

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN TEACHING A SECOND LANGUAGE THROUGH THE INTERNET

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ABSTRACT

We can call the education offered by using the Internet environment as "teaching through the Internet". Such a teaching contributes to interaction, which is not sufficient in traditional classrooms most of the time. It gives the geographically separated students the opportunity of exchanging ideas and information, collaborative learning, discovering alternatives in learning and developing their own learning styles. In addition, this type of teaching allows learners to see subjects from different perspectives. Groups having special interests can share their own experiences even if they are too far from each other. When we look at the aims of this type of learning that is mostly used in higher education, it is seen that learners are encouraged to learn through distance education. Teaching through distance education can also be done on campus environments. Learners can participate in the courses and discussions whenever and wherever they want except from the pre-scheduled meetings. The Internet-based interactive environments offer the interaction which supports the learners in learning. Being independent of time and place, learners can work with each other, and interact and collaborate with their tutors and classmates. Collaboration brings solidarity with it. The aim of learning through collaboration is to obtain information and use this information to solve a problem. In general, collaborative learning creates a positive social environment and facilitates comprehension. Collaborative learning is based on the idea that learners working in groups towards a common goal can learn better than the students who can work on their own. The aim is to make learners to want each other's success, to motivate each other, and to teach each other in order to achieve the learning objectives. Collaborative learning requires solidarity and reciprocal loyalty. Solidarity and reciprocal loyalty implies the active participation and contribution of each group member to the success of the group. This paper mentions how teaching through distance education happens, interaction in teaching through the Internet, collaborative learning, and how collaborative learning occurs in teaching a second language through the Internet.

Keywords: Teaching through the Internet, learning through the Internet, second language, collaborative learning.

INTRODUCTION

The Internet has the feature of being widely used in education and it is inevitable that this feature is becoming more important day by day. Recently, the Internet has been seen as an important learning environment.

This view is strengthened by the interaction of distance education students with one another and their teachers and the provision of high-speed interaction. Moreover, it can be thought that the Internet will cause the redundancy of other tools and equipments used in distance education soon (Odabaşı, 1998).

The Internet can be used functionally in teaching. Knowledge, thoughts and ideas of people can be united and an environment that combines all of these features can be provided by teaching through the Internet (Kaye, 1992).

MAIN GOALS OF TEACHING THROUGH THE INTERNET

Written, voiced and visual communication among people who are in different places can be supplied by teaching through the Internet. This method of teaching is becoming widespread in higher education. By the widespread use of teaching through the Internet in higher education, some goals are fulfilled. Some of the main goals are:

- Educating people in the World via distance education.
- Providing the participation of people in the lessons that are not limited to campuses.
- Providing students to join the classes in different universities.
- Giving distance education students a chance to join a class and showing them some sample practices without forcing them to commute among the campuses.
- Showing students practical applications.
- Providing students interaction with experts who are in different places of the World.
- Supporting the learning by encouraging the organization of meetings of students in international programs among themselves and experts.
- Arranging meetings with students and experts in different places on various topics.
- Providing opportunities for students who want to apply for the jobs to carry out interviews with related people.

When the main goals of teaching through the Internet are viewed, it is seen that it tries to provide distance education to students. Teaching through the Internet can also be conducted in campus. Students can join the classes and discussions about the lessons wherever and whenever they want apart from the scheduled hours.

INTERACTION IN TEACHING THROUGH THE INTERNET

The Internet has four kinds of interactive teaching environments. These are web sites, text based conferences, audio conferences and video conferences. Among these environments, video conference stands out in teaching a foreign language or a second language. The quality of learning process changes in an interactive environment in teaching through the Internet.

For example, students have to speak in turn in video conferencing so interaction through the Internet may be delayed from time to time. However, education carried out in this type of environment can be more democratic than the education carried out in a traditional class. At the same time students can participate in class activities more since interaction can continue and the voice is no longer something that is heard. Introverted students can make reactions, participate in the learning environment and learn.

Every student continues the lesson equally. This condition is important especially for the students who learn a second language. Mutual support between students and teachers enables stronger participation of students.

Participation in group conferences and continuous contact with teachers has a positive effect in student motivation (Soby, 1992). Students have some responsibilities for their classmates and these responsibilities provide students to be responsible for their own learning. Thus, the role of the teacher becomes crucial (Prendagast, 1996). Teaching through the Internet makes more individual and collaborative learning possibilities. Teachers can interact with students individually or collaboratively.

Interactivity is the key to use teaching and learning through the Internet effectively. Although teaching through the Internet makes written, face to face, voiced and visual interaction as in traditional class environment, the technology can change class environment. Participants in different places should make some adjustments to use technology and communicate via a computer with limited visual quality. Teachers who prepare technology to be used are important elements. However, what is more important is that they combine students' interaction strategies with their teaching and learning experiences and privatize education.

