Using the Internet in Secondary Schools to Increase International Understanding

Kenji Kitao
Doshisha University

Many secondary school English language teachers in Japan want to make use of the Internet to teach English and make international contacts, but they often do not know how to best exploit its potential. For more than two years, I have been involved in giving advice to such secondary school teachers. In this paper, I will discuss the situation of English language teaching in Japanese secondary schools, the problems that teachers face in using the Internet, and some suggestions that I have for making the most efficient use of the Internet in teaching English and making international contacts. Among the principles I suggest to teachers are: 1) Recognize that the Internet is one supplementary tool for teaching English. 2) Have a clear purpose each assignment using the Internet, and use the Internet only as much as necessary to fulfill that purpose. 3) Provide specific and concrete directions in easy English. 4) If possible, use an intranet at first so students can practice in a structured environment. 5) Be aware of possible technical problems. 6) Be familiar with useful Internet sites for teachers and students (I have provided a list of useful sites). Using these and other suggestions, I believe that the Internet can become more useful both for improving students' English and improving international understanding.

過去2年以上に互り、中学校と高等学校の英語教師でインターネットを使用して、英語能力の向上と国際理解を深めることに関心のある人達に、アドバイスをしてきた。その

提案の主なものは、1) インターネットは英語教育の単なる追加の道具である。2) インターネットを使用する目的を明確にし、その目的のためにのみ使用する。3) 容易な英語による使用方法の説明書を用意する。4) 可能であれば、まずイントラネットで十分な練習をしてから、インターネットを使用する。5) 技術的なトラブルが起こることを予想して、対処方法も考えておく。6) 教師や学習者に役立つインターネットのサイトをよく知っておく。（有益なサイトのリストもこのペーパーに含めた。）
これらの提言に従えば、インターネットは学習者の英語能力の増強と国際理解を深めることに大いに役立つ

The Internet is a resource with the potential to help Japanese students improve their English as well as to foster international understanding. However, the Internet does not always live up to its potential, often because teachers do not know how to exploit it.

For more than two years, since November 1999, I have been involved in giving advice through a bulletin board and by email to secondary school teachers who are interested in using the Internet. I was an advisor for a project for using the Internet for English language instruction in Toyama Prefecture in 2000. I have presented workshops organized by the Osaka and Yamaguchi Prefecture Boards of Education and the Ministry of Education and Science, and I made presentations at various conferences and universities about using the Internet to teach English.

I have used the Internet a great deal since 1996 in my English language instruction at Doshisha University, and I have communicated with many teachers on the mailing lists about the use of the Internet. S. Kathleen Kitao and I have published a book on computers and the Internet (Kitao & Kitao 1997) and constructed a resource site on English language teaching, linguistics and communication in 1996 (Kitao, 1998; Kitao & Kitao 2001). More and more secondary schools have Internet connections, and schools have invested heavily in computer equipment, but teachers may not know how to make the best use of these resources.

I will discuss how the Internet is used in secondary schools, what problems teachers have, and what some possible solutions are, based on my discussions with these teachers. I will also suggest some other possible uses for the Internet.

CALL Situation at Secondary Schools

Secondary schools generally have about 40 students in a class. Public junior high schools have English classes three hours a week, and senior high schools have four or five hours a week, though classes in private schools and special programs in public schools may meet more often. Classes meet 30-32 weeks a year.

Often secondary schools install a CALL lab, and then teachers feel pressured to use it for English language instruction. However, the teachers may not know how to use it effectively. Scheduling is difficult, and teachers

may get one class a week. They may receive some technical assistance in learning how to use the lab, but they have to teach their classes in the lab without any assistants. They feel they have to use computers and the Internet all the time when they use the lab. There is no one to explain how to use the computer and the software for the Internet, and English teachers have to figure out how to do it without a manual, since coordination with computer classes is not very good.

Most English teachers are not very familiar with computers, the Internet, or their use in language instruction. They may have used e-mail and the web, but they are mainly self-taught. They are not in a position to teach students how to use computers and the Internet efficiently. They may be fortunate enough to have a helpful colleague who knows computers and the Internet and can handle some technical aspects, but this is not often the case. There are few workshops where they can learn to use computers and the Internet, so most teachers have to teach themselves.

How the Computer and the Internet are Used for Instruction

Secondary school teachers generally use the Internet in three ways. First, they use e-mail, chat or bulletin boards. Teachers need to teach students how to write messages and abide by the conventions of netiquette, but students do not always follow directions, so the teacher has to supervise them closely.

