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Blended Learning



Implementation of Educational Videos into Flipped Language Classes

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Abstract

Flipped learning is an innovative approach that reverses the instruction of a traditional class. Students in a flipped learning classroom gain knowledge, usually by watching educational videos prior to class, providing more class time for in-depth discussions and activities. The flipped model was initially integrated into science and math classes and earned its fame with educational videos of Khan Academy. Flipped learning has also been adopted by English teachers, and several studies conclude that flipped learning is an effective way of teaching English as a Second Language. This article aims to analyse recent studies that focus on flipped learning in English language classes and discusses the essential features of effective educational videos. The final part is dedicated to a research study conducted at the University of West Bohemia collecting data on students' perceptions of educational videos. The research results will aid the researcher with preparing educational videos for a planned flipped Business Course at the University of West Bohemia, which will take place in the summer term of the academic year 2020/2021.

Keywords: flipped learning, flipped classroom, educational videos, EdPuzzle

1. Introduction

It is evident that technology has become an integral part of education. The main advantage of involving technology in teaching is the attractiveness and the enormous possibilities it offers. For example, it enables creating activities that are impossible without the use of technology. The format of teaching flipped classroom is not a new pedagogical approach. However, with the use of technology, this teaching format offers different dimensions, such as different class dynamics, feedback, and, above all, it facilitates both teachers' and students' work. Thanks to technology, this model is being used more often because it promises students' higher motivation and knowledge [1].

The flipped classroom teaching model has been used in a variety of disciplines. It was initially used in science and math classes, but this teaching format was also applied to English language classes over time. Bauer-Ramazani & Graney, & Marshall & Sabieh [1] point out that the flipped classroom potential is evident from the number of papers at the TESOL conference (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages). In 2013, there were only three papers on the flipped classroom topic, but in 2015 there were 30 papers [1]. Particularly in the English language classroom it is gaining more attention.

2. Flipped Classroom

The flipped classroom teaching methodology is not an entirely new pedagogical approach [2]. The methodology was already described in a book by Walwood and

Anderson in 1998, in 2000 it was known as the inverted classroom, and in 2001 it was known as peer-instruction [3]. Since 2012, the term inverted class has been gradually losing popularity, which was replaced by the term flipped classroom. In 2016 and the first half of 2017, 86 articles with the keyword flipped classroom were published in the ERIC database, but no article with the keyword inverted classroom [4].

The name flipped classroom gained its fame mainly thanks to the chemistry teachers Jonathan Bergman and Aaron Sams of Colorado High School, who began implementing the flipped classroom model in 2007. In the same year, they began creating instructional videos for their students for home preparation [5]. The educators Bergman and Sams define the term flipped classroom as: "... that which is traditionally done in class is now done at home, and that which is traditionally done as homework is now completed in class" [6] (p. 13).

Research carried out in the field of flipped classrooms began to appear in 2012. Until 2011, the Web of Science database included only six articles on the flipped classroom topic; in 2012, there were eight articles, and in 2018 there were 548 articles (Web of Science). This method's importance started to be perceived by teachers of other subjects not only by teachers of mathematics and science, and the first research on flipped classroom in English language classes was published on the Web of Science in 2013.

One of the first studies published on the Web of Science is a study by Jennifer Aw-Yong, Neil Anderson, and Philemon Chigeza. In their research, they focus on the application of the flipped classroom in English language classes in the People's Republic of China (Web of Science). In 2017 and 2018, a total of 185 articles were published in the Web of Science database. A total of 13 articles are devoted to the topic of the inverted class in Business English classes. However, some researchers acknowledge that there is very little research on incorporating the inverted class into English language lessons [4], [7].

The results of research on flipped classroom in English language classes most often point out the following advantages and disadvantages:

Advantages: elevation of time for discussion and subsequent deepening of knowledge of the subject matter [8], students and the content of the subject matter become the center of the learning process [7], overall improvement in English [8], more frequent presence of students at seminars [4], higher scores in tests [9], technologies and activities enable formative assessment of students [1], better cooperation of students in a class [10]

Disadvantages: time-consuming [1], students perceive this model as a more significant burden on home preparation [9].

3. Educational Videos

Videos have been used in ESL classes for a long time and have been gaining more and more attention among learners and teachers with the rise of social media and streaming platform such as Netflix. Kaur [11] (p. 33): "majority of the instructors and learners recognized that among the most commonly used educational technology in most of the classrooms is the video. Videos is seen to have brought stories and meanings alive through sound, action and visuals." Kim [12] confirms that videos are good tools which offer students with different learning styles the possibility to enrich their learning experience.

