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El uso del modelo de webquest como evaluación alternativa en el curso LM-
1001 *Inglés Integrado I* en la Universidad de Costa Rica

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Abstract:
This article explores the pedagogical principles as well as the advantages and recommendations of designing and implementing WebQuests in the course LM-1001 Integrated English I in the School of Modern Languages at the University of Costa Rica. This type of Web-based task was used as alternative assessment rather than traditional evaluation. This study also presents three sample WebQuests which were implemented with four groups in four different semesters of first-year students during their computer lab sessions.

Resumen:
Este artículo explora los principios pedagógicos así como las ventajas y recomendaciones al diseñar e implementar *WebQuests* en el curso LM-1001 Inglés integrado I en la Escuela de Lenguas Modernas de la Universidad de Costa Rica. Este tipo de actividad basada en una investigación en línea fue usada como evaluación alternativa en lugar del modelo tradicional de evaluación. Este estudio también presenta tres ejemplos de *WebQuests* los cuales fueron implementados con cuatro grupos de estudiantes de primer año en cuatro semestres diferentes durante sus sesiones de laboratorio de cómputo.

Key words:
technology, webquests, metholodogy, english teaching, language-lab sessions, alternative assessment

Palabras clave:
tecnología, webquests, metodología, enseñanza del inglés, sesiones de laboratorio de idiomas, evaluación alternativa

1. Introduction

The implementation of the WebQuest model, as an effective and valuable inquiry-oriented tool, helps EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners focus on meaning and content in a more dynamic, challenging, and motivating form. The main goal of this action research is to help novice English instructors of the course LM-1001 Integrated English I become acquainted with the theory

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behind the design and implementation of short-term WebQuests among first-year English majors. These novice professors can incorporate this type of Web-based task in computer-lab sessions as part of the course aforementioned. LM-1001 Integrated English I is a first-year course that belongs to the B.A. in English and the B.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language in the School of Modern Languages at the University of Costa Rica. Throughout four semesters, different groups worked in small teams on a series of WebQuests in which they interacted cooperatively to carry out the situation at hand, work on academic content, and report on their findings by means of completing a given outcome, being this product an oral presentation, a composition, a letter, among others.

Accordingly, the specific objectives of this article are: **(1)** to define what a WebQuest is and fully describe its framework, **(2)** to explain the preliminary steps before creating a WebQuest, and **(3)** to describe two sample WebQuests and analyze their implementation in the classroom. In addition, **(4)** the writer presents the comments and results gathered from a group of 48 students who completed at least three WebQuests and filled out a questionnaire which assessed the learners' opinions in relation to the use of WebQuests in their first-year course. Finally, this article **(5)** intends to address some key recommendations in designing and implementing short-term WebQuests during computer-lab sessions courses in both first-year English courses: LM-1001Integrated English I and LM-1002 Integrated English II.

Regarding the course LM-1001 Integrated English I, instructors plan different Internet-based activities during their computer-lab sessions, and learners complement course content with additional practice and material. First-year computer-lab sessions at the School of Modern Languages consist of fifty minutes, and all students attend three computer-lab sessions weekly out of 13 hours of class work; this certainly represents a challenge for novice professors who need to plan these three classes thoroughly. Some of the traditional activities include grammar-based exercises and listening comprehension or sound recognition tasks using several websites; unfortunately, some of these activities are not interactive. For this reason, the implementation of Web-based tasks during computer-lab sessions can make instructors modify their role in order for students to become active, critical and autonomous participants in the teaching-learning process. When asked 20 professors on the purpose of using the computer laboratory, these are some of the most frequent activities they usually plan:

i. Using academic software for first-English courses such as *Grammar 3D* and *LEE* (Learning English Electronically)

ii. Comparing different English accents by listening to radio stations from various countries

iii. Taking grammar quizzes as well as exercises (using different websites)

iv. Reading and quizzes on comprehension

v. Working on pronunciation exercises

vi. Practicing English at *Englishcentral.com*

vii. Working on interactive exercises using wikis or blogs

viii. Reading newspaper articles online in order to answer a questionnaire

ix. Videoconferencing with native speakers of English via Skype

x. Listening practice with videos from YouTube or Discovery

xi. Watching movies or documentaries

xii. Writing compositions and giving feedback

xiii. Editing compositions based on peer feedback

In addition, there are other professors who administer their own wiki because this tool allows its manager (instructors) and users (students and other guests) to access data and make modifications throughout the semester. A wiki, in short, is a more sophisticated and interactive form of interlinked web sites used to perform certain advanced tasks such as editing paragraphs and associating additional web links. Maintaining these platforms may result in a time-consuming task for instructors who need to update their resources regularly with practice on punctuation, error correction, outlining, and the like. More recently, composition and rhetoric courses have included the use of wikis so that students post their essays and receive positive feedback. Before doing so, instructors have received specific training by more experienced professors on this type of technological resource.

2. *Justification of this Action Research*

Even though most first-year English instructors plan effective computer-lab sessions thoroughly, there are still a few novice instructors who complain they do not know what to do during these hours. Similarly, a few students usually indicate on the course evaluations that, in some cases, some of these sessions are somewhat boring, ineffective, monotonous or repetitive. Also, they complain that a few instructors tend to cover textbook content and grammar-based printed practice during computer-lab sessions. It seems to be that to some extent a few sessions are underutilized.

