

Helping students to learn the English second conditional by blending Internet resources with virtual worlds: The results of a study

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The paper presents the results of a study whose main aim was to investigate the effectiveness of using Internet resources and a browser-based virtual world in helping a group of students to learn the English second conditional. The sample consisted of thirteen third year students studying English at a Polish senior high school. The data were obtained by means of a grammar test administered before (pretest) and after the intervention (immediate and two delayed posttests), a background questionnaire and an evaluation sheet. The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The results indicate that the instruction aided the subjects in using the target structure more correctly, not only immediately after the intervention but also in the long run. What is more, the students considered the lessons as a great learning opportunity.

1. Introduction

The discussion about the place of grammar teaching has played a significant role in second and foreign language instruction. Theorists and researchers have debated whether grammar instruction aids learners in mastering the target language. For Gascoigne (2002) the many answers to this issue might be located on a continuum with extremes at either end. That is, at one end highly explicit approaches to grammar teaching are placed, and at the other end, implicit ones that avoid reference to form can be found. However, Ellis (2006, pp. 101-102) claims that grammar “has held and continues to hold a central place in language teaching. The zero grammar approach was flirted with but never really took hold, as is evident in both the current

textbook materials emanating from publishing houses (...) and in current theories of L2 acquisition. There is ample evidence to demonstrate that teaching grammar works.”

Language teachers need to consider how to present grammar to their students, what options for dealing with grammar should be used and which area they will focus on during practice. In the task-based teaching approach, for example, students are engaged in real language use in the classroom, which can be performed by designing tasks (e.g. discussions, problems or games) which require students to use the target language for themselves (Willis & Willis, 2007). On the other hand, in the Presentation Practice and Produce procedure, the teacher first introduces a grammar item and then students practice using the grammar introduced by the teacher by means of oral drills and written exercises. After that fluency is developed by providing opportunities for students to use what they have learned in a less controlled environment (Larsen-Freeman, 2009).

In the history of second/foreign language teaching, grammar has been viewed as a set of rules to be memorized (e.g. “the plural form of most nouns is created simply by adding the letter *s*”; “adverbs are often formed by adding *-ly* to an adjective”). However, this type of approach, i.e. transmission of knowledge approach to grammar instruction, may produce learners who know a great deal of grammar rules but who are often unable to use English to communicate in everyday situations. In view of such inconsistency in grammar knowledge and its successful application in communication, last decades witnessed a change in grammar teaching. As a result of this shift, theorists, applied linguists and language teachers perceive grammar not as a set of rules to be remembered by students, but, rather, as a language subsystem to be mastered. At the same time, however, it has to be remembered that the knowledge of grammar is significant, and, if studied, might allow learners to use “grammatical structures accurately, meaningfully, and appropriately” (Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p. 251).

Nowadays interest in modern technology and virtual worlds has grown considerably. Computers and the Internet have turned out to be effective tools for foreign language grammar instruction (e.g. AbuSeileek & Rabab’ah, 2007; Kruk, 2009; Lys, 2013; Mohamad, 2009). Virtual worlds on the other hand are a promising new medium for language learning in this century. They “constitute a growing space for collaborative play, learning, work and e-commerce (...) allowing interaction with other people and objects and providing immediate feedback” (O’Connell, 2010, p. 15). The present paper reports on the findings of a study which sought to investigate the effectiveness of using Internet resources and a browser-based virtual world in helping students to learn the English second conditional. In addition, the paper reports on the students’ views on implementing such technology in English lessons.

2. Language learning in virtual worlds

Virtual worlds offer excellent learning environments for teaching foreign languages. For example, Czepielewski, Christodouloupoulou, Kleiner, Mirinaviciute and Valencia (2011, p. 8) provide a number of benefits of using virtual worlds in language education which might include: (a) teachers cooperation with students on less formal basis and students choice of an individual learning program as well as students cooperation with other learners, (b) the presence of avatars created according to individual needs, (c) the risks reduction associated with lack of success for the learner, (d) the opportunity to conduct activities outside the classroom, and (e) the possibility to carry out conversations between teachers and students

by means of chat applications, e-mail, synchronous verbal and visual communication. At the same time however, the researchers point to some drawbacks of implementing virtual worlds in language classes which might be related to: discipline problems, lack of trust (i.e. the relationship between the participants may cause problems due to possibility of identity changing) and anonymity which may cause unacceptable behaviors (Czepielewski et al., 2011, p. 8) as well as problems connected with navigation (Hislope, 2008).

