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EXPLORING THE POWER OF WEB-BASED MAPPING SERVICES TO BOOST ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract. *In today's digital age, the integration of technology into education is becoming increasingly common. This article examines the potential benefits and strategies of using web online mapping services in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It provides a comprehensive overview of how web mapping tools can improve EFL instruction, aid in language acquisition, and encourage active engagement in the learning process. The article delves into the innovative integration of web mapping services into EFL instruction to enhance language learning experiences. It explores new strategies and the transformative potential of using digital mapping tools in language education.*

Keywords: *EFL, web online mapping services, language acquisition, technology integration, pedagogical strategies.*

Introduction. Over the last 20 years, there has been a tremendous shift in the way that users integrate technology into their personal lives. These changes have taken time to filter down into the educational sector, but slowly teachers have realised the need to adapt their practice to reflect the changing nature of technological use in the wider world. The use of technology in education has significantly transformed teaching and learning methods across different subjects. Technology has great potential to enhance language acquisition and engage students in language teaching. Online mapping services, such as Google Maps and interactive mapping applications, offer visually rich and interactive experiences that can be utilized to improve English Language Teaching (ELT). This paper aims to explore the use of web-based mapping services in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instruction, highlighting the potential benefits and effective teaching techniques. The digital era has opened up new possibilities for improving teaching methods, and this paper seeks to investigate the transformative impact of digital mapping services on language acquisition and cultural understanding.

This article also aims to examine existing literature and research to shed light on the effectiveness and significance of this innovative technique for English language learners worldwide. For learner's effective classroom strategies have traditionally involved the use of

songs, rhymes and traditional stories with repeated language structures. The internet can be a rich source of authentic oral models via recorded songs, talking electronic books, podcasts, and video clips that help learners with pronunciation as well as the acquisition and reinforcement of new vocabulary. These tools can also help to support teachers who don't feel as confident with their own language skills. Notable academics advocating for experiential, hands-on learning experiences and emphasizing the importance of constructivist learning theory in education include Vygotsky and Dewey. According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, language development is rooted in social interactions and real-world experiences, while Dewey's experiential learning theory involves putting students in real-world situations to promote deeper understanding and skill acquisition. The article stresses the importance of taking into account the global context.

The incorporation of technology into school-wide teaching pedagogy as outlined above means that students will also develop *digital literacy skills* at the same time as acquiring a second language. It can be argued that because 'the ever-expanding connectivity of digital technology is recasting social arrangements and relations in a more open, democratic and ultimately empowering manner' (Selwyn, 2013: 2), so 'teaching our students language in its traditional media is no longer enough' and 'increasingly, in everyday and professional life, people need the skills of electronic literacy.' (Healey et al., 2011: 9). Clearly, because 'learning and literacy are changing radically in the internet age' (Richardson, 2012: 15), a place must be found for digital literacy in education, but what does being *digital literate* entail?

There are many definitions of digital literacy, and what is interesting is the way the definitions have evolved to reflect the way the technology has changed. One definition, for example, states that it is 'the ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers' (Gilster, 1997: 1), whereas a more recent definition expands it to '[a] person's ability to perform tasks effectively in a digital environment... Literacy includes the ability to read and interpret media, to reproduce data and images through digital manipulation, and to evaluate and apply new knowledge gained from digital environments.' (Jones-Kavalier and Flannigan, 2006: 1). One thing is certain, to be literate in the 21st century requires a more 'multimodal' (i.e. combining words, images, and sounds) approach because 'multimodality is more pervasive, diverse, and important today than ever before' (Gee and Hayes, 2011: 5).

One could also argue that digital literacy is more important now that more and more of our secondary learners come to school with mobile devices that have the potential to revolutionise

what happens in the classroom. Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) is one of the most interesting emerging types of technology enhanced learning, especially now that mobile devices are carried by more and more people every day, and that the mobile phone 'has evolved from a simple voice device to a multimedia communications tool capable of downloading and uploading text, data, audio, and video – from text messages to social network updates to breaking news, the latest hit song, or the latest viral video' and that it can also 'be used as a wallet, a compass, or a television, as well as an alarm clock, calculator, address book, newspaper, and camera.' (Kelly and Minges, 2012: 11). It is not just about the developed world, either: 'The developing world is now more mobile than the developed world' and 'the pace at which mobile phones spread globally is unmatched in the history of technology'. In 2003, 61 per cent of the world's population had access to a mobile cell signal, rising to 90 per cent by 2010.

