

Chapter 4

Utilizing Internet Resources in TESOL: The Design of English Language Learning and Formative Assessment Practices

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ABSTRACT

Advancements in digital communication technology (DCT) have significant potential to impact on language teaching and learning by providing new pedagogical opportunities accessible via the internet. Resources that support the design of English language learning and formative assessment have been seen as a fundamental component of the English language learning environments in English language intensive courses for overseas students (ELICOS) and the like. While its importance is universally recognized, the facilitation of a move from the traditional approach to languages learning to a more contemporary approach in keeping with social constructivist theory remains a challenge for both teachers and learners. Part of this challenge involves the need for teachers to reconceptualize the way that they teach to move away from the teacher as instructor to that of facilitator whose pedagogical approach ensures students have opportunities to use English for meaningful purposes. Since this demands an understanding of students' different proficiency levels and the ability to monitor improvement to ensure learning experiences are at the optimum level to facilitate growth, effective formative assessment practices are a vital monitoring tool. Thus, this chapter examines how internet resources can move pedagogy towards a social constructivist approach to improving English language learning bearing in mind the need for a framework to support formative assessment in the monitoring of improvements in proficiency.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, it is evident that the Internet provides access to the most usable digital communication technologies (DCTs) for supporting the teaching, learning and assessment process. With the evolution of various software applications many people across the globe, and particularly in the Western world and Asia, in particular, (O'Neill, 2019) are well connected such that digital communication technology and its easy access through mobile devices has a significant impacted on their lives (Tabatabaei & Gui, 2011). Thienthong and Lian (2014) note that:

This raises questions for educators and researchers on how online resources and applications can be used to enhance students' learning and meet their needs. An increasing number of language teachers are showing an interest in making use of resources on the Internet for language pedagogy (p. 108).

This is reinforced by Stockwell and Hubbard (2013), Tochon (2012), Towns and Loo (2012) and O'Neill (2015) who show how the availability of the CLOUD has created a new globally accessible virtual learning space where a wealth of data can be automatically recorded to support monitoring of learning, assessment and evaluation. While the CLOUD is applicable no matter which discipline this chapter explores its ability to transform languages learning in the case of English as an additional language (EAL) (including those learning English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL). Learning English therefore, continues to be a major activity for adults and children around the world, since it is the medium that connects people for many different purposes e.g. social/family connections, employment, international business, and education where teaching and assessing English for work and entry to higher education constitutes an international business. Of note is the fact that when developing countries adopt the use of DCTs for learning and training they can expect an increase in their GDP (Van Tol, 2016) and increasing proficiency in English the language to enhance international communication is a large part of this success.

Thus, in the context of international education, and the area of teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) DCTs are increasingly being applied to facilitate and increase the effectiveness of pedagogy and assessment practices. New digital tools such as Google, YouTube, Facebook, Viber, Whatsapp, WeChat, Skype and Zoom are some examples that apply to enhancing pedagogy and assessment of learning (Martin, et al., 2011). At the same time their use in education coincides with the everyday social and business needs of all who are connected to the Internet. Moreover, the ability of these tools or Apps to facilitate authentic communication in English (or other learners' target language) provide the learning opportunity that has been lacking in most languages learning programs.

Traditionally, languages teachers have needed to create communicative interactions for students to use the target language but these have been seen as contrived because of the absence of a real-life purpose and involvement of first language speakers of the target language. This has been in spite of changes to approaches (Hismanoglu, 2012; O'Neill, 2012a) and strategies to integrate the macro skills. Traditionally, opportunities for authentic communication in language programs has been addressed through short visits to the target language country. However, such approaches have been shown to have limitations for authentic language use (Magnan & Back, 2012), and shorter visits have potential to reinforce stereotypes rather than foster intercultural literacy (Peterson & Helms, 2013). But in the case of the provision

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