The literature offers a lot of research articles on the usefulness of virtual worlds in language education. In one study, Petrakou (2010) demonstrated how virtual worlds can be used as a learning environment in an online course in higher education. The subjects were seven students with no previous experience of using virtual worlds to learn a foreign language. They were paired up with American students and had access to English teachers who assisted them in the digital environment. In addition, the students had to perform specific activities and participate in various tasks. What is more, the sessions comprised a combination of lectures, pair and group discussions as well as presentations. The data were collected through observations, recordings and interviews. The results of the study showed that the virtual world offers heightened interactivity in view of the fact that it allows for synchronous communication and positions students in a spatial dimension. However, the researcher cautions that in order to take a full advantage of this improved interactivity, teachers should first instruct their students how to use virtual worlds and also how to deal with technical problems that might occur in computer-generated environments. Another study, carried out by Kurisak and Luke (2009), investigated students' attitudes toward virtual worlds, *Second Life*, computers and overall language learning as well as their attitudes toward corrective feedback. The subjects were 107 intermediate college students of Spanish who participated in weekly chats in *Second Life* mostly with other peers and Spanish native speakers around the world. The data were obtained by means of chat logs and surveys. The analysis of the gathered data revealed that the students who interacted mostly with native speakers in *Second Life* displayed more positive attitudes toward computers and overall language learning as well as *Second Life* and corrective feedback provided by Spanish native speakers. It should also be noted that the subjects demonstrated more positive attitudes toward computers and language learning. Yet another study conducted by Zheng, Young, Brewer and Wagner (2009) examined affective factors in learning English as a foreign language in *Quest Atlantis* i.e. a type of 3D game-like virtual world. The participants of the study, who consisted of nonnative speakers of English and English native speakers, together solved online content-related problem quests by means of communication tools such as chat, email and avatars. The findings indicated that the subjects in the *Quest Atlantis* group ranked themselves higher than those in a conventional group in self-efficacy toward English and e-communication as well as attitude toward the English language. What is more, the results showed that virtual worlds may be used to increase students' confidence and to overcome cultural barriers in studying the target language.

It should be noted that there is relatively little empirical research on the use of virtual worlds in teaching foreign languages. Chung (2012), for example, aimed at showing how digital environments affect the performance and motivation among college students. This experimental study included two groups which were taught in different ways. The experimental group was instructed by means of *Second Life* and the control group received traditional lectures. The results of the study showed that the use of *Second Life* as a teaching tool enhanced the experimental learners' performance and contributed to increased motivation among the students. It was therefore concluded that virtual worlds which offer interactive

interfaces constitute an effective source of authentic language practice and thus should be incorporated into English courses to deliver contextualized target language learning. Milton, Jonsen, Hirst and Lindenburn (2012) investigated the impact of vocabulary learning among subjects in the *Vill@ge* i.e. virtual learning environment in *Second Life*. The findings of the study provided evidence that virtual environments such as *Second Life* can efficiently benefit foreign language learning in view of the fact that vocabulary uptake was satisfactory and no worse when compared with traditional vocabulary instruction. One of the most recent additions to empirical research on virtual worlds is the study carried out by Topol (2013). The study compared the effectiveness of learning English vocabulary in *Second Life* environment and on 2D web. The participants were 68 Polish university students who were instructed to: (1) visit the Canaletto exhibit at the Dresden Gallery and (2) shop for indicated household appliances in SL and on 2D web. The results of the study demonstrated that the experimental (*Second Life*) group did better on post-tests than the control (2D web) group.

In view of the fact that communication in virtual worlds can be based on text or voice, of relevance to the present paper are research projects which utilized the former type. Toyoda and Harrison (2002) studied negotiation of meaning between language learners and native speakers of Japanese in chat conversations. They used the chat function of a 3-dimensional language learning environment called **JEWELS** (i.e. a virtual world located within *Active Worlds* and designed specifically for the research purpose). The research findings showed that the interaction triggered communication problems that produced instances of negotiation of meaning. Toyoda and Harrison categorized the difficulties the subjects faced in their conversations into nine categories: recognition of new word, misuse of word, pronunciation error, grammatical error, inappropriate segmentation, abbreviated sentence, sudden topic change, slow response, and inter-cultural communication gap. The researchers observed that unknown vocabulary, abbreviated sentences and the misuse or misunderstanding of a word constituted the most frequent cause of negotiations whereas instances involving grammatical errors were occasional. A study undertaken by Fiori (2005) investigated the role that consciousness raising plays in grammatical development among L2 Spanish learners engaged in synchronous **CMC**. There were 27 learners in the form-and-meaning-focused group and 17 subjects in the meaning-focused group. The researcher found that consciousness raising had a greater influence on learning and using the Spanish L2 forms (i.e. *por/para* and *ser/estar*) in the form-and-meaning-focused group than in the group that focused on meaning only. Peterson (2006) investigated the communication of 24 intermediate level undergraduate students of English from a variety of first-language backgrounds at a university in Tokyo. He found that the subjects were able to undertake a variety of tasks through target language interaction and also employed transactional communication and interactional strategies. Task type influenced the quantity of negotiation and the use of avatars facilitated student interaction management during real time computer-mediated communication. According to the researcher, the learner interaction was influenced by the complex interaction of a number of variables including task type, sociolinguistic factors, context of use and the mix of technical affordances provided by *Active Worlds*. Yet another study (Lee, 2008) demonstrated how corrective feedback was negotiated through expert-to-novice collaborative scaffolding with 30 subjects of Spanish working on three different tasks: jigsaw, spot-the-differences, and open-ended questions. Lee suggested that text chats supported the focus-on-form procedure through collaborative engagement. Based on her findings the researcher indicated that it is not easy to provide corrective feedback while attending to linguistic errors in a timely manner during meaning-based interactions.