Ben Goldstein wrote an article on the history of videos in ELT where he implies that the very first methodological handbook of using videos in English classes was published in 1983 and videos were then viewed as extension to audio with no added educational value [13]. The same author mentions another methodology handbook for teachers

called “Video” (1991) which included a set of activities to help the teachers to work with the videos further in class and enable students to complete activities based on the video that turns them into active viewers. Some excellent examples of using videos to activate students include from TEDed website or Learning-Youtube where teachers can find videos accompanied by questions of tasks for their classes. Another example of an active approach to videos is a book written by Jamie Keddie [13] who created a book for teachers that includes a number of activities on YouTube videos. The objective of all the activities is to trigger and expose student’s creativity, imagination and storytelling when watching a video.

Apart from the different platforms and methodologies that have been created to help languages teachers work with videos, there are also a number of studies have proven that videos are beneficial tool for language learning. Kim [12] conducted a study involving 86 participants who applied for a listening course at a Korean University. The results of the research indicate that students of the intermediate level of English reached a significantly improved their test scores. Another study that looked at the effectiveness of video vs. written text [14] (p. 331) shows that “the use of a video in a classroom enhanced the overall comprehension of the content compared to the use of a reading text.”

Moreover, videos can be also an essential instrument for vocabulary building (study) or communication skills (paper). In addition, Kaur [11] in his research paper talks about further use of videos in ELS classroom. The author mentions retention of content, authenticity of learning, contextualization of culture or as a stimulator [11]. The results of the study suggest that videos help students to reach better results in writing tasks after video presentation, videos help students to contextualize matter of learning better, the features of videos (sound, animation) facilitate students to talk about the context better.

Knowing that videos can be beneficial for languages learning is useful, however what types of videos should we use in the language classes? Goldstein [13] mentions the different types that have been used in language learning such as: comedy sketches, new and documentaries, Vox-pops (talking heads) and videos on cultural issues. Teachers can also use videos that can be found on social platforms such as Tik-Tok. Yang (2020) reported results of his study of Tik-Tok videos. The author did a research aiming at 184 Chinese secondary school students and their perception on Tik-Tok videos. The results of the study indicate that significant number of respondents have a positive attitude toward Tik-Tok videos and considers them as a great material for English learning, especially for improving listening and speaking skills as well as enriching their vocabulary. However, teachers should be careful about the type of videos their use for their classes and they should pay attention to the English level of students. For example, Kim [11] suggests that “teachers should consider selecting suitable videos to satisfy students’ interests and their proficiency level.”

Several studies have also indicated what are some recommendations for teachers who decide to create educational video or video activities for their classes. Perhaps one of the largest studies that has been done on video creation is a study by Guo [16]. The researchers analysed 6.9. million video watching sessions across four courses on the edX and MOOC platforms. The aim of the study was to find what features of educational videos sparkle students’ engagement. The analysed data show the following factors:

- length max. 6 min.
- format that is the most engaging is “talking head”
- Videos recorded in informal setting
- Tutorial videos – Khan-Academy style videos
- Speaking rate – instructors should speak faster
- Tutorial videos are preferred over lecture videos

Brame [17] in the study paper extends the findings of Guo [16] and recommends the following features of educational videos to support active learning:

- Using guiding questions,
- Using interactive features in the video,
- Making video a part of a larger homework assignment,
- Integrate interactive questions into the video.

4. Creation of educational videos using EdPuzzle

Educational videos can be created by using different online tools. One of the most accessible and user-friendly tools is Edpuzzle. It is an online learning platform that is designed for creating and sharing educational videos. So how does this app work? At first, teachers download either their own videos or videos from YouTube or Khan Academy, crop these videos, voice-over, and embed multiple-choice or open-ended questions. Then teachers share the video with their students using a class code. As students watch the videos, they have to watch the entire video, and they cannot skip answering the questions. All the students' answers and activity in the app are collected.

The teacher can check the answers to the embedded questions and the app tracks if the students watch the entire video, how many times they watched each part, or when they watched the videos. The collected data helps the teacher analyse to what extent the students understood the subject matter. Edpuzzle is an online platform, but students can download the Edpuzzle app to their mobile devices. It is an excellent instrument for flipped learning as it enables teachers to receive feedback on students' performance and understanding of the subject matter before class.

5. Research

The research for this study was conducted in the summer term of the academic year 2019/2021. The research aimed to collect and analyse the attitude of university students to educational videos. The research results will enable the author of this article to create educational videos for a Business English course that she intends to flip in the summer term of the academic year 2020/2021.

5.1 Participants

The research participants were 60 students of the University of West Bohemia, specifically students of the Economics Faculty who attended the Business English 1 course. The Business English 1 Course is obligatory for all the students whose level of English is B1. As there are noticeable differences in English among the students, the instructors sometimes struggle with completing the course content while also considering the students' differences. That is why the author of the text decided to flip the course and allow the students to practice the language in and outside the classroom.

Before flipping the course, the researcher intended to pilot the videos for the main research and collect and analyse the data to change or modify the educational videos for the flipped learning research.

