

THE USE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstract: *In the attempts to make students become and remain more competitive in this new world order brought about by globalization and technological developments, language teaching has adopted different approaches, including information and communication technology as a valuable tool to enhance foreign language teaching and learning. Technology is increasingly used in teaching foreign languages as a supplement to language training, or as a way of learning. Online platforms have progressed significantly in recent years. They continue to provide increasingly more useful and affordable applications, as well as tools for language learning. The present paper lists several examples.*

Key words: *information, communication, technology, language teaching*

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Literacy in information and communication technologies is essential and indispensable to life in our modern technological society. To equip students to be literate life-long learners and global citizens of the 21st century, the educational system must successfully integrate information and communication technologies into all its areas, including the pedagogical practice when it comes to teaching and learning foreign languages.

Information and communication technologies are a valuable instrument to empower teaching and learning. For teachers, information and communication technologies represent important professional resources, an approach when it comes to classroom delivery, and a source of valid and valuable text types. For students, information and communication technologies provide opportunities to communicate more effectively and to develop literacy skills including skills in critical literacy. It is a valuable instrument for researching, creating and responding, as well as viewing and representing in English.

With a focus on language, communication and culture as well as the national standards for learning foreign languages, teachers are in a continuous search for better ways of accessing authentic materials and provide experiences that will better develop the skills of learners of foreign languages. The technology is probably the best way to create an environment conducive to learning. Information and communication technologies can support teachers in making learning languages faster, easier, more attractive and interesting.

Technology has increasingly changed the ways of teaching and learning. "Because of the technological advancements, the instructional software developed and used in computer assisted learning has become more sophisticated. Newly-developed instructional software that integrates text, sound, and computer animation now can present material to students in a multimedia form that may maximize its effectiveness. Computer-based multimedia also helps students to develop technical and research skills that they cannot get from reading a textbook. Since the links and images are on a computer, students learn how to work with a keyboard, mouse, and to access online information." (Vilceanu, 2009:40)

When planning to use computer assisted language learning it is important to understand which processes are involved in language learning. Being a cognitive process,

language learning is the result of the student's own way of language processing and language acquisition. What is learned is mainly the result of this process rather than just explanations, rules, and questions presented by a teacher or a computer. Building on existing knowledge about the addressed theme and language acquisition, the student processes the input and incorporates it into the language system he possesses. Language knowledge is not just recorded, but rather constructed by the student.

Information and communication technologies can be used in many types of materials and activities. Several such examples of activities will be listed in the following paragraphs. Adventure games are computer managed role plays where the users are presented with a situation they will face. The user must choose what to do and introduce results such as text, speech (speech recognition software), by clicking on options. Based on results, the program branches to resulting situations and gives feed-back. Adventure games can be very entertaining when constructed for language learners.

Blog is another example of activity that can be used in language teaching. The term blog is derived from weblog and refers to a web page that is updated regularly. They are arranged in reverse chronological order so that the newest post is always at the top of the list. Blogs have a number of typical features that make online publishing extremely effective and versatile. Blogs can be created in just a few steps following instructions and they can have one or more authors. Each blog can contain various categories which can be accessed by a simple click. Publishing is easy as blogs provide templates which do not require any technical skills from the blogger. All these features illustrate the usefulness of blogs in a language teaching environment as a medium that develops reading, writing and communication skills.

Language teachers might want to start a class blog which enables them to provide online reading texts for students, provide additional materials like audio or video clips, images, organize Internet resources for the class by providing useful pages, links or addresses, give instructions, assign tasks, make the students practice writing (for an audience), to provide feedback to the teacher, start discussions with students, to encourage support and assessment made by fellow colleague. For different aspects regarding language teaching see also Madincea Pascu, (2015) and Leu, D.J (2000).

Online discussion can also be a valuable educational tool. Discussion centres can be a rewarding experience for language learners. The user meets other learners online and can communicate with them through text, speech and video. It is easy to set up a chat server and when combined with tasks and groups of students (age groups, interests, etc.) chats can lead to real communication.

