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## Using Web-based Tools as an Effective Feedback Technique in Language learning

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**Abstract.** The Using of Web-based tools (VLEs, Wikis, discussion groups) as an effective feedback technique (WBFT) in language learning is analysed in the article.

**Keywords:** *VLE (Virtual Learning Environment), Web-based Tools, Wikis, Discussion Groups, WBFT (web-based feedback technique), Face-to-face Classroom, Virtual Classroom, PTW (Personal Teaching Website), SF (Standard/Traditional Feedback), Online Teaching, Blended Language Learning.*

**Introduction:** Appropriate feedback is necessary for efficient and successful language learning. On a par with traditional feedback that is used in a classroom, more and more language teachers start to apply WBFT – web-based feedback technique that presupposes the usage of online feedback tools such as VLEs (Virtual Learning Environments), Wikis and discussion groups. In this sense, WBFT is viewed not only as the information which lets students know about their language learning success and whether their production is correct, but also as a new teaching tool that is multifunctional by nature. WBFT using is considered to be effective and helpful for teachers and students as it organizes language learning process and

creates a special positive studying environment that empowers its users to achieve numerous aims.

In view of this, the **objective** of the article is to reveal the nature of WBFT as an effective and efficient teaching tool as well as uncover major principles of its application in face-to-face and/or virtual classroom.

**The main body:** The research has been carried out on the basis of operating with web-based tools such as VLE, wikis and discussion groups in teaching English to 16 first and 27 second year students at NTUU “KPI”, who study the language as major.

To fulfill the research we have created web-based tools such as VLE (Virtual Learning Environments) on the ba-

sis of Personal Teaching Website (PTW), Wikis and discussion groups, and ensured they are linguistic in nature, focused on communication, which concerns the tasks that are studied in classroom face-to-face, interact with their class mates and teacher: send messages, share files, submit homework assignments electronically, check current schedule, latest news and notifications, be aware of homework tasks, grades and teacher’s comments, altogether, creating a common language learning environment that provides efficient feedback.

As a result, it should be mentioned that all these web-based tools constitute WBFT which is aimed to encourage students’ attempts to learn the language and improve language skills [3, c. 19].

Furthermore, we have analyzed the main principle of WBFT functioning in a face-to-face and virtual classroom and the effectiveness of its implementation in teaching English to first and second year students and have obtained the following results.

First and foremost, every teacher has to decide on the most suitable model of WBFT to work as blended feedback, taking into consideration its multi-functional nature. It is clear that the answers will depend on the objectives a teacher sets and the outcomes s/he is seeking. In this option, one of the primary things to choose is to set up a dedicated space online such as a Virtual Learning Envi-

ronment that can be an institutional VLE, Personal Teaching Website (PTW) or discussion groups where learners and teachers can meet and continue further cooperation [3, c. 20-21]. PTW that has been created as a social learning network allows its members to create their own profile page and link to other members in the site where they are given instructions to the tasks and are able to upload documents, audio files or videos, interact online, using text, audio or video, check the grades or private feedback on their works [2, c. 75-79]. Also, it is possible to have access to wikis that consist of series of collaborative web pages to which anyone with permission can contribute. Both teacher and students can add text, documents, images, video and audio to wikis [2, c. 74]. Apart from these web-based tools, teacher may use discussion groups to provide effective feedback. Online discussion groups are electronic lists in which list members communicate by email. Participants can exchange email messages and upload documents, images or video to a shared web page [3, c. 20].

Secondly, it is important to decide on the types of feedback that will constitute WBFT (see Figure 1). There may be distinguished such sorts of feedback as positive and negative, on-the-spot and delayed, formative and summative, oral, verbal or non-verbal [4].

