

## The Use of ICT in Social Tasks for the Teaching of English at Secondary Level



### Linguistics

**Keywords:** Webquests, social tasks, key competences, ICT, etc.

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### Abstract

In this article, it is pretended to demonstrate how the hypertext could be worked through the use of the Key Competence approach. I start defining what a social task is, and which benefits it provides to the learning process of the learners. Moreover, I introduce the Webquest as a powerful ICT tool to be included in a social task and carry out contextualized learning situations where students can focus on the development of the digital competence and the linguistic competence. Thus, I have included a real example of a social task through a Webquest developed by a team of students from my Faculty of Education.

## 1. Introduction

Nowadays, teachers as well as researchers on education need to consider the change of the education paradigm in order to focus the research and the teaching-learning dynamics of the present and the future. If we reflect on what our society and, more specific, our current and future learners demand is very different from the type of education we received in previous decades. Thus, we need to innovate and combine new methods that prove to be more successful and really connected to reality. If we do not pay attention to the constant changes our society experiments we will continue preparing students for nothing, because the future citizens need to develop skills, strategies and acquire knowledge to be competent and adaptable to the unpredictable future.

In this way, ICT and the treatment and development of the digital competence cannot be ignored or dealt with in any way. We need to show our students that the technology is not just for having fun or meeting people, they need to learn how take advantage of it for professional and academic aims too.

The main objective of this article is to show how social tasks respond to the current demand on education by contextualizing the learning and integrating different key competences in real or fictional learning situations. Moreover, the proposal I have included is focused on the use of ICT in learning English. For this reason, I introduce the Webquest and explain its benefits through the example developed by my students of the Faculty of Education.

## 2. The Social Task and the Key Competence approach

According to the Common European Framework of Reference of Languages (CEFR), a social task can be defined as any intentioned action that an individual considers necessary for

obtaining a specific result in relation to a resolution of a problem, the fulfilment of a duty or the achievement of a goal.

We can consider a social task as a new learning dynamic that can be very useful in those cases when teachers plan situations-problems that must be solved or dealt with. One of the main characteristics of social tasks is the creation of a final product, by doing so, teachers can check if their students fulfil the planned goals or not. These tasks can be fictional or real situations. Moreover, they can be planned by the teachers or be created after a reflection carried out in the classroom attending to the interests and motivations of the learners. One advantage of carrying out social tasks is that in some cases what it started as a fictional situation then can become a solution to a real problem or necessity.

Through the use of social tasks, we pretend that students will be able to relate activities and exercises in a social context. In this way, they are capable of using the key competences in meaningful learning situations for them. We cannot conceive the work on key competences without the use of contextualized activities, and social tasks are essential for it because they provide a full contextualization of the learning process. Thus, social tasks can be understood as a project to be done at the end of the didactic unit in which students put into practice the acquired learning that they were practiced during the previous sessions of the unit.

Regarding the definition of task, I provided previously, social tasks are didactic proposals whose main goal is the integration of the new concept of knowledge (to know, to do, to be) through the activation of all the available resources of the person and by allowing the transfer of knowledge to the daily life. Moreover, social tasks are useful for contextualizing the learning in any subject, not only in English, and they also offer many possibilities of development due to the fact that they can be adapted to the objectives teachers would fix.

In many of these tasks it is obtained information from Internet and the use of hypertext is indispensable as an ICT resource and as source of information and base for transforming the information that is obtained from the web. According to Pastor Sánchez and Saorín Pérez<sup>16</sup> (1995), we understand as hypertext the tools that allow us to create and manage hypertextual documents as much as the specific documents that are created with those tools.

From my point of view, the best way of learning how to use ICT is through the planning of different problems or situations in which the search of information through Internet for the creation of a specific final product will be perceived as a real need. Learning through experience and constructivist learning are the key for the development of the digital competence by the learners. However, thanks to the key competence approach through the work on social tasks, learners can develop and improve all the key competences.