Finally, Peterson (2012) investigated the task-based interaction of EFL learners in *Second Life*. He found out that the environment and tasks improved collaborative interaction and peer-scaffolding regarding vocabulary and correction in *Second Life* as a supportive atmosphere. The researcher concluded that this virtual world provides valuable opportunities for language practice and autonomous learning.

As can be seen from this brief account of some research projects, the use of virtual worlds might be of great benefit to language learners and teachers. In addition, the implementation of such virtual technology is not only justified for a number of reasons but also necessary if language teachers want to develop language skills and subsystems among their learners, motivate them to learn the target language or promote autonomy. However, more research which could provide evidence of the specific features and characteristics of such technological applications as virtual worlds that might contribute to the learning of second and foreign languages is needed (Gardner et al., 2011). Also, it seems to be necessary to conduct more studies which could employ virtual worlds and investigate their impact on foreign languages attainment among learners of different ages, attending various levels of education and levels of foreign language proficiency.

3. The study

3.1. Background to the study

The study reported below was carried out during four regularly scheduled English lessons and involved one intact third year senior high school class. The study, it was *pre-experimental* in character with a *pretest-posttest* design. The targeted structure was the English second conditional. The decision to focus on the item in question was motivated by the fact that the subjects displayed problems with correct and appropriate use of the structure both in controlled and in spontaneous production despite the fact that they had been taught it in the past. The lessons were conducted in a computer classroom equipped with fourteen desktop computers running **SUSE 11** (Linux operating system) and the broadband connection to the Internet. Due to technical requirements and slow Internet connection the browser-based virtual world *Yoowalk* (<http://www.yoowalk.com/>) was chosen. *Yoowalk*, it is a virtual representation of the world wide web. It is composed of categorized villages of 3D websites called *walksites* that users can browse with a personalized avatar. Similarly to other virtual worlds, it offers synchronous text-based communication. In addition, the world is very simple to navigate and does not require its users to register in order to use it.

3.2. Research questions

The data collected in the course of the study were analyzed with the purpose of examining the effects of using a combination of Internet based activities and the browser-based virtual world *Yoowalk* on helping the participants of the study to learn the English second conditional. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the impact of using the combination of Internet-based resources and the browser-based virtual world *Yoowalk* on learning the English second conditional?
2. Is the effect durable, as measured on immediate and delayed posttests?

3. What are the students' perceptions of using the online resources as a learning opportunity?
4. What are the learners' perceptions of using the browser-based virtual world *Yoowalk* as a learning opportunity?

3.3. Participants

The participants were thirteen third year learners studying English at a Polish senior high school. They were members of a bigger class divided into two smaller groups due to the policy of the school. What is more, they were divided into the two groups for their language classes in accordance with the alphabetical order. In view of the fact that only this group of students was taught by the present author, who, at the same time, was their regular English teacher, it was selected for the study. The overall level of the students' advancement could be characterized as A2 in terms of the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*. The students had three 45-minute English lessons per week. The background questionnaire revealed that, on average, the learners had been learning English for 8.46 years. They reported some out-of-class exposure to the target language; however, this was mainly limited to watching English movies with Polish subtitles and listening to English songs. All subjects claimed that they had access to the Internet at home; however, they used it infrequently to study English. Finally, the majority of the students regarded grammar to be the most difficult for them to study.

3.4. The schedule

The study was conducted during four regularly scheduled English classes. The data was collected over an eleven-week term. The pretest was administered one week before the intervention and the first posttest was conducted immediately after it. What is more, the study also included two delayed posttests administered four and eight weeks after the immediate posttest, respectively. The inclusion of the posttests allowed the researcher to explore the short term as well as the long term effects of the intervention and to determine the extent to which the improvement was maintained over time, with the caveat that the long term retention could also be the result of the teaching effect of the test itself or the students' work on the structure in their own time. The intervention continued for the period of two weeks and comprised four 45-minute lessons. Prior to the intervention the participants of the study were asked to fill in the background questionnaire and immediately after the intervention the subjects completed an evaluation sheet (see Figure 1).