Regarding the topic of this action research, many English professors do not know what a WebQuest is. To assess how much first-year professors know about the concept of Webquest, 20

instructors, who had recently taught LM-1001 Integrated English I, were given a questionnaire (see Appendix 1). They were asked if they knew what it meant; if the answer was affirmative, they were also asked to write their definition of WebQuest. In this case, 7 indicated they did not know what a WebQuest was, and 3 did not have a clear idea. These instructors refer to a WebQuest as a variation of research-based prompt or situation in which students surf different websites to find information in general (e.g. a great tourist destination, a good healthy food restaurant, an excellent university). In most cases, *all students* are given exactly the *same prompt* with the *same Web links* to narrow down the search. After taking some time, students are required to share their findings with the class individually, in pairs, or in small groups. On the contrary, only 10 professors seem to have a better idea of what a WebQuest is; these are some definitions given by a group of English professors who taught first-year courses for several years:

> "I give my students a question or situation related to health issues or current topics. My group takes 20 min. to look for the information, answer, details, or solution to the situation." "Later, they present the results in pairs orally. Sometimes, I ask them to write a paragraph. They receive a grade on it. This may be a quiz."

> "Roughly, speaking a webquest is a guided (or more or less guided) activity in which students search (the quest part) for information over the internet (the web part). The professor often gives a detailed set of steps to follow and websites to use. In my case, sometimes the guidelines are not so detailed because I want students to exercise their critical and rational criteria to find the information. We usually talk about the Internet and what places are not so effective when trying to find information. The objective or what is expected from them is the priority in a webquest and that is what I emphasize the most."

> "A webquest consists of a search for information about a certain topic to solve a given problem using resources on the Internet. Part or all of the information that Ss [students] need to carry out is taken from resources that are available on the Web."

> "Given some guidelines, Ss [students] must look for certain information in order to prepare some product. Ex. Give them a topic along with guidelines to prepare a presentation. They are also given the resources (time and computer) to look for the information in whatever websites they consider appropriate, although some possible websites might be given to them."

> "It's an activity used where the students need to search in the Internet the information based on the teacher's instructions. The students interact with the resources in the Web to find answers and complete the tasks."

For the reasons mentioned above, novice professors will benefit from WebQuests because this type of task will make their EFL learners focus on meaning in a more challenging way as long as they go beyond content to become critical thinkers.

3. *Review of the Literature*

a. *The Use of the Internet in the EFL Context*

Undoubtedly, the Internet has had an evident impact on language teaching. In step with the times, many language programs have incorporated computer-lab sessions into their courses so that learners have easy access to a large number of online resources and receive comprehensible input through authentic materials or teacher-made practice. In relation to this, Hanson-Smith (2001) points out that "where technology is deployed to its best advantage, we should see teachers' roles become that of guide or mentor, encouraging students to take charge of their own learning, helping them to learn at their own pace" (113). Having this in mind, teachers must have a clear idea of the activities to be carried out during computer-lab sessions in order for EFL students to fully benefit from a wide variety of online resources.

Throughout the B.A. program in English at the School of Modern Languages, several professors have decided to implement different Web-based activities in their courses. In the second-year-course LM-1235 English Composition I, for example, e-mail is used by students to send queries and receive professor's feedback on their paragraphs. Precisely, Solís (2011) has demonstrated that composition students took advantage of online feedback so that they became more aware of their grammatical and lexical errors; thus, at the end of the semester, those who actively participated in her study improved their writing by using strategies to reflect on their errors and correct them. Solís (2011) also concluded that "electronic feedback can change student attitude toward revising compositions, build student confidence and increase motivation" (279). In this case, the direct and constant online interaction among the instructor and her second-year students was a determining factor in their improvement and autonomy.

In terms of improving reading comprehension, some learners are given guided practice to extract information from short texts published on academic or commercial websites. Other faculty members make their computer-lab sessions more challenging and maintain web logs with exercises, songs, videos, and comments based on students' compositions, feedback, and progress. Students log in and carry out several activities previously uploaded by their instructors; answer keys of activities are also included for students to check their responses. By using blogs, professors and students interact constantly throughout the semester. Undeniably, this also represents an extra load of effort and time for professors apart from planning their lessons; however, classes are highly enriched and students take advantage of this. Barquero (2011), as an example, implemented a blog in the third-year literature course LM-1366 Introduction to Poetry in order to increase the level of motivation of

her students and make them write and publish their own poems and other multimedia material. Again, cooperative learning and positive feedback are essential in the learning process.

Throughout the teaching-learning process and implementation of Internet-oriented tasks during computer-lab sessions, instructor's role changes. As Quesada (2004) pointed out "the process of planning a web-based activity involves the teacher in the role of researcher and facilitator (88)." Thus, teachers must carefully prepare Internet-based tasks in which learner's results or outcome will require a thorough assessment before being implemented in future sessions or groups of students. The same source (Quesada, 2004) explains that "the teacher explores the Web for resources, evaluates and selects potentially useful sites and then stores and categorizes them for later retrieval and use by the students" (88). In short, many English professors at the School of Modern Languages take advantage of different Internet tools to meet the expectations, needs, lacks, and wants of their students depending on the course objectives. However, before planning this type of Web-based task, one should consider the following key questions:

1. Does this Web-based task correlate with the objectives of the official course outline?
2. Does the content of the task match the theme of the current unit or lesson?
3. Is the time allotted to do research appropriate for beginners to complete the task? Will they need any further session?
4. What kind of preparation do my students need in terms of vocabulary-building activities or pre-reading exercises before doing research online?
5. When will students present their findings? How will they do so?
6. What kind of feedback will students receive?
7. What aspects will instructors or facilitators consider to reflect on the impact of the Web-based activity?
8. What changes will teachers incorporate in future lab sessions?

