Teaching Modern Greek Literature to Teenagers through a Collaborative Webquest: Design, Implementation, Evaluation

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This paper presents the design, implementation and evaluation of an innovative, collaborative learning Abstract:

approach to the teaching of Modern Greek Literature to teenage students of Junior High School. The proposed method is based on a WebQuest especially designed for this study and aimed to motivate students, increase their collaborative skills, achieve enhanced learning outcomes and change their attitude towards the subject of Literature to the positive. An educational intervention is designed and implemented in a Model Junior High School in Athens, Greece, for comparative evaluation purposes. Two 2nd grade cohorts of students are taught in parallel the same material with (experimental group) or without (control group) the use of the WebQuest. Research questions comparatively evaluate ICT 'integration' through the WebQuest as compared to ICT 'addition' of more conventional ICT-based assistive tools, along the axes of student motivation, collaborative skills, learning outcomes and attitude towards a 'difficult', unpopular school subject such as Literature. Experimental results show that the proposed approach of ICT integration using the WebQuest effectively promotes student motivation, collaborative skills and attitude towards the subject; no significant improvement is detected, though, as to the learning outcomes achieved - an issue that

deserves further research, as discussed in the conclusions.

INTRODUCTION

While Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) establish their presence in modern education worldwide, the educationally pedagogically appropriate ways of incorporating ICT in daily school practice remain open to research to this day. Educational innovations are judged along two axes of quality: students should learn 'better' and should enjoy the process at the same time. Today it is agreed that blended learning advantageous over purely conventional or purely electronic learning (Garrison and Kanuka, 2004). The degree to which the quality of the educational event is affected by (a) the 'additive' use of ICT as an assistive tool for the teacher, as compared to (b) the holistic or 'integrative' use of ICT as a tool for implementing multidisciplinary learning, however, is not so clear. The additive use of ICT tends to be the rule in education because it does not require any major shift of position or change of method from the teacher's part; rather, it is easily inserted in the teacher's habitual teacher-centered strategy where ICT plays the role of yet another attractive tool, certainly fancier than books, maps and black- or white-boards. The 'hype' generated this way will soon deflate, though, if the new tool is not made part of a carefully designed, integrative teaching/learning plan based on authentic, learner-centered activities. Research findings indicate that inappropriate, superficial use of ICT in class is worse than no use at all (Hennessy et al., 2005). One major goal of the research presented here is to experimentally compare ICT integration against ICT addition along specific axes: motivation of students, collaboration in group work, learning outcomes attained and attitude towards the subject taught. The subject selected as the test-bed is that of Modern Greek Literature, as taught to teenage students in Junior High School, and the learning strategy of choice is the incorporation of a WebQuest implemented in a collaborative learning scenario, as detailed in the following.

2 ICT AND LITERATURE

The motivation for this study comes from the double observation that (a) the school subject of Literature is not popular among teenagers, who tend to ascribe their poor performance to the conventionality of both the subject per se and the instruction methods employed, while (b) thanks to ICT, Literature outside school is undergoing a series of transformative changes. Would the introduction of ICT in the didactics of Literature render it an attractive subject and allow student to benefit in multiple ways from their interaction with it – and if yes, under what form should this be implemented?

As to the first part of this observation, existing studies at the national level, e.g., (Greek Ministry of Education, 2009) as well as the relevant experience of the first author as a teacher of Literature in high school, are in line with similar observations coming from international reports and publications on education, e.g., (Ajayi, 2015; Clarke, 2013; Doering et al., 2007; Schrijvers et al., 2016). Within the formal K-12 education system in Greece, in particular, Modern Greek Literature is the school subject that has until recently held out against the introduction and use of ICT in class. Concepts and beliefs that demote ICT to the level of a mere tool as compared to the greater, everlasting value of the literary texts have often served as the grounds for this policy.

As to the second part of this observation, the last couple of decades have witnessed an interesting convergence of ICT and Literature, expressed in the new concepts and forms of e-literature, cyberliterature, hyper-literature, digital or web or computer literature. Each of these neologisms sheds light on a different aspect of the convergence; taken together, they emphasize the fact that digital technologies, multimedia and the Internet are essential elements to the conception, writing, reading and publishing of modern Literature. Today, Literature is undergoing a number of significant transformations, the non-linear constructs, blogging, fan-fiction and transmedia storytelling being the most evident ones. The hope to attract new readers from among new target groups re-emerges, backed up by the attractiveness, availability and portability of the new media, devices and technologies.