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<sup>16</sup> For more information, see <http://www.ucm.es/info/multidoc/multidoc/revista/cuadern4/hiperdoc.htm>

### 3. Webquests

We should foster the use of ICT for the development and acquisition of the digital competence. Nowadays, the access to information is not a problem, the challenge consists of how students learn to classify and differentiate among reliable and unreliable information as much as to know how to process it and create original products by using it. The work on strategies for the use of Internet, word processors, presentation programs and video editors, among others, should be included although we spend much more time in favour of students acquire these strategies and know to use them in their future learning situations. Thus, we should bear in mind the inclusion of the key competence of learning to learn each time we plan social tasks in which ICT are worked. The learning will be more complete, and the results will be more productive, and this will favour the autonomy of the learners towards future experiences. Below, I will deal with the definition, types and advantages of using Webquests for working the hypertext. We can consider them as useful resources for guiding the learner to know how to search for specific information on Internet. In this way, students work following a guided process to develop more autonomy and initiative later on.

A Webquest is a guided search in Internet. In other words, they are teaching-learning activities based on Internet where the teacher selects those webpages that are reliable and contain specific information that students should know to fulfil with the final task. Moreover, the students know from the beginning the objectives of this search: which information they need to know, how to select it, structure it and present it, etc.

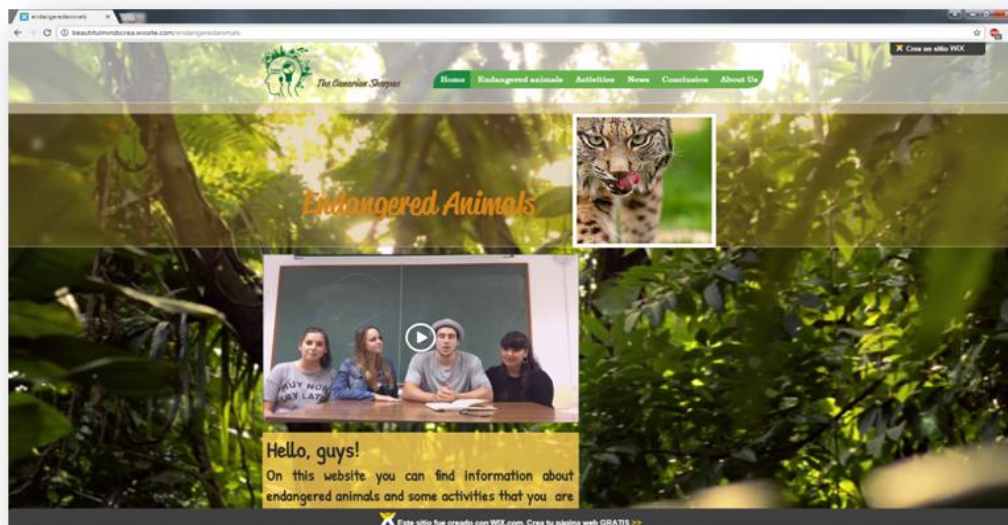
The work on Webquests can be complex due to it is necessary to invest time in its creation and it can be frustrating for the students if the objectives are not included or explained easily and clearly from the beginning. Thus, it is important to include a clear design, guidelines and resources to guarantee the success of the Webquest. In this way, we can make a distinction between three types of Webquests;

- Mini Webquests - They are formed by four elements: presentation (where it is specified what the activity is about), setting (here it is included what students will do and how), task (in this section, different questions and general guidelines will be provided to them to know what they need to solve), and the product (it is indicated how the results of the research must be presented, the format, the length, etc.)
- Treasure Hunt - It is formed by four elements: introduction (it is included a justification of the activity and the general guidelines that students need to follow), survey (here it is specified the questions that students should answer with the information obtained from the links that were provided to them), resources (a set of webpages they should visit for obtaining specific information) and the big question (it cannot be answered directly with the information obtained from the webpages, otherwise, it implies an analysis and a personal reflection by the students as a conclusion).
- Webquests

For this specific study I have focused on the third type. Before showing an example, I consider more suitable to explain the structure of a Webquest according to the model created by Bernie Dodge (1995)<sup>17</sup>.

In the introduction, it is included those elements that encourage students to reflect on a topic that lead to the description of the information that should be found.

