

International Web-Based Language Learning on the Internet

Summary

The task of the present survey was to locate and evaluate commercial and non-commercial providers of online language learning courses on the Internet for the languages focussed upon in the study.

Finding such materials using a variety of search words and search engines on the web proved to be a challenge, and the first impression was confirmed even after in-depth investigation: truly web-based language courses are still rare. Materials for the learning of different languages - although quite different in quality - are numerous. For the main part free grammars, dictionaries as well as audio files for the improvement of listening comprehension, etc. are readily available. Also, interactive learning games are found frequently.

However, what is often advertised as online language learning classes - especially in the entries in search engines - often turns out to be merely a collection of language study materials and loosely linked grammar or vocabulary exercises rather than a complete course.

Web-based courses currently on offer differ greatly in quality. There are a few serious providers who have easily accessible information regarding the content and structure of their courses. In addition, costs and services provided by the supplier are clearly listed and explained

As was to be expected, the number of online courses for English as a Second Language (ESL) exceeds those for other languages, such as French, German, Italian and Spanish.

It is chiefly in the field of EFL/ESL that high profile courses are offered, often with accompanying certificates of achievement, as is the case with Berlitz Online and Englishtown, to name but two.

The offers vary with regard to both the way in which they are presented and in content. They also vary with regard to the target group. Business-English courses are often available as corporate training, or offered exclusively for executive managers - courses that concentrate on one-to-one tutoring for instance.

ESL-courses usually offer a learning environment online, such as chatrooms, net-meetings with the entire class, pen pal search engines and the like.

In conclusion, it can be said that only few web-based language courses with a controlled learning environment are at present available. One major problem encountered during the evaluation was the difficulty of finding these courses in the first place. As mentioned above, the number of interactive online language learning materials on the net is growing day by day and makes it more difficult to find sound and well-organised online classes.

Very few of the courses make full use of all potential features of a "virtual classroom." A clear definition of such features, e.g. chat rooms, online whiteboards, and bulletin boards, the use of synchronous and asynchronous modes of

communication, as well as task-flow and modes of communication has not yet been proposed.

Two conclusions can be drawn from the survey:

- 1) **Web-based language learning materials** should offer more than simple online feedback on correct or incorrect input (similar to traditional computer assisted exercises on CD-ROM); they **should offer a platform for communication and interaction** within a virtual, telecooperative classroom.
- 2) **The features of such a learning environment need to be defined**, also in view of a possible link between learning in a self-study and telecooperative mode, net meetings, and contact lessons and meetings in a real classroom.

Based upon the research into this area, the following recommendations are offered to improve the situation:

1. It is strongly recommended to create a platform offering links to providers of online language classes and learning materials, possibly using <http://www.linguanet-europa.org/y2/> Europa as the platform. In addition, potential learners could be provided with a quality guide, like the one provided on the ECML website under the ICT in VOLL pages, outlining salient points to look for before enrolling for a class of this nature.
2. As none or very few materials were found with regard to the LWTUL, projects in this area would be very useful. Here, the development of a non-language specific platform with authoring options might be a promising venture, focussing on the development of a framework for such a learning environment. A sample of good practice seems to be the *Net Languages platform* (<http://www.netlanguages.com/>) developed for EFL, and claimed to be the world's leading virtual language school by International House, its developer

As managing a virtual learning environment also requires special qualifications and skills on the part of the teacher, training measures are to be encouraged. With regard to this, the [WELL Project](http://www.well.ac.uk/) - Web Enhanced Language Learning (<http://www.well.ac.uk/>) or the ICT4LT-Project (<http://www.ict4lt.org/>), which aims to develop a new Web-based training course in Information and Communications Technology for Language Teachers, could serve as a sample of good practice. The WELL Project in particular aims to promote wider awareness and more effective use of Web resources for modern language teaching. Despite the enthusiasm of a growing number of "digerati", the majority of academics in language teaching have yet to discover what the Web and associated new technologies can offer. This project aims to provide a starting point for this discovery and also to act as a forum for the exchange of good practice amongst more advanced practitioners. The Project, supported by FDTL - the HEFCE Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning - and runs from 1997-2001.

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ENGLISH

American English Language Foundation

<http://www.aelf.com/>

Focussing on American language and culture, a variety of online classes with different entry levels are offered. The registration fees include all class materials, an official certificate and free reference books. More classes on Business English are planned for the upcoming year.