Cloze exercises are similar to "fill in the blanks" exercises. This is an activity that can easily be created in a few minutes with online available software. Crosswords are often very popular with students, and when created from the vocabulary discussed with students it becomes a very good tool for exercises. Electronic dictionaries are useful for language learners. The Internet offers several examples of dictionaries that are either shareware or free. Electronic portfolio refers to a personal collection of information describing and documenting the accumulated knowledge of a person, and can be a valuable instrument in language learning. There are a variety of portfolios that extend from learning to extensive collections of achievement evidence. Portfolios are used for many different purposes such as accreditation of prior experience, job search, development. The pedagogical idea is that the students become aware of their learning style, which helps them to choose the right activities and thus enhance learning.

Podcasting is a method of distributing multimedia files over the internet using "RSS" or "Atom syndication" format. This allows a user to play these files on any personal

computer or mobile device. Another useful feature of podcasts is that they use open standards, like MPEG3, which means that there are many types of devices that can play them. There is free and available software to build podcasts and to play them, so the teachers can easily make technology work in their teaching environment. The model for submitting multimedia from audio to video is also called Vodcasting. Podcasts and vodcasts can be widely used in teaching environments. Students can be asked to record their speech and turn them into digital audio for assessment or for group work with other students.

Role-play or MUD (multi-user dungeon) is a multiplayer real-time virtual world, usually text-based. MUDs combine elements of role-playing games, hack and slash, player versus player, interactive fiction, and online chat. Players can read or view descriptions of rooms, objects, other players, non-player characters, and actions performed in the virtual world. Players typically interact with each other and the world by typing commands that resemble a natural language. In some cases the activities are created explicitly for language teaching and for use in the language class.

A WebQuest is an activity where the student answers questions and compiles information mostly found on the web. WebQuests are designed to focus on using and analysing information rather than looking for it. This means the teacher provides the student with the necessary links.

Imel (1999) proposed several additional guidelines for using information and communication technologies in language classes. She suggests that learning outcomes should drive the process of technology choice, as Technology is only a tool therefore teachers must use technology as part of a total instructional plan. According to her, teachers should strive to infuse and/or integrate technology into instruction and curriculum, use the technology to shift the emphasis from teaching to learning. Teachers have to be prepared to modify the role of the instructor as they are not the only source of information. Focus should be moved away from low-level cognitive tasks to higher order thinking skills.

Using the Internet in education, along with other auxiliary tools, enables real-time access to information exchanges and provides new interesting opportunities for learning and teaching. Various categories of people (students, teachers, IT specialists) participate in this framework each having a well-defined role.

Information and communication technologies are revolutionizing education by eliminating the distance from education and making information accessible to all. As Chinien (2003) notes, technology-enhanced learning is playing an important role in the development of a lifelong learning culture and has the capacity to empower learners by providing them with multiple pathways that offer choices and channels to meet their education and training needs. It is not unexpected therefore to see a growing interest in learning based on information and communication technologies across the world. According to Chinien (2003), technology-based learning may be defined as the collection of hardware and software used in the teaching and learning systems that include computer-based training systems, multimedia systems, electronic performance support systems, telecommunications systems, as well as the Internet with World Wide Web systems. The rate at which the Internet is being accessed keeps increasing. Technology based learning can enhance teaching and learning; it has the potential to become cost-effective as it offers greater flexibility regarding time and location of training delivery (Furst-Bowe, 1996).

The evolution and development of information and communication technologies has resulted in a paradigm shift in the educational system. Information and communication technologies are changing the way people learn, offering new alternatives to the traditional classroom. Nowadays, it is essential for learners to have access to education anytime and

anywhere. Haddad and Draxler (2002) state, that “lifelong learning and training for the workplace cannot be confined to the traditional classroom. It is unrealistic and unaffordable to continue to ask learners to come to a designated place every time they have to engage in learning” (p. 7). Information and communication technologies allow the delivery of education to adapt to an individual needs as opposed to having the individual adapt to how the education is delivered. Education is no longer restrained to the four walls of a classroom but to wherever and whenever the learner considers appropriate. “Education will not be a location anymore, but an activity: a teaching/learning activity” (Haddad and Draxler, 2002, p. 8). Information and communication technologies have the capability of providing “personalized, just-in-time, up-to-date, and user-centred education activities” (Haddad and Draxler, 2002, p. 12).

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