WEBQUESTS: FOSTERING FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN A UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENT

E. Baguzina

The Moscow State University of International Relations (MGIMO University) (RUSSIAN FEDERATION)

Abstract

The article focuses on the integration of WebQuests into the English Language Program for students of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). The digital generation has come to expect maximization of digital tools and technologies in class as well as learning activities that engage students and facilitate meaningful learning. Educational strategies for promoting true learning in a digitally enhanced learning environment have become a primary focus of attention of academics. The author of the article shares her experience of applying the WebQuest technology that triggers students' positive emotional response and immerses them in the educational process. Powerful digital images and internet multimedia resources have made it possible to make the process of learning more real, rich, relevant, revealing all the facets of the learners' multiple intelligence. WebQuests enable educators to turn Web resources into activities appropriate for learners, thus fostering the student-centred approach. The structure of a WebQuest has a built-in support for students as regards the content matter and critical thinking. The role of the teacher when applying the WebQuest format expands and becomes that of a mentor. Due to acquiring such a tool, students, in their turn, get a chance of extending their understanding of the topic and developing their communicative competence. WebQuests promote both the power of digital learning, intrinsic motivation and self-initiated learning. Drawing on her experience of integrating short and long-term WebQuests, as well as teacher and students' generated ones into the English classroom the author highlights their efficiency when complimenting the calendar-based curriculum and turning it into a more competency-based one. As regards developing students' foreign language communicative competence, the author will provide examples of WebQuests that developed both vocational and language skills of post-graduate students specializing in International Business and Management. Some of the WebQuests aim at developing listening and writing skills and prepare students for taking their credits and exams, some provide deeper insight into the subject matter and could be used as a standalone online course. The author also touches upon Google Forms online tool when developing WebQuests, both positive outcomes and challenges yet to be overcome. Students may access all WebQuests on the University portal on their PCs and mobile devices thus meeting the digital natives' desire of anytime learning. One of the major goals of the author is to turn every English class into a meaningful and joyous experience.

Keywords: WebQuests, digital learning, foreign language communicative competence, teaching English as a foreign language, digitally-enhanced learning environment, students-centred approach, critical thinking, self-initiated learning, intrinsic motivation.

1 INTRODUCTION

One of the major problems of education today is that universities can't keep pace with society's expectations and needs for the rapidly changing world of the 21st century. In order to succeed they should prepare students to become lifelong learners. The challenge implies a pedagogical shift from transmitting a body of expected knowledge that is largely memorised to one that is largely process oriented. The direct instruction method that was used almost exclusively in the 20th century is being substituted by a cooperative approach that involves students working together in a team to reach a common goal. The role of the teacher has become more of a facilitator letting students discover things for themselves. What is technology's role in this process? Most importantly it is supporting the pedagogical practices teachers introduce by providing the environment, the content and the place for students to put it together. The Digital Revolution has brought about changes in educational practices and the digital generation has come to expect maximization of digital tools and technologies in and out of class. Students expect learning activities to be engaging, interactive and truly meaningful. That is why educational strategies that meet those expectations in a digitally-enhanced learning environment have become a primary focus of attention of academics. Selecting relevant online resources and building learning activities around them that foster foreign language learning, critical thinking skills and

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motivation is the primary focus of this paper. Examples of such educational practices integrated into the English Language Course for post-graduate students of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) for the purpose of extending their learning opportunities will be viewed in the article as well. Students are able to engage in such learning-focused inquires on the university portal on their laptops, PCs or mobile devices. Teacher and students' generated WebQuests have proved their efficiency over a period of over ten years the author has been integrating them into the English Language Program for postgraduate students. WebQuest technology has greatly contributed to developing students' foreign language communicative competence as well as their intrinsic motivation and team-building ability. While teaching English to university students back in 2009, the author identified alarming signs of unfocused behaviour and started searching for activation techniques to make materials and tasks more interactive and more learner-focused. I wanted to tap into students' interests, aims and needs, to encourage them to take responsibility for their learning. My students and I negotiated the topics and activities of the course and identified the most interesting ones. Students wanted relevant comprehensive materials on the topics under discussion. They also wanted to be actively engaged in every class with a multimedia backup at every point. Another issue that was always on their mind was: «What's in it for me personally?». They wanted to discuss issues that were relevant to their needs and interests, i.e. hobbies, current events, cross-cultural issues etc. connected with the language-learning content. Role play also proved to be very motivating, students wanted to be part of a team, contributing to a common goal and bearing full responsibility for the decisions they made. The WebQuest format appeared to be ideal for this. The WebQuest model was developed by Bernie Dodge and Tom March at San Diego University in 1995. According to Bernie Dodge «a WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all the information that learners interact with comes from recourses on the Internet, optionally supplemented with videoconferencing» [1]. Besides, Web-Quests are part of project-based learning, which engages students in acquiring knowledge and skills «through an extended inquiry process structured around carefully designed tasks and authentic questions [2]. The project method aimed at achieving a practical result was devised in the USA at the end of the nineteenth century and was developed in the works of Professor William H.Kilpatrick. As for Russian academics, it attracted their attention at the beginning of the twentieth century and was much used by an outstanding pedagogue, Stanislav T. Shatskiy, in 1905. A number of other prominent educators implemented this method, i.e. Evgenia S.Polat, Alexander A.Karachev, Galina A.Lebedeva and Irina A. Zimnyaya.