Berlitz Online

<http://www.berlitz.com>

The Internet Language Center created by Berlitz School features mostly Business Language classes in English, German, French and Spanish. Individual and Corporate Training is available. The courses end with an official certificate. In combination with Audio Files and CD-Roms to improve listening and pronunciation skills, the classes consist of a monolingual program written in the respective language. A free placement test and a free sample lesson are also provided.

BizEnglish

<http://www.bizenglish.com>

At the "American Business English Internet School" emphasis is placed on three areas: Speaking and Writing Skills and Professional Presentations. Based on a workbook, the courses operate on a web-based learning environment and support mp3-files and interactive tutoring. An extensive course description is available online.

EFI - English School on the Net

<http://www.study.com>

Offers free English Language Classes in Grammar, Reading and Writing, Listening and Speaking, as well as specialized classes in TOEFL English for Special Purposes. Some of the courses use Internet Telephony and Voicemail to improve listening comprehension and pronunciation.

Eloquence

<http://www.elok.com>

This learning platform offers courses and study materials for English, German, Italian, Spanish and French. Free beginner courses in each language are offered. The main focus is on conversation practice and video tutoring is available.

English as a Second Language at About - The Human Internet

<http://www.esl.about.com/homework/esl/mbody.htm>

The language learning environment presented by "ABOUT - The Human Internet" features numerous tutorials at various entry levels. The courses are not monitored but chat rooms and forums for questions are available. The tutorials feature audio files for the improvement of listening comprehension and pronunciation. Interactive assessment tests are also available.

English Course Online

<http://www.english-course.com>

This English as a Second Language course is based on a virtual learning environment that features online exercises, assessment and a hyperactive (hyperlink-based) glossary. The entire course is also available on CD-Rom for offline studies.

English Page - Free Online Lessons

<http://www.englishpage.com>

This non-monitored learning environment features free course material that is corrected online. Weekly email lessons are also available. The courses are for all entry levels. Most of the exercises are available in a printable version, too.

English Space

<http://www.englishspace.ort.org>

English Space has been developed by [World ORT](#), a non-profit organisation focussed on delivering high-quality educational services and materials to under-privileged groups. EnglishSpace is a free language education tool for immigrant and refugee English language learners in the UK who need English to access the country's [National Curriculum](#).

English Student

<http://www.englishstudent.com>

Subtitled as the Internet English School, this platform provides general English courses for all entry levels. The lessons are not interactive, but can be delivered by email for correction.

Englishtown

<http://www.englishtown.com>

This commercial online learning environment offers a range of courses, including "Classic and Business English" as well as speaking lessons and preparation for TOEFL and TOEIC. Native English teachers tutor the classes and, in addition to the course work, free email lessons and a placement test are available. Online resources, a chat room, a magazine and a pen pal search engine are provided free. A university-certificate is available. The website itself is available in 14 different languages.

Executive English

<http://www.executiveenglish.com>

Interactive English for Business Professionals. This commercial online-trainer features a sample lesson and a tour about how Executive English works. Courses are available for individual and corporate training. The learning environment features an online dictionary and a personal notebook for the user. It also has a tracking system that allows the teachers or supervisors to monitor the progress of the class.

GlobalEnglish.com

<http://www.globalenglish.com>

Global English offers courses for all entry levels in General and Business English. A

placement test and a trial session are free. A personal tutor is available, though the classes mostly consist of assignments that can be worked with either online or offline.

GoFluent.com

<http://www.gofluent.com>

This web-based interactive English language school concentrates on conversational English. The classes are held as video conferences or net meetings with ICQ or MSN. The classes consist of ten students and are held in 30 minute-cycles. A free trial lesson and a placement test are also offered.

Learn English - British Council

<http://www.learnenglish.org.uk>

The free site is provided by the British Council, the United Kingdom's international organisation for educational and cultural relations. This site has activities and advice for Kids (8-12 year olds), Teens (13-19 year olds) and adults. The learning environment features online courses as well as interactive learning components, such as grammar exercises, games, etc. This website is available in thirteen languages.

Net LANGUAGES International House <http://www.netlanguages.com/>

IH Net Languages is a Virtual Language School, providing English courses over the Internet with a personal tutor. The school provides a level (entry) test, and full virtual classroom feature, including chat, direct mail-contact with a tutor, downloadable materials for offline study etc. The courses finish with an exam and certificate.

PeakEnglish

<http://www.peakenglish.com>

The Online Interactive English School - Low-cost lessons in reading, listening and grammar for various entry levels. Chat rooms, message boards, games, and pen pal lists are also available. This platform also features an "Executive Business English Course". Reference material is available online for the users and the fees include teacher-monitored chats in real time, coaching exercises and various other online activities.