3.2 Alternative Assessment

EFL instructors should continuously monitor what learners produce in order to provide appropriate feedback on their outcomes and progress. This may be conducted through formative assessment or traditional evaluation. Regarding this action research, the WebQuest model was used to establish *formative assessment* throughout the course program. Brindley (in Carter and Nunan, 2001, 137) defines assessment as "a variety of ways of collecting information on a learner's language ability or achievement." Thus, the emphasis is on what students are capable of doing with

language content; traditional evaluation is not necessarily conducted. Instructors pay more attention to their learners' strengths at the moment of working on meaning, presenting their outcome, and reacting critically to the topic at hand. This ongoing process of formative assessment is crucial in formal instruction even though students will not necessarily receive a grade on a given product, being this the case of an essay or a speech. However, instructors make adapt or prepare appropriate rubrics to give clear feedback after the completion of a WebQuest. This is important for students to know exactly what they are expected to do and how their outcome will be assessed.

3.3 What is a WebQuest?

The notion of WebQuest has a direct impact on language learners since this Web-based task enriches learners' vocabulary and their understanding of content. The concept of WebQuest was created by Professor Bernie Dodge in 1995. Dodge (1997, 1) defines a WebQuest as "an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet." Generally speaking, a WebQuest is a hands-on activity which may be conducted in small groups of students in a way that each member analyzes and explores different data that will be complemented with other information gathered by his or her group members on a given theme. Even though each student is expected to retrieve different information on a topic, all three or four team participants are assigned the same theme and, in most cases, the same Web page(s).

Due to its communicative value, this type of Web-based task is suitable to be implemented with courses based on academic English since it varies interactions and breaks the monotony and boredom of traditional grammar-based exercises and oral presentations. Thus, a WebQuest is a research-based assignment in which students select, analyze, summarize, compare, and classify meaning. Once all the information has been collected, students negotiate meaning to arrange data and report it to the rest of their peers. It is crucial to point out that students must respond critically to the topic so that the investigation would not end up in a basic Internet search. The final outcome may be, for instance, an interactive oral presentation in which there is constant whole-class participation. WebQuests can also be combined with other teaching methodologies such as *Content-based Instruction* and *Task-based Instruction* in which learners work on content and meaning to improve language skills. March (2003) complements the aforementioned definition and explains the following:

> A real WebQuest is a scaffolded learning structure that uses links to essential resources on the World Wide Web and an authentic task to motivate students' investigation of an open-ended

question, development of individual expertise, and participation in a group process that transforms newly acquired information into a more sophisticated understanding. The best WebQuests inspire students to see richer thematic relationships, to contribute to the real world of learning, and to reflect on their own metacognitive processes (p.42).

This means that for an effective WebQuest to be successful, learners must go beyond the mere investigation on given topic by using a particular website; instead, they are expected to interpret meaning and become critical thinkers who analyze content and react to it.

The complexity of WebQuests may vary in terms of the target population, equipment available, cognitive skills or learning strategies to be addressed, time allotted, and course content, among others. It is important to mention that EFL teachers may design either short-term WebQuests or long-term ones. While short-term WebQuests can easily be carried out in a few lessons, long-term ones may last even weeks and, as a result, turn into a major problem-solving project (i.e., comparing or contrasting technological breakthroughs and their impact on people's lives). Unlike other traditional Internet-based activities, "WebQuests might be enhanced by wrapping motivational elements around the basic structure by giving the learners a role to play (e.g., scientist, detective, reporter), simulated personae to interact with via e-mail, and a scenario to work within (e.g., you've been asked by the Secretary General of the UN to brief him on what's happening in sub-Saharan Africa this week)" (Dodge, 1997, 1). Therefore, students have an active and individualized role throughout the task.

Before exploring the framework for designing effective WebQuests, novice teachers should review the following five basic preliminary steps given by Dodge (2001, 1) in order to plan such a task:

a. **Find great and trustworthy sites:** Web sites must be relevant, meaningful, appealing, recent, and reliable. There should be enough text for students to analyze, process, and summarize. Instructors should constantly revise these Web pages to monitor possible changes or updates. Before designing a WebQuest, teachers should always consider that "though much of the information on the Web is very commercial, very superficial, and of very doubtful quality, much of the information on the Web is also of high quality, current, and free" (Linder, 2004, 16). It is always a challenging task to search for interesting websites and select those with academic content for students to process. For example, if one wants to design a short-term WebQuest in which students compare the most beautiful cities around the world, *www.travel.nationalgeographic.com* is an

excellent and reliable source of information. Since many students have access to the Internet on campus or at home, instructors must carefully look for meaningful Websites. Quesada (2005) explained that

> From the learners' perspective, one of the significant advantages of Web-based learning is that the universal language that is manipulated by internet users is English, and that is the language they are willing to learn by all means. This aspect intrinsically motivates learners to access Internet sources or use Internet means because it provides authentic use of the English language, so learners see a usefulness in this resource (7).

It is worth noting that the value and impact of a WebQuest is closely linked to the authenticity of online resources so that learners see a clear-cut purpose of going to the computer-lab sessions and the activity.

b. **Orchestrate your learners and resources:** If instructors or institutions may experience limitations regarding time, Internet access, or computer equipment, lab lessons must be carefully planned to fully seize resources as well as learners' work. In other words, depending on the number of terminals that a computer lab contains, instructors may divide the class so that a few students work offline while others are surfing the Net.

c. **Challenge learners to think:** Students must commit individually and in groups to doing a thorough investigation of the task at hand. Inquiry-based tasks such as WebQuests enable student to develop critical thinking skills towards content and how they can relate it to their own lives. Coffman (2009) highlights that

> Through inquiry learning, students become actively involved in the inquiry activity by incorporating information literacy skills into solving the problem. Skills such as observing, collecting, analyzing, and synthesizing information are developed in order to make predictions and draw conclusions. Inquiry-oriented learning allows students to discover and pursue information with active and engaged involvement in the material (3).