Another important feature of WebQuests is that their structure enables the modern digital native students to see the broader picture, develop their critical thinking skills and, consequently, their foreign language communicative competence. When surfing the web for information, students are mostly used to asking very targeted questions and this results in knowing very specific facts, but not seeing the wider context, which leads to inability to analyse, evaluate, draw conclusions and elaborate on the topic. Moreover, the structure of a WebQuest serves as «stepping-stones» not to be drowned in the online sea of information and to proceed logically with the task. Many educators believe, the ability to learn and make sense of new information is more significant for the labour market than detailed knowledge [3].

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1.1 Attributes of WebQuests

Dodge identifies critical and non-critical attributes of WebQuests. Among some critical attributes are: an introduction that sets the stage and provides some background information, a task that is doable and interesting, and a description of a process the learners should go through to accomplish the task. The process should be broken down into clearly described steps, with some guidance on how to organise the information acquired. This can take the form of guiding questions, or directions to complete organisational framework such as timelines, concept maps, or cause-and-effect diagrams, evaluation and conclusion that brings closure to the quest and reminds the learners what they have learnt, and perhaps encourages them to extend the experience into other domains. The non-critical attributes of attributes of WebQuests include these: they are not always group activities (might be solo quests), they may be enhanced by various motivating elements around the basic structure (role play, a scenario to work within), and they can be «within a single discipline or they can be interdisciplinary» [1]. Although WebQuests have a «clearly defined structure, which has been recognised as the definite schema for these activities, it should only really be taken as a basic guideline and you should design your WebQuests to suit the needs and learning styles of your group» [4].

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2.1.2 Types of WebQuests and the thinking skills they target

Bernie Dodge goes on to identify two types of WebQuests: short- and long-term WebQuests. «At the end of a short-term WebQuest, a learner will have grappled with a significant amount of new information and made sense of it. A short-term WebQuest may be spread over a period of a couple of classes or so, and will involve learners in visiting a number of websites to find information and they use this in class to achieve a set of learning aims. After completing a longer-term WebQuest, a learner will have analysed a body of knowledge deeply, transforming it in some way. They will have demonstrated an understanding of the material by creating something that others can respond to, online or offline. This is a big difference between the longer-term and short-term WebQuests – learners have to transform the information they acquire, turning it into a new product, a report, a presentation, an interview or a survey. Longer term WebQuests might last a few weeks or even a term or semester» [4].

Applying WebQuests as an active method of foreign language teaching the author was guided by several factors which determined the choice of a specific WebQuest format, i.e. foreign language level, rigid time-table, curricular and program requirements, scarcity of classes, lack of thought-provoking images (photos, cartoons, pictures etc.) in the course book, not enough student-centred activities, absenteeism of students due to their trying to juggle work and study, a one-sided view of an issue and routine format of study materials and activities.

The first type of WebQuests integrated into the English Course for Management Masters were individual and targeted such goals as: enhancing extrinsic motivation for learning, increase of communicative context, integration of relevant, comprehensive and motivating on-line recourses (text, images and videos), developing foreign language communicative competence (writing skills), improving Lower order thinking skills (LOTs) – Remembering, Understanding and Applying.

