

ICT IMPLEMENTATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND ENGLISH DIALECTOLOGY

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The aim of our paper is to show how we have implemented the use of ICT and competence teaching in two different modules in the degree of English Philology at the University of Valencia. We also try to demonstrate how their implementation has improved teaching and learning and how it has acted as a powerful catalyst for higher achievement. Using an Innovation and Education Programme (IEP) methodology has helped teaching methodology go beyond the bounds of the classroom. Another change brought about by the IEP is the defence of a cross-cultural teaching method. Furthermore, it has been a useful tool in the integration of the development of student competences. The implementation of the Innovation in Education Programme has strengthened teacher-student contact and promoted students' class attendance.

INTRODUCTION

In the following article our aim is to describe the most relevant aspects of the application of an *Innovation in Education Project* (IEP) methodology together with the implementation of ICTs in two modules in the Degree of English Philology at the University of Valencia, namely *English Language II* and *English Dialectology*. We first provide an overview of the theoretical and methodological basis on which we ground our teaching approach. This is based on the main linguistic theories regarding the acquisition of a second language and on the teaching/acquisition of competencies. Then we explain the nature of the modules and shift to a brief explanation of their characteristics. In most theoretical classes in both modules, we make use of a range of class units delivered through

PowerPoint slides, which are presented and explained in class or even uploaded to our e-learning platform, *Aula Virtual*. In the practice sessions, students are split into small groups so they can practise the activities designed by the teachers and voice all their problems and doubts in connection with the subject.

The role of *Aula Virtual* is essential in the development of this methodology: we explain its structure and focus on how we have taken advantage of the tools it offers. More specifically, we describe the exploitation of the "Resources", "News" and "Assessment" folders. We also detail in this section the role of the "portfolio" for both teachers and students, and its weight in the final mark. Finally, the conclusion deals with future possibilities such as, for instance, the

development of multimedia activities with computing education programmes such as JCLIC. We also offer a series of proposals for future enhancement of *Aula Virtual*.

Even though the implementation of this methodology had to overcome different obstacles, such as for instance, excessive class size, our experience was overall very positive. Two facts have been confirmed: that using a methodology that is less teacher-centred makes our modules more practical and that it improves the relationship between teacher and student.

METHODOLOGICAL AND EMPIRICAL BASIS

The implementation of our methodology is based on a series of theoretical principles and methodological theories that we will describe in this section. Following Krashen (1982) and his Monitor Model, we can claim that there are two differentiated processes which this author describes in the first of the hypotheses in his language acquisition model: acquisition and learning. Whereas learning is a conscious process through which we focus on several linguistic aspects and usually takes place inside the classroom, the acquisition process occurs naturally and subconsciously as long as we receive messages that we can understand, which is what he calls *comprehensible input*. This is a key concept in his theory since, according to Krashen, comprehensible input is the only way language is acquired. Through the acquisition process, people are able to develop their first language and a second language and thus it has a vital role in the language learning process. Therefore, this is the method we attempt to apply in class in order for our students to learn through a series of varied activities dealing with different topics so that they are exposed to language as much as possible, which is the only way in which they will eventually acquire it. We could say that ideally our students would be learning language in particular and concepts in general without really noticing that they are doing so, whereas in the classical classroom context, everything is pre-planned and controlled and the more formal aspects of language are foregrounded and so learning is promoted over acquisition.

We can add, following Gee (1992), that we acquire a language subconsciously by exposure to a model, through a trial and error process, and practice within social groups, normally without formal teaching. This is exactly what we want to promote through the methodology we use. We want our students to answer questionnaires, give specific information, etc. and receive immediate feedback in their answers. These types of activities are usually related to a specific context that gives the students the opportunity to acquire meaningful, real and useful knowledge which can be applied to specific functions. As the students can choose when and where to do these activities, they will be learning without the pressure of the formal classroom context and we will be able to improve their motivation, which, together with other affective factors, is a vital element in their learning process. We consider that meaningful learning is a crucial concept since, as Mayer (1997) explains, it takes place when the student is able to select the most important information in a particular context, to organise it into a logical mental picture and to integrate the new information with existing information.

