RESEARCH PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING BENEFITS OF ASYNCHRONOUS COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Branko Medic, D.Sc.
Manchester University
medic.tesol@gmail.com
Slobodanka Dolic, D.Ph.
Slobomir P University
slobodanka.djolic@gmail.com

Abstract:

The conventional teaching methods have been in practice for a number of decades and centuries but computers and technology has brought a revolution in the field of pedagogics in the past few years and the state of affairs in terms of teaching and learning can be now mapped on a big picture globally. The internet based resources such as podcasts, online forums, wikis and blogs have embellished the traditional face of education and enabled the learners as well as teachers to adapt to the online methods of learning and teaching. This new era of utilizing technology in the educational processes will broaden the vision of people regarding the acquisition of knowledge, its worldwide practical implications and furnish the every individual in the field of pedagogics with exceptional skills and motivation.

A recent Technology Assisted Learning (TAL) resource is the use of Wikis, a word derived from Hawaiian origin which means "fast; to hurry" (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001. Wiki, introduced in 1990s (Wei et al., 2005) is a dynamic web platform that is always prone to change as the reader perform dual duties of author as well as editor and a user friendly format that allows many users to build communities, create and upload content (Parker & Chao, 2007) alongwith worldwide distribution of content and collaboration (Knobel & Lankshear, 2006, p. 81) among readers and authors. Wikis are a collection of interrelated webpages that are expandable, used to serve the purpose of storing and editing information (Leuf & Cunningham, 2001, p. 14) in the form a database with the facility to read, arrange and update the stored information to the latest version (Zorko, 2009) and conveniently edited by users.

Wikis offer multiple distinct features that enable them to be used in the educational contexts particularly in foreign language learning processes. The key features provided by the wikis to the pedagogics in terms of foreign language learning are user-friendly frontier to upload as well as update the content, tracking history of the edits and much more to facilitate both the learner and instructor in the process of teaching and learning. Regarding pedagogical benefits, wikis are a source of communication and knowledge sharing that are applicable beyond the limits of a classroom. Being a foreign language pedagogue as well as a reflective person, I believe that the learning and teaching process must be innovative enough to embark the skills and boost motivation levels of students. I personally agree to the fact that the students of young age groups currently I am working with, must be engaged in learning activities that not only facilitate in achievement of the learning goals but also aid in grooming the personal abilities of students and their learning autonomy.

In this regard, wikis can best serve the purpose of learning that I being a pedagogue prefer my students to achieve because young students are more prone to creativity and learning ideas that can make them express their analysis on a platform that is read and updated globally. Wiki sites are created with a goal of becoming "an archive of knowledge with the ease of updates and expansion over time, with an expectation to achieve a considerable degree of innovation and permanence (Godwin-Jones, 2003). Using wikis in

foreign language learning is highly appreciated by me in pedagogics because it will enable students to become more reflective, creative and professional in every field of life rather than just engaging them in conventional teaching methods that are bound to the vicinity of classrooms. This particular study will focus on how wikis can play a role to broaden the learning aspect in educational courses especially in foreign language learning processes and how it can impact and broaden the vision of both instructors and students.

Literature Review:

Learning a foreign language is far more complex process than learning a secondary language. Foreign language is the one that is not natively used in the learner's social environment rather it is intentionally learned for some professional or academic purpose or to communicate globally with people of different cultures (Saville-Troike, 2012). In this regard, wikis are considered as collaborative and informative tools. The use of such online or internet based tools in foreign language learning can boost the student motivation, reflection and confidence (Pop, 2010). The web based collaborative learning has been studied by a number of researchers and it has now become mandatory to couple the learning process with technology innovations. Wikis have been under research and analysis process since a long time to be explored and employed in the educational activities. Wikis have facilitated the student teacher interactions and enhanced the learning collaboration worldwide (Packalén, Patokorpi & Tetrad, 2008).

Being focused on students' learning, wikis provide a chance to students to work mutually on an idea without the significant presence of instructor. They enable the students to share their thought process about a particular idea and then cooperatively work on it to produce an informative and structured piece of writing that can be viewed, read and updated with the passage of time globally (Reo, 2006). In a collaborative perspective, a report on cooperation and autonomy of students in language learning process by drafting a wiki based piece of writing indicates that such pliant learning activities can benefit the student interaction and use of foreign language (Kessler & Bikowski, 2010). It is essential to engage the students in a variety of innovative tasks such as wikis that can enhance their reflective and analytic skills along with writing and learning skills regarding a foreign language learning process (Kessler, 2009). By experimenting writing down their ideas in the form of a wiki, the students' ability to produce interesting ideas can be improved and they gain a confidence in expressing themselves by writing (Turgut, 2009).

It is stressed that mutual learning can aid the students in filling the space between what a learner can achieve by working alone and in collaboration with others (Vygotsky, 1978). The scaffold of wikis can equip the students with the skills of self-regulation of their activities, acquisition of skills and knowledge and independent working (Wells, 1999). The knowledge of learners is build up by sharing their information about a certain topic based on their previous knowledge and it can help increase the worldwide information pool (Kuiper & Volman, 2008). The approach of Constructivism allows the students to interact with their surroundings, to enhance their learning by mutual activities in context of information and to compare their previous experiences to the fresh ones (Willis et al., 1996). The central role of any educational course work is to impart knowledge and upgrade learning and the teachers play the role of a guide or instructor to devise different knowledge enhancing techniques and activities to improve reflective abilities and critical thinking of the students (Farabaugh, 2007). So the use of wikis in foreign language learning and teaching process affects the cognition of students because the learners who work mutually to create a unique and authentic piece of knowledge strongly believe that mutual knowledge is much more valuable and weighty than discrete (Matthew et al., 2009).