Everyone agrees that students should develop critical-thinking skills and reflect on course content and its impact in their lives and society in general. A WebQuest on environmental issues can provide students with an opportunity to learn new content, increase their lexicon, and personalize this new information according to their lives and communities.

d. **Use the medium:** the notion of WebQuest goes beyond the access to computers and Internet; that is, students may take advantage of other resources or media such as newsletters, experts, classmates, blogs, Wikis, or academic forums. Additional Web sites can be linked to a Webquest. By doing so, students may benefit from other forms of media such as conversations, videos, videoconferences, images, or audible files.

e. **Scaffold high expectations:** Dodge explains that "a great Webquest builds scaffolding into the process as needed so that the bar of what students can produced can be raised" (2001, 7). Furthermore, subsequent Webquests should be based on new and more challenging resources. Also, by applying more complex learning strategies to deal with content, learners are expected to produce more and certainly improve their outcome while presenting their finding to the rest of their peers.

3.3.1 The Elemental Framework of a WebQuest

To successfully create a WebQuest, instructors must follow the six main components of its framework. Thombs, Gillis, and Canestrari (2009, 27-30) describe the various sections of a Webquest which, in this case, were used to prepare a series of WebQuest for students who took LM-1001 Integrated English I. The author of this article will illustrate each section of this framework with a WebQuest used in his LM-1001 course. This sample WebQuest was carried out in groups of four members; so, the class worked in six groups of four students. This task belongs to Unit 1 of the textbook Interactions I: College Life.

1. **Introduction**: This is one of the most important parts of a WebQuest. This introductory section must be motivating enough for students to be interested in doing research on a given topic. Preferably, topics should correlate with the themes covered throughout the course or

followed in the textbook. As a result, students may apply the language seen before to what they will carry out later. As an example, consider the following introduction to a WebQuest on studying abroad:

You and three classmates are interested in applying for a scholarship to study English as a second language in a university in the United States during a semester. Before making a decision on which institution of higher learning you want to register, you need to find information on housing, language programs, admission, health services, among others, about one university. Next class, you will listen to information about other universities. After this, you need to write a paragraph in which you indicate the college of your choice as well as the reason why you chose that particular university and its ESL program.

2. **Task**: This section will guide students on *what* to look for in the Web site and *what* they will present to the entire class. Moreover, this also informs students on the aspects to be assessed as well as the rubrics to be implemented (if necessary) as formative assessment. Sample instructions are the following:

   A. *You have to work in a group of four classmates in order to look for the following information:*
      Student 1: admissions and housing on campus

      Student 2: scholarships and language programs

      Student 3: libraries and health services

      Student 4: sports facilities and cultural activities

   B. *In groups, prepare a fifteen-minute PowerPoint presentation in order to share your information with the rest of the class.*
   C. *Individually, write a composition in which you explain the reason why you want to study at the university of your choice.*

It is worth noting that during this stage, students know what type of outcome they will present. Ellis (cited in Tomlinson, 1998, 228) defines the concept of outcome as the final product learners do once the task has been completed; thus, this outcome "may be verbal (e.g. presenting a PowerPoint presentation) or non-verbal (e.g. writing a composition or drawing a diagram)."

3. **Process**: This component of the framework explains *how* students will complete the task. They will get informed on the number of participants in each team as well as the amount of time allotted to complete the task. The instructor will assign each person a number to inform him or her on the specific information to gather before knowing which Web site each team will access. These sample instructions illustrate this part:

   A. *Each person has to choose one topic to look for. You have 50 minutes to complete this WebQuest. Take as many notes as possible.*

   B. *Get together and present your findings to your team members. Try not to read your notes; instead, explain what you understood.*

   C. *In groups, prepare a fifteen-minute PowerPoint presentation in order to share your information with the rest of the class.*

   D. *Individually, write a composition in which you explain the reason why you want to study at the university of your choice.*

4. **Resources:** This involves a series of Web sites in which the WebQuest is based on. If necessary, additional reliable Web pages may be included for further research. In the case of the WebQuest on college life, the class was divided into six teams, and each group focused on a given institution of higher learning. Thus, students will learn about 6 colleges in the United States. After all the teams were numbered by the instructor, students receive the instructions below:

   Start your tour using the websites below.

   Team 1: University of Oregon

   http://uoregon.edu/

   Team 2: The University of Kansas

   http://www.ku.edu/about/

   Team 3: University of Michigan

   http://www.umich.edu/

   Team 4: San Diego State University

   http://www.sdsu.edu/

Team 5: University of Florida

http://www.ufl.edu/

Team 6: University of Northern Iowa

http://www.uni.edu/

In this stage of the process, one of the most challenging parts of creating a WebQuest is to find suitable online resources. Dudeney (2007, 162) proposes the following evaluation form to analyze weaknesses and strengths of online resources:

General Information	
Name of the site: URL of site: Date visited: Reviewer:	
Site Summary	
Description Add a short description of the site	
Content summary Give a brief description of the contents of the site	
Site Details	
Information Is the site content correct, reliable and accurate? Is the writer an expert on the subject?	
Currency Is the site up-to-date? When was the new information last added? When were the pages last updated?	
Content Is the content relevant, interesting, funny, useful or entertaining? How would you describe it?	
Presentation Is it attractive and easy to navigate? Does it use a lot of graphics, sound or multimedia files?	

Functionality Does it all work? Are there any broken links or missing pages? Does it take a long time to display page?	
Verdict:　　　**Excellent ( )　Very Good ( )　Good ( )　Average ( )　Poor ( )**	

Fig. 1. A Practical Form to Evaluate the Content of Websites

5. **Evaluation**: This part may be explained orally by the instructor. Thus, he or she briefly indicates how learners' outcome will be assessed according to the rubrics prepared in advance. Students should have the opportunity to read the rubrics to get acquainted with the aspects they have to pay attention to. In fact, Thombs, Gillis, and Canestrari (2009) point out that "when students have access to the rubric as they complete the assignment, they should have clear expectations of what the assignment entails and can use the rubric for formative assessment" (30). In this case, instructors may design their own assessment rubrics to meet the needs of their target population. To see the rubric implemented in the course LM-1001 Integrated English I, the reader can find it in Appendix 2.