5.2 Method

The data was collected from an online questionnaire that was sent to the students at the end of the winter term. The questionnaire contained 15 questions (open-ended, Likert scale questions) and the collected data was analysed in a descriptive way.

5.3 Videos

The educational videos that were used for the research were videos downloaded from YouTube and videos that were created by the researcher – talking head videos. The videos and embedded questions were focused on grammar, vocabulary and listening comprehension. The students were given in total 8 videos. All the videos were shared gradually over the term by the application EdPuzzle.

6. Results

The first part of the online questionnaire included questions that were to describe the student of the Business English Course. The profile of a typical respondent is a freshman (63.3%), who is between 21-25 years old (51.7%), is female (81%, 7), is studies Business and Economics and Management and has been learning English for 0-10 years (50%).

The second part of the questionnaire was devoted to questions/statements focusing on students' view of instructional videos, the length, comprehensibility, content, interpretation, language level, number of questions and overall satisfaction. The results of the questionnaire show that:

- 32 students viewed more than 3 videos,
- 46 students consider the length of the videos reasonable,
- 44 students, the videos were understandable,
- The content of the videos was interesting for 57 students,
- For 54 students, the interpretation of the issue was illustrative,
- For 44 students, the videos were moderately complex in terms of language,
- 51 students consider 3-5 questions for the video sufficient,
- 57 students would choose the same videos for their further study of business English,
- 42 students claim that the instructional videos helped them prepare for business English seminars 2,
- 40 students claim that the instructional videos helped them prepare for the credit and the exam,
- 47 students claim that the instructional videos helped them prepare for the listening part of the credit test.

The second part of the questionnaire was designed to find out students' perception on the EdPuzzle application. The purpose of these questions was to determine student satisfaction with the use of the EdPuzzle application before the main research. The students' answers are:

- 55 students declare that the EdPuzzle application was comprehensible and easy to use,
- 24 students sometimes needed someone else's help studying with EdPuzzle.

The last part of the questionnaire included open-ended questions. The first question was: What modifications would you make in terms of the educational videos:

- *Nothing*
- *More illustrative examples of the issue*
- *Maybe I'd put videos there that would be slower to listen to*
- *I liked everything as it was*
- *Maybe I would add the possibility of subtitles in the video, sometimes it was really difficult to understand the topic*

- *The video should be clearer*
- *More British English*
- *Possibility of subtitles*
- *Nothing*
- *Moana option caption*
- *I think the video was sufficient*
- *I think the videos were similar enough, but the first video was difficult for me, so I think it would be good to add English subtitles*
- *Animated videos are fun*
- *Subtitles, at least English*
- *Probably nothing*
- *I would add more “relaxing” videos like “cooperation”*
- *Nothing, it was nice*
- *The videos are sufficient, just long*
- *Sometimes the videos were too long*
- *I wouldn’t change anything*
- *I enjoyed animated videos*

The second open-ended question was: Do you have any suggestions or comments?

- *Nothing*
- *The videos were useful*
- *I also think that the videos can help students a lot with their preparation for English lessons and can be beneficial for passing the credit and the final exam.*
- *Thank you for a nice English course*
- *It was a great practice*
- *To make videos shorter*

7. Discussions and limitations

The students’ answers show that educational videos were beneficial for improving business English and preparing for the final test and the oral exam. On the other hand, the questionnaire results point to the fact that the selected videos should be slower and linguistically simpler. All of the preliminary research videos corresponded to language level B1, but according to some students, these videos should be easier. Some students mentioned that the videos should include English subtitles. Based on these comments, the author of the research will consider using English subtitles for all videos. The author of the research will also consider using animated videos, which one of the students mentioned in one of the answers.

Further research could be narrowed to videos focused on just one English learning area, such as vocabulary, grammar, listening, or writing. It would also be interesting to use different applications to create and share educational videos and compare their features. Another study could involve the perception of high school students or secondary school students to see whether their perception of education videos is different from university students.

The limitation of this study is definitely the number of the respondents and the fact that the study participants were students of Business English and not general English.

Also, another limitation is the time frame of one term and the number of educational videos.

8. Conclusions

The flipped classroom has proven to be a valuable approach to ESL classes, and educational videos are an essential part of the methodology. When creating educational videos, teachers should pay attention to the format of video they use, length, and interactivity. Teachers need to bear in mind that students should not be active views to use educational videos effectively. What makes the views active is the interactivity of educational videos, such as embedded questions, the possibility of watching some part receptively, or the possibility of easy sharing of the videos with the teacher. An excellent app for creating and sharing educational videos is the online application EdPuzzle. The author of the article used the app to share videos with her university students and collect information about students' perceptions of educational videos. The collected data shows that university students find the videos a valuable element of their English classes. The students perceive it as a beneficial tool that can help them prepare for the final exam.

