

Using Mailing List to Extend English Learning Time and Space and Expand Topics Beyond Classroom in High School English Classes



Fatemeh Nikui Nezhad, MA in TEFL
Email: Fnikui@yahoo.com

چکیده

امروزه استفاده از تکنولوژی، از جمله اینترنت، در تدریس و یادگیری زبان بسیار حائز اهمیت شده است. استفاده از لیست پستی (ایمیل) در کلاس زبان مزایای فراوانی برای دانش آموز و معلم دارد. اقدام پژوهی حاضر به توصیف چگونگی استفاده از لیست پستی به عنوان ابزار مؤثر یادگیری و آموزش زبان می پردازد. لیست پستی این امکان را برای دانش آموزانم فراهم کرد تا یادگیری و تمرین نکات گرامری و خواندن متون انگلیسی را در خارج از کلاس در زمان مناسب خود ادامه دهند. پیشنهاد می شود معلمان از این ابزار قوی استفاده کنند تا یادگیری زبان به زمان کوتاه هفتگی کلاس های زبان محدود نشود و دانش آموزان در خارج از مدرسه هم دانش زبانی خود را افزایش دهند و محیطی واقعی تر را در یادگیری زبان تجربه کنند.

کلیدواژه ها: لیست پستی، گروه های یاهو، اطلاعات ورودی

Abstract

The need for the help of technology and the internet in language learning and teaching programs is an issue of utmost importance. Mailing list can provide a wealth of advantages to foreign language learners and teachers. The purpose of my action research was to examine how mailing list could be used more effectively as an instructional and learning tool to provide my students with more input than they would normally expect from class time, which typically amounts to not more than 2 hours per week. My students, who were second graders in Farzanegan High school, were provided with more time and space to practice English outside of class. Using mailing list gave my students an additional context to do some extra readings and practice grammatical structures that were linked to topics being covered in class. In this study, I suggest that teachers integrate this great tool into their teaching practices to spare their students more chunks of time and space to expand their knowledge of English language.

Key Words : mailing list, Yahoo groups, authentic learning

Statement of the Problem

Numerous researches have approved of the leading effect of technology in improving foreign language education (Blake, 2008; Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Teaching tools offered through technology and the internet have the potential to bring about significant changes in teaching and learning practices, so both teachers and students should have the chance of the internet accessibility to keep up with new developments in teaching and learning.

It has been argued that when there is little exposure to authentic materials in a foreign language classroom, it's unlikely for the learners to develop their communicative skills in the second language (Demo, 2001). In the Iranian case, the contact hours in English classes (2 hours a week) are not sufficient for the development of the students' language skills. To address this issue, technology and multimedia can be used to increase students' exposure to authentic language and enhance learning since they give ample opportunities to the learners to develop their communication skills (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011). Network-based technology exposes the students to various resources of authentic reading materials, accessible at any time, to be used either in class or from home. English language learners can also get benefit from technology and the internet in terms of increasing the interactivity and efficiency in time and energy (Atai&Dashtestani, 2011).

To compensate for the limited amount of time that the students were exposed to English language and insufficient input they received in their English classes, I utilized mailing list as an instructional tool as a complement to the teachers' use

of High school English Book to benefit from technology and the internet and stretch the class time to a few extra hours outside the classroom context. Using mailing list in my classes also aimed at offering chances to enhance my students' language learning. Emailing which has been called as "the mother of all internet applications" (Warschauer, Shetzer, and Meloni, 2000, p.3), creates an environment in which the students can interact with both the teacher and their classmates. This environment allows the participation of all students including shy and less active ones. Considering the fact that my students used their own English books as the main source during the class sessions, they were also presented with opportunities to go beyond the restrictions of class time and input to discover many new information sources. This independence from one single source of information, i.e., their English book, made the students familiar with a bigger world beyond the classroom where they were exposed to the language outside the classroom in order to work independently on improving their language skills.