Teenagers have always been a 'tough' target group for Literature, either in or out of the school class. Modern education has now a strong weapon in the forms of hyper-literature and ICT-enabled practice to reverse this situation.

3 RESEARCH METHODS & TOOLS

3.1 Research Outline

An educational intervention has been designed for the purposes of this research and has been carried out comparatively, in two cohorts of Junior High School students of the 2nd grade. The experimental group has participated in a WebQuest that was set up within the curriculum of Literature and was designed as an open, realistic, collaborative activity intended to integrate ICT in the learning process. The same course contents were taught to the control group conventionally, through handouts and collaborative assignments; in that case, ICT has served as an assistive tool (students watched presentations, videos, etc.).

Research questions investigate (i) the motivation of the students, (ii) the level and quality of their collaboration, (iii) their attitude towards this course, and (iv) the learning outcomes achieved in the subject taught. Practical issues also evaluated refer to the quality of the particular WebQuest, its suitability for the target group, and the feasibility of the employed learning scenario within the limitations of the Curriculum.

Evaluation has been performed on the basis of data collected before, during and after the intervention, from (i) students in both groups, experimental and control, (ii) two non-intervening teachers-observers, and (iii) twelve (12) other teachers who volunteered to evaluate the WebQuest and the learning scenario off-line.

The tools used for data collection include: (i) the IMMS questionnaire of Keller (see section 4.4 below) to measure the motivation of students, (ii) a custom questionnaire composed by the teacher, to measure the level of collaboration and the reception of the intervention and the WebQuest, (iii) the students' group projects during the intervention and their individual projects after that, along with a post-test delivered by the teacher in class, to assess the learning outcomes, (iv) the observation sheets prepared by the teacher and completed by the two teachers-observers, along with their interviews held by the teacher aposteriori, as to the deployment of the intervention and the interaction among students, (v) the forum of the WebQuest platform itself, through which the twelve (12) volunteering teachers evaluated off-line the WebQuest design, structure, contents and overall quality.

Results indicate a clear positive impact of integrative ICT use (experimental group, WebQuest) as compared to the additive ICT use (control group)

on all research questions except the one on learning outcomes: there, the two groups attain comparable results — an interesting finding that certainly deserves further research, analysis and discussion.

3.2 Webquest: A Collaborative Tool

The WebQuest, first introduced in 1995 by B. Dodge and T. March in SDSU, California, USA, is an effective alternative learning method that engages students in well-designed activities towards clear and meaningful educational/learning targets, (Dodge, 1997). WebQuest is essentially a guided inquiry on a given problem or question, it falls, therefore, into problem-based or inquiry-based learning. Progress relies on data retrieved from sources that are chiefly electronic (the web); these are processed by the learner who constructs new knowledge and meaning and synthesizes answers.

The term 'quest' refers to a game or entertaining activity; indeed, WebQuests are set up as collaborative activities, where learners are required to work in (possibly competing) teams to complete the task set. This collaborative feature is considered as one of the major advantages of a WebQuest. WebQuests are therefore doubly founded on cognitive and on social constructivism (Kachina, 2012). What differentiates a WebQuest from other Internet-related educational activities is that (i) it stimulates in the learner mental processes of a higher level, such as critical thinking and analytic / synthetic thinking, while (ii) it promotes learner-centered, authentic, realistic and attractive learning activities, carefully designed by the instructor to fulfil a didactic aim (Richards, 2005). Ever since its first appearance around 1995, the WebQuest has been considered as an ideal example of effective incorporation of ICT in Education and has maintained its popularity up to now (Abbitt and Ophus, 2008).

In practice, a WebQuest may be a short-term (2-4 hours) activity or a long-term (1-2 months) project; by its context and plot, it falls into one of twelve (12) major classes (mystery, reporter, creative, scientific, etc.). It is structured into six (6) phases: Introduction, Task, Process, Resources, Evaluation and Conclusion. A teacher's webpage is often launched afterwards, to share material and instruction plans with colleagues. The teacher's role is to design the WebQuest, set the educational/learning targets, assign tasks, facilitate the learning process and keep learners focused, and eventually make sure results are evaluated and presented/published. For a successful WebQuest, Dodge (2001) advices teachers to 'FOCUS': 'Find great sites; Orchestrate learners and resources;

Challenge learners to think; Use the medium; Scaffold high expectations'.

