

WIKI TECHNOLOGY IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

SVITLANA MYKYTIUK, Associate Professor, PhD (Philology)
Yaroslav Mudryi National Law University

Digital technologies have not only penetrated our life, but have substantially transformed learning patterns. e-Learning 2.0 is learning through digital connections and peer collaboration.

Wiki is a web technology used for collaborative publishing on the web. The 'WikiWiki concept' was invented by Ward Cunningham in 1995 with a project called the Portland Pattern Repository. It is a type of server software that allows working with data on a remote server on the Web. Users interact with the software through a web interface that lets them read, edit and publish content. Wikis should not be confused with Wikipedia as this online encyclopedia is only one, although the brightest, example how this technology can be used for collaborative work. The most popular Wiki Software: Wikispaces (free and low-cost wiki software); Mediawiki (free software engine used for Wikipedia); TikiWiki (open source and free wiki software) etc.

Several authors who have access to the website via the Internet and proper authorization can freely add and change the content of the wiki website: rewrite texts, add new texts and images, add and link pages etc. The wiki owner can restrict editing to a group of people, publish to a wiki individually or open it for global editing by everyone on the web.

R. Lavin defined wikis as websites that are collaboratively editable; incrementally updateable; and radically hypertextual. 'The radical hypertextuality of wikis, combined with their collaborative nature, allows for constant restructuring of information as a social process, in a way that no other major tool appears to allow'. He calls wikis 'the ultimate social constructivist tool, as, in ideal cases, users strive together for a summary of their aggregated ideas or pool their knowledge to create a constantly evolving knowledge base' [3].

The educational potential of wikis has been studied by different scholars. S. Reinhold thinks that 'as a collaborative platform, wiki systems enable writing, editing and discussing online educational content, creating online glossaries and repositories of supplemental educational material, etc' [4]. A. Bruns considers that wiki technology can replace the traditional linear approach of presenting the course content with, for certain fields of knowledge, a more appropriate networked approach [1]. G. Bubas suggests that Wiki can be used for the development of Internet-based communication literacy, the collective creation of course content and peer-to-peer learning, and can contribute to students' learning experience [2].

Due to their flexibility and relative ease of use nowadays wikis have a wide range of educational applications. Primary uses include collaborative writing, project management, and multiparty running commentaries.

Collaborative writing in wikis may have two main forms:

- sequential writing that requires students to write a story sequentially, one by one, each contributing a fixed amount of written content according to the task. This task is both challenging and engaging to students, as they themselves control the story development);

- non-linear writing that is based on the same concept of collaborative writing, but instead of creating a linear sequential story, students are offered to split their story into two or more possible developments. The whole story structure can split, multiply, merge back and resolve in an unpredictable number of ways.

For *project management* wikis' potentials for publishing research materials, compiling reports and collaborating on creative tasks that include writing and embedding images and videos are immense. A wiki newspaper in the target language is one of the examples when students have a chance to create online collaboratively.

Multiparty commentaries can be effectively used for editing and adding comments to peer works, discussing different matters on wiki discussion pages etc.

Generally all course materials can be aggregated in one wiki site to keep everything in one place: lecture scripts, presentations, tasks, reading lists etc. These wiki sites can be used as 'digital handouts'.

Despite many benefits of wikis there are certain challenges involved. They depend on the features of each wiki. For wikis which are open resources to the world and can be altered by anyone, pages may be susceptible to intrusive or irrelevant comments or editing, or indeed even malicious hacking. Another disadvantage is the lack of control over published content and the inability of making the content visible only to enrolled students of a particular course. Moreover, the use of a wiki in courses requires careful planning and preparation, monitoring and moderation of students' work, as well as reflection and adequate feedback to the students after they have completed their wiki-based tasks.

Thus, wiki technology helps to extend the learning process beyond the classroom and engage students in authentic, real-life collaborative online experiences. However, in order for wikis to function effectively for successful language acquisition, tasks and materials need to be carefully designed.

References

1. Bruns A., Humphreys S. Wikis in teaching and assessment: the M/Cyclopedia project. Proceedings of the 2005 international symposium on Wikis, San Diego, 2005. – P. 25–32.
2. Bubas G., Kermek D. Courseware tools and social software in a hybrid university course: A case study with an evaluation of the online components. Proceedings of the International Technology, Education and Development Conference - INTED2007, Valencia, Spain, 2007. – P. 23–54.
3. Lavin R. Weblogs and wikis in language teaching. [Online] Available: <http://flteaching.wikispaces.com/>
Reinhold S. WikiTrails: augmenting wiki structure for collaborative, interdisciplinary learning. *Proceedings of the 2006 International Symposium on Wikis*. Odense, Denmark, 2006. – P. 47.