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Bringing the world to the classroom – towards ‘virtual reality’ pedagogies for international education

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Abstract

The ‘field’ is an integral part of international education at the tertiary level. Students are taken to the field in order to experience, first hand, the themes, processes and people that they learn about in the classroom. Despite the critical importance of the fieldtrip mode of teaching and the positive impact it has on learning, budget constraints mean that fieldtrips are becoming less common in tertiary curricula, especially when they involve learning about international topics. One potential way to counteract this is to identify how we might construct a ‘virtual’ field. This article reflects on this process in general and presents two case studies that attempt to bring the field to the classroom.

Keywords: international education, development studies, geography, tourism, virtual reality, simulation games, virtual fieldwork

Adopting an intercultural stance in EFL teaching and learning in a Vietnamese university: insights and outcomes

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Abstract

Intercultural language learning has become an important goal of foreign language education in response to the need for people to function in an increasingly multicultural world. Many foreign language programmes around the world have adopted an intercultural pedagogy which seeks to integrate into the language teaching experience opportunities for developing intercultural competence for language learners. This paper reports on an ongoing study that investigated the effect of adopting an intercultural stance on developing learners' intercultural competence in a tertiary EFL class at a Vietnamese university. Over a nine-week teaching period, eighteen English speaking lessons for two intact, equivalent classes of English-majoring students (N=38, N=33) were observed. For one class, the lessons were adapted to reflect the principles of intercultural language teaching and learning. For the other, no changes were made. The results showed that the intercultural competence of learners in the intercultural class increased significantly more than that of learners in the standard class. In particular, the students in the intercultural class were able to better articulate ethnorelative awareness and attitudes towards their home culture and the target culture. Overall, the study provided evidence for the feasibility and benefits of intercultural language learning in an Asian context. It also showed that intercultural language learning cultivated learners' affective capacities, which were usually overlooked in the EFL classroom. Implications about the classroom tasks that enhanced learners' intercultural competence are also mentioned.

Exploring the effects of language on students' mathematics and science achievements in ASEAN countries using Hierarchical Linear Modelling

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Abstract

The effect of language on achievement is an important issue as the language policy for teaching has become a sensitive and controversial topic in many ASEAN countries. This paper reports on the research that is based on a secondary analysis of performance of pupils in three ASEAN countries in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2007 in which pupils wrote tests in mathematics and science. The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of language on pupils' performance in mathematics and science subjects, taking into account gender differences and their socioeconomic status. Given the complexity of data collected in TIMSS, multi-level modelling techniques were used to account for the clustering effects. These found that within-classroom differences account for around half or more of the variations in student achievements in mathematics and science subjects in Singapore and Thailand. On the other hand, the within-class differences account for less than forty percent of the variations in student achievements in Malaysia. The effects of language on achievements for both subjects are not significant among Indonesian pupils, but it has a negative effect on mathematics achievement in Malaysia and has a positive effect on science achievement in Singapore.

Learning to adjust: The experiences of a sample of Chinese students in a New Zealand first-year undergraduate course

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Abstract

New Zealand's tertiary institutions experienced rapid growth in international student numbers in the last two decades, with Chinese students accounting for the majority of this growth. When they begin their studies in New Zealand, these students encounter very different teaching and learning models from those they experienced in China. To succeed, they need to quickly adjust, 'unlearn' previous ways of studying and acquire new skills.

The study reports the experience of a sample of Chinese undergraduates in a first-year management paper. It examines the challenges the students face as they confront different lecturing styles and material, participative tutorials, case studies and group presentations, and an emphasis on application rather than simply textbook-based study.

Data were obtained from observations, group and individual interviews. The findings illustrate the difficulties many Chinese students face as they struggle in lectures and tutorials with a language barrier, a continuous flow of internal assessment and different styles of lecturing. For many Chinese students, the first-year paper was a major challenge to their academic career in the west.