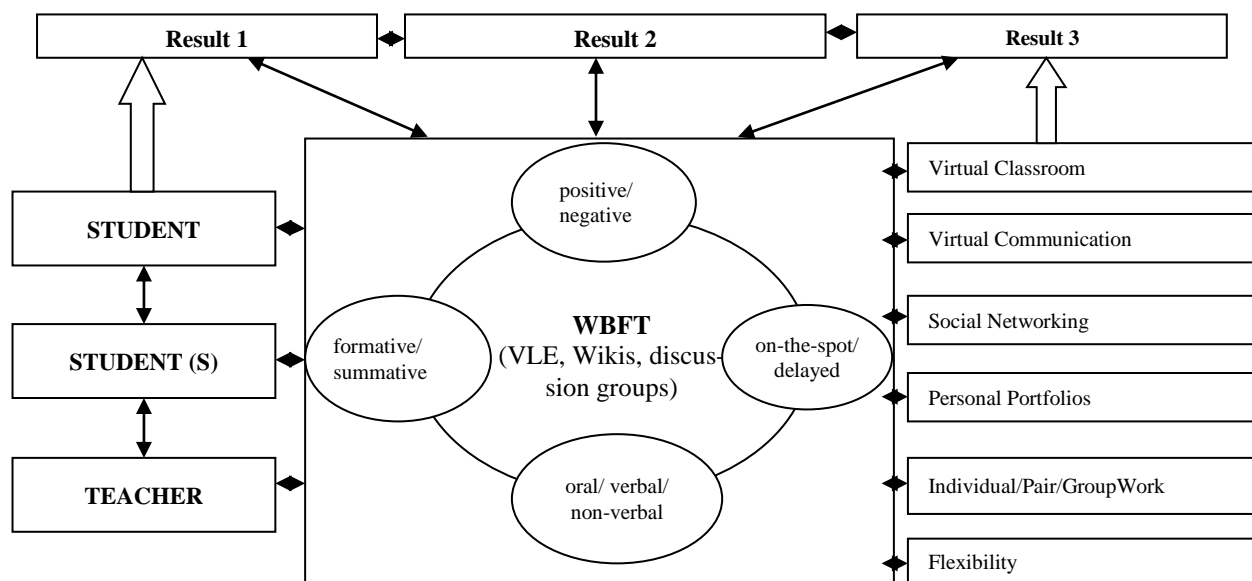


Fig. 1. WBFT Constituents

There is no doubt that WBFT should comprise both *positive* and *negative* feedback needed for the most effective language learning. Negative feedback is seen as a direct error correction or drawing attention to errors. Positive feedback ensures reward for correct or successful communication, or can provide the opportunity for self-correction. That means that students are not only assessed in the course of learning the language when working in wikis, VLE and discussion groups, but are also strongly motivated to learn the language and build confidence in using it.

Furthermore, the suggested technique provides such types of feedback as *oral* when students and teacher communicate by means of video chat, *written* via messag-

ing and text chat, or *non-verbal* with the aid of images [4].

Moreover, online feedback can be given immediately or *delayed*, depending on which would be the most effective for the task or situation. *On-the-spot* feedback can be applied as part of classroom activities (e.g. passing online tests or quizzes) or after classes when the users are online getting ready with homework assignments (e.g. working on a given project) or socializing (e.g. leaving comments on the photos, posts, etc). It is also called *synchronous* and presupposes learners and teacher work online at the same time. Delayed feedback, that is also known as *asynchronous*, is when learners and teacher do the online work at different times and use web-based tools after classes. Teacher can give instructions to the tasks, read students’

work, give feedback on work/assignments, discuss issues with learners, pick up messages from students, leave messages, a list of useful links, audio and video chats for students, create quizzes and polls, manage students grades, etc. Students, in their turn, can find instructions to the tasks, post answers to tasks, read feedback on individual and group work/assignments, discuss issues with their class mates and teacher, pick up messages from teacher, leave messages for teacher or other learners, find useful links, listen to audio and watch video, attend text and video chat with teacher and learner, do quizzes and polls, access grades privately, etc. What is more, it should be stated that asynchronous work online is often the preferred mode of studying for teachers and learners as it is more flexible. However, there are times when synchronous activities (e.g. chats) can be very helpful to build or reinforce group dynamics [4].