   While students carry out the WebQuest, the instructor plays the role of facilitator in the process. In other words, he or she should monitor students' work and encourage them to use English to interact with others if necessary. In addition, the instructor may take notes and collect samples of student's language mistakes for further analysis and feedback.

6. **Conclusion**: After each team has presented its findings, teachers may summarize key ideas and give final remarks on the oral presentation. He or she might also highlight strengths and weaknesses encountered in the presentation. In terms of language use, holistic feedback may be given in the next lesson.

   The last two parts do not have to be given in the list of instructions; so, students receive the guidelines with steps 1-4.

   In the case of designing and implementing WebQuests in first-year English courses, it would be useful to add a ***follow-up activity*** to wrap up the WebQuest and students' outcome. This will give a better sense of completion of the task. Some examples of this follow-up activity may be a feedback form, a content question, a crossword puzzle or the preparation of a word bank. To sum up, the WebQuest analyzed before will look as follows (learner's handout):

Sample WebQuest: Studying English Abroad!

Step 1: Introduction	*You and three classmates are interested in applying for a scholarship to study English as a second language in a university in the United States during a semester. Before making a decision on which institution of higher learning you want to register, you need to find information on housing, language programs, admission, health services, among others, about one university. Next class, you will listen to information about other universities. After this, you need to write a paragraph in which you indicate the college of your choice as well as the reason why you chose that particular university and its ESL program.*
Step 2: Task	*A. You have to work in a group of four classmates in order to look for the following information:* ***Student 1:** admissions and housing on campus* ***Student 2:** scholarships and language programs* ***Student 3:** libraries and health services* ***Student 4:** sports facilities and cultural activities* *B. In groups, prepare a fifteen-minute PowerPoint presentation in order to share your information with the rest of the class.* *C. Individually, write a composition in which you explain the reason why you want to study at the university of your choice.*
Step 3: Process	*A. Each person has to choose one topic to look for. You have 50 minutes to complete this WebQuest. Take as many notes as possible.* *B. Get together and present your findings to your team members. Try not to read your notes; instead, explain what you understood.* *C. In groups, prepare a fifteen-minute PowerPoint presentation in order to share your information with the rest of the class.* *D. Individually, write a composition in which you explain the reason why you want to study at the university of your choice.*

Step 4: Online Resources	Start your tour using the websites below. **Team 1:** University of Oregon http://uoregon.edu/ **Team 2:** The University of Kansas http://www.ku.edu/about/ **Team 3:** University of Michigan http://www.umich.edu/ **Team 4:** San Diego State University http://www.sdsu.edu/ **Team 5:** University of Florida http://www.ufl.edu/ **Team 6:** University of Northern Iowa http://www.uni.edu/

The Six Components of a WebQuest

1. Introduction
The instructor introduces the topic of the WebQuest as clearly as possible. It includes a short situation to be solved by the students.

2. Task
This section guides students and tells them **WHAT** to do. It involves a realistic set of instructions.

3. Process
It explains **HOW** students will carry out the investigation. Allotted time to complete the task is indicated here. Students may work in pairs or small groups.

4. Resources
This lists a series of links or websites in which learners will base their research on.

5. Evaluation
Students present their findings while the instructor assesses their content and takes notes. Appropriate assessment rubrics may be used to complete this stage. Public-speaking skills may also be evaluated.

6. Conclusion

The teacher makes a final remark on students' final work. General feedback can be given to conclude the presentation.

Fig. 2. Summary of the framework for designing a WebQuest

4   Brief Description of the Course LM-1001 Integrated English I

This is a team taught course which is part of the B.A. in English and the B.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. The level of difficulty of LM-1001 Integrated English I is intermediate-low. Students receive intensive instruction to improve all language macro (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and micro (vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and culture) skills throughout 15 weeks of formal instruction. In order to integrate all language macro and micro skills, learning and communication strategies are taught holistically following an academic approach to present and evaluate content. LM-1001 students attend classes 4 days a week, and they receive formal instruction during 13 hours. There are 10 hours of instruction at regular classrooms and 3 hours of computer-laboratory sessions each week.

4.1   Target Population

The participants of this project took the first-year English course LM-1001 Integrated English I at the School of Modern Language at the University of Costa Rica. Most English majors are enrolled in the B.A. in English; the rest in the B.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. This course is team-taught, and students receive 13 hours of formal instruction weekly. One professor teaches on Monday and Wednesday and the other one on Tuesday and Thursday. There are 3 language-lab sessions each week, and one instructor teaches 2 computer-lab sessions. Attendance to lab sessions is mandatory, and it represents 5% out of the final grade. Although the students who participated in this action research attended classes 4 times a week, the researcher worked with them two days a week with 4-5 hours of regular instruction including 1-2 computer-lab

sessions. These students completed a series of 1-6 WebQuests throughout the semester. It is important to clarify that only one instructor implemented WebQuests with the group.

