"Another brick in the WALL":
Wiki Assisted Language Learning in ESP university courses

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Abstract

In an effort to achieve high competence in languages, the Cyprus University of Technology (CUT) offers courses of English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP). These courses are tailored to the academic and professional needs of the students of the ten departments of the university. Furthermore, English courses offered at the university are designed in such a way as to combine face-to-face instruction with a CALL component, in other words blended learning. Such practice has been shown to promote student autonomy and empowerment. ICT tools incorporated in the courses were, among others, Word processing and presentation tools, the Internet, and YouTube.

In a recent evaluation research study conducted by the Language Centre (LC) of the university, students identified the use of the aforementioned ICT tools as extremely essential in their learning especially because these can be used to cater for their most important needs. For example, "searching the internet for information" and "reading and understanding online material in English" were identified as two of the most needed skills by the students, who found that these were covered in their English courses. The results from the study confirmed that ICT skills such as using online dictionaries and preparing presentations were greatly improved through CUT English courses, which demonstrated that the ICT component was a big asset and one which could perhaps be exploited even further. This led us to consider the integration of wikis in our courses.

Wikis were chosen due to their great potential educational value, which has become apparent in the recent years. Besides, they combine multiple applications and tools already used in CUT courses. This paper will show samples of ESAP wikis through which the benefits and challenges of this web 2.0 tool will be discussed. Reflections of students on the use of this revolutionary tool will be presented.

1. Introduction

The Cyprus University of Technology (CUT) being a newly established institution faces the challenge of satisfying the current and upcoming academic and professional needs of university students. This led to the development by the Language Center (LC) of ESAP (English for Specific Academic Purposes) courses for each of the ten departments of the university. According to a recent research conducted by the LC, to ensure the quality of the courses, the already existing ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) component was extremely important. This paper describes how analysis of the data, under the considerations mentioned so far, showed that the incorporation of wikis in the courses would be even more beneficial to the students.

2. English for Specific Academic Purposes

Dudley-Evans and St John [7] talk about four types of situations regarding tertiary level institutions. CUT falls under the fourth type, which is "a situation where all subject courses are taught in the national language, but English may be important for ancillary reasons". These reasons in the case of CUT, included firstly the realization that all of the departments require their students to study and use English bibliography in their studies and secondly the fact that competence in the English Language is a high necessity for professionals in the European Union. Considering these factors, the rational and theoretical background of the English language courses offered by the LC were based on the English for Specific Academic Purposes approach (ESAP), a relatively new area of English Language Teaching (ELT) currently receiving a great deal of attention worldwide [5,7]. ESAP, as a further subdivision of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), is defined to meet specific needs of the learner, make use of underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines that it serves and finally focus on

the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre [6]. ESAP courses at CUT were designed according to these criteria maintaining in this way students' motivation, as this depends largely on student's interest in the content and perceived relevance to the course [4].

3. ICT component in ESAP
Student motivation was only one of the reasons for technology to be incorporated into the ESAP courses. The growing presence of New Technologies in everyday life along with the fact that students are increasingly growing up in the digital environment mean that students feel more and more comfortable using New Technologies in the language classroom [12].

Other benefits attributed to the computer and supported by literature include collaboration, autonomous learning, integration of the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), authentic material, meeting the individual needs of leraners, feedback, as well as interaction with the computer and among the learners [2]. According to Smart and Cappel [14], online instruction provides opportunities for learners to be actively involved in learning and to participate in activities which promote reflective thought and critical thinking. Furthermore, Yunus [15] refers to the fact that ICT provides "greater teaching satisfaction". Being in an environment which supports ICT integration, such as the one CUT can provide, teachers meet the challenge of "finding ways to apply new technologies to a learning process with proven educational benefit" [1].

In order to achieve this, teachers should be able to use ICT in their teaching , which means they are not just preparing students for the challenges they will face in future life but they are evolving by becoming savvier with their technology use themselves. Given the increased interest and use of technology in higher education, it is only safe to assume that the benefits derived from the use of computers in the language classroom are becoming more and more evident. In the next part of this paper students' attitudes towards the incorporation of ICT into their ESAP courses will be examined. After all, if we hope to use technology to enhance learners'' educational experience, the perceptions and attitudes of students must be taken into consideration in the use of instructional technology.

4. The Study
In Spring 2010 the LC carried out research as part of a quality control project in order to evaluate the ESAP courses offered to the students of all ten departments of the University. The project included the development and distribution of a questionnaire to students, analysis of the data and use of the results in order to identify whether the courses needed to be improved in any way. A total of 304 students from all departments answered the questionnaire, 95% of whom are Greek Cypriots and are between the ages of 18-25 years old. Even though questions dealt with various aspects of the courses, for the purposes of this paper only the results related to the ICT component will be discussed.