Apart from this, online feedback can be represented as either *formative* (is not usually graded, given at all stages throughout the learning period) or *summative* (given at the conclusion of a unit, a project, or a period of learning in the form of a grade or a final report on students' work) [4]. The focus of WBFT is formative feedback that is continuous with the main purpose to encourage the learner. To provide suggested feedback technique, teacher constantly updates and students check grades and homework boards on PTW as well as their studying progress during the period of language learning to determine what has been learned so far and what still needs work.

Thirdly, we can ascertain that WBFT increases students' willingness and ability to use and produce language, creates positive atmosphere so that students could feel comfortable by trying to use the language, maintains students focus on the language goal, makes them independent learners, deals with the errors the whole class is making as well as individual errors, improves virtual class atmosphere and students' language production [1].

Moreover, WBFT provides efficient teacher – student(s) and student – student(s) cooperation and socialization. It organizes language learning work for individuals, groups or the entire class and makes it possible to cooper-

ate in the way that was hard to ensure in a face-to-face class. Let us take teacher-student cooperation face-to-face as an example. It is difficult for a teacher to provide appropriate collaboration with each student in a group, but it is much easier to provide it virtually by means of video or text chatting/messaging. What is more, WBFT tools supply both the students and their teacher with an opportunity to meet online when they can that is flexible and convenient for both.

What is more, WBTF may be applied both in face-to-face and/or virtual classrooms giving a greater degree of prominence to its web-based tools that may be better used in language learning process. Each teacher has an opportunity to form his/her own WBTF to suit the stated curriculum, personal teaching methods, type of the suggested course as well as students' individual language learning needs and preferences.

At the same time, it is worth to mention that communication online is different to face-to-face, but it is obvious that available online teacher will give his/her learners a far better language learning experience. Online teaching is much about creating communication, rapport and interaction as classroom teaching is: there is still the teacher, the students, the language. Talking face-to-face is not the same as talking via a webcam. But essentially, we are still talking about communication, and this is something that is known as vital for learning a language in modern world [3, c. 9-12]. Most importantly, is that the teacher monitors student's work closely to ensure that WBFT both correct and helpful.

In view of this, we have conducted a survey to find out what students think about WBFT that has been applied in blended language learning referring to a mixture of both face-to-face and virtual learning. In this option, our students have met 70 % face-to-face and 30 % virtual course. For our group of language learners that represented 16 first year and 27 second year students, who are being taught general English as major, this involved the following activities and language work (see *Table 1.*) that had to be done face-to-face (6/7,5 hours a week) and virtually as part of their self-study work.

Table 1.

**Model of Blended Language Learning**

Type of activity/ language work	Face-to-face learning	Online learning
Reading	articles, reading comprehension practice tasks	reading comprehension practice tasks, reading wikis, blogs, messages, comments, etc.
Listening	listening comprehension practice tasks, listening to teacher/peers	listening comprehension practice tasks (videos, songs, films, audio files, etc)
Writing	writing tasks	writing tasks, writing wikis, blogs, comments, messages, etc
Speaking	speaking practice tasks, communication with teacher and peers	speaking practice tasks, online chatting with teacher and peers
Vocabulary	vocabulary practice tasks and tests	vocabulary practice tasks, online flash cards to learn words, online dictionaries usage, online vocabulary tests and quizzes
Grammar	grammar practice tasks and tests	grammar practice tasks and tests and quizzes
Phonetics	pronunciation practice tasks, face-to-face communication with teacher and peers	pronunciation practice tasks (videos, films, audio files, etc)
Progress tests	tests, quizzes, exams	online tests, quizzes
Feedback	<b>Standard (Traditional) Feedback (SF)</b> that is represented as face-to-face cooperation + <b>WBFT</b> that serves as a additional component of face-to-face language learning	<b>WBFT</b> that is represented as online cooperation (sending and sharing files, submission of homework electronically, using homework and grades boards to check current schedule, latest news and notifications, homework tasks, grades, teacher's comments, video and text chatting)
Other	cinema and drama clubs, attending various events to develop language skills (excursions, British and American Resource Centres, etc)	

WBFT is an indispensable component of blended language learning model that has been illustrated above. The ratio of WBFT usage face-to-face to its implementation online is shown on figure 2. Overall, it can be seen that WBFT is more applied in virtual language learning at 55 % rather than face-to-face at 5 % where standard (traditional) feedback (SF) at 40 % is still used as the main

component of face-to-face learning. At the same time, WBFT was ranked the 1<sup>st</sup> on general scheme of feedback implementation of blended language learning model at 60 % with 5% used in face-to-face learning and 55% in online learning, while SF comes next with 40% used in face-to-face language learning.

