

The integration of ICT in English classes in the XXI century:
Motivating English learning

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Abstract

The integration of information and communication technology in the XXI century is an important part in the teaching-learning processes of education. In this research paper work, the integration of technology is shown as a significant tool in the teaching-learning processes of English as a foreign language of two universities with results, which can be of valorous information for other processes. The methodology combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. The study and evaluations of students' final achievements at the end of this research showed how powerful the integration of technology in the teaching-learning process has become and how useful is the integration of different kinds of technology tools to activate students' motivation towards the learning of English.

Key words: Technology; teaching; education.

Introduction

The English language is the medium of instruction in most countries and it is the connecting language of the global market. Many countries teach the English language from elementary school through higher education. It is a major concern in Colombian education to get students to reach optimal levels in English for their different areas of performance.

That is why this research paper shows evidence of the significant value of integrating technology as an academic tool in English as a foreign language teaching and learning processes. This evidence can be a determining factor in planning and teaching classes, in which the students will be able to acquire the target language in an easy and striking way and with a high motivational attitude.

Technology is not the future, it is the present and it is happening right now. Moreover, the integration of this technology will be of great help to obtain meaningful English learning by students (Gonzalez, 2013). Technology should be considered as a tool and not as a substitute, (Dillenbourg, 2000), teaching should be more than the traditional face to face interaction between student-student, or teacher-student, the integration of the different technological tools as a functional communication and the new ways of learning motivates learning in an active way.

The integration of technology in daily classes can significantly improve the quality of classes and promote very open minded towards technology in the classroom. Gonzalez (2015) said that technology should be a complement to traditional education.

Information and communication technology

According to (Sunkel, 2010), ICT should be considered as one more element that could contribute to human development, specifically in education. Badia, Meneses y Sigalés, (2016) said that it is not enough that teachers and students have competences and access to technologies, but also that they must have technological and pedagogical support to integrate technologies in the classroom, and it is necessary that they perceive that the technologies are beneficial and relevant to help them achieve better learning objectives.

Technology, computers, video beams and many other virtual interactions have motivated students to learn in a different way nowadays. Students are really good at reading images, so we need to take advantage of things like these. Preparing classes with lots of images representing the topics we need to teach could be an excellent option to optimize the learning process, having interactive activities in classes will help getting students attention easier and longer.

Oblinger, D. (2004), vice president for EDUCAUSE, refers to students as “net-generation” learners and “digital-natives”. She also says that by age 21, these students will have spent 10,000 hours playing video games, sent 200,000 emails, watched 20,000 hours of television, spent 10,000 hours on a cell phone, but less than 5,000 hours reading, all these as the result of the new era of ICT. This is a very good example of how teachers can take advantage of technology to prepare classes and get students involved in the learning process with a high grade of motivation towards the topics.

The integration of technology in education

The integration of technology in the English classroom has expanded very quickly and effectively throughout the world, and a wide variety of activities to choose from. Different researchers have found that online students can have better results than traditional students. (Maki and Maki, 2007).

Teachers should keep up with trends in education; integrating different activities related to technology in classrooms activate new motivations and help increasing the integration of students. According to Maki and Maki (2007), to be effective, online instructors require a strong methodology and many opportunities for students to interact with each other and with the teacher. So and Brush (2008) said that mixed learning (blended learning) is effective in providing a collaborative online learning.

Rosen & Weil (1995, cited by Mumtaz, 2000,page 320), there are some factors affecting teacher’s use of information and communication technology, such as lack of experience with ICT, lack of on-site support for teachers using technology, lack of ICT

specialist teachers to teach students computer skills, lack of computer availability, lack of time required to successfully integrate technology into the curriculum and lack of financial support. All these factors can be used as a get away from technology in our educational environment, but it must be remembered that surpassing all kinds of difficulties is part of the teaching process, and getting better every day will help students get a better English learning level.

In the process of implementing technology in English classes in two universities, there were different factors to deal with and overcoming them was part of the process in the implementation of new ways for students to achieve English in a new and more active way. The availability of video beams was a problem in many occasions, the time was limited in some classes, some students still reject the use of technology as a learning tool, some students still have some technology knowledge problems, and one of the biggest problems was the lack of integration of technology in the curriculum.

Involving technology in English teaching is one of the best improvements in our teaching processes. For example, eslvideo.com (2007) has a wonderful website where teachers can assign a video to watch and work listening comprehension, and teachers get the students' results on-line. To make a lesson on a Power Point presentation using animated images, videos, listening and all kinds of audio-visual things get students more involved in the learning process.

Virtual platforms

Virtual platforms are really enjoyable for students, they offer a wide variety of items which complement students learning activities; forums, tests, documents, chats, video conferences, and many others. There is an asynchrony and a synchronic communication with students. According to Lafford y Lafford (1997), access online provides infinitive and free updated virtual material.

Electronic mails

E-mails are an excellent way of permanent communication among students and teachers and they promote autonomous learning. Iwasaki (2008) said that an e-mail is a media where students feel safe expressing themselves because there is not immediate language production required. Electronic mails can compensate the lack of direct contact, (Tao y Reinking, 1996).

Nowadays most students have an e-mail account, teachers most take advantage of that to improve information and communication with them. According to Iwasaki (2008), e-mails interchange is similar to oral communication nowadays, students will spontaneously understand the pattern of a conversation.

These kinds of communications can help teachers deal with those students who have difficulties communicating in front of others. According to Sheer y Fung (2007), a teacher can use an e-mail to improve the relationship with students.