The second type of were team projects and the WebQuests targeted: enhancement of intrinsic motivation, the increase of communicative context, team-building skills, foreign language communicative competence (oral and writing skills), professional orientation, development of Higher order thinking skills (HOTs) – Analysis, Synthesis, Evaluation and Creation.

The notions of Lower order thinking skills and Higher order thinking skills were introduced by Dr. Benjamin Bloom, a prominent American educational psychologist. Bloom's taxonomy follows the thinking process: «You cannot understand a concept if you do not first remember it, similarly you can not apply knowledge and concepts if you don't understand them. It is a continuum from Lower order thinking skills to Higher order thinking skills» [5].

To develop both LOTs and HOTs, technology can be used, although «technology alone can't move learners to higher order thinking skills, but some applications are more suited for this task than others» [6]. If WebQuests are used as electronic textbooks it would be a lower order application, as only LOTs are used if the learner doesn't validate, question, or evaluate the information obtained. When learners are engaged both in online and offline collaboration while carrying out a WebQuest project, they are using HOTs, and therefore the Internet is being used as a higher order application.

Following Bloom's taxonomy, WebQuests can be split into two types: those, which target LOTs, and those aimed at the development of HOTs [5], see Table 1.

Table 1. Types of WebQuests and thinking skills they target

	Thinking skills	Types of questions	Example of tasks
Type 1	Remembering	What were the events in the text?	1. Write a short essay on the topic. 2. Make a list of the main events. 3. Write a biography of the person we are studying. 4. Recite a poem. 5. Retell the story in your own words.
	Understanding	What was the idea? Is the statement true or false?	
	Applying	From the information given, can you develop a set of instructions?	
Type 2	Analysing	Why? How are they similar/different?	1. Devise a new product, marketing campaign, advertising / promotion etc.
	Evaluating	How can you solve the	

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		problem? What do you think? Can you explain?	2. Conduct a debate about the issue with members of the team.
	Creating	Can you invent a story of your own on the topic? Can you plan an event of your own?	3. Come up with a presentation on the issue and a round table discussion after. 4. Carry out research on the topic and communicate it to your colleagues.

2.1.3 Applying WebQuests

Firstly, the author used the Google Forms Format for every topic-related WebQuest. As all groups of graduates specialise in International Business and Management, the author created a WebQuest for each topic under review, among them: «Work-Life Balance», «Digital Business», «Risk Management», Teamwork» etc., encompassing 17 topics. Every WebQuest was comprised of four parts: two texts (with hyperlinks to follow) and questions to answer, a video with a task on comprehension and a writing task related to the topic under review. Sometimes the WebQuest included two videos and one text with tasks on comprehension.

The students had to write a 350 words long essay, choosing from 5-6 topics, which always included a topic of a student's choice. This writing task always included a link of how to write an essay, in case the students were not very clear about it. The writing part was targeted at students applying the knowledge from their course book and the texts and videos from the WebQuest as well as improving their writing and self-expression skills.

The supplementary texts and videos were selected by the teacher in such a way, so as to upgrade the course book's materials: either to include more comprehensive materials, or give the topic a new perspective. The Google Forms Format makes it very easy to substitute texts, videos or images if they become out-dated or irrelevant to the topic, which is impossible to do with a course book unless you republish it. The Google Forms Format also makes it easy to find an attractive and motivating image or video, chose an appropriate colour and customise the topic of a WebQuest. Once you have created this type of WebQuest, you send it to a student's e-mail and receive the completed task within the deadlines or time limit you have set.

There are a lot of advantages of introducing such type of WebQuests into the English Course for Management Masters. Firstly, the students start working on such a WebQuest whenever it is most convenient for them, the multimedia format of the task makes it very attractive, if students have missed out classes and are away at work, they get the WebQuest via (e-mail) which gives them a good understanding of the topic and may be completed in electronic form and sent to the teacher. Having integrated this type of WebQuests the author asked students to give feedback. The majority of which was very positive and students made a point of the fact that their writing skills greatly improved and the study materials were very motivating. Nevertheless, each student put forward their ideas on how to improve or hone these WebQuests to their individual needs. Some wanted to add vocabulary and grammar exercises, some complained that they had enough of reading materials in the course book and that the WebQuests took too much time to complete. The structure of a WebQuest is very flexible, as it has been previously mentioned, and it allows to make them very student-oriented even within the framework of a calendar and curriculum-based program. So, the WebQuests with two articles and a video with corresponding tasks and an essay work well for students, who miss out a lot of classes or for those units of the program where a topic is not covered fully. For the topics which have been well covered and much discussed in class, another type of WebQuests was created – The Creating Meaning WebQuests.