If we take into consideration that the use of new technologies can improve the acquisition of this type of knowledge, we can then assert, following Mayer's (1997) Generative Theory of Multimedia Instruction, that when we apply mixed modes of delivery (texts, graphics, audio, video, animation, etc.), we are offering our students different ways of employing cognitive processes in order to acquire knowledge. We can thus claim that multimedia learning takes place when our students are able to construct mental representations through words and images presented to them in a text format containing illustrations, narrations and animations. This type of learning lends weight to the hypothesis that students learn to a greater degree when the messages they receive are well-designed multimedia material than when they are exposed to more traditional types of material based merely on texts. According to Mayer (2003), an educational multimedia message is a type of presentation that includes words and images and that has been designed to foster meaningful learning. This is the type of

presentations that we pursue in our project, i.e., material that has been designed to contain and transmit a message, often discipline-specific content, that, at the same time, can be used to promote the type of learning that can be more beneficial for our students.

Mayer's (2003) research in this field has led him to claim that students learn best when they have access to visual and verbal representations and they interact simultaneously in their memory. According to what he defines as The Multimedia Effect, students can learn better from well-designed multimedia messages through which students can build mental representations from words and pictures that are presented to them than from more traditional modes of communication involving words alone.

Another author who follows this line of research is Sweller (1999), who explains that multimedia products used in the educational background can be beneficial only if they are carefully designed and do not unnecessarily overload human information processing. In this vein, in recent years, media-based listening comprehension activities have evolved from a purely audio-only approach to one that is more holistic and multi-sensory. Materials no longer focus on nonsensical sentence structures. Instead, students now experience more authentic audio passages embedded in video, interactive CD-ROMs, or websites. This, together with interactive self-checking exercises, provides them with an opportunity to examine their output in terms of recall of the target language material.

As the development of L2 multimedia increases, researchers must find out more specifically how the attributes of multimedia can enhance listening and reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. The increasing use of new technologies in the classroom has brought about a new teaching approach which promotes a total change in the teaching-learning process in the classroom. We have evolved from a traditional perspective based on the final product and centered on the teacher, to a model which is process-oriented and centered on the student. In this new learning model, the interaction is not only between the teacher and the student, but also between different students.

This is related to the notion of collaborative learning which posits that students learn best when they are actively involved in an activity and that students working in small groups tend to learn more of what is taught and retain it longer than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats. It can be claimed that the active exchange of ideas within small groups not only increases interest among the participants but also encourages critical thinking. This type of shared learning gives learners an opportunity to engage in discussion, take responsibility for their own learning and thus become critical thinkers. Therefore, one of the main aims of our methodology is to offer our students activities and tasks that must be tackled in groups and where negotiation, dialogue and participation should be the most important factors fostered by them.

We must promote interaction among our students, or peer interaction, which, as Toussaint Clark and Clark (2008) explain, is a key concept whose importance was already acknowledged in the 1972 convention of the International Communication Association (ICA) and has evolved remarkably since then. Group dynamics can act as a catalyst to obtain better results in the final product of a particular task, in the interpersonal relation among students and in their psychological health.

One final aspect that must be taken into account is the fact that our students must be treated as adults and thus we have to make them aware that they are responsible for their own learning process. As the teaching directed to children and adolescents has its own characteristics, so does teaching adults. Knowles' (1975) Andragogy Theory attempts to develop a context which is specifically aimed at adult learning. This author emphasizes that adults are self-directed and are expected to take responsibility for the decisions they make. Thus, we must consider those aspects when planning our methodology. We must take into account that adults need to know why they need to learn something, that they need to learn experientially, that they approach learning as problem-solving and that they learn best when topics are of immediate value. This implies that instruction for adults needs to focus

more on the process and less on the content being taught. Activities centred on case studies, role-playing, simulations, and self-evaluation are probably the most useful. In activities of this type, the instructor adopts the role of facilitator rather than lecturer or grader.

