

USING WEB-BASED RESEARCH TASKS  
FOR THE PROMOTION OF DEEP LEARNING

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**Introduction**

This article draws on the concept of using the enormous cognitive and linguistic potential of Web resources for better and deeper learning. It concentrates primarily on how these resources can be used to train EFL college learners in approaching complex research tasks in a thoughtful manner, and, consequently, using deep learning strategies. It is based on the assumption that students' ability to use Web resources creatively cannot be taken for granted since their educational experience has taught them to be surface learners. Thus, the strategies they spontaneously turn to are those of memorization, repetition and, generally, passive reproduction of the input. Drawing from her teaching experience, the author of this article suggests a procedure for a Web-infused training, in which a special emphasis is placed on the process of framing research tasks and employing deep learning strategies in the process of their completion.

**Deep learning vs. surface learning**

Partly in response to the ever increasing accessibility of information provided by new technologies, much attention is currently being devoted to making learners active and autonomous participants of the learning process. With information of any kind being nowadays abundant and easily available, it seems that any learning situation should aim at coaching learners to treat it as a starting point for the creation of a new product. This is possible if they are not afraid to engage in a wide range of higher-order thinking processes nor discouraged by the intellectual effort that this kind of manipulation undoubtedly requires. Here, the deep-surface dichotomy, although relatively new in a pedagogical context, appears to best illustrate how students respond to resources.

First of all, it is common to point to the volitional aspect of the dichotomy using the two terms, namely *deep* and *surface*, to refer to learners' general approaches to learning. In brief, learners with deep approaches learn to understand whereas those with surface approaches learn for fear of failure (Biggs, 1987). This dimension appears to be closely connected with learners' motivation and has become the subject of several research studies (Marton, Saljo 1976; Biggs, 1987). The other aspect of the deep-surface dichotomy that has also been given enhanced attention is connected with the amount of cognitive manipulation that learners engage in. It can be linked to learners' general approaches to learning, yet it can also be prompted by a pedagogic task. Here, *deep learning* has come to encompass the kind of input processing that results in the creative production of a new quality. The deeper the processing of the input and the deeper the strategies that learners employ, the more valuable the learning outcome [1]. In contrast, *surface learning* is typically characterized by the uncritical acceptance of input and followed by its memorization and a possibly faithful recall. The most common strategies used in surface learning i.e. memorization, repetition and rote reproduction, do not require any intellectual manipulation of the material under study and, thus, result in learners' mental passiveness.

Desired as deep learning is for students' intellectual growth, it is rarely spontaneous and seems very unpopular, especially among academically struggling students. First of all, it requires much greater intellectual effort than surface learning. In practical terms, this means that even well-motivated students may choose not to engage in deep learning due to time constraints or in order to reduce an over-heavy learning load. It can also be hypothesized that most learners, especially in the Polish reality, are not aware of the difference between surface and deep learning strategies and they do not know how to transform the information they are exposed to. With the traditional transmission pedagogy conventionally prioritizing reproduction rather than creativity and expecting learners to absorb and reproduce as much factual information as possible, it is no surprise that the vast majority of them have been coached to be surface learners and that this type of learning is the only learning they are familiar with.

The issue of deep learning seems especially worth investigating in the context of foreign language instruction. Here, paradoxically, surface learning strategies make a valuable and efficient part of learning experience. Learners of any foreign language, especially at the early stages, are commonly expected to use memorization, repetition and rehearsal e.g. during drills or while memorizing new vocabulary items. Indeed, these strategies prove extremely efficient in learning