Table 1 shows students' opinions of where they would need English in their studies. Most of them indicated that they mostly need English for *reading and understanding material* (81.3%) and for *searching the Internet for information* (78.3%). This was not peculiar, considering the fact that students are often required to search for and study bibliography in English for their core subjects.

Table 1. Areas in which the English Language is most needed

Category label	Count	Percent of Cases
Reading and understanding material	247	81.3
Listening to lectures and taking notes	158	52.0
Listening to other study related material in spoken form	122	40.1
Participating in oral communication	158	52.0
Expressing opinions in group discussions	133	43.8
Taking part in seminars	160	52.6
Writing assignments	188	61.8
Writing various text types such as reports, graphs, etc	139	45.7
Searching the Internet for Information	238	78.3
Searching the library catalogue for information	187	61.5
Using technical vocabulary (related to your studies)	195	64.1

When asked to evaluate their ICT skills prior to and after their English course, students indicated that there was considerable improvement in all skills with *online dictionaries* being the one with the highest improvement after participation in the course followed by *PowerPoint presentations* (Table 2).

Table 2. Evaluation of ICT skills before and after the course
Descriptive Statistics - Mean Scores

	Total Sample	
	BEFORE	AFTER
Internet search	1.79	1.49
E-mail	1.88	1.52
You Tube videos	1.64	1.45
Online Dictionaries	2.09	1.58
Word Processor	1.95	1.64
PowerPoint Presentations	2.06	1.65

The results of the research supported the decision of the LC to include in the courses an ICT component, which would cover student's needs as these were defined by their academic and future professional environment. This confirmation together with the realization by the students that certain ICT skills were improving through the ESAP courses led the LC to the conclusion that the ICT element was a great asset in the courses and perhaps one that should be exploited even further. This is when the need to integrate a tool that would combine multiple applications became apparent.

5. Wikis in ESAP
In the search of such a tool as a means of enhancing the teaching of ESAP courses, instructors at the LC of CUT introduced wikis. Wikis belong to the new wave of Web 2.0 technologies, which are changing the way messages are spread around the web.

Among these so called social web applications, language instructors at the LC opted for wikis since they are often used to support online teaching and learning activities and can replace the traditional linear approach of presenting the course content with, a more appropriate networked approach [3].
A wiki is defined as a group collaboration software tool based on Web server technology that can be used to facilitate collaborative knowledge creation and sharing [13].

Most instructors at the LC integrated wikis in their ESAP teaching in order to help students develop language skills specific to their discipline of study. According to Dudley-Evans and StJohn [6], an ESP teacher is no longer a "primary knower" of the carrier content of the material and has to draw on students' knowledge of the subject matter [7].   This, along with the fact that most ESAP courses at CUT did not have a set main textbook made the wiki the ideal technology to be adopted. Afterall, wikis encourage students to be co-creators of course content and promote student-centred learning environments.

Although incorporating ICT into EAP courses is now a common practice, literature on the use of wikis in EAP/ESP courses seems to be rather limited. In fact, addressing wikis in a CALL perspective at university level is an area that needs to be further exploited. Research dealing with wikis in the field of ESP at tertiary level has been conducted by Kovacic, Bubas and Zlatovic [9], who have touched this newly evolving learning opportunity by evaluating the potential uses of a wiki in teaching ESP courses. One of their main conclusions was that incorporating wikis in ESP courses is a useful and innovative way of enriching the learning environment of students. In another study, the same authors tested the applicability of wiki technology in teaching ESP and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at university level. Their goal was to innovatively use a wiki by engaging students in various types of online learning activities [10]. Indeed, most of these e-tivities were evaluated positively by students. The wiki technology proved to be easy to use, simple, efficient and effective.
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5.1 Integrating Wikis in ESAP university courses
This section provides an overview of two wikis that were developed by instructors of the LC for the delivery of ESAP courses at CUT.

ENG191 wiki
The ENG191 wiki (Spring 2009) (http://eng191coursewiki.wikispaces.com/) was created for the course of 'English for Commerce, Finance and Shipping'. The instructor used the wiki as a means of providing course information such as lecture notes, presentations, worksheets, assignments, announcements but also as a means of encouraging students to create their own wiki (linked to the course one) to portray their e-portfolio Through the interaction with the central course wiki as well as the creation, development and maintenance of their own wiki space, students had the opportunity to acquire ICT skills as well as exchange ideas and share knowledge with each other and the instructor, brainstorm ideas and create a glossary with terms relevant to their field of study.