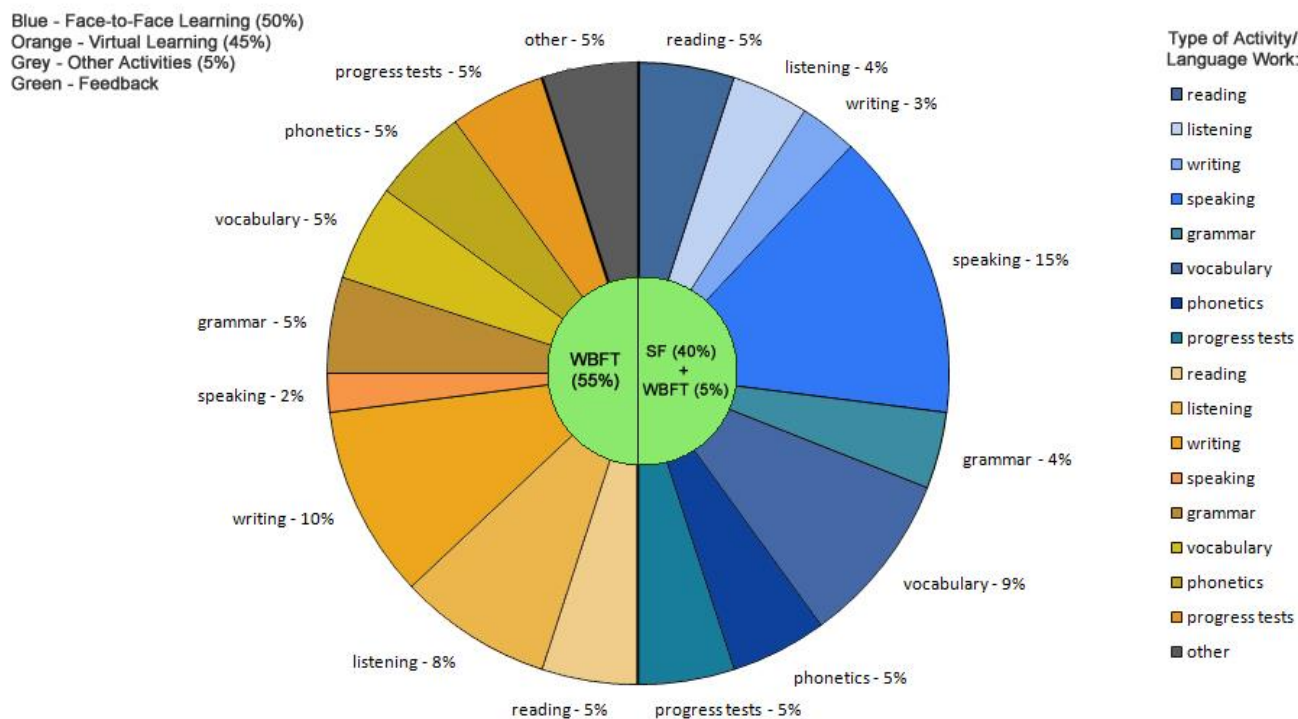


Fig. 2. WBFT Implementation in Blended Language Learning Model

Both first year and second year students have justified the effectiveness of WBFT usage in language learning in face-to-face and virtual class pointing out its benefits and

drawbacks. We have summarized some of the positives and negatives of WBFT usage in language learning in Table 2.

Table 2.

