

Develop Students' Soft Skills Using WebQuest: A Review

Nur Hafizah Rabi'ah Husin, Norhayati Husin, Nooryuhanis Hashim

Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Dungun, Terengganu, Malaysia

Received: August 26, 2015

Accepted: November 4, 2015

ABSTRACT

In this era, information and communication technology (ICT) has been a vital component in education and is a must to be integrated in every aspect of teaching and learning process. WebQuest is one example of ICT tools that has been widely used by educators to allow autonomy learning among students. Soft skills on the other hand, are a personal requirement that needs to be nurtured in every student as preparing them for the future needs. Thus, this paper discusses the importance of soft skills, the advantages of integrating WebQuest in classroom teaching and learning, and the incorporation of WebQuest in developing soft skills.

KEYWORDS: WebQues, Soft Skills, Information and Communication Technology (ICT).

INTRODUCTION

In today's world, teaching methodology has been going through a lot of changes and is getting more advanced day by day. The rapid growth of information and communication technology (ICT) and globalization have given a vast impact on educational system. Students are living in the era of ICT, where their education is much influenced by the integration of ICT. They are expected to acquire knowledge, master skills and develop an attitude towards their own education. Curriculum has also been altered and designed to integrate the use of ICT in teaching and learning process, while teachers are required to attend courses to equip them to fully use ICT tools in their teaching. This has moved the method of conventional teaching to technology-assisted education.

There is a variety of teaching trends and practices that are incorporating ICT such as mobile learning, e-learning, virtual learning, computer-assisted learning, web based learning, podcasting, vodcasting and even gaming simulation. The application of technology in teaching and learning does not only include the use of computer in the classroom, but it has expanded to the use of mobiles and gadgets such as personal digital assistants (PDAs), Smartphones, WebPad, tablet personal computer (PC), notebook and some other exclusively designed devices.

The importance of ICT in education has urged the teaching field in Malaysia to implement the use of ICT in classroom. This is believed by Ministry of Education (MOE) that the improvement in educational system enables students to become computer literate citizens, embeds ICT as a teaching and learning tool, and increases productivity, efficiency and effectiveness of classroom teaching and learning [4]. A large sum of money has been invested by the Ministry to ensure the technology is successfully used in the classroom as to achieve the objectives. Many steps have been taken by them such as implementing ICT in the teaching syllabus, supplying computers in schools with local area network (LAN) and Internet connections, providing trainings for teachers and the implementation of Malaysian Smart School project.

Apart from the rapid changes in integrating ICT in educational system in Malaysia, a recent awareness on the importance of human capital development is also highlighted. Human capital development comprises of soft skills elements which are believed need to be taught to students along with upgrading their mentality and intellectual capacity of a nation in order to achieve a developed country. According to [11], human capital development is also to chase the rapid growth of globalization not only in the capability of a nation to use ICT, but also in developing knowledge along with creativity and innovation.

Therefore, an announcement has been made by the Ministry of Higher Education demands public universities in Malaysia to introduce the elements of soft skills and integrate them in the undergraduate syllabus. The reasons for this urge are due to several factors. Firstly, many graduates nowadays are unemployed because they are lack of soft skills. Their academy performance may be outstanding but it does not guarantee them to excel in working field. Secondly, employers and educators frequently complain about students' lack of soft skills especially in communication and analytical skills [9, 10]. Their lacking of soft skills does not meet with the demand of today's job-market.

The lack of soft skills among Malaysian undergraduates is probably due to the "rote learning" practise. Since in primary schools, parents, peers, and school have put great pressure on the children to excel in academic. This is

due to examination-based education system that is being practised in Malaysia where the students are demanded to get good grades. Consequently, they may be successful in study but not in their personality development. Another factor that contributes toward the lacking of communication skills among Malaysian graduates is language proficiency especially in English language. Many factors play part in this issue such as exposure, awareness, family and social background, the teaching methods, and learners' initiatives to learn the language.

As the government is highlighting the importance of ICT and soft skills in Malaysian education, this paper will discuss about developing soft skills elements through WebQuest. The importance of soft skills and the benefits of WebQuest through prior researches will also be thoroughly discussed.

SOFT SKILLS AND THE IMPORTANCE

According to [10], the perception of soft skill is different from context to context, person to person. One element may be perceived a soft skill in one specific area, and may be a hard skill in another. The difference of hard skills and soft skills is the hard skills refer to the technical procedures or hands-on tasks that are easy to be taught, measured, observed and quantified. While the latter deals with the quality of a person that can be categorized into three main categories, that are personal traits, interpersonal skills, and problem solving and decision making skills. Soft skills are vital in career survival although it is not easy to teach.

The element of soft skills that is popularly known is communication skills. This is the skill that many graduates are lack of especially in using the second language, English. Language proficient includes the ability to use the language in terms of speaking and writing in the standard language. According to [10], ones may not be able to perform well, but his competency in communication skills would be a bonus for him that can cover up his deficiency in hard skills. This skill is not only can establish a person's professional career, but also can lead to one's social competence.