3.3 Motives, Motivation and Learning

The role of motives in education and learning is explained through the theories of Piaget, Erickson and Bandura. Given the importance of motives in leveraging knowledge and learning, (Ames and Ames, 1991; Covington, 1992), a variety of strategies has been proposed to develop and sustain motives in learners. Keller's ARCS (Attention - Relevance -Confidence - Satisfaction) model directly connects the motivation of the learner to the design of the educational event carried out by the teacher (Keller, 2010). A critical point is that Satisfaction is guaranteed through internal rewards, external rewards and equity for all. Keller's model has been validated on CSCL scenarios, as a tool both to design and to evaluate a motivating learning event. In the present research, it is exploited in both these capacities, along the model's 'define-design-develop-evaluate' cyclic path.

4 EDUCATIONAL INTERVENTION AND EVALUATION

4.1 Design and Development of the 'Stories of Refugees' Webquest

The award-winning juvenile novel 'Birds on the snow', by author Toula Tigka (2006, in greek) has been selected as the literary text for the WebQuest, after extensive search by the teacher (first author). It features juvenile heroes in a realistic situation (a refugee adopted by an elderly lady and going to school in the host town), it includes a puzzling element ('what might a bird be scribbling on the snow?') that lends itself nicely to a WebQuest, it is free of social stereotypes and conveniently structured in one-chapter-per-character style.

Popular platforms for WebQuest development include Zunal (http://zunal.com), QuestGarden (http://questgarden.com) and OpenWebQuest (http://eprl.korinthos.uop.gr/openwebquest/). For the purposes of this research, the WebQuest 'Stories of Refugees' is designed and developed in the OpenWebQuest platform, which is offered free of charge and provides an interface in greek (http://eprl.korinthos.uop.gr/openwebquest/view/inde x.php?wq=1534).

'Stories of Refugees' is structured in the standard six (6) phases for WebQuests and includes missions for six (6) groups: the Linguists, the Historians, the Archaeologists, the Movie Makers, the Philologists and the Psychologists. The missions are outlined, documented, guided and carried out collaboratively; upon completion, they are presented through the platform. Figure 1 shows the Title/ID and Introduction webpages of the WebQuest (in greek). The pebble art by the awarded syrian sculptor Nizar Ali Badr and the poem 'Argonauts' by Nobel laureate greek poet George Seferis are selected to be in context with the 'Stories for Refugees' topic of the Quest.



Figure 1: Title/ID and Introduction webpages of the 'Stories for Refugees' WebQuest (OpenWebQuest platform-in greek).

4.2 Experimental Methodology, Settings and Participants

A quasi-experiment is set up to investigate the research questions stated in the Research Outline section. Such a setting uses any pre-existing grouping within the sample instead of random sampling (Cohen et al., 2002). Care is taken to demote any biasing factors between the experimental and the control group: The two groups are equivalent in school performance; they have the same class teacher in Literature; collaborative learning is employed in both cases (throughout, in the experimental group; partially, in the control group) while collaborative activities are of equal cognitive loads; common multimedia learning contents are used; two (2) class teachers-observers (the teachers for Language/Literature and Computers) are present in all sessions; the same literary text is taught in both groups; common evaluation method and criteria are used; the intervention is run in both groups by the same teacher (first author). The evaluation of the practical aspects of the intervention (quality of the WebOuest developed; suitability for the target group; feasibility of the learning scenario given the time limitations set by the Curriculum) constitutes a case

study.

