



# Universidad Zaragoza

## WebQuests and the development of the reading skill

Máster en Profesorado de Educación Secundaria  
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## ABSTRACT

*“Information becomes knowledge when it is searched”.*

This TFM seeks to overview the uses of ITCs in developing the reading skill in ESL classes.

The main purpose of this research project is to analyse the basis of the implementation of WebQuests to enhance reading skill and the impact of this tool on the students. The research relied on the study and comparison of several studies, theoretical ones and case studies that show the level of improvement in the critical reading skill of the students, which is directly related to their performance in the WebQuest assigned as for the rest of their learning process.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

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The origin of this research dates back to the moment when I bought an e-book reader. The purposes of buying this kind of device were clear: to facilitate the storage of all the books and files that I wanted to read and study in a single portable storage unit. The fact is that, things did not turn out as I expected: I experienced some difficulties in studying texts from this device. Indeed, I realized that it wasn't the same studying my pdf class notes than just reading an e-book for leisure. At that time I did not know what was really happening to me and it is through the passing of this year studying this Master that I have learnt more about the learning processes and the acquisition of some specific skills like *reading*.

Nothing strange was happening to me. It was just a question of “digital literacy” (Leu, 2001) Instead of reading I was *skimming* without being conscious of it. Skimming a text implies a fast reading in order to get the main idea. I started leaving some parts of the text and, as my speed was increasing my comprehension was decreasing. This is the consequence of an extensive reading instead of an intensive one. The last result of this process was that as a result of this skimming I had banned some useful information that I tried to find by means of scanning the pages again with the result of getting completely lost.

The next question that came to my mind as a teacher was: If I am already having some problems trying to gather relevant information from this device written in L1/L2 language, what could happen to a L2 student of English in a similar situation? Are ICTS useful tools for teaching ESL? What about WebQuest?

Thus, based on the preceding information, the next **research questions** arise:

- 1) Are WebQuests a useful tool to develop the student's critical reading skills?

- 2) Which aspects of the reading skill are successfully developed through this kind of activities?

The main objectives of this research project are to answer the questions above by analysing previous research on the effectiveness of WebQuest to develop reading competence.

Nowadays we are living a “Digital Age” and WebQuest can be used as a part of a project devoted to help students to develop skills for autonomous learning and electronic competences (Luzón, 2010)

The use of new learning technologies has been revealed as relevant opportunities for informal and continuing literacy learning in all phases of the education programmes. According to UNESCO some ICTS could enable skills development, encouraging the use of learner-generated materials and promoting awareness-raising and learner motivation.

Indeed this organization catalogues some technology uses in education as “promising examples of how ITC can contribute both to the creation of a literate environment and to the enhancement of literacy learning opportunities” with examples such as interactive websites, chat-rooms, listservs, web-based courses and online libraries.

### **1.1 ICTS for developing different skills**

- *Key competences and foreign languages*

Documents such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF), the European language portfolio and the Aragonese Curriculum emphasise the importance of a language teaching methodology is suited to the development of a number of the key competences, among them the competence in linguistic communication and the competence in processing information and use of ICT.

- *Competence in linguistic communication: reading*

Learning a foreign language contributes to progress in this competence by improving student's communication skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Student's written and oral communication skills are enriched by understanding the way language is structured. Students must show that they can use language conventions appropriate to the situation, and can understand that discourse must be adapted to suit different contexts. They should be able to relate this to the study of other languages. Thus, to some extent, all activities in the language class have a communicative outcome of some kind.

- *Competence in processing information and use of ICT*

Knowledge of a foreign language enables students to access a broader range of information. Learning a foreign language should also involve learning how to process online information and use it for different purposes: to create a Wiki with all information they gather from several web sites or for planning a travel to an agreed destiny.

When learning a foreign language, it is important to be exposed to a range of resources and genres of speech and writing. The regular use of digital learning resources, including websites and interactive whiteboard materials, directly adds to the development of this competence.

This paper explores the use of WebQuests in EFL classes. The main purpose of this TFM is to analyse if reading skills could be improved by means of using Webquests, and to determine the level of impact of this instrument on learners through the study of several critical studies about this issue.

Therefore we will try to see how this skill (one of the main five skills to assess the knowledge of a language) is achieved by students through the use of ICTS.