The Creating Meaning WebQuests comprise a thought-provoking image and a video, which highlight a new aspect of a topic; they are also aimed at students' making sense of the topic and reflecting on «what is there for me in it?» question. Triggering students' professional and personal interest in a digitally enhanced setting makes learning more meaningful and engaging. Students actively participate in the learning process and learn to express themselves.

In his preface to «The Image in English Language Teaching» Gunther Kress points out that the task for theorists is to make use «of a multiplicity of resources for making meaning – of «modes» in multimodal approaches… designing semantically apt environments for learning… The designs for learning have to be apt for both the curriculum – the matter taught – and pedagogy – the social relations in environments of teaching and learning» [7]. The seemingly simple format of this type of WebQuest means a lot of work for the educator. The process of selection of images and videos is

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rather time consuming, apart from putting all the materials together in a single WebQuest. Nevertheless, a powerful image both still and moving triggers students' emotional response. David Jiles Ph.D. in his article «Intuition and emotion in creative thinking» studies the relationship between thinking and feeling and makes a point of the fact that our feelings – our intuitions – are not impediments to rational thinking; they form its origin and basis… body and mind, emotion and intellect are inseparable. Not only do scientists feel their way toward logical ideas, but creative thinking and expression in every discipline are born of intuition and emotion [8].

When the WebQuest is sent out, the students may complete it whenever it is convenient for them on any PC or mobile device. All the study materials are presented in an attractive multimedia format. Let me give you an example of this type of WebQuest.

2.1.4 Examples of WebQuests

«The Power of Words» Unit comprises such topics as: the power of words in the business environment and in everyday situations, body language and plagiarism, etc. The first part of the WebQuest comprises an image (a photo, a cartoon, a picture) which highlights the importance of carefully selecting words for life situations. For this purpose a photo «The Struggle was Real. Job hunting in Post World War I, 1930's» was chosen [9], see Figure 1.

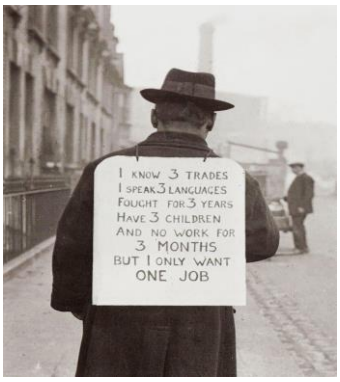


Figure 1. The Struggle was Real

The Viewing and Learning Activity included several questions the students were required to answer in order to proceed to the next section of the WebQuest.

The Topical Question is: How important is the choice of words in job hunting?

1. What is the image saying? What do you know on the topic?
2. What have you learnt from the photo? What ideas did you get that made you think in new directions?
3. What challenges on the topic cross your mind? What questions do you now have?

So, we start the WebQuest with the emotional impact the photo has. It evokes the feelings of compassion, you can «feel» how desperate or even crushed the man in the photo is, the image is an emotional «hook» for students. The ad the man is carrying on his back reads: « I Know 3 Trades; I speak 3 Languages; Fought for 3 Years; Have 3 Children; And no work for 3 Months; But I only want ONE JOB». The students start looking deeper and thinking about the wording of the advert (the carefully chosen words and the repetition of the number «ONE» in capital letters) and the fact that the ad is so concise on the one hand, and so powerful on the other. So, we come to the point of asking the students what they know about the issue and what they have leant from it. The students will find similarities and differences with the present day strategies of job hunting and draw conclusions.

This part of a WebQuest, the Viewing and Learning Activity, is well suited for general discussion in class, as well as preparation of oral reports, presentations, and the third part of the WebQuest – writing an essay on the topic, the questions serving as stepping stones for students to think logically and identify the relevance of the study materials for them personally and the chosen speciality.

While surfing the Web for thought-provoking images related to the topic of «The Power of Words» I have come across quite a few that could also be used for creating separate Viewing and Learning Activities used either in class to trigger discussion. For example a cartoon (see Figure 2) [10] where the applicant is at a job interview and is being taken on for the job of writing annual reports due to his

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«creative» skills when writing his CV. The focus is on the present day online job hunting and the art of writing a good CV, which is truthful, up-to-the-point and concise.