The majority of the students also claim that they would appreciate having educational videos in their future English classes. The research data also points out that students feel that the videos should be easier and include subtitles. The research paper aims to pilot educational videos to modify them according to the students' needs for research, which will take place in the summer term of the academic year 2020/2021. The research objective is to flip a Business Course at the Faculty of Economics at the University of West Bohemia.

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Innovative Hybrid Responses to Emergency Remote Learning in Rural Indonesia

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Abstract

With the coronavirus pandemic, educational institutions all over the globe have been forced to migrate to fully online instruction. This radical shift has come with significant challenges for ELT teachers around the world, especially those with limited access to internet connectivity and infrastructure as is the case in rural Indonesia. Indonesia had been suffering low and stagnant educational quality prior to the corona virus pandemic. Indeed, there had been no significant progress on Indonesian students' performance in the Program for International Students Assessment, or PISA, between 2003 and 2018 [1]. This situation has worsened with educators' forced shift to online learning. Many teachers and students in Indonesia who live in poor rural areas lack internet access and smartphones and have thus been struggling to conduct online instruction [2]. However, in spite of harrowing scenes in the international media, the Indonesian people have been resilient and innovative in the face of the "new normal" [3]. Many teachers in rural areas are striving to improve their own online literacy, to support their students, and to facilitate their students' learning in creative and responsive ways. This study explores teachers' innovative practical and pedagogical responses to the monumental constraints represented by rural poverty. Based on these innovative responses to emergency conditions, recommendations for preparing and supporting teachers to teach English through hybrid forms of learning are discussed.

Keywords: online language teaching, emergency remote learning, innovative hybrid learning, blended learning, remote learning, ELT, rural Indonesia

1. Introduction

With the corona virus pandemic, schools in more than 50 countries remain fully closed affecting over 870 million students globally [5]. To ensure that students still have opportunities to access education during these school closures, many countries moved their instruction to online learning. However, the migration has come with significant challenge for ESL teacher all over the globe, especially in the rural areas where access to internet connections and electronic devices is very limited. In an archipelagic country such as Indonesia, the challenge to ensure all students have equal access to remote learning is enormous. Socioeconomic and educational inequality had been a concerning issues in the country prior to the pandemic. These disparities have increased since the school closures due to unequal access to educational infrastructure and inexperienced teachers trying to conduct online learning. For urban schools, conducting remote learning has been less of a challenge due to adequate equipment and internet connectivity. In contrast, for schools in rural areas where internet connections and electricity are a luxury, the migration into remote learning have limited what teachers and students can do. Hence many teachers in rural areas are working with powerful

limitations. Rural Indonesian English teachers are striving to improve their online literacy, to support their students, and to facilitate their students' learning in creative and responsive ways.

2. Methodology

To explore teachers' innovative practical and pedagogical responses to these constraints, we surveyed and then interviewed two teachers from different educational and generational backgrounds teaching English in rural Central Java. By probing these subjects' distinct educational and generational backgrounds, we aim to gain deep sense of what was important to each teacher as they improvised and innovated during this transition to online instruction. We explore with each teacher their evolving online teaching practices and how these developed. Two research questions guided the inquiry:

1. How do teachers' knowledge, perceptions and experiences guide their online ELT teaching under emergency migration conditions?
2. What innovations do they evolve to meet their local challenges and constraints?

3. Subjects

The two subjects for our case studies were recruited through the authors' professional networks and asked to participate in two forms of data-gathering: first they completed a written questionnaire that directed them to articulate their perceptions and practices (Appendix A); second, they were invited to participate in a synchronous online interview with one or more of the authors.

3.1 The older teacher: Joko

Joko is a self-taught polyglot and has been teaching EFL at the same middle school in a small village in Central Java for seventeen years. Whereas he reports knowing five languages, his proficiency is limited to reading and writing. He attended four years of college where he majored in English Education. Prior to the pandemic, he had neither experience taking courses nor teaching online. He does not see himself as proficient in online socialization other than in WhatsApp groups. However, he responds to the emergency migration by using personal approaches with both students and parents in his class in order to support them.

3.2 The younger teacher: Siti

Siti was a former translator, businesswoman and marketing agent prior to changing her profession to ELT. She teaches at a public middle school in a small village in Central Java. She has been teaching EFL for two years at this school. Her formal training background is comprised of four years of college in English Education and two years of college in Business and Marketing at the graduate level. Although she has limited experience teaching EFL, she experiences taking online courses and is very comfortable using online communication platforms and social media. She reports knowing four languages at different proficiency levels. However, she is not proficient enough in the native language in her current area due to her status as an immigrant teacher there.

Hence, she tries to learn the local culture through day-to-day communication with her neighbours and her students' parents in order to adjust her teaching materials and strategies. She believes that the ideal language teacher is one who encourages students to use the target language as much as possible in contexts that are familiar to them.