Forty seven (47) 2nd grade (13-14 years old) students, in a public Model Junior High School in Athens, Greece, took part in the educational intervention. The experimental group (24 students: 16 boys and 8 girls) and the control group (23 students: 14 boys and 9 girls) are all of greek mother tongue and constitute a 'convenient' sample (one to which the instructor-first author of this paper has immediate access). It is not a representative sample, as students are admitted in Model Schools through a strict selection process involving written exams. As this could not be setup as a randomized experiment, care was taken to choose two cohorts of equivalent performance. Indeed, the cohorts selected have equivalent motivation towards the subject of Literature and equivalent class average grades (17.9) and 18.3 over 20); a pre-test was therefore not necessary. The roles of the experimental and of the control group were assigned randomly, for internal validity. A preparatory action organized before the intervention was the interdisciplinary instruction of the Greek Language and Computers subjects in the 1st and 2nd graders of this school, for 1 hour / week, to boost ICT skills and to get students to employ ICT tools in critical reading and production of texts.

4.3 The Intervention in Phases

The intervention ran in four (4) face-to-face sessions in class, of 45 minutes each, spread across two consecutive weeks. The school's digital coop classroom was employed. It is equipped with eight (8) workstations, desks arranged for groups of four (4) around each workstation, an interactive whiteboard and a video projector. Six (6) groups of students were formed, of four (4) members each, heterogeneous as to gender and performance. The learning plan was purely collaborative for the experimental group and hybrid collaborative-lecturing for the control group.

4.3.1 The Control Group Learning Plan

The text-centered interpretation approach is adopted for the control group, in an attempt to stay close to the habitual method of class instruction. Guided discussions, free dialogue, brainstorming, collaborative learning and ICT use (class wiki, audiovisual contents drawn from the Internet, digital storylines) are the strategies selected and used to provoke the students' interest and provide them with information on the topics examined. In brief, the intervention has proceeded per teaching session as follows:

1st Session: Motivation and introduction using mixed material (a poem, an image and a video), followed by oral interpretation: the teacher has read aloud the literary text in class.

 2^{nd} Session: Comprehension and interpretation of the literary text using worksheets. Tasks assigned, to be completed initially at the class and subsequently at the group level.

3rd Session: Students present their completed works (assigned in 2nd session) to the class; teacher's feedback.

4th Session: Students present their completed works (continued). The class watches a relevant video and takes part in a brainstorming session to draw conclusions as to the major message of the literary text. Personal assignments follow for homework; the intervention is concluded.

4.3.2 The Experimental Group Learning Plan

The approach used in this group is text-centered, communicative, interpretative and interdisciplinary. In order to implement collaborative learning using a WebQuest, ICT are employed as authoring tools for multimedia content contributed by students, presentation tools for completed group projects, library space and information searching and retrieval space. The intervention follows the WebQuest steps:

1st Session: Brief introduction by the teacher to the WebQuest tool; navigation in the platform. Students complete the Introduction and Activities parts in it, under the teacher's guidance. In the Evaluation part they get informed on how and on what criteria they will be evaluated and in the Process part they read their missions and get self-organized (allocation of roles and duties).

2nd Session: Students work in groups to accomplish their missions. The teacher holds a guiding, supportive role (Figure 2).

3rd Session: Students continue working in groups; they complete their missions. Group projects are uploaded to the class wiki after self-evaluation. The 3 out of 4 groups briefly present their projects live in class.

4th Session: The 4th group presents their project live in class. All groups complete the Conclusion part of the WebQuest. Personal assignments follow for homework; the intervention is concluded. Unfortunately, cross-evaluation and discussion in class to summarize major points and draw conclusions had to be omitted, due to time limitations.



Figure 2: Snapshots of 4 out of the 6 experimental group teams, while they work on their WebQuest missions.

4.4 Evaluation: Data Collection, Analysis and Results

4.4.1 Research Question 1: Motivation

The Instructional Materials Motivation Survey (IMMS) questionnaire, designed by Keller (1987) in correspondence to the ARCS method, has been employed to investigate the motivation of students in the experimental versus the control group. Students' answers to the revised IMMS (Huang et al., 2006) used in the post-test are given in Table 1, in the form of group averages +/- standard deviations, for each one of the 4 components of Motivation, namely, Attention, Relevance, Confidence and Satisfaction, and for net Motivation (sum of the 4 components). The experimental group (i) scores higher than the control group, both in net Motivation (72.550 versus 65.173) and in each of the components, while (ii) exhibits consistently lower standard deviations, which is desirable.

Table 1: Evaluation results on students' motivation along ARCS components: average +/- standard deviation.