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The Solution Strategy

Background to the Pedagogical Benefits of Mailing List

Warschauer&Turbee(1996) express



the benefits of using email in the second language class. Emailing makes students autonomous since it provides them with a better opportunity for control and initiative in learning and communicating with other students or the teacher at any time of the day and from a number of places rather than during class sessions. It also gives equal rights to students with various learning styles and personalities to contribute at their own pace.

Clyde and Delohery (2005) mentioned that email, as an asynchronous instructional tool, can be utilized with the aim of enhancing teaching and learning English. According to

Chhabra (2012), internet as a source of information, which comes in various forms of courses, articles, conferences and etc., enables the teachers to send their assignments to the students through email and the students' work can be viewed by their parents at any time. Quan-Hasse et al. (2005) stated that the integration of computer technology in the form of email, into the class passes up the opportunity to communicate ideas and information as well as sharing the feeling without any limit on time and space.

As many researchers have noted, email makes it possible for the teachers to extend what they can do in the classroom as it provides a venue for communicating and exchanging ideas outside the class.

Thus, the students are not confined to a specific class at a particular time of the day to improve their knowledge of English. Their electronic folder, inbox, exposes them to authentic class-related contents.

The students can grasp this opportunity from the comfort of their own room or from a cyber-café to increase the amount of time they can spend either doing some extra readings or composing in English working on grammar structures in a communicative context.



English language teachers often have to follow a rigorous schedule since they are expected to present and practice some content and grammatical topics in a semester one session per week. This amount of time does not meet the students' needs to be exposed to big chunks of input to learn English in more authentic environments. Email spares the students an additional context for reading and discussion that can be linked to topics being covered in class. Moreover, increased control over learning exists, since the students are able to work on content-related topics at their own convenience.

Network-based technology exposes the students to various resources of authentic reading materials, accessible at any time, to be used either in class or from home. English language learners can also get benefits from technology and the Internet in terms of increasing the interactivity and efficiency in time and energy (Atai&Dashtestani, 2011)

Teachers can design email assignments as pre-class, post-class, or supplementary activities. Setting up a class email list, the teacher can easily distribute information and materials to be discussed or presented in class. The teacher can also connect communicative tasks to the topic currently being covered in class, which results in extending the learners' communicative time and involvement with that topic.

Action Plan

Incorporating mailing list into English Class

Using a mailing list for assignments

A mailing list is a list of the students' names and addresses which is managed by the list owner, i.e. the teacher. The class email list enables the teacher to send assignments easily to everyone associated with the class. When a message is sent to the list, it is electronically distributed to each of the students on the list. A copy of the message is saved in files which are known as list archives for future reference. A mailing list affords a teacher the opportunity to let the students do more practice on their course-related topics.

To incorporate a mailing list to the class, the following action plan was created.

I explained the project to the students as members of the email group, and introduced the possible use of email in class. The students received step-by-step instructions on making and using email. I then created a class email list. To manage a number of email addresses and send a file to everybody on the email list, an email service like Yahoo Groups was utilized. In addition to managing email addresses, this service can provide the ability to store and share files among all of the list members. There's no need to send the file to everybody on the email list individually, just uploading the file to the list itself makes it available to everybody. To create a group, I took the following steps:

I went to <http://groups.yahoo.com>; clicked on the link "Start Your Group"; followed the steps. A Yahoo ID is needed to be able to run a Yahoo Group. Then I manually added the emails of my students to the list. To do this, I clicked on Management > Manage Members. This lists all of the members of the group.

To the right, a blue box titled "+ Invite" is seen. I clicked on this box and entered the email addresses of my students one by one. When I was done with the invitations, I clicked on "Send". Yahoo Groups sent an invitation to each of the addresses I entered. The students had to respond to the invitation message to join the group. Joining the group, the class had one email with as many as 70 members. To send an email to all the members of my group, I sent an e-mail to <my_group_name>@yahogroups.com.

Each weekend of the fall semester, in total 10 sessions, I sent out one email message to my students. They were required to check their mail boxes at the end of

the week to get the assignments, which contained either grammar or reading links.