Figure 2. Writing a good CV

The Viewing and Learning Activity's Topic question is: How important is it to write a good CV in order to be taken on for a job? With a number of «stepping stone» questions to follow:

1. What is the cartoon saying? Why is it so amusing?
2. Have you written a CV? Is it easy? What is the role of a well-written CV in the recruitment process?
3. Would you like to learn more how to write a good CV and improve your chances of being taken on for a job? What questions do you have?

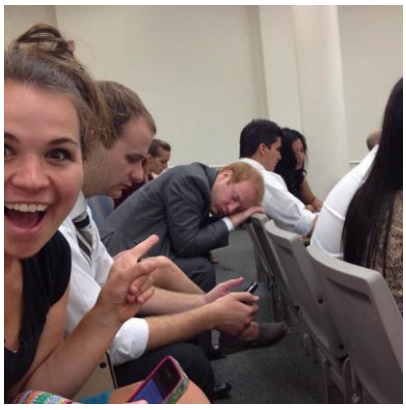


Figure 3. The Sleeping Class

Several activities have been created: around the photo «The Sleeping Class» (see Figure 3) [11] where the emotional «hook» was a comic situation, with a girl in the forefront pointing at a student fast asleep in the middle of a presentation. To illustrate the issue of Plagiarism a cartoon «What is Plagiarism?» (see Figure 4) [12] as chosen with a student furiously shouting at his teacher: « Whaddya mean all my facts are wrong? I copied everything straight off the Internet!»



Figure 4. What is Plagiarism?

The second part of the WebQuest has a video related to the topic of the unit. It may complement the content of the unit under review, highlight a new aspect or present the study material under a new angle. For the Power of Words Unit I selected one of Robin Sharma's Video «The Power of Words»

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Mastery Session found on https://youtu.be/ASoCmtAX _b8. Robin Sharma is often called the leader to leaders. He is one of the top leadership experts in the world. His work is embraced by royalty, billionaires and many celebrity CEOs. With over 15,000,000 books sold, clients such as Starbucks, Nike, GE and Coca-Cola. NASA and Microsoft are using his leadership methods to drive real growth and top performance. Robin Sharma's Mastery Session on the Power of Words is of special interest to students majoring in International Business and Management. In this session Robin Sharma explains how choosing the proper words could «uplift» people and the words with negative connotation could destroy them. He goes on to give advice of how to transform the «Victim Language» into the «Language of a Leader», thus reframing the mindset. In order to master the «Language of Opportunity» you should get your words right. The Google Forms format links the students to the YouTube video right away, which is quick access without any need of following the video link. It's important to find videos that are not too long (from 3 to 10 minutes approximately, or clip them) so that the completion of the WebQuest doesn't take up much time. One should always keep in mind the students' feedback on cutting down on routine, boring and monotonous stuff. The video develops students listening and comprehension skills and gives ideas for the writing task.

The third part of the WebQuest is the Writing Task. The students have to write an essay of about 300 words related to the topic «The Power of Words». There are at least 5 topics students can chose from which always include a topic of their own choice. The essays are aimed at students making sense of the study materials of the unit and the WebQuest and producing their piece of writing. For «The Power of Words» Unit the students submitted essays on the following topics:

1. Do you agree that the words we use may change our careers and life at large?

2. Why is it important to be able to write a good CV? What are the tips for writing a good CV?

3. Why are presentation skills important in a business environment? What contributes to a presentation's success?

4. Is body language as important as words?

5. Write on a topic of your own choice related to «The Power of Words» Unit.

No time limit is set for the three tasks. The students may take their time and complete the WebQuest in a week. This type of WebQuest was especially created for very targeted educational goals: compliment the study materials of the courses unit, develop individual progress of students' listening and comprehension skills, improve their writing skills as well as their LOTs. Besides, students are supposed to do a Listening and Writing Test at the end of each semester. The test is a part of their Credit or Exam Requirements specified by the English Program for Management Masters. Such type of WebQuest is teacher generated to provide the stepping-stones for developing students foreign language learning and creating meaning skills. The WebQuest is aimed at students' individual progress. This is a short-term WebQuest that is completed at the end of a Unit within a weeks' time. According to Tom March, this type of activity may be categorized as «Insight Reflector». «Teachers choose to create an Insight Reflector when…

1. creative thinking is more important than a uniform response,
2. the subject matter benefits from being viewed through new perspectives,
3. you want students to engage their emotions and minds in the topic,
4. reflective writing is a course objective

…the wealth of the Web can assist us here. The first aspect of reflective writing is an open occasion, something that sparks an emotion or starts the mental gears to turn» [15].