Having offered a general view of the most important premises on which we base our methodology, we will now explain how we have applied it to two specific modules in the degree of English Studies.

THE CASE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE II

In the particular case of the subject *English Language II*, we are going to focus our attention on a specific project designed for this module, but also used in a cross-curricular way in other modules in the degree. Apart from exploiting our e-learning platform and using activities designed to be used in the classroom, we have created a specific web-based project called *Sing a Song, Learn Along* (Clavel Arroitia and Zaragoza Ninet, 2008).

This series of web pages has been developed by three lecturers (Carmen Gregori, M^a Goretti Zaragoza and Begoña Clavel) and our objective was to create extra material for the students of English Language. However, due to the cross-curricular nature of the material, it can be also used in subjects such as English Dialectology, History and Culture, Phonology and others. The site revolves around different songs for which we

have created a series of activities. We chose classic pop/rock songs as they are less ephemeral than the latest top-twenty hits; songs that deal with broad topics which refer to cultural and historical aspects that were relevant at the time they happened but could also be applied to today's society. They include a historical and cultural moment in the history of a specific country (*Sunday Bloody Sunday*), an issue that affects all human kind (*A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall*), socio-cultural legacy (*American Pie*), or problems arising from consumerism, conforming or lack of fight (*Pretty Fly for a White Guy*). This is just the first selection of songs and in further stages we plan to include songs that centre on other topics such as love, war, friendship, etc.

The type of activities created around the songs include more traditional activities, such as vocabulary, grammar, translation and writing, and also multimedia activities, such as web quests, video, audio, etc. Both types of activities can be answered on line using the tools of our e-learning platform. The material was designed in order to be exploited on-line, as traditional tasks (use of downloadable handouts and photocopies) and as blended learning tasks (some activities in the classroom and others as autonomous work). Both teachers and students can use the material in these three ways. Our e-learning platform (*Aula Virtual*) is essential for this project, especially the Multimedia Server which allows us to upload the songs and the necessary material.



Fig. 1. Sing A Song, Learn Along

THE CASE OF ENGLISH DIALECTOLOGY

English Dialectology is an optional module offered to students who are in the fourth year of our five-year degree and lasts a whole semester. Over the past academic year, we implemented IEP methodologies for the first time. Just as in *English Language II* this has brought about a series of changes in the teaching and learning process. First, we have modified the traditional evaluation system from one featuring a single final exam into one in which a continuous evaluation system has been implemented: students are assessed on a plurality of tasks aimed at acquiring discipline-specific content and developing subject-specific competencies but also more general skills and competencies, including their ability to communicate in English. This process is divided into three main stages: a team presentation, worth 30%; class participation, compulsory readings and performance in online questionnaires, worth 20%; and a final test which accounts for 50% of the final mark.

INTEGRATION OF ICT IN THE TEACHING METHODOLOGY

We have also incorporated ICT in the teaching methodology, enabled, partly, by the project “*Diseño y creación de materiales multimedia y profundización en la enseñanza semipresencial*”, sponsored by the University of Valencia. Firstly, we have made use of ICT: the theoretical lectures

were given through the medium of *PowerPoint* presentations and the students have in turn, employed this programme in order to prepare and deliver their presentations. Furthermore, we have made use of other software in order to elaborate online self-corrected questionnaires, namely, *Respondus*. The questionnaires are first created in *Word* with a specific format and are then transferred to the programme to convert them into real online questionnaires. Finally, these are uploaded to the e-learning platform. Other software, specifically *Audacity*, helps us work with the different audio files in order to create audio questionnaires, of particular relevance in the subject of *Dialectology*. Besides all this, in the lectures we have exploited a wide range of audio and video material including films, series, TV shows, real audio files, video extracts, etc., which were aimed not only at developing students’ listening comprehension skills and grasp of the different English accents and dialects, but also at making lectures more dynamic and entertaining.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF AN IEP METHODOLOGY