4. Results

With limited access to infrastructure and internet connectivity, both teachers tried to provide materials that were accessible for their students. This chiefly occurred via *WhatsApp* or other low bandwidth platforms. Both Joko and Siti believe that participation is the key to language instruction as well as when it comes to measuring students' understanding and engagement. Therefore, they make the most of their instruction to encourage their students to participate in their online class. In Joko's case, he used a *WhatsApp* group as a medium to give one-way instruction, examples, and for students to submit their work. When the students did not respond or when they did not read the discussion, Joko would directly message them to make sure that they were online when the class was in session. On the other hand, in addition to their instruction group, Siti created a "student group discussion forum" to where students' could strategize their challenges. Here students could communicate with their classmates without teacher intervention. Siti also assigned daily tasks such as sharing five new English words that they found either while the class in session or from outside the class. Students thereby were responsible to keep learning.

These two teachers' educational and generational backgrounds influenced how they considered the online media and ELT. For a person who had not engaged in many online interactions prior to the pandemic, Joko was consequently pessimistic about the efficiency of online teaching in his region. Especially with only *WhatsApp* as the primary tool with which to teach, he was limited to one-way communication with his students.

Joko did not have the capacity to set up student collaborations of any kind. As a consequence, he was limited to focusing on grammar along with limited instruction in reading and writing. In addition, due to his students' limited English vocabulary, he rarely used English as the medium of instruction. He argues that the students needed to understand his instructions clearly in order to be able to do the task. This practice was also reflected in the fact that most of the written instruction was in Indonesian.

"It is difficult to teach English online because students need more explanation in Indonesian Language. Prior to Covid, my students had many challenges to understand the materials from English subject. They also have low motivation to learn. The main problem that my students face is the limited inventory of English vocabulary".

On the other hand, Siti was very determined to use the target language when her classes were in session. She believes that English language learning is easier to do online because most learning platforms such as *WhatsApp*, *Google Forum*, *e-learning Madrasah* or the internet in general use English as the language of instruction.

Therefore, she could make use of students' internet funds of knowledge to develop her online instruction.

I feel that learning English has become easier because the internet uses a lot of terms in English.

To ensure students understood her, she broke down complex questions into simpler questions. When no one responded to her, she would provide an example of a possible answer using a short sentence so that the students could follow the model and respond to her questions.

Unlike Joko, Siti provided speaking and listening activity as part of their homework.

She had students submit their homework via direct messaging instead of group sharing which would put too much demand on bandwidth. She also gave one-on-one

online listening and speaking tests using *WhatsApp*. This practice represents one of her efforts to remind students that the school was in session and that their teachers were still there to support their learning.

To support his students, Joko emphasizes the importance of knowing students' backgrounds in terms of their language proficiency, economic background, geographical background and online literacy. He believes that communicating with students both online and off strengthens rapport and enhances emotional engagement, something that helps to overcome digital/distance ambiguities and that can foster motivation [4]. In developing his online instruction, he adjusts the teaching platform based on what students can afford and understand. He also adjusts his teaching by using the national language (Indonesian language) to make sure that his students will not be overwhelmed.

He is truly interested in and learning from his interactions with his students online. He also blends his instruction by regularly calling his students' parents or doing home visits to support students' well-being and check on their understanding of course content. For him, a teacher should be flexible in emergency online migration to create a comfortable learning environment for the students and develop a safe learning community for them.

On the other hand, Siti emphasized the importance of tailoring her teaching materials with students' interests, funds of knowledge, and fun activities. She tailored her lesson plan to align with students' interest and backgrounds. These she learned about via the children's parents and neighbours. At every opportunity, she interweaves students' interests and passions into the conversation:

*When I teach present perfect tense, I use the expression from Mobile Legend game which is **"Enemy has been slain"**.*

Instead of using pizza, spaghetti, or hamburgers for content as illustrated in the course textbook, she modifies this to fried rice, chicken noodles, or chicken satay. This way her students can both identify with, and thereby learn relevant new vocabulary.

Students go on to understand the meaning of English words like spicy, delicious, hot, cold, etc. through the funds of knowledge that they possess. In addition, she gives trivia quizzes to stimulate students' background knowledge and make connections in English.

She believes that she can keep her students interested and participating in her online class while tracking their language development through their conversational participation.

5. Conclusion

Remote learning is a challenge for teachers and students in poor rural areas. Hence, there is much to learn from teachers' experiences, strategies, and perspectives in these extraordinary times. Joko and Siti's responses to emergency migration to remote learning inform us about their resilience and their efforts to support their students and their communities. Such experiences and responses say much about the intellects and dedication of professional educators and more research that conceptualizes the of teaching languages online in the rural area is sorely needed. This can contribute to an understanding of the interrelations between technology practice, students, teachers and successful instructional activity generally and in the rural areas in particular.