Diagram 1. Screenshot of the ENG191 course wiki homepage
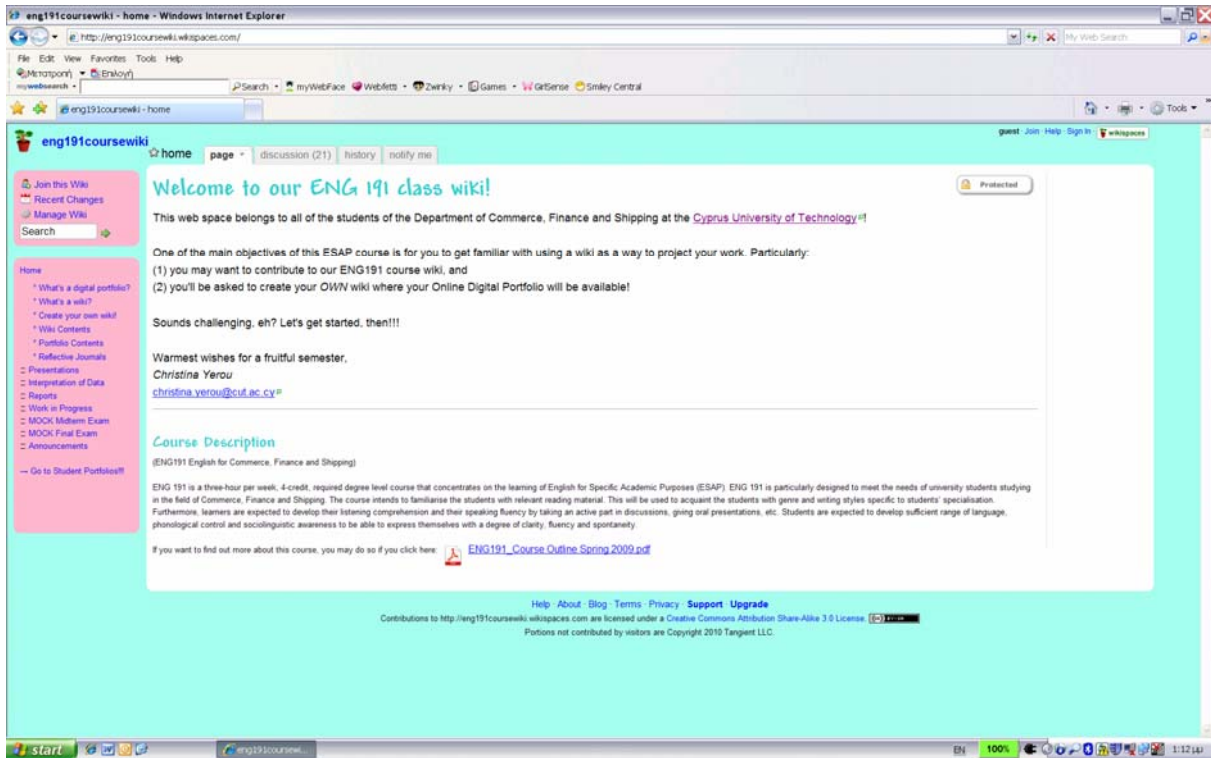
ENG220

The ENG220 (Fall 2009) (http://eng220fall09coursewiki.wikispaces.com/) is another example of a wiki created for an ESAP course, entitled 'English for Communication Studies'. This wiki was also used as a means of communication between the organizer (instructor) and the users (students). The instructor used it to provide the students with an electronic archive of all the relevant course information, lecture notes, announcements etc. The students had the opportunity to practise their ICT and language skills by saving and manipulating the material and to exchange their knowledge and opinions with the instructor and other students by creating a collaborative web space for sharing ideas, emotions and information relevant to their area of interest.