The task consists of a clear explanation of what students should present at the end of the work on the Webquest. In other words, it is detailed the information that should be gathered, as well as, the guidelines that they should follow in order to do the final work. In the process, it is included what all students have to do during the work on the Webquest, this means the activities they should carry out and the links of the webpages they should visit. Moreover, it is necessary to include here the roles of each student during the whole process. The conclusion includes all the aspects that have been worked during the search of the information and what has been achieved. Thus, it is strengthened the students reflection about their work. Resources is used for adding several webs students could need, such as useful bibliography for the search. The didactic guide is added when the creator of the Webquest considers that other teachers can use it. Thus, in this section it is included the level and subjects that the Webquest alludes to. However, it can also be added other type of information that would be interesting and clarifying. Once I have dealt with the structure of the Webquest, I am going to show and explain an example created by a team of my students from the last year of the Degree of Teaching at Primary Level, Speciality of English. As part of the didactic units they have to create, a Webquest is also required.



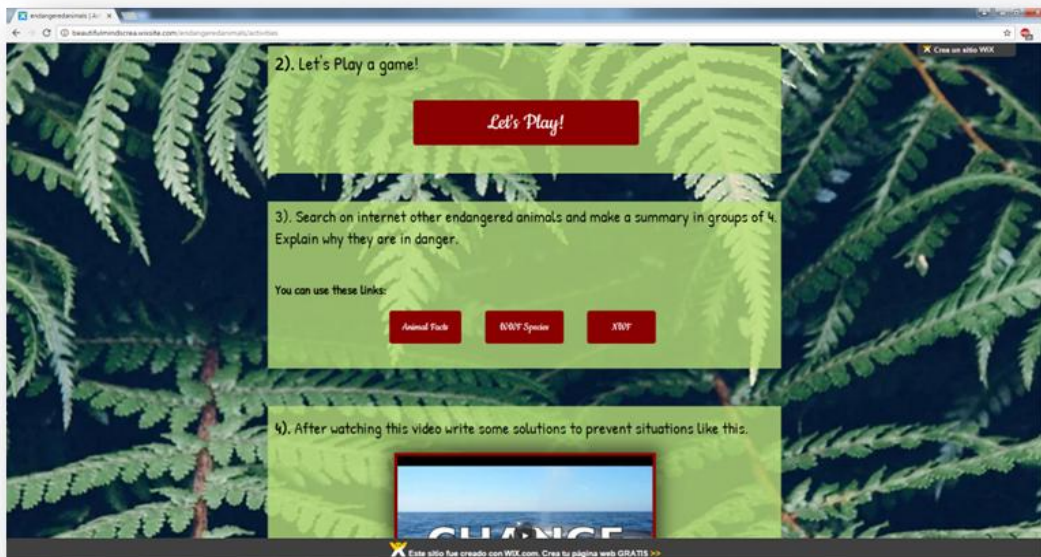
Screenshot 1 – Home page of the Webquest created by students of the Faculty of Education

As it can be appreciated in the first screenshot, the structure of the Webquest is presented clear and following the order established by Dodge.

<sup>17</sup> For more information, see <http://Webquest.org/index.php>



Moreover, it is important to add that one of the keys is the attractive and simple design that was made to avoid possible obstacles in the learning process of the possible students. By doing so, it can be guaranteed that learners could do the activities properly.