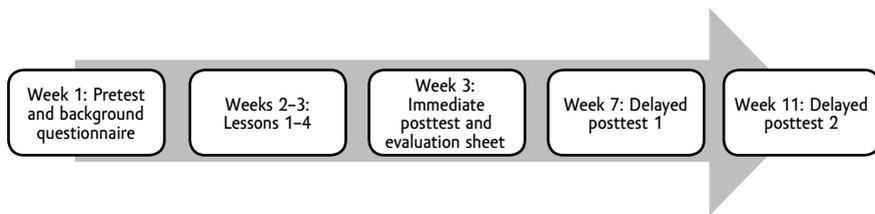


Figure 1. The research schedule

3.5. Instructional treatment

The four lessons were based on rather traditional online and offline materials¹ as well as the browser-based virtual world *Yoowalk* (<http://www.yoowalk.com/>). The first lesson commenced with the multimedia presentation of the second conditional during which the teacher explained its usage and provided relevant examples. Next, the students were asked to do three online activities of the following type: matching, translation and multiple-choice activity. After that, the subjects were given handouts which comprised several sentences with gaps to be filled with the provided words. The activity was checked by the teacher who asked at random several students to read the answers. At the end of the lesson, the learners were requested to do a gap-filling activity as a homework assignment (see Appendix A for examples of activities used in the first lesson). During the second lesson the participants of the study were asked to perform a series of online activities which included multiple-choice exercises and a gap completion activity. Next, the learners were given handouts which contained five situations and asked to write sentences in the second conditional. The activity was then checked by the teacher who asked some of the students to read the answers (see Appendix B for examples of activities utilized in the second class). When it comes to the third lesson, the subjects were first required to do a multiple-choice activity and then fill-in-the-gaps exercises. After that, they were requested to log on to the browser-based virtual world *Yoowalk*.² It has to be added that the students were supplied with a handful of example questions in the second conditional and encouraged to use them in order to talk to the residents of that virtual world, i.e. the students of their own group (see Appendix C for examples of exercises used in the third lesson). As for the last lesson, it commenced with one online multiple-choice activity and two sentence completion exercises. Next, the learners logged on to the virtual world *Yoowalk* in order to further practice the grammar item. It was a contrived experimental practice activity during which they were asked to conduct a questionnaire among its residents (i.e. the students of their own group) and write a short note based on the answers. In order to accomplish the task the students were allowed to use the questions from the previous lesson and encouraged to create their own ones. In addition, the subjects were requested to answer the questions in full sentences (see Appendix D for examples of exercises used in the fourth lesson). It has to be added that the second, the third and the fourth lesson began with revision of the previously acquired information related to the second conditional and checking homework assignments. In addition, each class finished with giving the students relevant homework assignments.

It should also be noted that the students were not learning anything else during the period (i.e. the four lessons). This was not different from the usual input the subjects received when it comes to grammar in view of the fact that this language subsystem was always taught in a series of lessons. What is more, efforts were made not to draw the learners' attention to the targeted feature between the immediate posttest and the delayed posttests, and the use of materials and activities that could have accidentally achieved such a focus was carefully circumvented. Finally, it has to be noted that the students were not informed that they were part of an experiment so as to avoid the fallacies inherent in the Hawthorne effect (Brown, 2006, p. 32).

3.6. Data collection tools, scoring and analysis

Three different types of data collection instruments were used: information gathered by means of the background questionnaire, the evaluation sheet and the test. Prior to the study, the tools were piloted with a comparable group of senior high school students and some changes were introduced. The questionnaire was used to provide background information concerning the subjects' learning history, access to the Internet and type of out-of-class exposure to the English language which might prove useful while interpreting the results of the research project. As for the evaluation sheet, it was intended to obtain the students' opinions on the activities and lessons. The evaluation sheet consisted of several close-ended and open-ended questions. Both questionnaires were presented in Polish and filled out anonymously by the participants. The data were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The percentages of responses to the close-ended questions were calculated and the answers to the open-ended items were first transcribed on a computer word processor program to be further read in order to search for the most typical and frequently occurring information. Once this stage was completed, the items were counted and the percentages were computed to be included in the results.