Having come this far, we should note that new interpretations and concepts arises from this new conception of teaching through ICTs. Thus, the team of the research project ATC21S (Assessment and Teaching of 21st-Century Skills) state that classical skills are being substituted by e-skills/21th skills:

- Ways of thinking
- Ways of working
- Tools for working
- Skills for the living world

In this context, literacy could be divided into several sub-types and learners should acquire new ways of these literacies in order to adopt the level of today culture. According to Shetzer and Warschauer (2009) the concept of *electronic literacy* refers to the ability to use electronic tools for communication.

As we all know, the way in which knowledge is measured nowadays consists of a series of competences. We no longer check what someone knows just by testing the concepts he or she acquired, but by seeing if he/she is competent. A competence is a sum of abilities and knowledge which enables one to communicate. Knowing a language consists of many varied competences (linguistic, paralinguistic, intercultural, pragmatic, etc.); however, in this project, we will focus on the Reading skill, as it refers to what students should be capable of doing as far as reading in English is concerned.

As we have already mentioned, our project is designed for working with 3ºESO classes. However, before focusing specifically on this academic year, the Aragonese Curriculum gives already a global aim for the whole ESO stage concerning the reading competence: "students will be able to read and understand varied texts of an adjusted level to their capacity and interests so as to infer general and specific information, apart from enjoying reading as an enriching activity".

This objective in the curriculum tends to summarise what students are expected to achieve. What we want to see is how this aim is achieved.

## **2. WHAT IS A WEBQUEST?**

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### 2.1 WebQuest definition and overview

Before going forward in deep explanations about some pedagogical approaches it is necessary to explain the reason of the selection of WebQuest to stimulate and improve student's reading skills and critical criteria. I'm going to start this point by giving this definition: "A WebQuest is an inquiry-oriented activity in which some or all of the information that learners interact with comes from resources on the internet" (Dodge, 1995). The model was designed and developed by Bernie Dodge at San Diego State University in 1995.

Since the very beginning there are two types of WebQuests that are distinguishable one from another.

*Short Term WebQuests:* the target of a short term WebQuest is divided into two phases as Marzano states in his research "Dimensions of thinking" (Marzano 1992), that is: knowledge **acquisition** and **integration** (Marzano's model nº2). The purpose of this task is to make students get on the issue of gathering relevant information and make sense of it. The length of this kind of WebQuest is designed to be completed in one to three class periods.

*Longer Term WebQuest:* The target of a longer term WebQuest is also divided into two phases as Marzano (1992) also states (Marzano's model nº3): **extending** and **refining** knowledge. At the end of a longer term WebQuest, a student should have analysed an entire block of meaning in a deep way, transforming it, and he/she should have revealed an understanding of the theme by means of producing and output that others can reply to, on-line or off-line. The length of a longer term WebQuest is designed to be completed between one week and a month in a classroom setting.

A WebQuest is a task that develops different types of thinking and that helps the student to work on his/her critical thinking in order to engage with the text (Dodge: 1995). Thus WebQuest can promote several sub-skills which are necessary for a critical reading. See table 1 below.

All these thinking skills have to do with the management of information and are useful tool to acquire in order to work on the different literacies of today society. Dodge also states that WebQuests are the perfect frame where the students can develop these skills in order to create a discovery process that leads them from an initial stage of looking for information to a final stage of synthesis and conclusions by means of a process of gradual reuse and refinement. Thus, the conclusion we can extract from this that completing a WebQuest involves not only a process of searching information but also a process of analysis and synthesis (Yoder, 2005)

1.- Comparing: Identifying and articulating similarities and differences between things
2.- Classifying: Grouping things into definable categories on the basis of their attributes
3.- Inducting: Inferring unknown generalizations or principles from observations or analysis
4.- Deducting: Inferring unknown generalizations or principles from observation or analysis
5.- Analysing errors: identifying and articulating errors in one's own or other's thinking
6.- Constructing support: Constructing a system of support or proof for an assertion
7.- Abstraction: Identifying and articulating the underlying theme or general pattern of information.
8.-Analyzing perspectives: Identifying and articulating personal perspectives about issues.