The types of WebQuest a teacher chooses depends on his and his students educational goals, the course program and curriculum. Back in 2009 the author was very much motivated to start integrating the Web into the English classroom resorting to the long-term team WebQuest with its structure (introduction, task, description of the process, resources and evaluation) for the reason of bringing motivation, creativity and team work into class. These team WebQuests were presented at the end of semester and encompassed comprehensive on-line resources on a topic and elements of role-play. The author developed several long-term WebQuests on such topics as: « Apple: Innovation Factory», «H&M. Fairtrade: pros and cons», «Employment: How to identify employees' personality types using MBTI», «MARS: How to rise brand recognition?», «HSBC: Multinationals & Cultural Diversity». The WebQuests were presented by teams of students in English and made learning more real, relevant and creative. Over the years student teams engaged in long-long term projects took an active part in

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brainstorming the topics of WebQuests. Role-play gave way to a more practical approach to business topics under review. Students wanted to identify their role in resolving issues and make a meaningful contribution. These WebQuests were generated in close cooperation of the teacher (more a facilitator) and students. For example the team project on the topic «Leadership» was presented in the form of a WebQuest «Setting up a Leadership Training Program in MGIMO University»; students enrolled in the Russian-Norwegian Dual Diploma Program presented a project «Responsible leadership vs. conflict and management risk for the energy sector», students majoring in Public and Private Partnership came up with a team project focusing on the role and cooperation of BRIC member countries on the international arena with their WebQuest «PPP – providing global opportunities», students majoring in International relations presented their project « A new philosophy of leadership and business mindsets – devising an updated MBA course in MGIMO University».

Among the most interesting student generated projects were «Save Lake Baikal!» A heated debate of students of the Faculty of Applied Economics was held on the issue of the pros and cons of building a Chinese factory on the bank of lake Baikal for export of bottled water to China and South Korea. As well as a team WebQuest presented by students studying for their Bachelor's Degree «Is the Internet killing our brain?». As for the most motivating individual student generated WebQuests were «Ecology and business: Green buildings», «Flashmob: Volunteers will save the planet».

Tom March also points out that an educator «…might want to use a WebQuest as a first activity to quickly immerse students in real learning, then go back and fill in the broader picture with Knowledge Hunt or Subject Sampler»

[13]. This was exactly the case with my research on integrating technology and WebQuests into teaching English to university students. Alongside with devising long-term WebQests I've come up with short-term subject oriented WebQuests and Creating Meaning WebQuests for the Masters' English Program, as well as with a number of Listening and Creating Meaning WebQuests for the Language and Country Studies Program.

3 RESULTS

By introducing WebQuest technology into the classroom, educators motivate students to study, providing a very attractive environment and support for carrying out WebQuest projects. The results of introducing WebQuests into the foreign language learning process and assessment of the students' communicative competence are very rewarding.

The assessment of students' progress as concerns short-term WebQuests Type 1 and Creating Meaning WebQuests which are subject, language and Lower order thinking skills (Remembering, Understanding and Applying) oriented pose no difficulty. The teacher assigns scores for students' answers to questions as well as their written essay or oral answers. The outcomes of the autumn 2019 Listening and Writing Credit Test were most satisfactory: 22 opinion essays of four groups of 34 students were graded as «good» and «excellent», 12 students got a «satisfactory» grade, no one received a «poor» grade. This is an increase of 1/3 of excellent, good and satisfactory grades that guarantee a credit. As for the Listening part (BEC Listening Test), only 2 students performed poorly in the test out of the total number of 34. The results signified a 25% improvement as compared to results of the control group in the Listening and Writing Credit Test in spring.