**Advantages and Disadvantages of WBFT usage in Language Learning**

Advantages	Disadvantages
Flexible – students can log on when and where they like	Flexibility means that students have to be disciplined and self-motivated
Students have access all day, every day	Students may expect the teacher to be available 24/7
It is easy and quick for students to submit work and assignments	Students may expect instant responses and feedback
The majority of students are familiar with internet and working with wikis, social networks already	Some students may find working online alienating
It can include multimedia	Low-bandwidth connections can mean that not all media can be viewed easily
It helps to be aware of current schedule, latest news, homework tasks, grades and teacher’s comments	Students have to check constantly for the updates on homework and grades boards, notices and notifications that may be stated by their teacher which were not mentioned in face-to-face class
It is strongly motivating and encouraging to communicate and socialize in a target language by means of video and text chat, via messaging, with the aid of images, etc.	The teacher is unable to check for language mistakes when students communicate or cooperate with their peers
It provides students with an opportunity to check their current progress in language learning, analyze it and improve language skills if necessary	It may be time-taking for the teacher to provide students with all necessary tasks, test, quizzes and students have to be disciplined and self-motivated
It enables students to cooperate with their teacher and peers either synchronous or asynchronous	It can be more time-consuming for the teacher

More than 80 % of respondents said they prefer WBFT to be used in language learning indicating that the advantages in the left column far outweigh the disadvantages on the right.

Apart from the benefits of WBFT usage in language learning that may work well for students, we want to suggest some of the positives that can be highlighted for lan-

guage teachers: WBFT can create online learning opportunities, motivate and encourage students to learn the target language and practice all languages skills online as well as facilitate the process of teaching the language to students.

Naturally, to apply WBFT in language course each teacher needs to be able to design an online component

for language learning to suit the curriculum, his/her professional and individual needs of his/her students, and that requires time, special knowledge and maybe some training. Secondly, s/he has to think about the ratio of WBFT usage in face-to-face to virtual classroom taking into consideration the peculiarities of the target course and various language learning scenarios that can best suit its objectives.

Current research suggests that the best results come from suggesting language learners a blended option with the main part of the language teaching offered face-to-face and part online. Indeed, it appears that the combination of online and face-to-face elements proves itself as an efficient technology in language teaching and shows that students do even better than in purely face-to-face learning.

We have come to **the conclusion** that WBFT encourages students to learn the target language through web-based tools, create positive comfortable atmosphere in which students see making mistakes as part of learning

process. Moreover, this effective technology can ensure students to stay motivated, lead to more and better language practice, provide plenty of opportunities for student-student(s) and student(s)-teacher socialization and interaction, increase participation from students in language learning, set up the atmosphere of acceptance, so that students could feel more comfortable to communicate in the target language, contribute to positive learning atmosphere and encourage trial-and-error process. At the same time, web-based feedback technique may be popular with growing number of teachers who will need to be online for some of their teaching work due to an ever accelerating cycle of innovation in teaching tools and constant need of reaching students, challenging and motivating them to language learning, and thus is a significant issue for further investigation and its implementation in language teaching methodology. There is no doubt that WBFT opens up new opportunities in language learning and is able to work for every teacher.

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**Растегаева Д.Г. Применение современных Интернет-средств как веб-технологии обучения иностранному языку, что обеспечивает эффективную обратную веб-связь и виртуальное сотрудничество студентов и преподавателя в процессе обучения английскому языку.**

**Аннотация.** В статье рассматривается методика организации обучения английскому языку студентов НТУУ «КПИ», будущих технических переводчиков, через применение современных Интернет-средств обучения как веб-технологии обучения иностранному языку, что обеспечивает эффективную обратную веб-связь и виртуальное сотрудничество студентов и преподавателя.

**Ключевые слова:** виртуальная среда обучения, смешанное обучение, средства обучения ИЯ с использованием Интернет-технологий, Интернет-технологии обучения ИЯ, вики, дискуссионная группа, занятия в реальной аудитории, виртуальное занятия, виртуальное общения, обратная связь, персональный сайт преподавателя, дистанционное обучение, традиционный тип обратной связи, обратная веб-связь.