*Table 1. Thinking skills promoted by WebQuests. Marzano (1992), as cited by Dodge (1995)*

WebQuests of either short or long duration are purposely designed to take the most advantage of learner's time. In order to obtain the highest number of benefits as possible from this process , WebQuests should contain at least the following parts:

1. An **introduction** that presents the WebQuest by setting the context and gives some background information.
2. A **task** that includes the aim of the WebQuest and the targets to be covered
3. A set of **information sources** which students are going to need in order to complete the task successfully.
4. A description of the **process** the students should follow in accomplishing the task. The process should be divided into clearly defined stages.
5. A **guidance** in order to help students about how to organize information. This can take the form of guiding questions, or directions to complete organizational frameworks such as timelines, concept maps, or cause-and-effect diagrams as described by Marzano (1988, 1992) and Clarke (1990).
6. A **conclusion** that brings the outcome to the quest. It helps the students to revise what they've learned, and maybe inspires them to use this type of task into other areas.

## 2.2 Underlying learning theory and related pedagogical approaches

The learning theory underlying WebQuest is constructivism. Social constructivism focuses on the importance of social context for learning. This theory of learning promotes learning environments that reflect real world, building on previous knowledge to construct new knowledge, and using activities that promote dialogue, interaction, meaning negotiation, and collaboration (Bonk and Cunningham, 1998). Web-based learning such as WebQuestS can provide a useful context for the development of the social interaction where the learners are able to commonly construct the knowledge of the target language by being engaged in meaningful activities (Simina & Hamel, 2005). This implies a change in focus of the classroom. By means of this change from teacher dominated to student-centered in a constructive environment learners obtain more independence and they fell freer in order to interact with the result of a collaborative work.

Other principles behind WebQuests are Krashen's input hypothesis and the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis.

.- The *input hypothesis* is based on the acquisition of new language knowledge due to the slightly difference of level between the learner and the input. Krashen called this level of input "i+1" where "i" is the language input and "1" is the higher level of language acquired. By means the inquiring process that the WebQuest involves, learners acquire new linguistic structures and terms by means of reading. In general terms this i+1 input implies not only linguistic devices but also our knowledge of the world and the situation.

.- The *Acquisition-Learning hypothesis* related to the way that humans develop their language ability. As Krashen (1977) states, there are two different and independent ways in the way we, as humans, develop our linguistic skills: acquisition and learning.

Acquisition is related to a subconscious process in which we are immersed as learners of which the individual is not aware. Thus, the learner acquires part of the language in a direct but unconscious way and the acquirer generally does not realize that he possesses any new linguistic capacity. In that way, through WebQuests learners will be acquiring new linguistic structures and knowledge as means as they are immersed in the inquiry process.

Learning a language, as a contrast, is a complete conscious process in which the learner plays an active role. Thus, in a WebQuest activity, learner may learn the specific structures or linguistic items that are focused on.

A WebQuest combines the benefits of several pedagogical approaches like the inquiry-based approach, project based approach, content-based language learning and gamification.

**Inquiry-based learning:** the process of inquiring starts when learners have to apply their senses in order to gather some required information. Thus, learners look for appropriate resolution to some concrete questions and issues

rather than a right answer itself. In this sense teachers should stimulate their student's inquiry skills in order them to be more effective in this issue.

**Project-based learning:** Project-based learning started in 1918 in an article called "The Project Method" by Kilpatrick and is an instructional student-centered education approach in which learners work in a collaborative environment to explore real world difficulties and generate presentations to share what they have learned with the rest of the community (Warschauer et al., 2000).

**Content-based language learning:** is an approach in which the aim of the instruction is shifted from a language instruction to a mixed process of mastering both language and the content matter (Snow, Met, and Genesse, 1989; Spanos, 1990). It is based into four main criteria:

- .- Learning activities have to contain a wide range of perspectives on the content area (Marco, 2002)
- .- Activities should be formed by authentic materials without any oversimplification. (Spiro and Jehng, 1989)
- .- Activities should include visuals and other references useful for making associations as they facilitate deeper thinking (Craik and Lockhart, 1972)
- .- Activities should promote the SQ3R formula: surveying, questioning, reading, recalling, and reviewing materials under study (Schmeck, 1986)

In general terms WebQuest are embedded in inquiry-based, project based learning, and content-based language learning approaches ( Hopkins- Moore and Fowler, 2002; Matejka, 2002) since they pursue students motivation and authenticity. WebQuests promote cooperative learning (Watson, 1999; Hopkins- Moore & Fowler, 2000) at the same time that learners develop higher thinking skills. In addition, they can be used as a tool for gamification, an approach that promotes the use of game thinking and game mechanics in a non-game context to engage users and solve problems (Pelling, 2002; Coonradt, 1984).