When it comes to the test, it consisted of three tasks. The first one required the students to complete six sentences with the correct form of given verbs (e.g. *If she (have) the money, she (buy) a new car.*). It should be noted that the task comprised two statements, two negatives and two questions as well as it included from 6 to 7 irregular verbs. The second task was a typical multiple-choice exercise and contained six sentences each accompanied with three possible answers (e.g. *If I ... that coffee I ... it. a) didn't liked / wouldn't drink, b) didn't like / wouldn't drink, c) didn't like / wouldn't drank.*). Finally, the third task required the students to spontaneously answer five questions (e.g. *What would you do if you lost your keys?*). In addition, the subjects were required to answer them in full sentences and to begin their answers with 'if'. It has to be noted that on each occasion the test was administered, it was possible to score a total of 28 points for it (i.e. one point for each correct answer). As Pawlak (2006, p. 380) recommends, three different versions of the test were created (referred to as version A, B and C) in order to minimize the likelihood of the practice effect to occur. It should be emphasized that the three versions of the test were different in their content, although they were identical in format and contained comparable tasks and levels of difficulty. In addition, on each occasion the students were divided into three groups and were requested to use the three versions of the test. More precisely, while one third of the students worked on version A on the pretest, the second third completed version B and the last third received version C. As for the immediate posttest, those students who had been provided with version A on the pretest worked on version B, the learners who then completed version B received version C, and those who had been supplied with version C were presented with version A. The tests were mixed up once again on the delayed posttest 1 so that each subject could receive the version of the test he or she had not worked on before. For the delayed posttest 2, the original distribution was restored, with the learners completing the same versions of the tasks as they had had in the pretest.

The results of the test were subjected to quantitative analysis which involved computing the mean score, the percentages of the mean score, and the standard deviation. The statistical significance of the differences in the means was established by means of ANOVA with repeated measures. The significance value was set at $p \leq .05$. Effect sizes were established

eta-squared was used: $\eta_p^2 > .01$ = small, $\eta_p^2 > .12$ = medium, and $\eta_p^2 > .26$ = large (Cohen, 1988). In order to make sure that the tests were scored consistently, randomly chosen samples of the data originating from the pretest, the immediate posttest as well as the delayed posttest 1 and 2 were assessed by a qualified English teacher. The results were then compared to those obtained by the present author with the purpose of determining interrater reliabilities. Moreover, the researcher reanalyzed samples of randomly selected data derived from the tests so as to control for consistent scoring of the test over time. The analysis revealed that both interrater and intrarater reliabilities were high since the lowest value of the Pearson Correlation Coefficient in each case equaled 0.994 and 0.996, respectively.

4. Research findings

4.1. Language gains

This subsection presents the results of the study related to the first two research questions: (1) What is the impact of using the combination of Internet-based resources and the browser-based virtual world *Yoowalk* on learning the English second conditional? and (2) Is the effect durable, as measured on immediate and delayed posttests?

Figure 2 diagrammatically presents the means of the subjects' performance on the test. Even a cursory inspection of the Figure 2 and the numerical information presented in Table 1 demonstrate that the learners who participated in the study and provided the data for analyses used the structure in question much more correctly on the posttests than on the pretest. A repeated measures ANOVA indicated that there was a significant difference in the performance of the group on the test between the four times of measurement ($F(3, 36) = 48.408, p < 0.000, \text{eta-squared} = .801$). In addition to the significance level, the results indicate that the time factor accounted for 80% of the total variance in scores, which is a very large effect size. Moreover, post hoc tests using the Bonferroni correction revealed that the students improved from the pretest to the immediate posttest by 13.30 points or 47.5% and the difference was highly statistically significant ($p = 0.000$). Also, the post hoc tests showed that the group improved from the pretest to the delayed posttest 1 as well as from the pretest to the delayed posttest 2 (both by 13.07 or 46.68%) and these differences were also highly statistically significant ($p = 0.000$). What is more, the analysis of the data showed negligible and statistically insignificant deterioration in the performance of the subjects between the immediate posttest and the delayed posttests. This shows that the gains for the group held over the time frame of the present study, as revealed by the lack of significant differences between the immediate posttest and the delayed posttests as well as between the delayed posttest 1 and 2.

Table 1: Ranges and standard deviations for the group on the test ($n = 13$)

	Pretest	Immediate posttest	Delayed posttest 1	Delayed posttest 2
Percentages	24.46 %	71.96 %	71.14 %	71.14 %
Mean (SD)	6.85 (4.02)	20.15 (6.84)	19.92 (7.64)	19.92 (6.84)