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No Gender Difference Exists in Academic Self-Efficacy Improvement for Higher Education Blended Foreign Language Learning

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Abstract

In order to determine whether gender difference exists in academic self-efficacy (ASE) improvement for blended foreign language learning, the current study uses a larger sample than the previous study, and tests the interaction between the intervention effect and gender directly. The results show that a statistically significant interaction was found between the intervention effect and gender in repeated measures ANOVA, and that ASE improvement was found to be greater for the female students than for the male students. However, since the female ASE scores were lesser than the male ones, regardless of the intervention, the current study conducted a further analysis to test the hypothesis that ASE learners with lower scores show larger improvement than the ASE learners with higher scores. The difference between the pre-intervention ASE and post-intervention ASE was significantly correlated with the pre-intervention ASE. Also, when the difference between the pre-intervention ASE and post-intervention ASE was included as a confounding covariate in ANOVA, no significant interaction was found between the intervention effect and gender. These results indicate that there is no gender difference in ASE improvement for blended foreign language learning, and that the difference occurs as a result of lower ASE scores at the pre-intervention period, regardless of gender. The current study implies that when using ASE, teachers and researchers may need to pay attention not to gender difference but to the lower ASE scores before intervention.

Keywords: academic self-efficacy, improvement, gender difference, foreign language learning, blended learning

1. Introduction

Self-efficacy is the belief of a learner that he/she can learn something or master certain skills [1-3]. Recently, self-efficacy has been considered as one important factor in academic success [4-6]. Many studies have carried out investigations to find out the factors that affects academic self-efficacy (ASE) and its improvement. Further, many researchers have recently focused on the effect of ASE on academic achievement [7].

A previous study has reported the presence of gender difference in ASE improvement for blended foreign language learning [8]. However, that study did not statistically test the interaction between the intervention effect and gender directly. This means that there is a need to test whether there is a gender difference in ASE improvement for blended foreign language learning. Thus, the current study uses a larger sample than the previous study, and tests the interaction between the intervention effect and gender directly.

2. Methods

2.1 Participants

Self-efficacy scales of foreign language learning courses were collected from 168 Japanese college students (109 males and 59 females aged 17-23 years, with an average age of 18.65 years).

2.2 Materials and methods

Moodle, an open source learning platform that students use for taking their blended English learning course, was used for collecting the ASE data. In the present study, Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MLSQ) [9] was used as the ASE scale.

While the students were assigned to one of the several classes, however, all the students were given the same textbook and course materials. The course schedule was also identical. The course duration was 15 weeks, one class per week. All the participants were informed of the method and deadline in the first lecture.

2.3 Data analysis

Repeated measures ANOVA was implemented to find out the interaction between the intervention effect and gender on ASE directly. Then, if there is a statistically significant interaction between the intervention effect and gender, post hoc analyses will be conducted.

3. Results

The results show that a statistically significant interaction was found between the intervention effect and gender in repeated measures ANOVA ($F=55.2, p<0.001$).

Particularly, in the post hoc analysis, female students were found to have greater ASE improvement than the male students ($p<0.001$, Bonferroni), and the intervention effect was also found to be higher among female students ($p<0.001$). The results are shown in Figure 1.

However, since the female ASE scores were lesser than the male ones, regardless of the intervention, the current study conducted further analysis to test the hypothesis that learners with lower ASE show larger improvement than the learners with higher ASE. As a result, the difference between the pre-intervention ASE and post-intervention ASE was significantly correlated with the pre-intervention ASE. Also, when the difference between the pre-intervention ASE and post-intervention ASE is included as a confounding covariate in ANOVA, no significant interaction was found between the intervention effect and gender.