### 2.3 WebQuest for learning languages

There is an increasing number of language teachers that find Internet a useful learning environment where learners and teachers can find opportunities to make language learning more truthful and engaging (Koenraad, 2002)

In his paper "Tools and Strategies to Support the Implementation of Web-Based and Task-Based Approaches in Modern Language Education" (Koenraad, 2010) describes the Dutch Language Project (Language Quest) that was created along the premises of the Common European Framework together with the integration of the World Wide Web. The project objectives are to raise awareness of the conditions for effective learning processes and language acquisition when complex, integrated tasks such as WebQuests are used (Koenraad, 2002). The project has developed a set of criteria for Webquests intended for use in language learning. The task should promote use of the target language, should require use of authentic materials and meaningful communication. Another objective of the project was to develop a diagnostic tool

LQAT (Language Quest Assessment Tool) designed to test the potential of a concrete WebQuest for the language classroom.

The structured approach that configures the WebQuest scheme is a useful tool for providing language integrated curriculum activities. As a contrast, as the author states, the problem for language education in relation to WebQuest is that the most of the current available WebQuest lack a specific design for the use in language education.

According to this and, Inspired by the WebQuest page, the Dutch National Bureau for Modern Languages started the TalenQuest project in 2000. Its educational approach is characterized as an active and learner centered learning with a model with relates with modern Second Language Acquisition and MFL pedagogy. It is also based in the idea of the *input* as a precondition, for language learning (Krashen 1985) so that, the text level is preferably Interlanguage+1 (= just above the competence of the learner).

Pérez Torres (2005: 3) believes that “a WebQuest for teaching and learning a second language is an inquiry oriented activity placed in a relevant thematic context. At the same time, it provides the students the opportunity to learn and put into practice some linguistic skills”

Research on WebQuest for language learning has focused on the SLA criteria that they should meet (Koenraad, 2002; Pérez 2006). Research carried out by the GIAPEL group states that in order to develop a framework for the composition of language tasks in an online environment, it is necessary to have the SLA (Second Language Acquisition) as a reference (Luzón and Ruiz-Madrid, 2010).

CLIL is a methodology that enhances language immersion and content based instruction under a constructivist perspective. The term was created in 1994 by David Marsh and Anne Maljers and promotes multilingualism in the school by means of teaching foreign languages through common subjects like History or Sciences which, in a normal official curriculum, are treated as isolated subjects.

Results of recent studies on multilingualism have demonstrated that multilingualism in schools has contributed to the development of the students' communicative skills in languages that make easier the acquisition of following languages. (Fernández, Pena, García, & Halbach, 2005; Fernández Fontecha, 2008). Do coyle (2002) states that CLIL is based on four key principles:

.- Acquisition of contents, skills and comprehension of the subject through the process of learning.

.- Definition of the language as a way of communication but also as a channel for the acquisition of knowledge. According to this perspective, language is learned by means of using it in different and spontaneous situations.

.- CLIL should suppose a cognitive challenge for the students: in order them to develop their thinking skills together with their basic interpersonal abilities for communication in the academic language.

.- Multiculturality, as language, thinking and culture are tied, CLIL offer the students the opportunity to interact with other cultures.

CLIL and CALL are two means of improve foreign language education (Fernández, 2010) Also both function under the same constructivist perspective (Met, 1998). CALL and, in particular, CLILQuest (a WebQuest implemented in a CLIL class), might improve CLIL by means of giving support to most of its main features like visual support, cooperative learning or motivation (Fernández, 2010).