Second, teachers have students use web resources for gathering information. However, it can be difficult and time-consuming to find resources, especially for users who are not familiar with search techniques. In addition, students need high English proficiency to find specific information and evaluate its accuracy and potential bias.

Third, teachers have students make web pages. They write short English compositions with links and publish them on the web. However, it is very difficult for students to make good web pages. Robb (2000) and Nozawa (1998) report on the effectiveness of their web projects.

English teachers are interested in using the Internet for teaching communication, and they want their students communicate with non-Japanese people in English. They are not especially interested in using learning materials such as readings, quizzes, grammar exercises, listening, pronunciation, writing, etc., for instruction. They are even less interested in making learning materials for their students.

Advice for Using Computers to Teach English

Among the principles I suggest to teachers are:

1. Recognize that the Internet is one supplementary tool for teaching English. An entire course should not be built around it.

Some teachers tend to get caught up in using

computers and the Internet, and they lose sight of the fact that the purpose of their course is teaching English, not computer and Internet use. Teachers should keep the goals of the course in mind.

In addition, there are often logistical problems such as email correspondents who are not conscientious about answering email, or partner classes in different countries whose school year is different, making it difficult for students to carry out assignments. Particularly if the teacher and the students are not very experienced in using computers, there are likely to be many technical problems, and these can be distractions from the main goals of the course.

2. Have a clear purpose each assignment using the Internet, and use the Internet only as much as necessary to fulfill that purpose. Give students concrete, easy tasks.

Some teachers try to use e-mail, chat, MOO, web pages, etc., all during one semester. They have to spend time just explaining how to use them. Students have many problems, and students may have to spend most of their time and energy just learning to use computers, not learning English. Also, teachers have to spend a lot of time preparing to use the computer, the software, and the Internet well and coping with problems that students experience, rather than teaching English.

3. Provide specific and concrete directions in easy English on how to use the Internet, so that students can follow the directions exactly. Supplement the directions with examples, including bad examples, to show students what mistakes to avoid

Teachers need to practice what they want to teach students to do and become thoroughly familiar with the procedures and possible problems by using the Internet themselves. They should find the most efficient way to do what they want the students to do and write an explanation for students, if possible in easy English (For example, the explanation we have written for university students on using SchMOOze University can be found at http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/schmooze.htm). The explanation should include a good example and, if possible, a bad one. (We have made a good example of a university student web project at http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/doshisha/cultural/cultural.htm and a bad example at http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/japan/kyotanabe/. An evaluation sheet we can be found at http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/project/project.htm. This helps students know what is important in the web project and also makes it easier to do peer critiquing.)

4. If possible, use an intranet at first so students can practice in a structured environment. For example, teachers can provide a limited number of web pages for students' research, or allow them to chat with each other first.

After students learn how to use the Internet efficiently, they can still practice with their classmates using the intranet. When they get comfortable with doing this, they are ready to communicate with non-Japanese friends using the Internet.

5. Teachers should be aware of possible technical problems. If a large number of students are connected to the Internet at the same time, for example, it can be very slow. Many students may have problems during the class, and they will make a lot of demands on the teacher's time and attention.

When introducing something new, the teacher should give clear, step-by-step instructions. Students should be allowed sufficient practice time, and the teacher should make sure that everyone can handle the new activity. It is important to find the best method to teach students. The intranet should be used as much as possible and Internet as little as possible. When students use the Internet, they can be divided into groups, with some groups working on using the Internet and some working on other projects. This allows more individualized instruction.

6. Searching for information on the Internet is not easy, so before students begin that type of work, they should have instruction in how to search efficiently.

Students are not used to doing research, even using traditional library resources, so it is important to teach them how to find information on the Internet using search engines, search directories, and searchable sites, and also how to evaluate resources they find.

We have written "Searching for Information on the Internet" (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/project/searching.htm), "Using AltaVista" (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/project/AltaVista.htm), and "Evaluating Internet Resources" (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/project/evaluating.htm). For secondary students, AskJeeves (http://www.askjeeves.com) may be a useful search engine, because they can search by asking questions in natural English, like "What is the population of the United States?"

A major problem students have in writing papers using the Internet resources is plagiarism. It is very easy to copy passages from web pages, and it is tempting for non-native speakers of English whose proficiency is not high and with a limited ability to express themselves. We have written "Plagiarism" (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/class/project/Plagiarism.doc) to help students understand what plagiarism is and how to avoid it.

7. Students can write e-mail to non-Japanese friends. They can introduce themselves, talk about their hobbies, describe their hometowns, discuss current events, etc.