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The students were supposed to do the grammar tests and let me know about the score they got. These online grammar tests were automatically corrected giving positive and negative feedback along with



a total score on the student's performance. Another email mail contained a reading task. Students read the stories emailed to them and discussed them in class as part of the class presentation. They were also introduced to some links to do topic-related readings in advance and be prepared for class presentation. These extra out of class assignments, which saved the class time, involved the students in class discussions related to topics of class readings. One-on-one email exchange through which the teacher could help some students to share their ideas, offer suggestions, and experience beyond the class interaction and create bonds with the teacher, was a great enjoyable experience for me, too.

Analysis of Results

Mailing list as an educational tool was

incorporated into my English classes to grant the students an environment where they worked on more activities or tasks outside the class according to their own pace and were exposed to a wider range of English input than they could see in their textbooks. As the students practiced reading and grammar via different links and resources provided by the teacher,





their language skills improved. Furthermore, the students' class study time of English over the week stretched, which could bring about differences in overall language proficiency of the students in the long run.

Email can be utilized as an effective means of student-teacher communication, since some students are more willing to say what they are really thinking through email rather than through a face-to-face conversation. This being the case, a few of my students offered suggestions about the content of email messages and a variety in exercises. Some students also shared their topics of interest including inspirational photos or quotations with the group so joining a mailing list let the students to interact with either their own classmates or the teacher.

By using email, students became familiar with this vital communication tool in order to optimize their understanding of the themes taught in class. Using e-mail also saved class time for some assignments since the students received weekly e-assignments or announcements. Teachers need to be aware of the fact that not all the students are in favor of using this tool in class. Some students do not use technology or do not have access to the internet. Some of my students

expressed their dissatisfaction with this learning tool and explained that they participated in activities because the teacher had made presentation activities compulsory for the whole class as part of the students' homework. Some others considered it time-consuming. However, it's the teacher who is responsible for meeting the needs of the many learning styles and multiple intelligences that the students possess. Providing a variety of delivery methods is always helpful and it gets more students involved in the process of learning.

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Conclusion and recommendations

Emailing as an essential tool can be used to supplement the content taught in class and bring effective benefits to the process of learning English. These benefits include its capability of presenting various activities and resources that if used by the students and monitored by the teacher can increase the time that students interact with the language and enhance the students' language learning.

While the teachers use a mailing list as a stimulating means of communication, they have to be fully involved in the process of teaching and learning through email. Constant teacher involvement and active encouragement allow the emailing as a useful pedagogical tool to ensure deeper learning of the students. Regular messages on a weekly basis indicate the fact that the teacher cares for the students' learning and is interested in deeper and better

learning of the students.

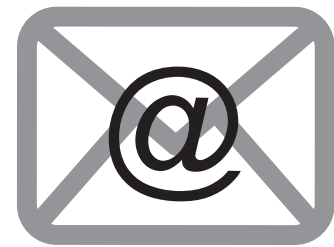
The teachers should keep in mind that they have to be prepared to spend time on email activities in order to get the desired results. Nowadays, a teacher is expected to be knowledgeable in computer applications related to teaching and be at the good level of email proficiency. As I myself have experienced, the internet-savvy teachers can earn their students' respect as well as their own self-confidence when they make use of the internet as an additional teaching tool in their teaching practices.

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There are some obstacles such as slow speed of the Internet, inadequate facilities and technical problems (Marandi, 2010; Atai&Dashtestani, 2011), which limit technology integration into our classes; however, teachers (as the title of Marandi's paper tactfully suggests) should bravely step forward to make good use of technology as far as possible to pave the way for the students in order to experience new contexts of learning English. I suggest that English teachers make use of the mailing list in their English classes to provide various environments and authentic materials related to instruction. Such tools can keep some students, if not all, motivated to keep in touch with English outside the classroom and to make English a part of their daily lives. Teachers should develop a key positive role as

providers of various attractive teaching strategies to shape students' attitudes positively towards English learning. I hope that this action research will help English teachers recognize the advantages that may be gained from using the internet resources and mailing lists in their classes. It can really make a difference in class if integrated and harnessed properly!

Mailing List



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