## 2.4 A CLILQuest for learning History

Thinking of my TFM and the subject of TICS of this Master I decided to implement a WebQuest in my period of Practicum II and III. I was said that the first thing I needed to know were the objectives of the WebQuest or, in other words, what I wanted to do with the project and which my priorities were. As I was interested in language acquisition through the reading skill I decided to design a WebQuest devoted to this issue. The fact is that, if wanted to design a WebQuest for this purpose : how to do it? Talking with the English Department I was said that what I had to do is to design a WebQuest for the Department of History or Sciences but written in English (CLILQuest), in that way my pupils would learn new contents about History whereas they practised the English language by means of reading as a main tool for the WebQuest. The English Department argued that, as the classes were part of the bilingual section, all scholars were able enough to successfully get on this task. I wasn't very convinced of the results of my initial purpose although anyway I designed a CLILQuest about "La Guerra de los Sitios" for the Dep. of History that I didn't implement finally for calendar reasons.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with a white background. The title 'The Siege of Zaragoza' is at the top left. On the left, there's a vertical navigation bar with a red header 'Welcome' and a green body containing links: 'Introduction', 'Task', 'Process', 'Evaluation', 'Comments', and 'Teacher Page'. Below this is another green box with links: 'About Author(s)', 'Evaluate WebQuest', 'Review', 'Statistics', 'Expert WebQuest', and 'Share This WebQuest'. The main content area has a yellow 'Welcome' icon and the text 'Welcome: The Siege of Zaragoza'. It includes a description: 'Description: This is a webquest about the Siege of Zaragoza by the French troops. In this WebQuest students are going to discover heroes, heroines, relevant places and buildings from the city at the same time that they learn more about what happened in that War.', 'Grade Level: College / Adult', 'Curriculum: English / Language Arts', 'Keywords: War, war, heroes, Zaragoza, Napoleon', and 'Author(s): Edurne Muñoz Arredondo'. At the bottom, it says 'The Public URL for this Webquest: <http://tinyurl.com/weblearn1.php?w=100214>'.

This CLILQuest has been designed with the help the tool Zunal WebQuest maker. The CLILQuest consists of the following components:

Wellcome: Introductory section with a brief explanation of the task.

Introduction: An effective introduction does two things: it relates directly to what is about to be learned by foreshadowing it. Second, it engages interest by pointing out the importance of the topic, or the mystery of it, or the relevance

Task: The most critical part of any WebQuest is the Task description. This section simply describes what you want the learner to have accomplished by the time they have finished the lesson. The Task description will be short, but it will represent the results of higher level thinking. It should be written in the second person and in language accessible to your targeted learners. In this case students are immersed in a role play. They are tourist guides and they have to design a guided tour around Saragossa talking about some emblematic places related to the "Siege Of Saragossa".

Process: It spells out step by step what the learners will do, how they'll interact with the teacher, each other, and with information. There are three phases to the process. In Phase 1, the teacher provides learners with the information they'll need to perform the task. You may want to have everyone reading one set of pages, and then break them into groups with separate roles, each with a different set of links to look at

**STEP Nº1:** your group (of four) will need to begin this WebQuest by deciding who will take responsibility for each of the four major components for this assignments

- A) WALKING MANAGER: to set the parameters of the walk
- B) CONTENT DESIGNER: to select the contents of the guided tour
- C) ART ADVISOR: art guidance of the main monuments of interest
- D) PRESENTATION EXPERT: to design the result presentation of the WebQuest

In Phase 2 of the Process, the thinking work takes place. Students have now examined the information and now they need to transform it in some way. Here is where they play with ideas, make decisions, and so on. In the last Phase of the Process, learners actually produce something that reflects the thinking they did in Phase 2. They may be writing a position paper, preparing a debate, creating a model... This is the design of the process of my CLILQuest:

**STEP Nº2:** Each member should begin gathering information from the WebQuest. Although the Walking Manager and the Content Designer have more direct responsibility each member should begin to get the ideas of the project in their mind.

As you do your research be sure to document each site used for the Works Cited page of your presentation.

At this stage teacher provides the references of the websites to the students.

In Phase 3 the teacher explains what they have to do with the collected data:

**STEP Nº3:** the group should come together with the collected data and evaluate the general condition of the quest. The Walking Manager and the Content Designer should work together to design the route. The Art and Presentation Experts should get a copy of the work completed to this point for careful analysis.

In Phase 4 the students revise all the information and present the results.

**STEP Nº4:** a final team meeting should be held to finalize all parts of the project and verify satisfactory completion of each WebQuest component.

The Presentation Expert will take the final changes and additions of the project presentation.