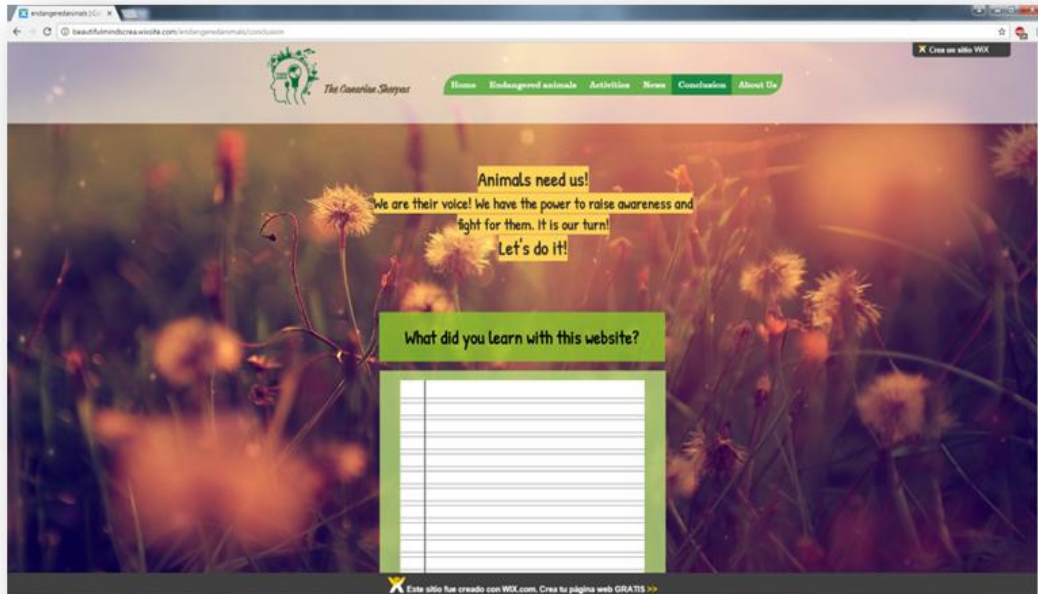


Screenshot 2 – A set of activities



Screenshot 3 – More activities

With the last two screenshots I illustrate the way in which it has been designed a set of activities that lead to the creation of a specific product. In this case, the final product is a proposal with different ideas that contribute to improve the situation of the animals in danger of extinction that students would have chosen for doing the social task.



Screenshot 4 – Conclusion

Finally, I show the kind of conclusion my students designed for this Webquest. In this case, this section is divided into two parts, although it can be appreciated the first one in the previous screenshot. First, students need to reflect on what they have learnt about the species in danger of extinction and then, they have to highlight which aspects they consider more interesting and which ones they do not.

#### 4. A Social Task through a WebQuest

With the example of a Webquest I have shown, it can be appreciated how a Webquest can be included within a social task. This inclusion guarantees the use of ICT. Moreover, due to the aim of social tasks is the achievement of the key competences, by programming them with Webquests it is assured the work on several key competences like the ones I mention below;

- Linguistic competence,
- Digital competence,
- Learning to learn, and
- Social and civic competence.

Students unconsciously learn how to deal with and classify digital information thanks to the guided search. Thus, they focus on the creation process and do not spend time in autonomous searches that at certain levels can be more problematic.

On the contrary, it contributes to their future, that is to say, the student will acquire useful strategies for doing his/her own searches of information in his/her academic/professional or even personal future.

Cooperative work is essential because different team dynamics are also present in social tasks. Some examples are learning to distinguish among different roles and to work according to the one you have been assigned. Factors such as negotiation, conversation and patience will be fundamental for the success of the task. It is important to emphasize that these aspects are connected with the reality and they improve considerably the future expectations of the students.

Regarding the linguistic competence, thanks to the use of a social task through a Webquest, students can work the linguistic skills in different ways. We have to take into account that it will depend on how the social task is designed. However, there will be some skills that we can consider implicit in any social task, for example, the spoken interaction with the teammates, the reading comprehension for understanding the information from the different web resources, the writing in many activities and, in some cases where we include videos, the audiovisual reception.

The reason why I have selected this example is to emphasize how important is to be coherent in the work following the key competence approach through the use of social tasks at primary level as much as on secondary level. There should be continuation in the modus operandi in both learning stages in order to systematize the learning process and achieve that the students will be really competent at the end of the compulsory education. In many cases, regarding the methodology, students find a huge change among learning stages, and these do not imply just academic consequences but personal too.

## 5. Conclusions

To conclude, I would like to highlight that I have shown a tool that facilitates the development of the work on key competences not only in the subject of English as a foreign language, as I have focused on here, but in any other subject too.

Thus, I have presented a proposal that is very related with the new education trends and the key competence approach implemented in Europe, and that it really connects the students with the reality of our century. ICT are indispensable in the current education and they will be even more in the future. In this way, we have to go forward and continue preparing the students to become the digitally competent citizens of the future.

As lecturer from the Department of Didactic Specifics (subject of Didactic of the Language and Literature) of the Faculty of Education of the University of La Laguna, I include in my lessons, as it could be appreciated in the example, the teaching, training and development of these didactic proposals because I believe in the effectiveness and possibilities of the key competence approach and I consider very suitable that the future teachers will contribute to the change of our reality in education.

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