	Experimental Group	Control Group	
Attention	38.870 ± 7.822	34.087 ± 8.005	
Relevance	$\frac{38.870 \pm 7.822}{11.500 \pm 2.078}$	10.608 ± 2.294	
Confidence	19.125 ± 3.430	18.000 ± 4.000	
Satisfaction	03.041 ± 1.122	02.478 ± 1.201	
Motivation (total)	72.550 ± 12.449	65.173 ± 13.231	

4.4.2 Research Question 2: Collaboration

The level and quality of collaboration among students in the same group was assessed through the questions:

(a) "How much has your participation in this course promoted collaboration with your classmates?" and (b) "Are you satisfied by the quality of collaboration with your classmates during this course?" Students' answers are given at five (5) levels ranging from 'Not at all' (1) to 'Extremely' (5). The results, summarized in Table 2 in absolute student numbers per answer level, agree to what the two teachers-observers have stated in their interviews: In both groups students have collaborated smoothly and managed to complete all assignments and missions. Students in the experimental group, however, have collaborated more 'fervently', being compelled to 'search and discover' and to 'use interesting new tools' which 'motivated them' - as the two teachers-observers have put it. As they had to collaborate around and through the computer, in order to resolve technical and nontechnical issues and format their projects and presentations, they exhibited a higher level of verbal and non-verbal exchange and communication than students in the control group did. No quarrel ever did arise in any one group; and yet, students in the experimental group have held more discussions and took part more actively in the group activities.

Table 2: Comparative results on collaboration: student numbers per answer level (experimental / control group).

SCIEN	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very Much	Extremely
Question (a)	2/2	2/2	4/9	8/6	8/3
Question (b)	4/2	1/2	5 / 12	6/5	6/2

4.4.3 Research Question 3: Attitude towards the Course

Students were asked to characterize the instruction/learning method employed as 'pleasant' or 'unpleasant' and to justify their answer. The majority of the experimental group students (21 out of 24) answered 'pleasant'; only three (3) students didn't find it pleasant. To justify their choice, they stated that both the learning content and the learning method were interesting, creative, enjoyable, not boring or tiring at the least. As a result, they have enjoyed working for their projects.

Further analysis of their answers to open-style questions has revealed that this attitude is due to (i) the teamwork (for the majority), (ii) their satisfaction for the quality of their project outcomes, and (iii) the fancy (and fun) of working through the computer and over the Internet.

Students in the control group have also developed a positive attitude towards this course, though not to the degree of the experimental group: 15 out of the 23 students characterized it as 'pleasant', while 8 students characterized it as 'unpleasant'; 5 of them explained 'unpleasant' as 'boring'. Only 4 students referred to collaboration in their learning plan to justify their overall satisfaction – a considerably lower count than the experimental group, where the majority referred to collaboration as a source of satisfaction.

4.4.4 Research Question 4: Learning Outcomes Attained

The progress achieved through the intervention in the cognitive domain is evaluated by (i) a post-test (8 marks) and (ii) the personal assignments given for homework at the end of the 4th session, which include a content comprehension task (6 marks) and a creative writing task (8 marks), both graded by the teacher using rubrics.

The results given in Table 3 show that the control group scored clearly higher in the post test (retention of new knowledge, 88% versus 78% for the experimental group) as well as in the creative writing personal homework assignment (75% versus 61.3%). The experimental group scored marginally higher in the content comprehension part of the homework assignment (73% versus 70%).

Table 3: Evaluation results on learning outcomes attained: group average scores (absolute values and % values).

		Homework:	Homework:
	Post-Test,	Content	Creative
	in class	comprehension	writing
	(8 marks)	(6 marks)	(8 marks)
Exper.	6.25	4.40	4.91
Group	(78.1 %)	(73.3 %)	(61.3 %)
Control	7.04	4.20	6.00
Group	(88.0 %)	(70.0 %)	(75.0 %)

The qualitative assessment of the projects completed by the teams in the two group shows that most of the experimental group teams have produced projects of a clearly higher quality compared to the control group – although these projects do not constitute fully comparable material, in terms of form, structure and targets set.

4.4.5 Evaluation of the Webquest

The WebQuest was evaluated by (i) the students and the two class teachers (design and implementation), (ii) a group of volunteering language teachers (design). Evaluated components include structure, contents, material organization and presentation, usability, technical and pedagogical soundness, suitability for the target group.