As with *English Language II*, we have incorporated four main applications into our teaching methodology (cf. Fig. 2): the news section, where we inform students about important events, dates and deadlines; the administration section, where we manage



Fig. 2. The Resources Folder in *Aula Virtual*

students' performance and grades in the different phases of the evaluation process; the questionnaires section, where we upload the online questionnaires above described; and, finally, the resources folder where we upload a wide range of material related to the subject. This material is aimed primarily at facilitating students' acquisition and at developing the teaching process. For instance, we have uploaded the different power point presentations on several curricular topics, to help students revise for the final exam, additional articles on specific curricular material, and, finally, the different audio files used in the lectures accompanied by their transcriptions for the students to be able to listen to these again in a more stress-free context.

TEACHING COMPETENCES

Another change brought about by the IEP methodology is the defence of a cross-cultural teaching method: *English Dialectology* has given the students the opportunity to practice the four competences which make up the communicative competence of any second language speaker (Canale and Swain, 1980). Therefore, the students have improved their grammatical competence (words and rules) through reading articles and the creation of *PowerPoint* team presentations and their accompanying written handouts. Moreover, their sociolinguistic competence (appropriateness) has been exercised through a study of the different registers associated with the different varieties of English. Discourse competence (cohesion and coherence, attention to the reader's needs) was highlighted both during the making of their presentations and the written handouts aimed at providing students with written summaries of every presentation. Finally, we tried to ensure strategic competence (appropriate use of communication strategies) through the oral delivery of presentations. All in all, as the focus is on the delivering content, the students were less aware that they were using a foreign language and more concerned with getting their ideas across which, we hope, fostered the acquisition of English vocabulary, structures, pronunciation and prosody.

Furthermore, the IEP has been a useful tool in the development of additional student

competences and skills. For instance, students' team presentations have helped acquire interpersonal competences –such as critical and respectful attitudes towards other students and their opinions– and systemic competences –autonomous learning, summarising skills and the transmission of ideas. Besides, learning to use questionnaires, *Aula Virtual* and other software has proved useful in the building of technical or instrumental competences, such as using computers and audio and video material. Finally, the general test has facilitated the teaching of disciplinary and academic competences –such as aptitude for oral communication– and professional skills, such as being able to identify problems and select research topics.

CONCLUSIONS

The implementation of the methodologies which are part and parcel of the IEP has brought about radical changes in our teaching and the way students learn/acquire content and competences. We have made extensive use of ICT inside and outside the classroom; we have used our e-learning platform extensively as an essential tool within our methodological approach and we have promoted the use of different types of activities, thus changing class dynamics in general. This has meant a change in approach, from a teacher-centred one to numerous and different types of interaction (teacher to a single student, teacher to a group of students, student to student, student to a group of students and a group of students to another group). This new style of class dynamics gives students the opportunity to participate, negotiate, discuss, give opinions and develop many other types of competences which we find essential for the learning process and which did not exist before IEP methodology was introduced. Moreover, the implementation of the *Innovation in Education Programme* has strengthened teacher-student contact and promoted students' class attendance, having 60 students on average per class in both modules.

With the implementation of the IEP and the ICT Projects, we have attempted to promote a learning process that does not end once the

lecture is finished, but goes on through the medium of online activities permitting the students to be in permanent contact both with the subject and with the English language. As to the assessment processes, traditionally, these two modules used to be difficult subjects consisting of only one examination at the end

of the year. At present, individual and group work is assessed, which makes the process a more feasible and engaging one. In *English Dialectology*, especially, the change has been very promising. Out of 110 students, 72 (65%) chose this type of methodology and no student failed the module.

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