Another skill that is seen important by employers in the working field is the ability to think critically and solve problems. This skill is important as to meet the job demands where graduates need to have the abilities to identify and analyse complex situation or problem as well as making rational evaluations [9]. Therefore, a good employee has to think in a critical, creative, innovative and analytical manner which includes the ability to apply knowledge and find innovative approaches or alternative solutions to any problems.

Table 1: Soft skills elements [10]

| | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication skills • Critical and structured thinking • Problem solving skills • Creativity • Teamwork capability • Negotiating skills • Self-management • Time management • Conflict management • Cultural awareness • Common knowledge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility • Etiquette and good manners • Courtesy • Self-esteem • Sociability • Integrity/honesty • Empathy • Work ethic • Project management • Business management |
|---|---|

There are a lot of elements that have been identified as soft skills, and Table 1 is one of the examples. According [9, 10], soft skills can be divided into three categories which are personal qualities, interpersonal skills and additional skills/knowledge. The Malaysian Institute of Higher Learning emphasises the need of non-academic skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication and lifelong learning apart from the knowledge and practical aspects. In the effort of incorporating soft skills in tertiary education syllabus, seven important traits of soft skills are embedded which are communication skills, critical thinking and problem solving skills, teamwork, lifelong learning and information management skills, entrepreneurship skill, ethics and professional moral and leadership skill.

The implementation of soft skills in education is because soft skills are indeed fundamental to every student as to shape one's personality and as to complement the hard skills. Knowing the knowledge and how to do are not enough in today's world. It is because companies are always looking out for employees who are able to lead in any situations and have good communication skills, apart from being highly qualified in technical expertise. Therefore, the incorporating of soft skills in the education syllabus is to cater the problems of unemployment among graduates. So, the graduates will be able to fulfil the expectations from the employers and able to be competitive as to differentiate themselves from the other capable qualified candidates.

WEBQUEST AND THE ADVANTAGES

WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented learning approach, developed by Bernie Dodge and Tom March in 1995 [12], which learners need to find and gather information from various websites to complete tasks. It is a web-based learning that aims to create lessons or tasks that integrate a good use of the web, promote learners to think critically to authentic problems and gain the knowledge, and use everyone's time well. WebQuest is a very effective teaching and learning tool that allow students into independent and centred learning and allow the teachers to make use of ICT in teaching and learning process.

The WebQuest model is based on constructivism, self-directed learning, collaborative learning, situated learning and scaffolded learning [1]. The instruction for the lessons can be designed in either short-term or long-term and the objective can be either to incorporate information to create new purposes or to critically review information from various perspectives. The resources on the Internet will be carefully selected and provided by the instructors as to guide the learners to find the information. There are six attributes in WebQuest. These include an introduction to the task or problem, achievable and fascinating tasks, a depiction of the process, lists of online sources and perspectives, followed by evaluation and conclusions.

WebQuest is an efficient learning tool to organise enormous resources from internet and help learners to gain a lot of knowledge through a guided and directed-learning setting. It has been extensively used by many teachers in various subjects such as science, biology, English language, literature and music [1, 5-8]. Furthermore, a lot of studies also have been conducted to investigate the effectiveness of WebQuest and they have reported that it does have a significant positive effects in many ways.

According to [3], it lists the strengths of WebQuest as followed:

- Is an alternative teaching method that enhances students' motivation in class.
- Serves as an alternative assessment tool of students' learning.
- Provides teachers an idea of the students' degree of acquisition of knowledge and implementation of the knowledge.
- Provides teachers an opportunity to view and evaluate students' ability to learn using technology.
- Enhances teachers' creativity in thinking and writing
- Enhances teachers' higher-order thinking skills
- Requires students to be active learners.
- Allows students to use Internet as an important learning tool.

From the studies done by researchers, most of them agreed that WebQuest does inculcate critical thinking skills. It promotes independent thinking [1] when they work individually. In completing task in groups, the learners able to analyse, organize and synthesize information the data that they have gathered [6, 8].

The second advantage highlighted in the use of WebQuest is the collaborative work. In [1, 5-8] agree that WebQuest promotes team integration as the learners have to seek solutions for the problem, share their information and take into account the information of others. Thus, every member has to carry out the role and the responsibility to complete the task. They also have to be able to give and receive feedback from the other members.

The other advantage of WebQuest is it enables the students to read extensively. The respondents in [8] reveal that they had to read a lot of online reading sources to complete the task but it did not overwhelm them. They were interested in seeking the information, and learned a great deal of vocabulary [7] and various reading strategies such as word guessing, finding main ideas and skimming skills.