In secondary education this is important because 'nearly every student carries a mobile device, making it a natural choice for content delivery and even field work and data capture' (Johnson et al., 2009). This combination of available applications and a device that learners usually carry offers an opportunity to introduce learners to tools for study which could help them in later life, as well as new motivating ways of learning a language. Because of this, the implications for secondary education are dramatic.

However, in most secondary teaching situations, learners are not allowed to make use of these devices, even when, in many cases, these could be powerful aids to language learning. The final case study is an example of a teacher who has started to implement mobile learning in her classes, and how she and a colleague overcame resistance from the school and some of their colleagues.

A survey of pertinent literature was done to look into integrating web-based mapping services in EFL training. We investigated academic publications, peer-reviewed papers, and pedagogical materials to learn about mapping tools' theoretical underpinnings and real-world uses in language acquisition. Pedagogical tactics and instructional approaches for integrating web mapping services were also examined to determine best practices and efficient implementation techniques. A comprehensive assessment of the literature covering educational technology, language acquisition theories, and pedagogical techniques was carried out to unveil the dynamic potential of integrating online mapping services in EFL instruction. The investigation covered various sources, such as academic publications, conference proceedings, and instructional websites, to get information about the most efficient methods and approaches for utilizing digital mapping tools in language learning.

Using web-based mapping applications in EFL training has several advantages for language learners. First, by giving pupils visual context and practical application to language learning, these tools help students understand abstract language concepts and give them more substance. Interactive mapping activities facilitate communicative and interactive learning environments by encouraging active involvement and cooperation. Synchronous solutions like video-conferencing and face-to-face interaction through online virtual worlds are becoming increasingly popular as vehicles to promote language learning. Video conferencing is being used to bring learners together over distance so that they can communicate in a common language and share cultural experiences. Virtual worlds like Second Life, Active Worlds, and Open Sim afford learners the possibility of 'living' within a 3D space, collaboratively developing content and interacting with peers through virtual experiences: debates, role play, exhibitions, and performances. Asynchronous tools like email, blogging, and the collaborative development of wikis also have a significant role to play in facilitating the co-creation of content, where learners interact with peers by composing, editing, and exchanging texts. These technologies offer learners the opportunity to engage in activities that produce comprehensible output and where meaning has to be negotiated. It has been argued for some time that for learners to develop competent language skills they need to engage in comprehensible output. Additionally, web mapping services support genuine language use by exposing learners to various linguistic settings and cultural information encoded within maps. Research indicates that integrating mapping exercises into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curricula improves students' spatial reasoning abilities, cultural awareness, and language ability. A summary of the research shows that integrating web mapping services into EFL education is connected with a tapestry of creative methods and promising results. Using anything from virtual field trips to interactive language games built into maps, teachers have made the most of digital mapping to help students develop their language skills, cultural sensitivity, and spatial reasoning.

In conclusion, by offering dynamic, real-world, and captivating learning opportunities, incorporating web-based mapping services has enormous potential to improve EFL training. Teachers may design dynamic language learning environments that support students' linguistic, cultural, and digital abilities by utilizing mapping tools' visual and interactive characteristics. Subsequent investigations should delve more into the efficaciousness of diverse instructional methodologies and the enduring consequences of incorporating mapping technology into EFL curricula. Through digital mapping, educators stimulate inquisitiveness, cultivate international proficiency, and enable students to traverse worldwide terrain confidently and proficiently. The

range of technologies now available can support teachers in a variety of ways both inside the young learner classroom, but also increasingly in the home environment and while learners are on the move about their daily lives. Technological use is clearly 'situated', dependent on context and predicated on the notion that what works in one context may not be entirely replicable in another. However, creative practitioners will always be able to see the potential for an idea and are particularly adept at customizing approaches to meet the individual needs of their learners. Using technology to enhance language learning, as Jewell mentions 'allows for increased learner autonomy and control, providing a more student-centred pedagogy' with learners at the centre of the learning process and 'more actively engaged in their learning than in traditional direct instruction methods' (Jewell, 2006: 178). Finally, encouraging the use of educational technology in secondary language education has wider implications: if we are truly interested in preparing our students to be responsible citizens in an increasingly technologically advanced society, then our way of teaching our students must reflect this.

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