**Conclusion:** The Conclusion section brings the lesson to a close.

### **3. HOW EFFECTIVE ARE WEBQUESTS FOR DEVELOPING THE READING COMPETENCE?**

As I could not implement the WebQuest I had designed, I had to change the orientation of my research and focus on the results of previous empirical research on WebQuests. Thus this is the reason of the title of this last section of my TFM. As Koenraad (2002) points out, although the relation of the WebQuest concept with learning theories (Marzano and Kendall 2007) and with educational approaches (Bransford and Schwartz 2001) is well documented there are new studies and researches that appear every day questioning and analysing the relation and consequences that arises from their implementation. It is therefore worth analysing what research on WebQuests implementation.

A historical overview of the different methods in language teaching brings to our memory the audio-lingual method, the silent way, TPR, task-based learning, communicative language teaching, suggestopedia or the most recent Dogme. Thus the fact of teaching languages should be understood under the frame of a constant evolution and change that generates a lot of book titles every day.

Different approaches have been born as a reaction to a previous one. Dogme philosophy goes against current trends in the language classroom. Structural methods and grammar driven materials are “the worst scenario” in a Dogme ELS class. Beneath this conception of the ESL classes lies a different way of understanding language. Dogme conception of language has to do with its social spectrum influenced by Krashen theory of language as a complex social phenomenon (Bryndal, 2000)

Teachers must ensure that lessons are language rich, and language must be used for meaningful communication, relevant to students' learning and socio-cultural context (cf. Thornbury 2001). The new cultural and socioeconomic context, with the increasing important of online information and communication, provides new types of texts and new forms of constructing meaning (Luzón: 2010) and Webquests are revealed to be a useful tool for the treatment of information and therefore it could be a useful tool for teaching languages.

Society is under a continuous process of changing and therefore its contexts as for example the way we acquire languages (Trong Tuan, 2002). The use of ICTS has changed the scene of education and therefore how we teach languages. In terms of reading skill learners have to deal with most useful resources and a big amount of accessible authentic materials (Trong Tuan, 2002).

New social and cultural contexts generate new literacies. Learners also need to develop the new literacies of today society (Luzón, 2010). Thus in the process of being multiliterate learners have to acquire different skills that provide them the access to diverse modes of communication by means of different technologies. This brings us to the term electronic literacy, as the ability to use electronic tools for communication and which is the basis of the WebQuest. Inquiry based tasks related to internet implies a range of multiple

acts like navigation, reading, and interpretation skills, including effectiveness and evaluation (Luzón: 2010). At the same time electronic formats implies new way in thought processes (hypertextuality and interactive multiple media).

As Luzón and Ruiz-Madrid state (Luzón: 2010), the WebQuest format provides ESL teachers a useful tool that encompasses all these terms, that is: provide the students a multidisciplinary frame for work in order to develop genre awareness and promoting the development of new technologies. In this new context, where electronic literacy is so important, the **reading** and writing competence would be integrated into a wider competence, the *wreading competence* (Luzón and Ruiz Madrid, 2010) causing the necessity of development of particular skills:

- .- Linguistic and semiotic skills (e.g. ability to relate different semiotic codes)
- . - Cognitive and metacognitive skill of information, elaboration and management (e.g. the ability to evaluate the usefulness of online information)

The fact is that the reading competence is dealing with a new paradigm and that the focus of the reading skill, the text, has changed. As Luzón (2010) states, resources should also reflect the textual complexity of the web in order to train learners to manage this complexity. Coiro (2003) characterizes digital texts as “hypertextual networks” which are compound by multitude of new formats and new thought processes for making meaning.

Thus, according to the new paradigm of the reading competence two questions arises as to whether it is possible the utilization of WebQuest help to improve EFL learners’ reading skill and what EFL learners’ attitudes towards WebQuest- based teaching of reading are.

Some experimental studies have shown that WebQests are effective to develop the reading competence. In her research on the use of WebQuest for language learning Trong Tuan (YEAR) sought to answer the two previous questions.

The author introduces a new variable that is: the motivational component. Not all people react in the same way when they deal with something new, and of course, if they have to implement it to their learning processes. According to the results of a case study about 44 second-year students, 26 females and 18 males who were attending the third course (reading 3) at the Faculty of English Linguistics the findings revealed that the students who received the Webquest based program made considerable improvement in their reading. The results were complemented with the positive feedback of the students toward the use of webquests.