As for long-term team WebQuests Type 2 which target the Higher order thinking skills (Analysing, Comparing, Evaluating and Creating) as well as communicative skills, evaluation of students progress is much more complex. One of the approaches that can be adopted is to evaluate communicative competence, component by component. According to Sandra J. Savingnon [14], communicative competence is comprised of grammatical, discursive, sociocultural and strategic competencies. Her «inverted pyramid» model shows how through practice and experience in an increasingly wide range of communicative contexts, learners gradually expand their communicative competence. «Having analysed the works of a number of prominent academics in the field of linguistics (Dell H.Hymes, Alice C.Omaggio, Stephan M.Canale, Sandra J. Savignon, Donald Davidson, Michael N.Vatyutnev, Innessa L. Bim, Anna J.Konstantinova), one can single out following communicative competence components: linguistic, discourse, socio-cultural, pragmatic components and personal progress». [15].

An educator may appraise the long-term team WebQuests in the form of a presentation by filling out an evaluation table. As a rule if the WebQuests were successfully carried out, the students were considered to have achieved their autumn or spring credit. «The final score was calculated as a simple average as all components of communicative competence were considered equally important;

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otherwise, depending on the goal of a particular language course and its focus, the final score could be calculated as a weighted average» [15]. The results of this research were presented in the second chapter of the author's thesis «WebQuest technology as a didactic means of developing students' foreign language communicative competence». «When comparing progress results of students whose course of studies did not include WebQuests and those whose did, it was discovered that the latter improved their discourse competence by 17%, their strategic competence by 19%, their pragmatic competence by 16% and their individual progress improved by 15%, as compared to a 7% increase of respective competences in the control group». [15]

4 CONCLUSIONS

By introducing WebQuest technology into the classroom, teachers provide a very attractive virtual environment. Type1 WebQuests and Creating Meaning WebQuests target the development of specific language skills, as well as Lower Order Thinking Skills, motivate students to view the topics under review from a different perspective and achieve meaningful learning, i.e. learning which enables them to reassess their own goals and aspirations and become actively engaged in the learning process. The Google Forms format offers a great variety of options an educator can choose from to create student-oriented WebQuests. Taking into account students' feedback those WebQuests could be tailored both to an English Language Programme or Course and to students' interests and specialisations. The virtual format of such WebQuests allows an educator to include colourful thought provoking still and moving digital images, interviews with outstanding experts, sound tracks and videos, which impact the students emotionally. The Google Forms format allows to send the WebQuests individually to a student's e-mail or simultaneously to a group of students, it registers every response and sends a reminder if necessary. The educator also selects tasks that are «Required» or «Optional», they may also set a time limit for every task. Type 1 WebQuests, which focus on the content matter, may comprise a stand-alone online course for students who juggle work and study. Creating Meaning WebQuests may compliment the study materials of an English Language Course with multimedia recourses inspiring creative thinking and reflective writing. Depending on the goals the educator pursues and programme requirements; they may tailor the WebQuest format accordingly due to its flexible structure.

Long term team WebQuests of Type 2 target the Higher Order Thinking Skills as well as language and communicative ones. Due to their structure they provide the necessary «stepping stones» which allow students to tackle the challenge of the digital generation of poor thinking skills and the inability to see the broader picture without being lost in cyber space. They learn to analyse, synthesize, evaluate and create new knowledge, later presenting their outcomes to their peers and educators. «Discovering» knowledge for themselves when working on a team project in the form of a long term WebQuest motivates students to study and may become the basis of life-long independent learning. It also develops team-building skills.

WebQuests focus on monitoring educational attainments, summarising them at a certain time (end of month, semester, year), when a student takes tests and the teacher assigns scores - this is often necessary for accountability. We can treat them as «learning oriented assessment», which encourage students to be more motivated and creative.

WebQuests could become an alternative to credits and exams, reducing high levels of stress and revealing students' creative potential.

In his «Next Era Ed Readiness Checklist» Prof., San Diego University Tom March argues that «digital technologies can provide the infinite variations that allow individuals to pursue their own unique, deeply rewarding growth. [The educators should try to] suggest their application to stimulating self-initiative, critical thinking and life-long learning» [16]. WebQuest technology has proved to be highly effective in developing students' foreign language communicative competence, as well as their critical thinking and communication skills. It helps teachers « …to enlist students' interest on their side. They do this by being sensitive to students' goals and desires, and they are thus able to articulate the pedagogical goals as meaningful challenges» [16].

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) for funding my participation in INTED 2020, 14th annual international technology, education and development conference.

Electronic copy available at: https://ssrn.com/abstract=3552707

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