

How to Create a Google Site Webpage for Your English Class

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Abstract

This workshop is the result of an investigation to create a technological platform in English classes. The investigation was done between wikis, blogs and Google Sites. The study demonstrated that Google Sites is the best option because it includes wikis and blogs and it is much secured. Two different groups of Economics students from the ESP program of the University of Costa Rica have already worked with this technological tool in regular classes. In addition, the research also revealed that 100% of the students have access to internet which is not a limitation to create the class webpage. This workshop is about creating a didactic webpage material for English students using Google Sites as a tool. This internet page could be used in regular classes to give additional practice to students, to create projects as forums where students practice reading and writing, to watch videos, or even for bimodal courses, or when the professor cannot assist to classes so students will take a remote class. The participants in this workshop will learn how to create a Google Sites page for their English class. They will learn how to create the main page, subpages, to make the page public or private, to insert and remove elements like pictures, web links, text, videos, and to give access to the students, etc.

Key words: education, technology, English, distance education, bimodal classes

Resumen

Este trabajo es el resultado de una investigación para crear una plataforma tecnológica en las clases de inglés. La investigación fue realizada entre *wikis*, *blogs* y sitios Google. El estudio demostró que estos sitios son la mejor opción porque incluyen *wikis*, *blogs* y son muy seguros. Dos grupos de estudiantes de economía del programa de inglés con fines específicos de la Universidad de Costa Rica ya habían utilizado esta herramienta tecnológica en las clases ordinarias. Además, la investigación reveló que 100% de los alumnos han tenido acceso a Internet, lo cual no sería un obstáculo para crear la página *web* para la clase. Este artículo trata sobre la creación de material didáctico en página *web* con el uso de sitios Google como

herramienta. Esta página de internet podría ser utilizada en las clases regulares para brindar prácticas adicionales a los estudiantes, crear proyectos como fórums donde practiquen lectura y escritura, ver videos o, incluso, para cursos bimodales, o para aquellos casos en que el profesor no puede asistir y los alumnos tienen la posibilidad de lecciones a control remoto. Los participantes en esta experiencia aprenden cómo crear una página de sitios Google para su clase de inglés, así como crear la página principal y subpáginas, hacer la página pública o privada, incluir y remover elementos como fotos, *web links*, texto y videos, dar acceso a los estudiantes, etc.

Palabras claves: educación, tecnología, inglés, educación a distancia, clases bimodales

How to create a Google Site webpage for your English Class as a Didactic Material

Education, students and the way of learning and teaching English as a second language have changed rapidly in the last twenty years or less. Because of globalization students have different expectations when attending to classes, so professors need to be up to date with technology, new methodologies and techniques of teaching. Besides, nowadays, most of the students have access to at least one of the following technological devices: smart phones, tablets, and laptops; in addition, all of them have internet access either in their house, the University or permanent access in their smart phones. This facilitates professors to opt for technological tools as a didactic material for teaching, to innovate their classes and educators can be more competitive as professionals. Google Sites is a web page tool that professors can use as a didactic instrument to teach English as a second language. Thus, research proposes the use of Google Site for English classes in different modalities: face-to-face classes, distance learning and a combination of both that from now on, it will be called bimodal. This research was an initiative to the EPS program from the University of Costa Rica to find out which tool would be the most convenient to use it in bimodal classes. The selection of this tool was done after an investigation, and it was tested in two different groups of pre-intermediate Economics students from the ESP program which has 11 students, and an upper intermediate group that has 12 students. The main activity implemented in both groups was to participate in forums as a way to improve their writing skills; this was the project of both courses. The methodology used was that the professor posted an article or video related to the topics studied in class and the students have to write a comment about those materials once or twice a week; feedback was given to every student every week. At the end of each course, an anonymous survey was given to the students to know their reaction. General results from the twenty-three students that tested the tool are that one hundred percent of the students have internet access; more than half of the students connect to internet more than twice a day, and ninety-eight percent of the students use Internet to study. After a brief research between blogs, wikis, and Google Sites, the latter

one could be used as an English didactic material because it has all the necessary features to use it in a virtual classroom, and the advantages to use it for distance education, face-to-face classes and bimodal lessons are very significant.

A preliminary investigation reveals that Google Sites is the best tool to create a secure and friendly web page as a didactic material to incorporate it in English lessons. A lot of technologic software, tools and materials are available on the Internet, and it is unused by students and professors. This research analyzed blogs, wikis and Google Sites. A comparative chart from the three options demonstrates that wikis are a cooperative page in where everybody participates in creating it. The owner of the web page is a lot of people; it has multiples author and users that create content and change it constantly on the web page. Posting an article then requires an agreement among the participants. However, the information posted could not be very reliable because the source of this participation is open and could be questionable. It also links the information to other wiki pages. On the other hand, blogs have an owner that posts the information and the participants collaborate or not by writing comments. Usually, blogs have one author who publishes and a lot of participants who comment. Blogs cannot contain a wiki, but a wiki can contain a blog. In addition, Google Sites can contain both, wikis and blogs. These sites have security so the owner can give access only to the participants, they select if not, the web page could be open for free access. It could have three types of participants, the owner, the collaborators and the users. Google Sites has the capacity to save the history of the page to keep track of all actions. The professor not only can add didactic material but also documents related to the course, messages and social activities. It is possible to insert any add from Google. The owner can be notified by email and have access reports. It is very friendly to use not only as an owner of the page but also as a student or participant. After researching between wikis, blogs, and Google Sites, the investigation reveals that Google Sites is a highly useful Internet tool to include it in English classes as a didactic material because of all its features.