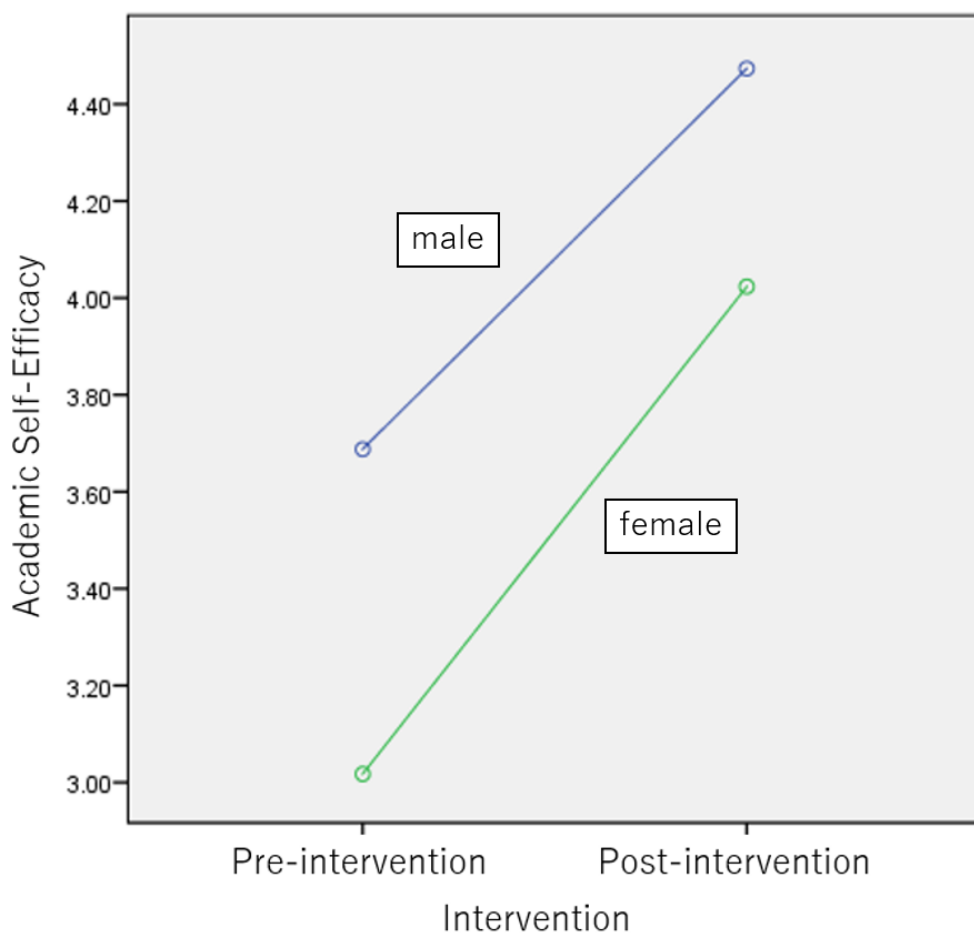


Fig. 1. ASE results

4. Discussion

The purpose of the current study is to test the interaction between the intervention effect and gender on ASE directly. The current study found a statistically significant interaction between the intervention effect and gender, as reported by the previous study [8]. However, since the female ASE scores were lesser than the scores for male students, regardless of the intervention, the current study conducted a further analysis to test the hypothesis that learners with lower ASE scores show larger improvement than the learners with higher ASE scores. This further analysis showed that the difference between the pre-intervention ASE and post-intervention ASE is significantly correlated to the pre-intervention ASE. The results of this study support the hypothesis. Further, when the difference between the pre-intervention ASE and post-intervention ASE was included as a confounding covariate in ANOVA, no significant interaction was found between the intervention effect and gender.

These results indicate that there is no gender difference in ASE improvement for blended foreign language learning, and that the difference occurs due to the lower ASE scores at the pre-intervention period, regardless of gender. The current study implies that when using ASE, teachers and researchers may need to pay attention not to the

gender difference but to the lower ASE scores before intervention.

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Teaching and Learning Languages under Covid-19

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Abstract

2020 will be remembered as the Covid-19 year. Under these out of the ordinary circumstances, teachers and professors had to quickly adapt to finish the 2019-2020 academic year, and learn new techniques, and technologies to be ready for the 2020-2021 academic year. Different countries, states, or even institutions, had to make a choice about how we would return to the classrooms under this “new normal”; fully online, blended, or face to face (AKA mask to mask) were the main options across the globe. In this presentation, I will show how my institution moved towards a HyFlex approach trying to keep our students in the classroom by dividing them into groups: half of them in class, half of them at home synchronously. Our faculty had to combine different teaching styles to accommodate the necessities of these different groups all together at the same time. Some content areas are easier to accommodate to this new normal, languages were a different beast. How did we provide differentiated instruction while making meaningful connections and aiming for communicative competence? This is my experience and how I survived the pandemic of 2020.

Keywords: Covid-19; Hy-Flex approach; language methods; higher-ed

1. Introduction

2020 will be remembered as the year that shut down the whole world. The economic market, the education system, jobs in services, religious gatherings, and health systems across the globe had to be turned off in order to face one of the most devastating pandemics in recent history.

Covid-19 started spreading out from China where, even with heavy lockdown measures in place, the virus could not be contained. This virus spread fast and soon got to different places in Europe, such as Italy and Spain, where heavy lockdowns were set in place. The education system in all these countries was hit hard, and all levels of education found themselves in unprecedented circumstances. They had to adjust fast and with little to no support to make these changes.

2. Spring Semester 2020

In the US, we were about to go on Spring break, when the news of the virus spreading massively made our state – Utah – send an order to move all education to an online setting.

From Kindergarten students (5-year-olds), to College students (graduate and undergraduate programs) found themselves at home to finish their studies for the year.

The K-12 system (elementary, middle, and secondary education) move to remote teaching providing the students with a mix of asynchronous online education and synchronous online education.

As Hrastinski explains, asynchronous E-learning uses means as discussion boards and blogs to reflect on complex issues, guaranteeing students have more time to respond because there is not an expectation for an immediate answer. On the other hand, synchronous E-learning works best when discussing less-complex issues, letting students increase their motivation “because a quick response is expected”.