Students were positive as to all the components and particularly as to the contents, which they found to be 'clear', 'useful', 'directly correlated to the subject of Literature' and 'captivating'. Assignments were rated as 'not too difficult', 'not stressing'. Structure and presentation of the material was characterized by the majority as 'attractive', 'not overloaded', 'not cluttered'. As to the organization, only 1/3 of the students considered it 'captivating' (10 'neutral'), while answers on students were presentation style, colours and emphasis were balanced. The majority were positive as to the usability: platform access and navigation were 'straightforward'; interaction was 'easy'; no technical problems or software malfunctions have been reported. Most students commented favourably on the features of active participation, self-assessment, explicit and open evaluation criteria and feedback. The level of content and platform usage requirements were deemed suitable for the target group (themselves). Minor collaboration problems have been reported; time limitations were criticized.

The two class teachers were both strongly positive: they found the topic 'imaginative', 'uncommon' and 'interdisciplinary', the structure 'excellent', the learning process 'controlled by the student' thanks to 'student autonomy'. Pedagogic features of self-assessment, personalized instruction, student autonomy and initiative, active-discovery learning, and the development of problem-solving skills were all commented upon favourably. Suitability for the target group was answered de facto by the enthusiastic collaboration and successful completion of all missions, especially so from the experimental group, reported to include strong, highly competitive student personalities, with coordination problems and a preference for individual work at home. They found the flow of the intervention 'smooth'; they stressed the need for the teacher to plan carefully and to prepare alternatives for the case of technical problems.

The volunteering teachers-evaluators were equally or more positive in their views. They added positive comments on the scenario, the topic and its timeliness, the experiential nature of learning through WebQuests, the clarity of the structure of this WebQuest, the creativity it asked for, the multimedia presentation of the material, as well as the technical soundness and the easy platform access and navigation. Pedagogical advantages mentioned are the functional inclusion of ICT in learning, the active

participation of students 'scaffolded' by the teacher, the students' autonomy and experiential, discovery learning and the added value as to the curriculum of Literature. This type of intervention, however, was considered 'very demanding' for the teacher in terms of preparation / class time required.

5 CONCLUSIONS - FURTHER RESEARCH

The positive evaluation results obtained from post tests and questionnaires of the students, observation sheets and interviews of two class teachers-observers and a number of volunteering teachers-evaluators, are in good agreement with existing research results on collaborative learning plans employing ICT. These results reveal that the proposed approach holds a considerable potential for motivating young students towards a 'difficult' subject such as Literature, for engaging them in active, discovery learning and for cultivating their collaborative skills. They are in good agreement with positive results reported on the educational uses of WebQuests: increased motivation and engagement (Friedman and VanFossen, 2010; Ikpeze and Boyd, 2007; Tsai 2006); positive attitude towards the subject taught (Beyerbach and Burrell, 2004; Murry 2006); increased collaboration (Laborda, 2009; Leahy and Twomey, 2005).

On the other hand, the learning outcomes measured in the experimental group are comparable or slightly inferior to those of the control group. These results are in good agreement to existing research as well (Strickland and Nazzal, 2005; Gaskill et al., 2006). A possible explanation of this fact is that the experimental group has had time just enough to complete their missions; due to practical limitations, they have not been given time to recapitulate and hold a discussion in class – a phase that did take place in the control group. Another tentative explanation was offered by one of the two teachers-observers, who pointed out that no group did give wrong answers on questions directly related to their own mission. In assigning distinct roles and distinct missions to each group, the WebQuest may be decimating the taught material and thus preventing participants from 'connecting the pieces' and 'constructing the whole picture'.

In light of the fact that the construction of new knowledge, i.e. the development of interpretation strategies and creative writing skills through Literature takes time and practice, such findings should not come as a surprise. Rather, they constitute a clear indication that (a) both detailed learning planning *and* meticulous execution are critical to the quality of the results, while (b) further research and analysis is necessary in order to fully understand whether such results are inherent to the WebQuest method or may be reversed – and how. In any case – and beyond the WebQuest case – the major objectives of teaching Literature, namely, the understanding and interpretation of literary texts and the development of creative writing skills, render Literature a demanding subject and leave the question of the proper framework for ICT integration in Literature open to further research.

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