COLLABORATIVE LEARNING IN INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

The Internet-based interactive environments offer the interaction which supports the learners in learning. Being independent of time and place, learners can work with each other, and interact and collaborate with their tutors and classmates. Through the use of computer, modem, telephone and related software, functional virtual classes can be formed in the Internet-based education. Virtual classes can be used functionally in face-to-face and distance education. Students may interact with one another or teachers by using written, voiced and visual or all the written, voiced and visual communication methods. Virtual classes enable students and teachers share their knowledge and ideas wherever and whenever they want in a protected environment.

Students' and teachers' sharing their knowledge and ideas can be carried via spoken, face-to-face speech and written modes according to their communication type. As in the written communication, students' and teachers' shared knowledge and ideas can easily be understood and saved for future references in the Internet-based interactive environments.

Students' participation in discussions to share their knowledge and ideas can be saved to serve both for themselves and practitioners of distance education. Saving the discussions enables students to review their messages, engage in cognitive analysis and plan their future discussions different from traditional classes (Kaye, 1989).

Students in face-to-face education learn by either competing with each other or working in small groups (Johnson, Johnson, 1994; Şimşek, Deryakulu, 1994; Senemoğlu, 1997). Teachers generally decide when students study individually, competitively or collaboratively and if they have to study in one of these ways.

Students' studying individually may affect other students' success or failure. Students' studying competitively requires the success of one student and the failure of another student. When they study collaboratively, the result is the opposite of the competitive study. If a student studies hard, s/he can increase the other students' success (Senemoglu, 1997).

Differences among the structures of learning goals, the level of success expected from the students, the relationship between students and teachers, required amount of help and the type of planned evaluation are effective features on the decision making of teachers on students' studying. Students' working collaboratively supports the fulfillment of learning goals that require collaboration and enables learning collaboratively (Kaya, 2005).

Studying collaboratively is accepted as vital in family life and even in the development of the community since collaboration in the developing and incompatible world is the most important skill to survive.

Collaboration requires cooperation. There are two different approaches in developing learning in groups. These are learning collaboratively and cooperatively. Concepts related to cooperative learning were first developed in art and academic environments at universities and gained importance in work life and educational applications. However, concepts related to collaborative learning first appeared in educational psychology and in studies related to group learning and were applied in educational processes (Ryan, Scott, Freeman, Patel, 2000). Cooperative learning, in general, explains the help opportunities of students who are in different levels or fields. The goal is to combine skills of the students or the assistance of more successful students to others to fulfill a common aim. Collaborative learning can be accepted as a process in which students work in small groups and help each other to learn (Açıkgöz- Ün, 1996). In this process, the purpose is to unite students with similar proficiency levels and enable them to learn. Collaborative learning is an approach that requires students' formation of small groups to solve a problem or fulfill a task with a common aim to learn (Kömleksiz, 1994; Demirel, 2002).

The purpose of learning collaboratively is to acquire common knowledge and use this knowledge to solve a problem. Collaborative learning is beneficial for the teachers who want their students to gain benefit and share it with the other students. Related studies have shown that collaborative learning is more advantageous, especially for students who failed in traditional classes (Joyce, Weil, Showers, 1992). Collaborative learning creates a positive social atmosphere and facilitates perception. Collaborative learning is based on the idea that students who work collaboratively with a common aim learn better than students who work individually. The purposes of the students are to desire the others' success, have motivation and teach each other to reach learning objectives. Students are required to present their ideas and study on differences of ideas. They are encouraged to think about the content of the lesson and use this content to fulfill group aim. Collaborative groups are heterogeneous or they were united according to ability, gender and ethnic group. The topics such as positive academic success, improved self respect, improved social skills and improved race relations are related to experiences of collaborative learning (Norton, Wiburg, 1998).

Democratization of the environment and humanization are important concepts in collaborative learning. Group members have to know that the group is a whole and every member is responsible for the success or failure of the group. Students who have different abilities, different body developments and different learning backgrounds go towards a common aim and establish better friendship in group works. While they know each other better, the artificial obstacles disappear. Thus, the success of the individual depends on success of the group and group members contribute to their friends' success. Group members help each other by teaching one another or every member completes one part of the task. In other words, everybody in the group is responsible for the others' learning (Demirel, 2002).

Collaborative learning requires mutual and positive commitment. Positive and mutual commitment means that every member of the group has active participation and role for the success of the group. When students are set free to make decisions on the suitable behaviors to become successful, positive mutual collaboration appears. When this mutual positive collaboration emerges, students have the personal experience of 'being on the same side' and they behave cooperatively.

One of the important ways of learning in a member of a collaborative group is students' questioning themselves. Group members need to talk about which relations are on track and want to discuss what kind of developments can be done. Teams should be supported to evaluate team work. Students can be more successful when they revise their work and set purposes for the development (Ryan, Scott, Freeman, Patel, 2000).