Diagram 2. Screenshot of the ENG220 course wiki homepage
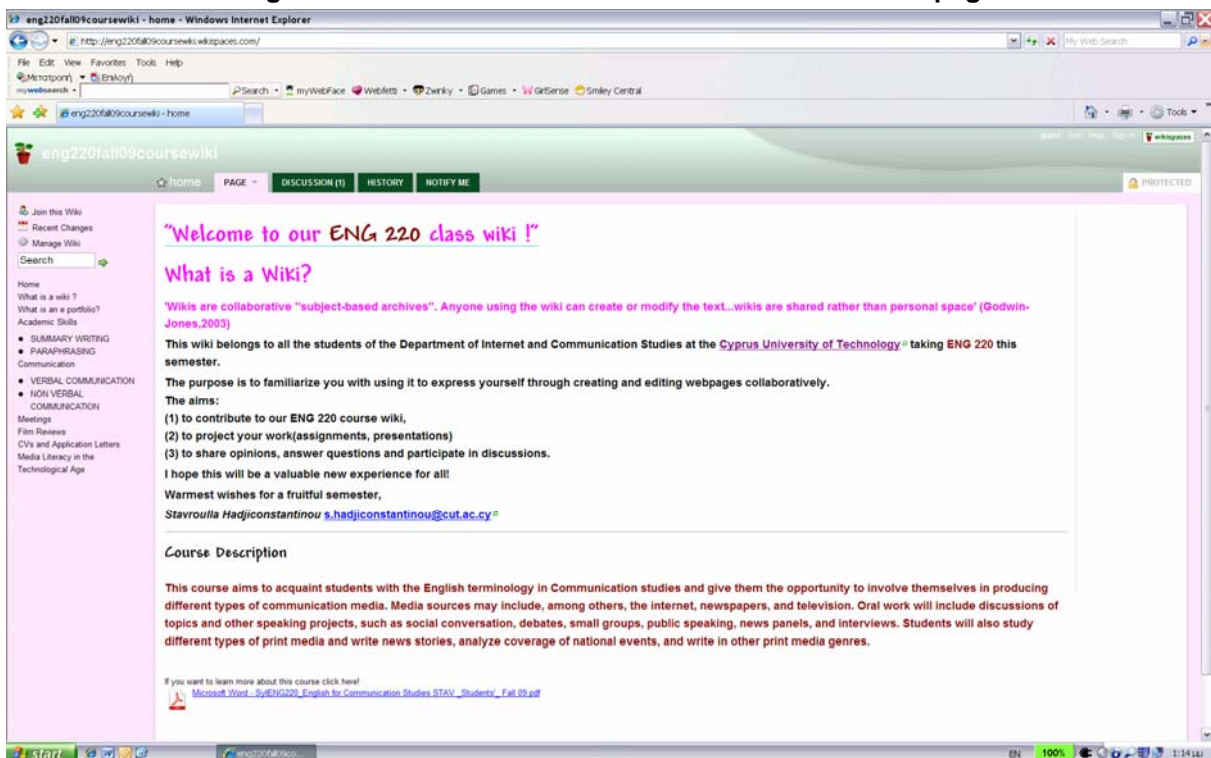
5.2 Benefits
The wiki is gaining traction in education. Particularly as regards ESP, the uses of wikis enable novel innovations [9] since it seems to be an ideal tool for collaborative work. The real power of wikis with regard to collaborative writing lies in the fact that as students work towards the final document, all intermediate copies are retained. Its ease of editing is yet another powerful element – it requires nothing but a standard web browser.

Wikis can be used for the creation of reports, presentation and graphical pages with links to internal or external sources. They can also be used for peer correction, presentation of course information and digital portfolios. These uses were applicable to both wikis described in section 5.1.

Moreover, wikis help develop Internet-based communication literacy and create course content collectively. This can be beneficial for courses where no textbook can cater for the learners' needs, as in the case of ESAP courses. Another benefit which also derived from the ENG191 course was that through wikis learners can record their reflections on learning, which offers a positive interdependence of group members [11].

5.3 Challenges
The most common challenges involved in wiki technology deal with the fact that wiki pages may be susceptible to intrusive or irrelevant comments or editing thus wiki content can be misleading. Elrufaie and Turner [8] refer to the inability of making the content visible only to enrolled students of a particular course. This was a limitation also experienced by the LC instructors.

The use of wikis in teaching requires careful planning, preparation, and constant monitoring of students' work. Other challenges involved in wiki integration in ESP courses as experienced by CUT instructors are the fact that synchronous editing may not be possible, organization and maintenance of a course wiki can be time-consuming and also the fact that once a file is uploaded it cannot be deleted from the system.

5.4 Students' Reflections
Having worked with wikis for a semester, students recorded their reflections concerning the integration of the wiki in their course. Students expressed that the use of wikis during their ESAP course gave them a sense of achievement: *I didn't believe that someday I could do something like this, I am proud of my creation*. Learners also found that the wiki experience gave them a sense of belonging: *I feel I belong to an online community, Now I feel part of the group and a small society.*

As seen from the learners' echoes, CUT students' feelings regarding the use of wikis as a means of delivery of their ESAP course were positive. Such data have given the researchers valuable insight into students' perceptions.

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