Web sites

There are many web sites for students to practice all English skills needed in language learning anytime from anywhere. Teachers have a huge range of activities online to choose from, improving the possibility of integrating technology in classes to make them more attractive for students. Chinnery (2005) said that materials are available anytime from anywhere having a device connected to internet. He also mentioned that teachers need to create active learning situations in which students can significantly practice what they are learning. According to Reinders (2010), integrating the web in classes motivates students learning.

Cellphones

It is really common to hear a teacher telling students to put away their cellphones at the beginning of a class or a presentation, but there is a new tendency in English classes where teachers promote the use of the cellphone as a complement in their English learning process. Cellphones are a social tool which facilitate authentic and relevant communication among students (Reinders, 2010).

According to Nihat Sad (2008), teachers must be very creative on searching for different methods to make their classrooms more communicative.

Power point presentations

Integrating Power Point Presentations in English classes can be one of the most effective ways of teaching. The time teachers spend creating Power Point Presentations for classes is compensated with the time gained in class management (Taylor 2012). Visual aids using animated gif images and sound integrated in the presentations give students a sense of reality in the classroom (Gonzalez, 2013). Images lower the cognitive load of students and give them more direct significant (Healy, 2011). These presentations help keeping students attention and make the class more interactive.

Therefore the main objective of this research is to show how technology integrated into the English as a foreign language has a significant impact on the teaching and learning of undergraduate students. To get final data was necessary:

- To follow up on classes. Technology was used as support in the classroom.
- To use virtual platforms to supplement face-to-face class sections.
- To search about the different technological tools globally available.

Methods

The methodology combines qualitative and quantitative approaches because there are different processes and techniques adapted to the requirements of the investigation.

Four groups were selected (English level 2), groups ranged between 25 to 30 students. All the groups took an evaluation at the beginning of the semester to check on their English level. Data was recorded and analyzed constantly and students were observed and evaluated. The research was done in two different periods of the university year, two groups were taken

in the period A (from January to June) and the other two groups were taken in the period B (from July to December).

Technological tools were integrated in all classes in order to get significant learning in the English as a foreign language process. The web page www.voxopop.com (2009) was used for students to record a reply to a discussion proposed by the teacher to assess their oral production and listening skills.

There were reinforcements with different virtual aids and tutorials on various websites, such as the platforms Chamilo and Moodle which are used in the universities. Students participated in forums, surveys, reading documents, checking the calendar and grades online. These activities kept students in contact with the target language at all times.

Students had to perform different types of English exercises online in addition to everything discussed in the face-to-face classes. Many different web sites were carefully chosen on every topic studied during the semesters. There was always a great willingness on the part of participants in classes to these options.

PowerPoint presentations were a very important base in the development of this research. Visual aid using gif animated images and audio in presentations helped the students' motivation and it also gave a much more real environment to the classroom. E.g., one of the classes about present continuous showed different activities with sound. Just like going to the movie, you could see a couple dancing to the sound of a song, a boy jumping into a swimming pool splashing water or the man driving his car under the sound of a strong engine. The teacher and the students participating actively all the time.

E-mails were used to have a non-stop communication among teacher – students and students – students. There were no limits on the amount of questions asked and answers given through this media. There were even some personal issues worked and resolved by e-mail.

Mobil phones were not banned at all. They were actively integrated in classes as a useful tool. Students looked for new words in the online dictionaries, they sent some paper work and they also took pictures of some of the presentations given in the classroom. Mobil

phones were also used in an activity where students were challenged to write as fast as they could and answer some questions working in groups.

There was an observation regarding students' active participation in both face-to-face and virtual classes, followed by a rigorous analysis of final results of the courses.

Students were constantly reminded of the importance of achieving the independent work which included many activities integrating technology as a daily homework. And the teacher was always looking for new and different technology tools to integrate them in the academic routine.

The integration of technology in class created a very modern environment in which most students are immersed nowadays and this led to a better disposition toward the work to be done during the class period. All of this followed a methodology of quantitative and qualitative analysis. Results and conclusions were reached after studying and analyzing all data collected during the research.

Results

Having integrated technology in classes of two universities for a period of one year has given a significant result in the students' English acquisition. The use of a computer and a video beam, the use of different websites, the use of the university's platform and the integration of power point presentations using animated images, sound and video and the constant communication through e-mail has given the classes the levels of productivity expected. And furthermore, it has extended the expectations in the English teaching process to get better results from students' levels of producing in English.

Integrating technology to get better results from students has been a great achievement, presenting a new topic, for example, present continuous: What are they doing? And showing an animated image of a couple dancing with some background music, gives

the students an illusion of realism which help students get the ideas easier and faster and they become totally involved and participative in their class.

Giving the students the opportunity of exploring different websites where they can listen, watch and practice English has activate the students' curiosity to get more and more. Teachers who have their own website get extra recognition from students and it helps them assigning homework through technology.

Becker & Riel (2000) said that some of the characteristics of using technology successfully are when students work more with their choices than their teacher's direction, students become empowerment learners rather than students receiving instructions, and teachers who have positive attitude towards the use of technology will be more effective. And that those teachers who are motivated and have strong commitment to their students learning and their own professional development will evidently integrate computers more easily within their teaching.

At the end of the semester there was plenty of evidence of a significant improvement in the learning process of the students. The written evaluation they had taken at the beginning of the semester and which they have scored an average of 60/100 went up to 85/100. The oral skill which had shown an A2 level went up to a range of A2+ and B1. This proved that their English level had increased. And students showed their wiliness to keep using technology as a learning tool in their own time.

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