Keywords: Learning adjustment, international students, learning models

Language and cultural identity: Resolving the conflicts in using national language and English in Bangladesh context

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Abstract

Language plays a vital role in national and cultural identity of any country. The national identity, the cultural identity is completely mingled with the language a person speaks. In this paper I would like to show the relationship between language and nationalism and cultural identity, what way a language can contribute to the understanding a culture and how this is reflected through a nation's language, how it will help build a nation. In this context I will also try to show the very interesting position English holds in Bangladesh and how the contrast between Bangla and English can be minimized. Being a proud Bangladeshi I would be happy to provide most instances from our national language Bangla, although I would cite examples from some neighbouring nations as well.

Learning Strategies of Portuguese as a Foreign Language: Face-to-face vs distance learning

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Abstract

In a globalised society where the specific qualities of individual learners must nonetheless be recognised and valued, we will examine learning strategies in formal settings utilised by adult foreign language students of differing provenance—linguistic, generational, professional, cultural, gender, among others—in both face-to-face and distance settings. To this end, we propose to present a postgraduate research project in Language Didactics currently being conducted under the auspices of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Porto (Portugal). Given that the understanding and appreciation of practical knowledge is equally as important as, or even more important than, declarative knowledge, we shall argue in favour of a reflective, critical, constructive and proactive teaching method aimed at enhancing and developing cognitive, metacognitive and motivational strategies for foreign language learners.

Going global, staying intercultural: The e-competencies in Portuguese foreign language learning

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Abstract

In recent years, the new technologies have had a major impact in foreign language teaching and learning, especially in a globalised modern world, where mastering foreign languages is indispensable to foster a successful intercultural dialogue. This can be achieved by an internet-mediated constructivist approach, which is even more significant when it comes to bridging the gap in a non-immersive language-learning context through the development of the learners' autonomy and interaction skills. This article is meant to discuss how the use of diverse Web 2.0 tools like Facebook, Skype and YouTube can effectively convey cultural traits and enhance the learners' intercultural communication competence and awareness, by determining their initial cultural expectations, assessing their motivation in getting acquainted with other ways of life, interpreting and mediating between different cultures and their own, analysing them critically and eventually changing points of view, and gradually shifting towards a cross-cultural adaptation. This approach promotes a more conscious understanding, and a mutual respect, of the other's language and culture in a globalised yet multicultural world. We also propose to take into account some practical suggestions of a project developed within this perspective, involving students from different nationalities, mother tongues and backgrounds in the scope of a post-graduate course in Foreign Language Didactics at the Faculty of Arts from the University of Porto in Portugal.

Keywords: Foreign Language Learning; Intercultural Communication Competence & Awareness; Cultural Expectations and Adjustments; Web Tools.

Website attribute evaluation system (WAES) – a tool for qualitative analysis of the website marketing strategy of tertiary education providers from New Zealand

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The study investigates the practices of web presence strategies by tertiary education providers in New Zealand. It introduces an assessment scale, namely Website Attribute Evaluation System (WAES), customised to measure the performance of educational institution websites in five different aspects of performance. A sample of 349 websites of the tertiary education institutes listed on the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) website was chosen. The result indicates that the overall performance of the websites was less than the expected standard. Identified key areas of improvement are accessibility, appearance, and ownership declaration, followed by providing accurate up-to-date organisational information. Websites can become a valuable tool for developing competitive advantage. The proposed scale can be used as a valuable tool for benchmarking the quality of the higher education websites. A number of strategies are proposed to increase the performance of these websites and improve the quality of service provided through them. The findings of the study might be of interest for policy makers, educationists and researchers.

Key words: Website evaluation techniques; New Zealand university website; Service; Web strategy; Choice of university; Student decision making process; Web strategy analysis

Abbott, M and Ali, Ershad (2011). Fundamentals of Economics. South Melbourne: Cengage Learning. ISBN: 978 0170217293

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