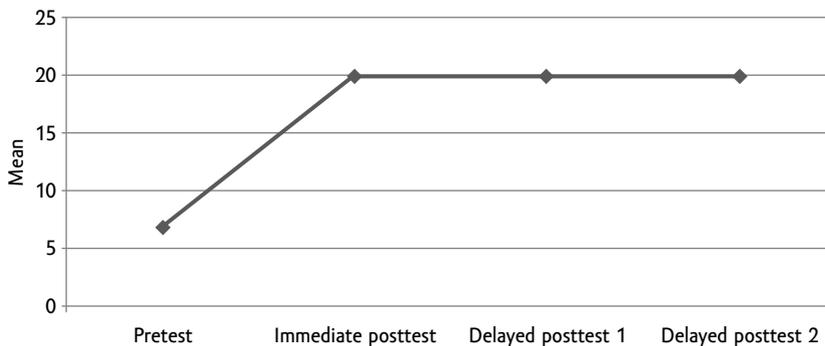


Figure 2. Means for the group on the test

As evidenced by the data presented in Table 1 above, the standard deviations were higher on the posttests than on the pretest. It should be noted, however, that the values of standard deviations were not particularly high and they did not change considerably for the group after the lessons, as the difference between any two standard deviations never exceeded 1 point. What is more, the standard deviations remained constant on the immediate posttest when compared to the delayed posttest 2, which can be taken as evidence that the group as a whole did not grow more heterogeneous over time.

4.2. Students' perceptions of the lessons

This subsection presents the findings related to the third and fourth research questions: (3) What are the students' perceptions of using the online resources as a learning opportunity? and (4) What are the learners' perceptions of using the browser-based virtual world *Yoowalk* as a learning opportunity?

It needs to be stressed that the type of instruction employed in the study not only positively affected the students' performance on the test but also the learners' perceptions of the digital classes. This is visible in the subjects' responses to the questions in the evaluation questionnaire. Thus, 69.23% learners considered the lessons to be interesting or very interesting (23%) and only one subject regarded the classes to be **OK**. Such views can be seen from the following extracts:

Very interesting and I learned a lot and very well. I didn't get bored even once. Also, the conversations in the virtual world *Yoowalk* were very interesting and they were something new in English learning.

In my opinion, such lessons are the best because we can learn on our own. Such classes aren't boring but very absorbing. There is a variety of exercises on the Internet and thanks to them we can learn a lot.

I was very interested in the lessons because there were many interesting things. They connected theory with practice.

difficult for them to study before the intervention (see section 3.3.), no one considered it to be a substantial learning challenge after the study was completed, at least with regard to the second conditional. Thus, there were 38.46% students who claimed that studying the targeted structure was quite easy for them and 53.84% who said it was **OK**. Such tendencies should not be surprising in view of the fact that as many as 6 (46.15%) students and 7 (53.85%) learners regarded the classes to be definitely useful or very useful in learning the item in question. In addition, the learners pointed to multiplicity of activities, the possibility to check answers on their own and repeat the exercises they did whenever deemed necessary. The students also appreciated the fact that they had the opportunity to ask a colleague in case of a problem or consult relevant webpages which provided needed information. The following three excerpts exemplify some of the findings:

The lessons helped me because they were very clear and I was able to understand how to use the second conditional.

I could repeat the exercises many times and practice it until I was able to understand it.

As soon as I did the exercise I was able to check it and see my mistakes.

When it comes to the activities the participants of the study liked the most, they frequently mentioned conversations they carried out in the virtual world and regarded them as a good learning opportunity for practicing the target structure in real life situations. In addition, the students enjoyed doing the online exercises and pointed to different levels of their difficulty. It should also be added that no one in the group mentioned an activity they did not like. The following comments illustrate these points:

(...) Yoowalk. Thanks to this world I learned how to use the second conditional in practice.

I liked the quiz and completing the gap type of exercises, because I was able to do them correctly. The exercises varied and I didn't have any problems with them.

I liked asking and answering questions in the virtual world because I had to think and make full sentences.

Such positive findings reported thus far should not be surprising, given the fact that the majority of the students (10 or 76.92%) considered the websites and online activities used during the lessons as very good or good, and as many as 11 (84.61%) subjects did so with regard to the virtual world they inhabited and used for practicing the second conditional in English classes. What is also of great relevance to the present study is the fact that as many as 10 or 76.92% of the subjects declared their willingness to take part in lessons conducted by means of Internet-based resources and virtual worlds and as many as six subjects (46.15%) wanted such lessons to be carry out every class. What is more, seven or 53.84% of the subjects opted for such classes to be conducted once a week. This shows clearly the appealing nature of online resources and virtual worlds for language instruction as well as beneficial impact of such classes on the learning of the second conditional at least for the group of students who participated in this research project.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Research questions 1 and 2 asked about the impact of using the combination of Internet-based resources and the browser-based virtual world *Yoowalk* on learning the English second conditional as well as the extent to which the effect of the intervention was durable, as measured on immediate and delayed posttests. The increase in scores manifested on the immediate posttest and the two delayed posttests demonstrates the beneficial effects of employing a combination of online resources and the browser-based virtual world *Yoowalk* in the English lessons. However, it cannot be ruled out that the gains could also be attributed to the teaching effect of the test itself in view of the fact that exposure to numerous instances of the second conditional in the test might have sensitized the students to the target structure or encouraged them to work on it in their own time. What is more, the positive effects of the instruction might also be partly ascribed to the increased awareness of the targeted item on the part of the subjects developed as a result of the pretest. They may have started to pay more attention to the second conditional since they anticipated the structure to appear again. It should be kept in mind, however, that the class consisted of learners who regarded grammar as the most difficult for them to study and yet they managed to score significantly better on the posttests when compared to the pretest.