4.2   Materials and Resources

Although implementing a WebQuest does not require lots of materials, in this case students used the following resources to carry out the tasks:

- WebQuests designed by the instructor
- A computer laboratory with 25 machines
- Access to the Internet
- A video beam or multimedia projector
- A smart board
- Three types of peripherals: a printer, a scanner, and speakers
- Large sheets of paper, construction paper, printed pictures and markers (for those sessions where technology could not be used)
- Photocopies (if necessary)

5. Sample Webquest 1: Traveling Around the World!

Step 1: Introduction	**You and three classmates will take an arm-chair tour in one the best cities to visit. You will have the opportunity to take a virtual tour in this place and learn about its people, food, weather, nightlife, culture, among others.**
Step 2: Task	A. You have to work in a group of four classmates in order to look for the following information: **Student 1:** travel basics and two hotels **Student 2:** Must-Dos around the city and two restaurants **Student 3:** cultural tips (Dos and Don'ts)

	Student 4: shopping and entertainment
	B. In group, prepare a ten-minute oral presentation in order to share your findings with the class. You need to use posters.
	C. At the end, explain some advantages or disadvantages of visiting the assigned city. Give several reasons to support your answer.
Step 3: Process	A. Each person has to choose one topic to look for. Take as many notes as possible. Then, get together and explain what you found out. B. The entire class will be divided into six groups with four members each. You instructor will assign a number to each team; each team will visit a given website. C. You have 50 minutes to complete this WebQuest.
Step 4: Online Resources	Start your tour using the websites below. **Team 1:** San Francisco, California http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/city-guides/san-francisco-california/ **Team 2:** Rome, Italy http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/city-guides/rome-italy/ **Team 3:** Hong Kong, China http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/city-guides/hong-kong-china/ **Team 4:** Berlin, Germany http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/city-guides/berlin-germany/ **Team 5:** Tokyo, Japan http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/city-guides/tokyo-japan/ **Team 6:** London, United Kingdom

	http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/city-guides/london-united-kingdom/

5.1 Reflecting on the WebQuest 1

5.1.1 Strengths

Some students started working as soon as they arrived at the laboratory; they knew exactly what to do since the groups were organized in the previous lesson. A few students expressed they liked the website (www.nationalgeographic.com) and said they will visit it again at home. Most learners took as many notes as possible. Others retrieved some information and sent it to their email accounts for further reading in order to extract unknown words. Regarding timing, most students used the allotted amount of time to finish the WebQuest. A few students consulted additional websites to find more data on their topic. During the oral presentation, most students did not read their notes and relied on the visual aids.

5.1.2 Weaknesses

The instructor observed a series of problems while students were carrying out the entire activity (the WebQuest itself and the oral presentation). To begin with, some equipment did not work properly, and three students wasted some time getting ready. Two other computers did not have access to Internet. Then, a team of students used their L1 to interact with their team members. The instructor had to ask them constantly to speak English only. In addition, those learners with a low proficiency level did not have the communication strategies to negotiate meaning or ask questions; so, they ended up using Spanish. Likewise, some of them asked about the meaning and pronunciation of unfamiliar topic-related words. Finally, a team pointed out that they needed an additional website to find more information on the city they were investigating. Regarding the oral presentation, students took a lot of time to prepare the visual aids.

5.1.3 Suggested Changes based on Weaknesses

It is relevant to mention that appropriate changes to overcome the difficulties mentioned before were implemented; by doing so, students had an opportunity to perform better in the next WebQuest. In future WebQuests, each team had a leader that monitored that everyone on his or her team spoke English. Furthermore, the instructor introduced some useful language with phrases or questions so that students developed communication strategies while carrying out the activity. In

terms of the online resources, the WebQuest also included extra links to a good monolingual dictionary access to the pronunciation of words and an encyclopedia. To create the visual aids for the oral presentation (outcome), students might prepare some posters or pictures at home to save time.

6. Sample WebQuest 2: Learning about Youth-based Subcultures!

Step 1: Introduction	***You and three classmates are journalists who investigate about youth-based subcultures. You are interested in knowing more about one type of subculture and its followers in terms of beliefs, fashion, interests, slang (street language), behavior, music or symbolism.***
Step 2: Task	A. You have to work in a group of four classmates in order to look for the following information: **Student 1:** definition of this type of subculture and beliefs **Student 2:** clothing and other external elements **Student 3:** interests and music **Student 4:** samples of slang and body language B. Prepare a ten-minute presentation in order to report on your findings. Use PowerPoint to prepare your visual aids.
Step 3: Process	A. The entire class will be divided into six groups with four members each. You instructor will assign a number to each team; each team will visit a given website. B. You have 50 minutes to complete this task. C. After investigating on this topic, you have to react to this type of subculture and give your opinion on it.
Step 4: Online Resources	Start your tour using the websites below.

	What is a subculture? http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youth_subculture www.youtube.com **Team 1:** Punks http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Punk_subculture **Team 2:** Skates http://honors.usf.edu/documents/Thesis/U69703351.pdf http://fashion-lifestyle.net/subculture_en_broi14 **Team 3:** Emmos http://www.emo-corner.com/ **Team 4:** Goths http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Goth_subculture **Team 5:** Metalheads http://www.wikihow.com/Be-a-Metalhead **Team 6:** Skinheads http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Skinhead

6.1   Reflecting on the WebQuest 2

6.1.1 Strengths

Students were highly interested in the topic, and they expanded on the topic because, to some extent, they had some background knowledge on subcultures and music bands. To illustrate their topic, some groups used video clips taken from YouTube. In case, they need extra information, the WebQuest included a website in order to define what a subculture is. During the computer-lab session, they visited an online dictionary to get familiar with new words and their pronunciation. Most students thoroughly studied the content of their individual information at home. In addition, they asked questions about the meaning of difficult words related to their specific type of subculture (e.g., vegan or veganism).   At the end of the presentation, they asked their classmates several questions about content. It is worth mentioning that they had to react to the topic and give opinions of the different kinds of youth subcultures. In general, students were more autonomous during the entire process of developing this WebQuest.

6.1.2 Weaknesses

While LM-1001 learners were carrying out this WebQuest, two students with the lowest proficiency level needed more time to assimilate the meaning and pronunciation of new topic-related words. These were the students who relied on reading their notes throughout the oral presentation. Furthermore, a few students did not acknowledge their sources while giving explanations.