GERMAN

BBC Languages - German

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/languages/german/index.shtml>

Interactive learning opportunities based on the BBC's wide range of multimedia language materials for Italian, French, Spanish and German. This self-study environment features a variety of exercises and materials: basic language courses based on broadcasts from the BBC Learning Zone and available for download, accompanied by a work sheet. Listening comprehension and reading materials are also provided. This site is not monitored and does not feature interactive tutoring.

Berlitz Online

<http://www.berlitz.com>

The Internet Language Center created by Berlitz School features mostly Business Language classes in English, German, French and Spanish. Individual and Corporate Training is available. The courses end with an official certificate. In combination with Audio Files and CD-Roms to improve listening and pronunciation skills, the classes consist of a monolingual program written in the respective language. A free placement test and a free sample lesson are also provided.

Deutsche Welle - German, why not?

<http://www.dwelle.de/campus/sprachkurse/dwn/dwn-english.html>

This radio language course is a co-production by the [Goethe Institute](#) and [Inter Nations](#). It's designed for beginners through intermediate students. *German, why not?* is aimed at young adults. The course consists of four series of 26 lessons. Each broadcast lesson lasts about 15 minutes. In the accompanying lesson book the student can find further explanations, exercises, grammar reviews, etc.

eLanguage

<http://www.elanguage.com>

This Language Learning Center provides conversational lessons, vocabulary builder and Virtual Talk for various languages, including German, Italian, Spanish and French. The main target groups are people who are looking for a crash course, travellers, etc.

Eloquence

<http://www.elok.com>

This learning platform offers courses and study materials for English, German, Italian, Spanish and French. Free beginner courses in each language are offered. The main focus is on conversational practice and video tutoring is available.

German at About - The Human Internet

<http://german.about.com/homework/german/>

The Language learning environment presented by "ABOUT - The Human Internet" features numerous tutorials at various entry levels. The courses are not monitored but chatrooms and forums for questions are available. The tutorials feature audio files for the improvement of listening comprehension and pronunciation. Interactive assessment tests are also available.

Interdeutsch

<http://www.virtuelles-kaufhaus.de/interdeutsch/index.htm>

This German virtual language learning environment features various courses - German for Foreigners, Business German and crash courses. The lessons mainly focus on the development of writing and reading skills. Conversational skills can be trained in monitored chatroom meetings. Members can use the virtual library that includes grammar,

dictionary and additional exercises. All courses are conducted in German.

LearnPlus!

<http://www.learnplus.com/german/german1.html>

German Online Course for beginners and intermediate students. This fully interactive course has an estimated length of about 35 hours. A free lesson and placement test are available. This site also features a course for travellers. The tutorial fee also includes the assistance of a personal language tutor for three months.

Parlo

<http://www.parlo.com>

Parlo is a learning environment that concentrates on language, culture and life. The languages available for study here are English, German, Italian, Spanish and French. The diagnostic test and the sample lesson are free. The lessons consist of a number of different components. Each covers conversation, reading, grammar and vocabulary. Becoming a member of this virtual environment is free of charge, so anyone take advantage and benefit from the resources provided by this site.

Texthaus

<http://www.texthaus.com>

The interactive online learning service for German in cooperation with Goethe-Institut Milan features two German online courses, for beginners and for advanced students. The courses consist of study material available for download. The exercises can be sent to tutors for assessment.

ITALIAN

Adesso!

<http://adesso.heinle.com>

Free Italian Online course in 18 lessons. The entry level is intermediate and the whole course is based on a workbook. The whole course concentrates on modern Italian culture and life.

BBC Languages - Italian

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/languages/italian/index.shtml>

Interactive learning opportunities based on the BBC's wide range of multimedia language materials for Italian, French, Spanish and German. This self-study environment features a variety of exercises and materials: basic language courses based on broadcasts from the BBC Learning Zone and available for download, accompanied by a worksheet. Listening comprehension and reading materials are also provided. This site is not monitored and does not feature interactive tutoring.

Cyberitalian

<http://www.cyberitalian.com>

This Italian Online course is available for various entry levels. It features a free trial lesson for each entry level. In addition to this the environment also features an interactive area, where the students can meet in chat rooms.

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This learning platform offers courses and study materials for English, German, Italian, Spanish and French. Free beginner courses in each language are offered. The main focus is on conversational practice and video tutoring is available.

