequencing the ideas of the lesson. Similarly, it is happening in all other strategies. Finally, the evaluation stage brings out the success of the WebQuest page. In this stage, students are asked to project the learning content by any means like written or spoken document. Sometimes it can be like filling graphic organizers or even doodle it tasks. The concluding part consists of summarizing the lesson, sharing opinions about teaching learning method and student's feedback over this method.

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The collaborative learning through webquest promotes the reading skills well comparing to other language skills. With the implementation of this cyclic process, students learn the basic steps to approach a text. In each step, it becomes clear that the sub-skills of reading like summarizing, synthesizing, notes taking and guessing meaning for the words is being developed. It is easy for them to tackle the problem with their team. Moreover, it reduces the stress factor of students while approaching the English text. (Hubbard & Levy 2006). The communicative skill test identifies the integration and triggering motive in a group. It gives a positive result. Consequently not only the communicative aspect rather skimming, summarizing, synthesizing can be easily done through the group work with webquest model (Tsai, 2006).

Conclusion

Though, there are some limitations in executing technologically oriented education in developing courtiers; steps have been taken to solve it. For instance, the Indian government has taken an effort to afford opportunities to the students through NCERT and by creating portals for teachers and students like 24X7 Guru. By this means, the language teachers started to implement it in classrooms. Apart from reading skill it also helpful in motivational part, fostering autonomy in learning, cooperation among learners and so on (Lipscomb, 2003; Torres, 2005; Koenraad&Westhoff, 2003&Luzón, 2007, and Prapinwong, 2008)

Additionally, Webquest tends to develop higher order thinking of the students. For instance, cognitive skills like comparing, analyzing, generalizing and metacognitive skills like planning, monitoring and evaluating is well functioned. The limitation of this study is it concerns only on implementing the strategies in webquest learning. But it fails to categorize it based on the levels of the learners. Therefore, further research is needed to explore what kind of strategies can be incorporated based on the level of the readers including their age, learning capability. Researchers can also investigate methods to develop language skills through webquest in content oriented syllabus except reading.

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