There are various problems with these types of projects. Some teachers find partner classes and have students correspond with those students by email.

They are planning that students will exchange email once a week during a semester. However, students may exchange two or three emails and then run out of things to write. They may not receive answers from their partners.

Teachers need to closely supervise this type of project. They should emphasize the importance of students being conscientious about writing to their partners. They should teach students to write complete, interesting messages with questions, so that their partners feel motivated to answer the messages. Instead of matching students two by two, it might be better to match one student in their own class with two or three students in the other class, so that each student will have much better chance of receiving an answer.

It might be a good idea to use one e-mail account with all students, so they know who wrote what. It is easy for the teacher to monitor all e-mail messages. One of the main problems with keypal projects is that students are not taught how to write letters, e-mail messages, etc., in English. They are not taught how to write correct, clear, concise, complete, and courteous messages. They need to learn the differences between letters and e-mail messages. They need to write interesting messages. They need to learn how to ask questions in order to get answers.

Teachers should be teaching English and writing in English more than they should be teaching the Internet and the computer. All students need to learn how to write English well enough to communicate using the Internet. They should not spend too much time learning about the Internet and the computer in Japanese. It is important for teachers to keep the purposes of their English classes in mind.

The main purpose of an English writing class is to teach students to write clear, concise, complete, correct and courteous messages. Corresponding with people overseas is a bonus. (Writing materials at http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/library/student/writing/ are useful.)

8. Even if the students are doing something easy with the computer and the Internet, it is likely that someone will make an error or have a problem. If they are working on something complicated, some students are certain to make errors. The teacher needs to think through what is being taught and what the potential problems are.

Teachers have to familiarize themselves with the computers, software, and activities in advance and practice them well. They need to find out the best way to teach the computer and the Internet effectively. They need to be aware of the problems students might have, and how to help them. Then they can include such help in their instruction to avoid problems.

9. There are many learning materials or sites on the Internet for English teachers. However, many teachers

do not know where they are or how to use them. There is little information on useful sites. Some of teachers use Japanese sites with Japanese language for English instruction.

I have a list of vast number of useful sites in 20 categories. The site is at http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/japanese/library/article/eigokyoiku/internet.htm.

List of Useful Sites (abridged)

Typing
M I K A T Y P E (http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~BG8J-IMMR/)
MIKATEXT (http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~BG8J-IMMR/)

E-Mail
Free E-mail (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/japanese/library/kyozai//abroad/#fre)
Writing Materials (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/library/student/writing/)

Keypal Project
Keypal Opportunities for Students (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/online/www/keypal.htm)
E-Mail Keypals for Language Fluency (http://www.kyoto-su.ac.jp/~trobb/keypals.html)

Chat and MOO
On-Line Chat Information and Chat Sites (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/online/www/chat.htm)
Using Chat to Teach English (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/library/article/jaltcall2000.htm)

Student Projects
Web Projects for the ESL/EFL Class: Famous Japanese Personages (http://www.kyoto-su.ac.jp/~trobb/projects.html)
Student Projects (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/japanese/online/project.htm)

Making Web Pages
GeoCities (http://geocities.yahoo.com/home/)
Making Simple HTML Files (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/online/www/kitao/int-www.htm#adv)

Quizzes
Self-Study Quizzes for ESL Students (http://www.aitech.ac.jp/~iteslj/quizzes/index.html)
Flash Quizzes for English Study (http://a4esl.org/q/f/)
ESL Quiz Center (http://www.pacificnet.net/~sperling/quiz/)
Quiz Site (http://quizsite.com/)

Dictionaries

Reference Materials: Dictionaries, Thesauruses, Quotations, Encyclopedias, Grammar, etc. (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/online/www/referenc.htm#reference)

Teaching/Learning Materials

TESL/TEFL(http://ilc2/users/kkitao/online/www/www2.htm#tesl)

Study Abroad

Study Abroad (http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/online/www/study.htm)

Studying Abroad (http://ilc2/users/kkitao/class/material/abroad/)

Library

(http://ilc2.doshisha.ac.jp/users/kkitao/library/)

Conclusion

Using these and other suggestions, I believe that the Internet can become more useful both for improving students' English and improving international understanding.

Notes

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The bulletin board we have used for discussion among high school teachers in Kochi Prefecture is at http://www2e.biglobe.ne.jp/~msnaga/cgi-bin/discussplus/discuss.cgi?id=net&info=1&stat=1. We have discussed various and probably most issues we need to consider when we use the Internet in English teaching in secondary school, though discussion is in Japanese.

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