In addition, on the basis of such findings it seems legitimate to say that a combination of Internet materials and virtual worlds in particular might constitute one of the most beneficial options to be applied in the foreign language classroom when it comes to helping students to learn the English second conditional, and, perhaps, other grammatical structures. At the same time, however, caution has to be exercised about making definitive conclusions because of the pre-experimental design of the study since studies of this type do not include a control group. Moreover, the change might occur even without the application of the treatment or independent variable or it is possible that mere maturation may cause the alteration in grades and not the work experience itself (Hatch & Lazarson, 1991). On the other hand, it has to be noted that pre-experimental designs can be used as a way of generating insights for further research in more rigorous experimental designs (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). Another weakness of the study is related to the small sample, which reduces generalizability of the findings. Yet another limitation might concern the small number of data collection sessions. Finally, another weakness is the lack of another group of students the participants in the present study could talk to in the virtual world in order to engage in more natural conversations.

Research questions 3 and 4 asked about the students' perceptions of using the online resources and the browser-based virtual world *Yoowalk* as a learning opportunity. One of the positive findings of the study is the result of the evaluation sheet, which demonstrated that the subjects liked the classes and opted for more lessons devoted to online grammar activities and virtual worlds, despite the fact that they expressed unwillingness to study grammar before the study. It has to be noted, however, that such a change in the students' views on studying the grammar item might also be related to the innovative character of the instruction, the novelty and attractiveness of the virtual world they were asked to participate in as well as the learners' increased motivation.

Although there is still a place for using traditional (i.e., coursebook) materials in lessons, it appears warranted to claim that language teachers, if at all possible, should provide their students with the opportunity to use digital resources, and, in particular, virtual worlds

contextualized setting in which learners can actually use grammar structures better than in traditional classroom environment. In addition, virtual worlds can serve as another tool that language teachers can take advantage of as they create curricula that best serve their students' needs.

While the data obtained in the course of this study provided valuable insights into the role of utilizing a combination of online resources and virtual worlds in teaching the target language grammar, more research is needed in this area, such that would involve younger and older students representing different levels of language proficiency, focus on a variety of grammatical structures and make use of both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies.

Notes

1. The use of online materials was motivated by the fact that the participants of the study had already been familiar with such resources and used computers in the past during English lessons. In addition, the materials varied, were adjusted to the students' level of the target language advancement and offered more practice than activities in their coursebook.
2. It should be noted that before the study went under way the subjects got the chance to become familiarized with this virtual world. For example, they were shown how to log on, choose avatars or navigate.

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Appendix A

Sample materials used during the first lesson

Exercise: *Match the items on the right to the items on the left.*

If you were me, what would you do?	If I had a boat, I would go to South America.
If you got a loan, what would you buy?	If I were you, I would study languages.
If you had a boat, where would you go?	If I got a loan, I would buy a flat.

(<http://www.anglik.neostrada.pl/virtual.worlds/second.conditional.match.1.htm>)

Exercise: *Match the items on the right to the items on the left.*

If I were you, I'd call a doctor.	Poszedłbym ją odwiedzić, gdybym tylko miał czas.
Would you call him if you needed help?	Na twoim miejscu wezwałbym lekarza.
I would go and visit her if only I had time.	Czy zadzwoniłbyś do niego, gdybyś potrzebował pomocy?

(<http://www.anglik.neostrada.pl/virtual.worlds/second.conditional.translation.match.htm>)

Exercise: *Fill the gap using the verb in brackets.*

- I _____ that if I were you. It's bad luck. (not / do)
- They'd be a better team if they _____ fitter. (be)
- If I had some spare money, I _____ a DVD player. (buy)
- Those children _____ so horrible if their parents were stricter. (not / be)
- I wouldn't go out with him even if you _____ me. (pay)

(<http://perso.wanadoo.es/autoenglish/gr.con2.p.htm>)

Homework: *Each of these sentences is a second conditional. Complete the sentences by typing the correct form of each verb in brackets. Type your answers and click on "Check". If you need help, you can click on "Hint" to get a free letter.*

- If Joe ... (be) here, he ... (catch) some fish for supper.
- It ... (be) nice if the rain ... (stop)!
- I ... (sing) you a song if I ... (have) my guitar.
- If I ... (have) a better sleeping bag, I ... (not feel) so cold.