Motivation is also a benefit gained by learners in the incorporating of WebQuest in their learning. WebQuest develops learners' interest to complete the task in investigating, exploring the sources and producing their final work [5]. Compared to traditional method of teaching, this self-directed learning allows the learners to drive their own learning process [6]. This motivates them to participate in the classroom learning and use WebQuest effectively.

These are the advantages that are found from prior studies. It is believed by many teachers and researchers that it is an effective web-based instructional tool to assist students learning without much depending on teachers. Some of the benefits discussed above are definitely the elements of soft skills.

SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND THE IMPLEMENTATION

According to [9], the implementation of soft skills in tertiary education can be done as a stand-alone subject or by embedding it in existing courses. As for a stand-alone subject, the courses such as English (written and oral), entrepreneurship and others elective subjects can be offered to students in any semester. These stand alone subjects

provide an opportunity to the students to develop soft skills on a formal basis. Alternatively, soft skills also can be introduced by interweaving them with the course content and integrating soft skills elements in the curriculum will be a greater way out.

In [2], they state that soft skills can benefit strongly from ICT, both in gaining the skill and in performing the skill. The information skills, presentation skills, team working skills, and project working skills are also essential for social necessities apart of for one's educational career. It is where people are expected to learn for lifelong benefit, to improve the skills endlessly and to capitalize in their education. Therefore, WebQuest can be seen as a good web-based instruction tool that provides a lot of benefits especially in developing soft skills elements.

Soft skills can be developed but it cannot be taught. It is the role of the teachers to identify the most effective way to develop a student's personal development. In [9, 10] agree that to develop soft skills, the teaching method should promote learner-centered learning. This is because when the learners participate actively in their own learning, this allows them to gain the benefits themselves and seek for improvement. The teachers only hold the role as facilitator to guide and assist the students' learning. Thus, WebQuest again can be a good medium for this purpose as most of the learning process is handled by the students themselves.

Other suggestions proposed by [9] are the learning styles which introducing a problem-based learning or case study in the classroom. This method will emphasize the need to think critically, analyze and synthesize the information. This can be enhanced with the need for the students to form a group work to do research and later to present their findings to the class [10]. Hence, this also gives a good idea for the teachers to use WebQuest as a teaching tool to that can be beneficial in developing students' critical thinking and problem solving.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this paper has discussed briefly the importance of soft skills, the advantages of WebQuest according to previous studies and how WebQuest can be an effective tool to develop students' soft skills in the classroom teaching and learning. Soft skills are important to the learners especially students in tertiary education. This is because soft skills are the requirements that are needed to tally with the expectations from employers and companies. However, teaching soft skills is not as easy as teaching hard skills. Thus, a proper planning of teaching strategies and methods is needed to ensure that the soft skills can be developed for every student, and the use of WebQuest as the ICT learning tool will provide the utmost benefits.

REFERENCES

1. Chen, F.-S. and Y.-W. Hsiao, 2010. Using WebQuest as a creative teaching tool at a science and technology university in Taiwan. *World Transaction on Engineering and Technology Education*, 8 (2): 203-206.
2. Diepen, N.V., E. Stefanova and M. Miranowicz, 2009. Mastering skills using ICT: An active learning approach. In: *Research, Reflections and Innovations in Integrating ICT in Education* (eds A.M. Vilas, A.S. Martin and J.M. González) pp. 226-233. Formatex, Badajoz, Spain.
3. Halat, E., 2008. A good teaching technique: WebQuests. *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, 81 (3): 109-112.
4. Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum, Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 2000. Sukatan pelajaran kurikulum bersepadu sekolah menengah: Bahasa Inggeris. Retrieved from <http://www.stsimon.edu.my/mn/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Sukatan-Pelajaran-Bahasa-Inggeris-KBSM.pdf>.
5. Lara, S. and C. Repáraz, 2007. Effectiveness of cooperative learning fostered by working with WebQuest. *Electronic Journal of Research in Educational Psychology*, 5 (3): 731-756.
6. Oliver, D., 2010. The effect and value of a WebQuest activity on weather in a 5th grade classroom, Ph.D. thesis, Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho.
7. Prapinwong, M., 2008. Constructivist language learning through WebQuests in the EFL context: An exploratory study, Ph.D. Indiana University, US.
8. Puthikanon, N., 2009. Examining critical thinking and language use through the use of WebQuests in an EFL reading class, Ph.D. thesis, Indiana University, US.
9. Shakir, R., 2009. Soft skills at the Malaysian institutes of higher learning. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 10 (3): 309-315.

10. Schulz, B., 2008. The Importance of Soft Skills: Education beyond academic knowledge. *NAWA: Journal of Language and Communication*, 2 (1): 146-154.
11. The Economic Planning Unit, Prime Minister's Department, 2006. Ninth Malaysia Plan 2006-2010. Retrieved from http://www.pmo.gov.my/dokumenattached/RMK/RM9_E.pdf.
12. Dodge, B., 1995. Some thoughts about WebQuests. *The Distance Educator*, 1 (3): 12-15.