A successful collaboration is not complete without certain planning or education. Teachers have to do more than establishing groups and telling them to study together. Firstly, teachers have to make students gain social skills. Three workouts are advised in order to improve social skills for collaboration and cooperation. First of all, teachers should help students understand what social skills mean. Secondly, students should try to apply these social skills. Doing exercises on how students behave in the scenarios designed by teachers is a good way of improving social skills. Thirdly, students should make reflections about the use of social skills. They should discuss to what extent they interpreted aimed skills in their groups (Norton, Wiburg, 1998). Collaborative learning in teaching through the Internet is fulfilled via planned or unplanned social interaction process. The nature of learning environment requires the regular interest with the topic and interactive study so the result is high level learning.

THE ROLE OF TEACHERS IN COLLABORATIVE LEARNING

The role of teacher or director is crucial for the success of the implementation of teaching in teaching through the Internet. Some practices show that the success or failure in this type of teaching stems from social factors not from technical factors (Kaye, 1992). It is known that teachers or directors have four basic roles to provide collaborative learning. These are educational, social, administrative and technical roles (Ryan, Scott, Freeman, Patel, 2000).

Educational Role

The most important role of the teacher is to be an educational improver. The main characteristics of an educational improver are the following:

- S/he has the expert knowledge and view.
- S/he focuses on discussion in critical points.
- S/he asks questions in discussions and react students' participation.
- S/he combines different comments.
- S/he synthesizes main points in order to refresh new topics that are emerged.

Social Role

Teachers who are engaged in collaborative learning in teaching through the Internet should have the key social skills like the teachers, advisors or directors have in traditional learning environments. A teacher who has good social skills has the following characteristics:

- S/he encourages the active participation of all the participants.
- S/he evaluates active participation of all the participants.

- S/he helps group members discover their different views and ideas.
- S/he has the ability to create a clear environment in which group reports are created and learning is accepted.

Administrative Role

A teacher should have the following characteristics to fulfill this type of role:

- S/he adjusts the schedule of teaching.
- S/he determines main rules for interaction and clarifies them.
- S/he determines the goals of discussions.
- S/he enables the implementation of the application and interaction with his/her high leadership qualities.

Technical Role

The teacher should be in harmony with technology in collaborative learning. Main characteristics of such a teacher are:

- S/he is certain about the participants' recognition of hardware and software.
- S/he organizes user license rights.
- S/he organizes the order of the conference.
- S/he organizes pre-applications related to special discussion topics or group project works for small groups.

The role of the teacher may change when students gain confidence and experience, and when the application of teaching advances. A-five-step model was developed in order to develop effective online administration. In this model importance of the following five steps is emphasized:

- **Entering the system and motivation:** Giving information about the use of the system by increasing the self-confidence of the users and encouraging their regular access to the system.
- **Socialization:** Improving group dependency and culture, and developing methods for effective study.
- **Sharing of knowledge:** Encouraging all participants to join discussions, giving information about different learning styles and supporting, summarizing thoughts and information that are changed and combining them.
- **Structuring the knowledge:** Stimulating interaction, making connections on learning components (e.g. perceiving, thinking, wondering), giving feedback in order to enable students to interact and form their own knowledge.
- **Fostering students to be educators:** Enabling participants to direct teaching through the Internet (Salmon, 1998).

Collaborative learning in teaching through the Internet offers some encouraging possibilities to students who construct knowledge and control their learning (Kaya, 2003).

CONCLUSION

Interactivity is the key to use teaching through the Internet in teaching and learning. Although teaching through the Internet has the possibilities of written, face-to-face,

aural and visual communication as in the class environment, its technology may change the class environment and may create some problems for teachers and students. Participants in different places have to do some adjustments to use technology and communicate via a computer.

Teachers who make use of technology are crucial factors. Hence, what is more important is combining students' effective interaction strategies with teaching and learning experiences and privatizing education.

Interactive environments based on the Internet offer educational interaction that supports students. Freedom of space and time gives students a chance to study together in different places, communicate and collaborate with their classmates and teachers. Collaboration requires cooperation. The aim of collaborative learning is to get common knowledge and use this knowledge to solve a problem. Collaborative learning generally creates a positive social atmosphere and makes comprehension better.

Collaborative learning is based on the idea that students who study in groups for a mutual purpose learn better than the students who study alone. The aim is to motivate students to desire their friends' success, have motivation and teach each other to reach learning objectives. It is known that teachers or administrators who support collaborative learning in distance education have four main roles. These are educational, social, administrative and technical roles. Teachers become counselors, helpers and supporters of the learning process instead of being controllers of the content and the process. Students, on the other hand, are the ones who learn by collaborating in groups.

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