(<http://web2.uvcs.uvic.ca/elc/studyzone/410/grammar/2cond2.htm>)

Appendix B

Sample materials used during the second lesson

Exercise: Choose the correct answer.

1. If we gave John another chance, he _____ the same mistakes again.
 - a) make
 - b) made
 - c) will make
 - d) would make

(<http://www.anglik.neostrada.pl/virtual.worlds/second.conditional.quiz.2.htm>)

Exercise: Fill in all the gaps, then press "Check" to check your answers. Use the "Hint" button to get a free letter if an answer is giving you trouble. You can also click on the "[?]" button to get a clue. Note that you will lose points if you ask for hints or clues!

1. If Helen ... (come) along, we ... (have) a good time.
2. I ... (lock) the door if you ... (give) me the key.
3. If they ... (offer) that house to me for nothing, I still ... (not take) it.

(<http://www.anglik.neostrada.pl/virtual.worlds/second.conditional.cloze.1.htm>)

Exercise: Proszę stosować formy skrócone w przeczeniach, np. *haven't* zamiast *have not* oraz wpisywać pełne formy wyrazów w innych przypadkach, np. *I am* zamiast *I'm*.

1. I ... (not accept) her offer if I was supposed to decide.
2. I ... (not give) her any money unless she promised to give it back.
3. We ... (not go) abroad so often if our dad didn't have such a well-paid job.

(<http://testyourenglish.pl/test-76>)

Exercise: What would you say in the following situations? Use the words in brackets to help you.

Co powiedziałaabyś / powiedziałabyś w podanych sytuacjach? Użyj wyrazów z nawiasów i ułóż zdania w drugim trybie warunkowym.

1. Paul has asked you to go to a jazz concert. You don't like jazz so you're not going with him.

(I go / with you / if I / like jazz)

.....

2. You want to go on holiday but you're very busy at work at the moment.

(If I / not be / busy at work / I / go / on holiday)

.....

Appendix C

Sample materials used during the third lesson

Exercise: Fill in all the gaps, then press "Check" to check your answers. Use the "Hint" button to get a free letter if an answer is giving you trouble. You can also click on the "[?]" button to get a clue. Note that you will lose points if you ask for hints or clues!

He ... (be) one of my best students if he ... (be not) so shy.

- 256 It's a pity you can't get a longer leave. If you ... (get) a month's leave, we ... (visit) Italy.

If only Jim ... (write) to me, I ... (answer) at once.

(<http://www.anglik.neostrada.pl/virtual.worlds/second.conditional.cloze.2.htm>)

Exercise: *Complete the Conditional Sentences (Type II) by putting the verbs into the correct form. Use conditional I with would in the main clause.*

1. If we ... (have) a yacht, we ... (sail) the seven seas.
2. If he ... (have) more time, he ... (learn) karate.
3. If they ... (tell) their father, he ... (be) very angry.

(<http://www.ego4u.com/en/cram-up/grammar/conditional-sentences/type-2/exercises?02>)

Exercise: *Ask and answer the following questions:*

If you had a lot of money, what would you buy?, If you were an animal, what animal would you be?, What would you do, if you had a special power?, If you were a machine, what machine would you be?, If you could change the world, what would you do?, If you could change your past, what would you change?, What would you do if you were a girl/ boy for one day?

Homework: *Make the second conditional*

1. If I ... (be) you, I ... (get) a new job.
2. If he ... (be) younger, he ... (travel) more.
3. If we ... (not/be) friends, I ... (be) angry with you.

(<http://www.perfect-english-grammar.com/second-conditional-exercise-1.html>)

Appendix D

Sample materials used during the fourth lesson

Exercise: *Put the verbs in brackets into the gaps. Form a Conditional sentence - type II.*

1. If I ... (to come) home earlier, I ... (to prepare) dinner.
2. If we ... (to live) in Rome, Francesco ... (to visit) us.
3. If Tim and Tom ... (to be) older, they ... (to play) in our hockey team.

(http://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/exercises/if_clauses/type_2_statements.htm)

Exercise: *Put the verbs in brackets into the gaps. Form a Conditional sentence - type II. Mind the negations in the sentences.*

1. If Oliver ... (to find) money, he ... (not/to keep) it.
2. If they ... (not/to wear) pullovers in the mountains, it ... (to be) too cold during the night.
3. If Tony ... (to know) her phone number, he ... (not/to give) it to Frank.

(http://www.englisch-hilfen.de/en/exercises/if_clauses/type_2_negation.htm)