A research by Alshumaimeri (2012) also reveals the positive attitude of students towards WebQuests. Alshumaimeri (2012) stresses the important role of motivation in the process of accomplishment of long-term goals as the fact of learning a language (Guilloteaux & Dörnyei, 2008). As he states, students in all grades have a especial interests in being taught via WebQuest instead of the “traditional” way of learning (Hassanien, 2006). Thus, the author also introduces the concept of *blended learning* and their benefits to their students in spite of the fact the students do not agree with this concept of education. Considering WebQuest an effective tool to promote foreign language skills, the author of this

paper designed an experimental study almost in the same way than the previous one.

The study was conducted in a university first year preparatory program. The participants were 83 students in a science and engineering track in the Preparatory year. These students were divided into two groups: a control group of 41 students and an experimental one of 42. In order to ensure that the subjects had the same level of English (proficiency) in reading comprehension, a reading comprehension pre-test was assigned to both groups. The students completed pre-and post-reading comprehension tests to grade the students' performance before and after the treatment. In the test the students were provided with a passage to read carefully in order to discern the topic and general meaning of the text as a whole. After this, students had to answer five questions with four-option multiple choice answers.

The results were enlightening. They show the potential of WebQuests and their suitability for the promotion of the reading comprehension. Nevertheless, as the author states, both teachers and students need to be trained in order to obtain more effectiveness from the use of WebQuests.

According to Norton-Meier (2003) a series of observations and interviews with adolescents Internet readers reveals that these readers create new comprehension strategies. These strategies help students in order to better understand what they are reading or, in the case of WebQuesting, this reading strategies provide them enough tools to speed up the searching process of information:

*Activate prior Knowledge:* students reactivate their prior knowledge in order to locate relevant information

*Monitor comprehension:* readers move from big ideas to small ones or details, with a emphasis on efficiency and speed when reading on the Internet.

*Repair comprehension:* students reread texts on the Internet following the curve of a spiral, moving ever closer to the center and the answer to look for the question

*Determine important ideas:* keywords are important for readers, by this means they form a mental plan for their internet search.

*Synthesize:* sometimes readers need to confirm her own understanding by orally join all the ideas from the text they have read on Internet.

## **4. CONCLUSIONS**

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At the beginning, digital literacy was largely conceived as the ability to use a computer and to write in programming languages. Nowadays being digitally literate implies being able to understand texts in new media (as most medium have been/are being digitalized), to search and have critical focus about information (with the widespread of the Internet) and to be able to communicate with others through a variety of digital tools and applications (mobile, internet). All these skills belong to different disciplines: media studies; information sciences; communication theories.

ICT usage is becoming more extensive across learners: more students are using technologies on a daily basis, for more time and for different drives. This use is moreover derived by the digitalisation of society in general, as many of the activities students undertake have a digital component. Exposure to digital tools related to all these different disciplines embraces the domains of work, learning and teaching. As society is becoming digitalized, the knowledge, attitudes and skills (KAS) that are needed to be digitally competent becomes diverse: being digitally literate today is not limited to the understanding of a certain digital text. For this reason, one of the challenges for nowadays teachers is to provide students enough tools to develop new skills of online reading. New forms of literacy call upon students to know how to read and write not only in the print world but also in the digital world. Every change implies some consequences and this shift in the way that students read changes the way they face this new challenge. Therefore, the idea that arises from this statements is the idea of the student **autonomy**.

How can we as teachers provide students with the right tools to face this new literacy? Student will became **autonomous learners** as a result of a right training in these issues.

WebQuest appears as a suitable combined way to immerse the students in a real world of Literacy, with real helpful texts.

WebQuests promote the use of links to essential resources on the World Wide Web developing individual expertise and participation in final group processes. The use of Internet content in the WebQuest process offers a wide range of different text levels according to the student's interests and necessities. Thus, WebQuests are not only a useful tool to develop the reading but also to carry out online reading strategies as I stated at the end of the previous point.

This research provides an implication that WebQuest can promote the teaching of reading. The results of the research show that there are clear grades in the contrastive studies supporting the use of WebQuest to improve EFL learner's level and motivation.

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