Raised Awareness and Repositioning:

The literature has been studded with many case studies and researches that support the use of wikis as a tool in the process of foreign language learning. The versatile features of wiki make them significantly effective in enhancing the learning abilities and boosting the motivation levels of students. In terms of mutual working and collaboration of ideas among students, the traditional techniques and those used on internet are being compared by many researchers

and the conclusion was that the learners are more attracted and motivated towards those learning and writing activities regarding foreign language which are to be published on online platforms rather than merely peer reviewed and they get motivated to improve their write up regarding a particular task assigned by the tutor by spending more time and investing more effort in it (Ioannou-Georgiou, 2005).

In this method of learning, the students contribute to the content creation, reflect about the topic and share their perspectives rather than just becoming the beneficiary of knowledge imparted by the teacher. Learners can coordinate to create and produce knowledge rather than absorbing the available information about a particular topic (Farabaugh, 2007). Another key feature of wikis is that the edits are usually tracked by softwares so the users can easily retrieve previous versions of stored information. Wikis enhance both technological and intellectual skills in every aspect of a language learning process i.e. reading, writing, enhanced vocabulary and performance. The significance of wikis in terms of foreign language learning outcomes is far better than the courses that do not couple such diverse and impressive technological tools in learning of a foreign language.

Being a foreign language practitioner, the review of literature regarding use of wikis in foreign language learning has broadened my vision about the educational utilization of technological platforms. I am a believer of technology aided learning as we are advancing towards a more technical and innovative era but it is also considerable that the adoption of technology in educational courses is yet to be explored in a broader context. Being a reflective instructor and working with young students I always prefer to adapt innovative methods of learning that will not only enhance their knowledge but also impart them skills and teach them how to express their ideas in an impressive way globally. So, wikis can aid me and others in the field of pedagogics to provide the students with a platform for brainstorming and sharing their knowledge with a wide number of users worldwide. They can be used to empower the learners with the ownership of their own content online and make them a responsible and updated learner due to the global access of the online content (Augar & Zhou, 2005).

Regarding the foreign language learning process, I must say that the web based content creation platforms such as wikis, can play an extra ordinary role in boosting the mental capabilities of students and enhancing their critical thinking alongwith a sense of responsibility coupled with global view of their created content. The whole discussion has convinced me that wikis can be undoubtedly use to create a learning environment that will furnish the learners with better cognition, reading, writing and grammatical skills in addition to the related professional skills.

Pedagogical Interventions:

As discussed in earlier sections of this article, Wikis are a constructive source of learning for both instructor and learner. With the help of wikis, students actively participate in the process of learning and create new perspective of knowledge regarding a certain subject which refines their skills in a particular context. Many researches with significant interventions strongly convince the instructors regarding utilization of wikis in foreign language learning courses. This platform is a helpful resource in pedagogics but there must be some insight while designing the course contents for foreign language learning when the instructor is supposed to use wikis for this purpose. Like other technology assisted learning techniques, wikis are also need to be observed and regulated at both ends i.e., by both instructor and learner. The teacher must monitor the overall learning process of students and students must seek the new information from their peers or instructors by social interactions. In my personal and professional context, wikis can equip the students with the following skills in learning a foreign language and benefit them in every aspect of life:

- **Integrated Language Skills:** Foreign language learning courses that involve the use of wikis are much more acceptable by the students because they help the students to share their reals life experiences about a particular topic and the charm of being read globally is more fascinating to students rather than conventional learning techniques. Wikis inculcate the integrated language skills in students as well as cognition due to their impressive features.

- **Reading and Writing Skills:** Through use of wikis the vocabulary of students is enhanced and they learn how to perceive the depth of a writing as well as how to write and draft the information in an engaging and unique style. They help produce coherence and creativity in the content.

- **Grammar:** Wikis encourage the students to focus on their language accuracy as the content will be published and viewed worldwide. The students learn to select better words and overcome their spelling errors while publishing their content in the form a wiki.

- **Critical Analysis and Reflectiveness:** Implementation of wikis in language learning courses enable the learners to analyze a global scenario while writing about a particular subject and be reflective about their content as the content will be accessible to the worldwide audience once it gets published.

Although wikis are simple to use, edit, less complex in comparison to other technology assisted techniques, help in interaction while completing a task assigned by the instructor and learners observe the whole process of expressing their ideas mutually and using suitable words to convey the exact matter to the audience but there are some concerns that, I must say, should be consulted and addressed while implementing use of wikis in language learning. Like some students are not much familiar with the web based learning methods and they find it difficult to interact with their peers and other fellows, some have the concerns regarding the editing of their write up etc. So, being a professional practitioner of foreign language I must say that it is the responsibility of an instructor to maintain a coherence among the thoughts process of students and learning activities and also support the students to help achieve satisfaction and learn new skills from whatever the technique is being employed either wikis or something else.

Conclusion:

Wikis are a significant tool among multiple web based learning techniques and they impart exceptional learning and cognitive skills to the students. They possess very simple, easy to handle interface that can be managed easily after a short practice. It is asserted that they are the most suitably useable to carry out the collaborative tasks or projects and require very less navigation. This study has produced a tremendous increase in my knowledge regarding the utilization of wikis in foreign language learning skills and has broadened my personal as well professional developmental skills. The most essential part that has been added to my knowledge is the effect of using wikis on cognition of students and their motivation levels. Students find it fascinating to be able to publish their content online for a global audience rather than the limited number of learners in a classroom. Regarding the enhancement of competences and innovation there must be more research and case studies to support the use of wikis as well as to address the concerns of both instructors and learners. Designing the course outlines and coupling them with web based techniques with be done in correspondence with the interests of students and diversified context in terms of language competencies, motivational levels, cognition and skills development of students as well as teachers.

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