Google Sites can be used in face-to-face classes, bimodal classes and even in distance education, and it provides academic and administrative advantages for the teacher. Nowadays, the technological innovation of universities has contributed to eliminate economic barriers between students, and universities. Students that dropped out of classes for economic or distance-related reasons will have a new opportunity to continue with a higher education. Single mothers, housewives, adolescents or just people that need to work would opt for a variety of on line lessons, courses, higher and specialized education and even majors. A lot of countries, Universities and people use long distance classes. At the beginning, a prevalent misconception of not being able to study Music, English, Medicine, Nursery, Architecture, Art and Science in distance courses remains; however, in Athabasca University in Canada this perception changed. Athabasca is a University that teaches distance education. It has doubled its registration number because of the implementation of long distance lessons in one class; it could be four hundred students, all around the world, instead of just twenty students like in face-to-face classes. Even though this number sounds

uncontrollable for a professor, there is a tutor for every twenty to thirty students that coaches them through the learning process. Education becomes again a one to one relationship and students can interact between each other. The Cervantes Institution in Spain is another good example of virtual lessons where Spanish is taught from beginners to advanced students. From the main web page, students are able to access the enrolled course in three different modalities, face-to-face lessons, distance and bimodal classes. In Costa Rica, the Universidad Estatal a Distancia (UNED) is a university specialized in distance education and now the University of Costa Rica has implemented some programs such as "Francés and Inglés a Distancia". There is also another similar proposal to implement bimodal lessons in "Ciencias de la Comunicación Colectiva" at the University of Costa Rica. The modality of distance and bimodal learning benefits the students and the institutions as well. Operative costs reduces; the consumption of electricity, water, paper, and building facilities decreases, less administrative employees are hired in the Universities, and the capacity and space problems of having only twenty students in a classroom is solved. Students and professor do not invest in transportation, meals, and clothing; besides, they save a lot of time to dedicate it to study and learn. This actually contributes to the country's economy. Another advantage of this modality is that students and professors would have access to class everywhere they are, so location is no longer an obstacle for students and professors to learn and to teach. The trajectory and experience of so many universities and programs in long distance learning expose the importance of using an Internet tool as Google Sites to innovate English lessons with a new didactic material.

Professors and students of English as a second language could centralize important didactic material from the class in Google Sites web pages. To acquire a second language, in this case English, the students need to be perseverant, persistence and exposed to language as much as possible. When the process of learning interrupts, either because of personal reasons or because the Institution does not have space to locate the group, the possibility to lose knowledge that has been learned increases. The professor needs to be creative to create the Google Sites web page and to motivate the student in accessing it. Google Sites could be used for any English topic such as grammar, oral, pronunciation, writing and reading, and listening. Authentic material could be added to the Google cybernetic web page such as videos, readings, podcasts, and links to practice pages, links to online dictionaries, and more. In addition, information about the course could be posted such as the program and chronogram, outlines for exams, or projects, news, reminders for special dates, evaluation rubrics, homework, information about how to contact the professor, social events, or activities done in class, pictures of the students and more. To create a project for the students to use the web page is recommended as in the sample of the investigation because this motivates the students to access the page. The investigation raises the creation of a workshop to teach professors in how to create a Google Site web page for their English classes. The participants in this workshop will learn how to create the main page, subpages, to make the page public or private, to insert

and remove elements like pictures, web links, text, videos, and to give access to the students, etc. Using Google Sites as a didactic material in English classes to teach grammar, writing, reading, pronunciation and speaking helps the students to have all the information centralized in one place.

After investigating blogs, wikis and Google Sites, Google sites is a more friendly and secure tool to use as a pedagogical material for English classes as a second language. There are many tools on the Internet that are unused by students and professor, and there are many tools that a professor could use as a didactic material; Google Sites is one of them. Security, friendliness and innovation are some of the features and reasons why Google Sites was chosen to implement it in English classes. Many options could be applied to use it; face-to-face classes, bimodal and distance learning. Everybody would benefit from using this tool, the students, the professors, the Institutions, and the country. This would be a great platform to use it in the ESP courses as bimodal modality. However, not all the students have the skills to study bimodal or distance education. From the anonymous survey applied to the two groups of Economics, ninety-five percent of the students say that they will enroll in a bimodal course by using Google Sites, the other five percent says that they still need the presence of a facilitator to practice English. As English professors, it is important to update not only in the academic field but also how we as professional can present the topics to the students. Teachers cannot be left behind from other disciplines that incorporate technology every day. Students also ask different ways to learn, and to use technology is a new way. Incorporating Google Sites in your English classes will be a beginning.

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