6.1.3 Future Changes based on Weaknesses

Perhaps, a few students should be given additional websites to complement the content of their topics. In the next WebQuest, learners need instruction on phrases to acknowledge their sources. Finally, instructors might consider assigning a grade due to the amount of work that this Web-based activity requires.

7   Analysis of LM-1001 Learners' Opinions

During four semesters, four groups of students were given a questionnaire to see the impact of WebQuests on their learning process. In each group, it is important to indicate that absenteeism was a foremost obstacle in some lab sessions; for this reason, during these two years of implementing WebQuests, 48 students, who completed at least 3 WebQuests, filled out this instrument (see Appendix 4). Thus, this section is a qualitative analysis that attempts to assess

students' perception regarding their performance in this web-based task. Unfortunately, a few people skipped some questions or did not write any answer or comment.

Firstly, in regard to students' opinions in relation to the preparation of WebQuests in groups, the following categories were gathered:

Category	Number of comments
Interesting / exciting task	9
Appealing / entertaining	2
Learned new vocabulary	2
Nice / good activity	6
Excellent	3
Liked to work in groups	5
More Interaction	4

Figure 4. Learners' Perception on the preparation of WebQuests

Although most comments were positive, one student indicated that it is somewhat difficult to work with other classmates whose level of proficiency is advanced. Interestingly, another person commented that all group members should change every time they carry out a WebQuest, and another learner indicated that the professor should not organize the groups.

The second question attempted to observe if preparing a Webquest may break the monotony of traditional computer-lab sessions. In this case, 39 students answered positively (2 students checked *no*, and the rest did not check any alternative); in general, this reveals that interaction is a key element in which cooperative learning takes place. Figure 5 summarizes some of the most frequent reasons why students preferred this task over traditional grammar-based activities.

Implementing Webquests breaks the monotony of lab sessions because…

It requires that you break your individuality by working with other classmates.

It gives us the chance to increase our vocabulary and knowledge.

We work in small groups.

You have to look for unusual information.

It is kind of boring to do exercises all the time.

It is something new that we haven`t ever done.

It's a different way to learn.

We can practice orally.

Sometimes lab sessions are too boring.

We are looking for something different that we like.

Figure 5. Students' opinions on the use of WebQuests

The objective of the third question is to assess the type of websites that students accessed to gather data. It is worth noting that students were given a series of websites, and 21 learners indicated that they did not need to access additional resources online. On the contrary, 17 students decided to consult different websites related to cultural differences, subcultures, online dictionaries, and Wikipedia. The main purpose of doing so was to use images and video clips to reinforce content and illustrate their PowerPoint presentations.

The purpose of asking the fourth question was to assess the level of interaction of students while gathering information at the computer laboratory. Also, it observed if students consulted an online dictionary. In this case, only 5 people said they worked on their own, but 26 students indicated they asked their group members a few questions. Then, there were 20 people who indicated they had answered questions from their team members; 19 students the instructor questions. One possible explanation for this may be that there were more doubts during the first WebQuest; later, students developed more autonomy as they knew exactly what to look for. Finally, 24 learners said they needed to consult an online monolingual dictionary due to the level of

difficulty of some reading texts. These results reveled that there was a high level of interaction during the computer-lab session as students negotiated meaning and clarified doubts.

The fifth question deals with time management while carrying out the Webquest. In this case 36 students indicated they did not need more time to complete the task. They did research on their assigned topic for one hour during the computer-lab session and one additional hour to get together, combine content and prepare their assigned output (oral presentation, composition, newsletter, among others). Interestingly, one student wrote that absenteeism was a major problem in her group since they presented their findings in separate classes.

The next item refers to the assessment of the level of difficulty of the vocabulary of the online resources given by the instructor. Only 1 student marked *Very Difficult* and nobody chose *Difficult*. Then, 31 people said it was *Acceptable* for their level of proficiency, and 9 students indicated that the vocabulary was *Easy*. Again, 1 student chose the last alternative which was *Very Easy*. In general, these answers reveal that the level of the course (Intermediate Low) according to the Course Syllabus correlates with students' perception on the level of difficulty of the vocabulary of the online resources, being this at an intermediate level.

There are many positive aspects that students experienced while conducting their Webquests. Based on the brief comments obtained from the questionnaire, students highlighted the fact that interaction, motivation and variety were crucial in this activity. Figure 6 summarizes some of the ideas expressed by the students.

Student's comments
Investigating about a topic on the Internet because we learned very much
I can learn about any topic; we are doing something different
History, definitions, interests, and music
The fact of learning more about certain subjects
To prepare and deliver the presentation
When the instructor gave us the sites to know the meaning of the words
To do something different from grammar exercises

To share with my partners

To work on a team
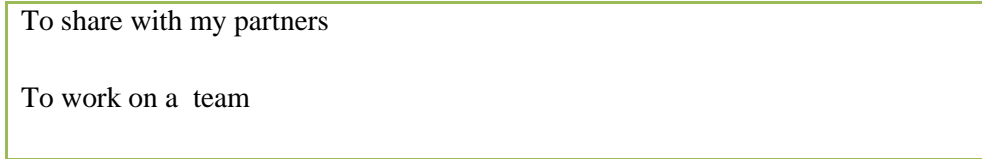
Figure 6. Learners' positive comments regarding Webquests

This question is related to the next item which deals with those aspects that should be improved or changed about having Webquests in this course. Unfortunately, most people chose not to answer this question. However, 5 students said that oral presentations would be more interesting that written output, and by doing so, they may take more advantage of technology; 2 students wrote that the topics and their vocabulary should be more advanced. Then, 3 people said they needed more time to look for information because they depended too much on the dictionary. Finally, 2 people complained about the condition of the computer equipment and its access to the Internet.

