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ACTIVITIES BASED ON INTERNET CONTENT FOR ESP

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***Abstract.** The article deals with benefits and limitations of a content-based approach to ESP and examines how WebQuests can be integrated into ESP teaching.*

***Key words:** English for special purposes (ESP), content-based activities, Internet-based information, WebQuest, specialized vocabulary, background information, problem solving.*

ВИКЛАДАННЯ ПРОФЕСІЙНО ОРІЄНТОВАНОЇ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ З ЗАСТОСУВАННЯМ ІНТЕРНЕТ-СЕРЕДОВИЩА

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***Анотація.** Розглядаються переваги та обмеження застосування матеріалів контенту у викладанні професійно-орієнтованої англійської, а також шляхи інтеграції веб-квестів в навчання.*

***Ключові слова:** Професійно орієнтована англійська, види діяльності на основі контенту, інформація з інтернету, веб-квест, фонові інформація, вирішення проблеми.*

In view of widespread internet technologies there have appeared approaches focused on content-based education as one of the most appropriate methods to learn and to construct knowledge. Such an approach can be successfully applied to teaching English for special purposes (ESP). The Internet as a learning tool can be adjusted quite well to a content-based ESP syllabus. Among the benefits of its use in the foreign language classroom are the following:

- More opportunities for students to work with the target language and content area because they spend more time on the task [2].
- Increased motivation and participation.
- The possibility to introduce an approach based on critical thinking and problem solving [6].

- Greater integration and consolidation of reading and writing skills and opportunity to practice them in meaningful context.
- More autonomous self-paced learning which is student-controlled rather than teacher-controlled [5].

In addition to these benefits, the Internet provides the resources necessary to carry out authentic projects and analysis, hence development of ESP students' communicative competence. Such resources enable teachers to design role-playing and simulation activities using authentic material. Kimball [3] stresses that "Internet-generated materials can be flexibly arrayed to engage students with topics and cognitive tasks relevant to their professional futures."

Activities exploiting Internet resources have many forms, from simple and undemanding to integrated ones comprising various skills. WebQuests seem to be especially promising ones because they are inquiry-based activities in which learners interact with information coming primarily from resources on the Internet [1].

Although the WebQuests free to use are designed for native speakers and have not been developed as activities for second and foreign language learning, they can be effectively used as activities for a content-based approach to English for Specific Purposes (ESP) instruction. There are hundreds of Web sites that offer guidelines for teachers and samples of students' work; entering "WebQuest" in any search engine will turn up dozens of them. One place to start is *A WebQuest of WebQuests*, an Internet site by Bernie Dodge, a professor of educational technology at San Diego State University in California who has been developing this model for Internet-based teaching and learning since 1995.

Most WebQuests are designed so that students can integrate complex concepts of a specific discipline – for example, science, music, art, or history – with new technologies [1]. The principles underlying WebQuests are those of constructivism. Internet technology is integrated into the course curriculum, thus enabling students to learn by constructing their perceptions of complex concepts.

A WebQuest must have the following steps [1]:

1. An introduction that explains the activity and provides background information.
2. A task that is feasible and interesting.
3. A set of information sources needed to complete the task
4. A description of the process the learners should follow to complete the task.
5. Some guidelines on how to organize the information.
6. A conclusion that closes the quest.

In a WebQuest, students go beyond mere fact finding by studying a controversial issue in order to analyze its components and suggest a solution [4]. First, they need to learn some basic background information about the issue. Then, working in small groups, students become "experts" on some aspect of the problem by analyzing the Web sites given to them by the teacher. Finally, students complete a real world activity such as e-mailing elected officials or presenting their interpretation to recognized experts on the topic [4].

WebQuests foster cooperative learning, since students usually have to collaborate and share information to solve a problem or find an answer to a complex question. They engage students in performing authentic simulation tasks by providing up-to-date information on a topic and by helping students develop critical reading and synthesizing skills. They also promote writing with a purpose for a real-world audience.

Although the Internet is a useful tool in teaching, it has limitations and can pose problems for some learners. Elementary and intermediate level students can feel overwhelmed by the wealth of information and may lack the proficiency in English necessary to understand many texts. Of course, not all the information accessible on the Web is relevant for ESP students. Additionally, lack of direction may become an insuperable hindrance. Therefore, at every stage of an activity learners need to know the purpose of the task they are performing and what to do next.

These difficulties can be overcome with appropriately planned WebQuests. A Web-Quest must be integrated into the ESP curriculum, taking into account the overall design and goals of the course. The teacher should explain the activity, its purpose, the benefits the students can obtain by doing it, and the expected outcomes. Before starting a WebQuest, students should be given some background information on the topic of the task and some practice with the vocabulary they will encounter in the WebQuest.

The task must be challenging and relevant to the students in order to maintain their interest and enhance their motivation. The type of WebQuest and the tasks that the students have to perform must be suitable to their level of knowledge of English and the ESP content area, the topic should be familiar to them and the material should be related to their field of knowledge, in order to enhance their confidence.

The guidelines for teachers given by Warschauer and Wittaker [6] are useful for the design of WebQuests and for ways to use them in class. Teachers should consider carefully the goals of the task, not underestimate its complexity, provide necessary support, and involve students in decision making.

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