Italia 2000

<http://www.italia-2000.org>

Italia 2000 is a European LINGUA project. The Internet Course is based around twelve thematic [units of study](#) which relate to the programmes broadcast in the Learning Zone in the late spring and summer of 1997. Each programme lasted half an hour and consisted of edited footage from a variety of programmes already broadcast on either [RAI](#) or [Teletna](#). The programmes explore various cultural themes, often through the eyes of young people. Students will be supplied with the respective video clips, transcripts and various other materials online.

Italian at About - The Human Internet

<http://italian.about.com/homework/italian/mbody.htm>

The Language learning environment presented by "ABOUT - The Human Internet" features numerous tutorials at various entry levels. The courses are not monitored but chatrooms and forums for questions are available. The tutorials feature audio files for the improvement of listening comprehension and pronunciation. Interactive assessment tests are also available.

Italica

<http://www.italica.rai.it/>

Virtual Campus for Italian language and culture. A language course is offered on this site, however the entry level is at least intermediate because it is entirely conducted in Italian.

Oggi E Domani

<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/modlang/carasi/site/pageone.html>

This free language course consists of 20 lessons for beginners or intermediate students. An online grammar, pronunciation reference and a dictionary are provided.

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SPANISH

BBC Languages - Spanish

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/languages/spanish/index.shtml>

Interactive learning opportunities based on the BBC's wide range of multimedia language materials for Italian, French, Spanish and German. This self-study environment features a variety of exercises and materials: basic language courses based on broadcasts from the BBC Learning Zone and available for download, accompanied by a work sheet. Listening comprehension and reading materials are also provided. This site is not monitored and does not feature interactive tutoring.

Berlitz Online

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Business Spanish Online

<http://www.businessspanish.com/index.htm>

This non-commercial learning environment features lessons in conversational and writing in Business Spanish. All lessons contain vocabulary with recorded Audio files. The platform also features online-translators, verb conjugators and free downloads of tutorials.

eLanguage

<http://www.elanguage.com>

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Eloquence

<http://www.elok.com>

This learning platform offers courses and study materials for English, German, Italian, Spanish and French. Free beginner courses in each language are offered. The main focus is on conversational practice and video tutoring is available.

Learn Spanish

<http://www.studyspanish.com>

This free online tutorial consists so far of 78 lessons on Spanish grammar. New lessons are added on a regular basis. This self-study guide to the Spanish language is not monitored.

LearnPlus! Spanish

<http://www.learnplus.com/spanish/index.html>

Spanish Online Course for beginners and intermediate students. The fully interactive course has an estimated length of about 35 hours. A free lesson and a placement test are available. This site also features a course for travellers. The tutorial fee also includes the assistance of a personal language tutor for three months.

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Spanish at About - The Human Internet

<http://spanish.about.com/homework/spanish/mbody.htm>

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Spanish Course for Beginners

<http://www.docuweb.ca/SiSpain/english/course/calgary/index.html>

The Spanish Embassy in collaboration with the University of Calgary, Canada has provided this introductory course for Spanish. This self-study programme can be downloaded and installed on the PC at home. The course itself is not monitored and the platform does not feature any additional references such as dictionaries. etc.

WeBspanol

<http://www.handsonspanish.com>

Online Spanish Tutorial program of 7 lessons. Emphasis is on practical conversation. The tutorial is supplemented with Real Audio to improve listening comprehension and pronunciation skills. A Computer Tutor explains grammar and answers question sent in by email. The tutorial is mainly directed at beginners.

FRENCH

BBC Languages - French

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/education/languages/french/index.shtml>

Interactive learning opportunities based on the BBC's wide range of multimedia language materials for Italian, French, Spanish and German. This self-study environment features a variety of exercises and materials: basic language courses based on broadcasts from the BBC Learning Zone and available for download, accompanied by a work sheet. Listening comprehension and reading materials are also provided. This site is not monitored and does not feature interactive tutoring.

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This learning platform offers courses and study materials for English, German, Italian, Spanish and French. Free beginner courses in each language are offered. The main focus lies on conversational practice though and video tutoring is available.

Frenchlesson.org

<http://frenchlesson.org>

Tutorials with interactive Practice. As a registered user, you will have access to your personal test results which will be stored on the web site, enabling you to gauge your progress and weak points and practice with exercises geared specifically for your problem areas.

French Tutorial

<http://www.helio.org/education/french>

This non-commercial site features a complete self-study tutorial for the French language. It covers all grammatical elements of the French language and features audiofiles for the development of speaking skills. It is neither monitored nor does it provide interactive support.

[French at About the Human Internet](http://french.about.com/homework/french/mbody.htm)

<http://french.about.com/homework/french/mbody.htm>

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[Parlo](http://www.parlo.com)

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