The last two questions tend to assess students' perception regarding how much content and vocabulary they have learned through the various WebQuests. In regards to content learned while conducting the task, 25 students marked *A lot* and 18 circled *Fair*. Nobody circled the last two alternatives (*A little and Nothing*). Finally, 4 people indicated they learned *a lot of* new words and 9 learners circled *Fair*. In the same item, 1 people marked *A Little* and nobody circled *Nothing*. The results obtained in these two questions seem to demonstrate that students had a positive perception on the effectiveness of having carried out WebQuests in their course although the level of difficulty of the task was challenging due to the authenticity of online resources.

8   Suggestions

Based on the mistakes encountered by the author of this article, novice LM-1001 instructors must always keep in mind the following suggestions before using short-term or long-term WebQuests with their groups:

a. To avoid plagiarism, it is appropriate to instruct students on the importance of acknowledging resources when necessary. They should do so while incorporating quotations, photographs, graphs, and other forms of multimedia material to their WebQuests.

b. It is a must to check if equipment works properly and if there is a stable Internet connection. These two aspects were the most significant drawbacks encountered at these computer sessions.

c. Check if online resources have not been eliminated or modified.

d. Due to time-saving considerations, the instructor should divide the class into small groups of students *before* going to the computer laboratory; if possible, each learner can be given a role within his or her team.

e. WebQuests should also include a link to a well-known monolingual dictionary in the case the students encounter an unknown word or if they need to learn its pronunciation.

f. Regarding the *process* of carrying out a WebQuest, students would benefit if they receive a useful language chart to develop communication strategies and use English only.

g. Due to the fact that some students may use Spanish while conducting the activity, a group leader should be given the task of monitoring that everybody uses the target language only.

h. Having a time keeper or leader in each team is also useful.

i. Learners must have a clear idea what the outcome consists of and how they are expected to do it and present it.

j. Students' outcome should not necessarily be an oral presentation all the time. One may assign a reaction paper, a composition, a journal, a newspaper article, a role play, a short debate or group discussion. Thus, students should feel there is variety of outcomes after each WebQuest so that they will never lose enthusiasm.

k. To establish cooperative learning, each team should have learners with different proficiency levels; this is particularly important if some students are taking the course for their second, third or fourth time.

l. If possible, students should interact and work with different members.

m. Students must react to content and transform it in a way that they process information and develop a specific outcome.

n. Instructors may upload their WebQuests using blogs or wikis to have easy access and avoid making copies of learners' handouts.

o. Students may also have access to the assessment rubric.

p. If necessary, students may fill in a self-assessment form or checklist to evaluate their classmates' work or reflect on their own learning.

q. Finally, keep in mind that some students may expect a grade after completing a WebQuest and its corresponding outcome due to the amount of work and time that this requires. Instructors must point out at the beginning that they will conduct a non-graded task instead of a graded quiz or composition.

9   Limitations

It was always time-saving to check with students the conditions of the computer equipment to see that the machines functioned properly. In this study, a few computers could not be used and their access to the Internet was inexistent. Unfortunately, one semester before this study was conducted; access to the Internet was interrupted during the first weeks of classes. In some other sessions, the connection worked extremely slowly due to a technical problem. For this reasons, three computer-lab sessions were used to work with the content of the textbook and other oral and listening activities. Another key constraint is absenteeism, and this seriously affected the development of the tasks and their presentations. Surprisingly, absenteeism occurs in most groups although attendance to lab sessions is part of the final grade.

10   Conclusion

In summary, implementing short-term WebQuests in the course LM-1001 Integrated English I includes the following advantages:

1. WebQuests bring variety to computer-lab sessions and break the monotony of traditional grammar-based activities,
2. the use of time in computer-lab sessions is optimized,
3. Cooperative-language Learning plays an important role at the computer lab where learners typically isolate from others and interaction is almost inexistent,
4. first-year students are exposed to authentic materials, being this the case of online resources which are not published for educational purposes,
5. learners with a lower level of proficiency can use additional online-resources (dictionaries or encyclopedias) to make sense of unfamiliar content,
6. there is an integration of all language skills and sub-skills,
7. learners have an opportunity to put communication strategies into practice if instructors provide them with a list of useful language,
8. students can apply different learning strategies such as note-taking and paraphrasing while gathering data at the computer laboratory,
9. learners will become critical thinkers especially if a WebQuest is used as input for future debates or group discussions on more complex issues,
10. a WebQuest may serve as an effective pre-writing activity if students will eventually write an academic composition,

11. as a different type of students' outcome (apart from an oral presentation), they may have the possibility of preparing a debate, role-play, group discussion, a journal entry, or even a videotaped documentary (this may be part of the course LM-1002 Integrated English II due to the level of difficulty of those tasks),

12. if required, students' work may be graded depending on the complexity of the outcome such as a composition or letter to the editorial,

13. students may use most of their creativity at the moment of preparing their visual aids, and they feel the freedom to express their thoughts in various forms and artistic techniques,

14. if LM-1001 Instructors have two computer-lab sessions each week, students can easily complete a WebQuest in one session and present an in-class PowerPoint presentation in the other one, and

15. if faculty members use WebQuests in different LM-1001 groups, they may share valuable feedback as well as sample of WebQuests with new topics.

To increase students' enthusiasm and interest towards the three computer-lab hours, teachers may design their own WebQuests on various topics. Creativity is the key to success, and appealing topics for this kind of student-centered task need to be carefully chosen. In fact, Teeler and Gray (2000) explain that "one point of departure for creating tasks is to look through your course book, pinpointing activities that did not seem to work well with your class, that did not challenge them or engage their interest for whatever reason" (62). Once challenging and interesting tasks such as WebQuests are used in the computer-lab sessions, learners will explore authentic materials and benefit from improving their English in a more motivating, autonomous, and collaborative environment.

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