However, in Higher Education, not many instructions were given in terms on what online teaching should look like to finish this semester. My institution received a State mandate to close all face to face teaching and learning as we were going on our Spring break. This break is usually a period of time when faculty does research (I am at a teaching-centered institution where research is not required for tenure and promotion), completes service projects, or just recharges to get enough energy to finish a long semester. This time around, we found ourselves dropping everything we have planned in order to modify our teaching to ensure the learning process for our students.

Some faculty members moved their courses to a synchronous setting, trying to maintain a feeling of normalcy. Students and faculty would connect at the class scheduled time via zoom or google teams. They would conduct their lectures as usual, but including breakout rooms and grouping activities online. During the meeting times, students would engage in interpretive mode of communication, defined by Cutshall as “Focused on the appropriate cultural interpretation of meanings that occur in written and spoken form where there is no recourse to the active negotiation of meaning with the writer/speaker” (35). The lecture format of the course would be working towards Standard 1.2 “Students understand, interpret and analyse what is heard, read or viewed on a variety of topics” (ACTFL 1). Even though the lecture was happening in a synchronous environment, most of the opportunities for negotiating meaning happened during the breakout rooms, and group work. These types of group work would allow students to interact and engage in interpersonal communication with their peers supporting Standard 1.1, “Students engage in conversations, provide and obtain information, express feelings and emotions, and exchange opinions” (Cutshall 35).

Other faculty members, understanding the stress that was put into our students who suddenly were jobless if they were not *essential workers*, decided to move their course work to an asynchronous mode of learning since “*synchronous e-learning*, [...], supports work relations among learners and with teachers, even when participants cannot be online at the same time. It is thus a key component of flexible e-learning” (Hrastinski).

This approach seemed appropriate when our students had to find a new job, usually as retail store workers, to support themselves during a pandemic.

We finished the semester offering the opportunity to our students to change their grades to a credit vs. non-credit option, so even if the work was not the best and they did enough to pass the course, a low grade would not affect their general GPA (grade point average).

3. Fall Semester 2020

Our state decided to go back to the classroom in a face to face model of sorts. The Utah State Board of Education offered the opportunity for families to decide if they wanted to send their kids to school fully online, fully face to face, or in a hybrid combination. There was a mask mandate so everyone would have to wear a mask indoors when at school, and physical distance would be maintained when possible.

Depending on the county, the rate of transmission, and/or size of the student body, some schools adopted a schedule for students' groups to attend class in person on different days.

At the Higher Education level (colleges and universities), after summer planning

meetings and discussions among Faculty Senates representatives, University administration representatives, and Health Department representatives, we were ready to go back to class. My institution, DSU, decided to try a HyFlex approach: “HyFlex (hybrid and flexible) is a blended form of teaching that combines physical spaces, virtual spaces, and face-to-face interaction with online learning”, (Leijon 1). In order to support this approach, the university equipped every classroom with high-end cameras and microphones, so we could be live-streaming our classes to those students who would be attending the class remotely.

Under this approach, we divided our student body to attend half of the time online and half of the time in person based on their identification number. Group A would be in class on Mondays and Tuesdays, when group B would be attending via Zoom. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, group B would be in class, and group A would be on Zoom.

This was the theoretical approach we took. However, reality hit fast, and we found that there wasn't an even division of people on each setting.

Furthermore, as Inglis *et al.*, (2011) showed, when students were given the chance to flip or switch between settings, most of the students stayed on the online environment, even on those days when they could be physically in the classroom. Gannon explains how “The flexibility afforded to students by HyFlex courses has been evident this semester, but the style of teaching required has proven more difficult to maintain than anticipated”, and most of the faculty I interact with, in languages or other content areas, agrees with this statement. Having to maintain appropriate engagement among and with students when managing a chat setting, a live streaming setting, and an in person setting gave a lot of headaches to the faculty. We didn't want to neglect our online students, but it is easier to see a student rising their hands in the class, than one who is sending a question through the chat.

We were finding ourself looking to kind-of-engaged students in the classroom vs. black squares online, since only a few of them would have their videos on. Trying to manage interpersonal communication between students who are in two different settings was proved to be hard to accomplish. Even though we used breakout rooms for those remote, and pair/group discussion for those in class, we came to different issues. First, those remote had to conduct their discussions in groups without the presence of the faculty. From Zoom, the faculty could jump into a breakout room, but, because of the setting of the technology, everyone in the classroom would hear what was going on.

Secondly, those in the classroom had to maintain social distance and wear masks.

Even trying to check for understanding when working on interpretative mode of communication was harder to achieve. Most faculty relies on facial expressions and non-verbal communication for this. When students are in different settings, faculty attention gets divided, and sometimes, both students and faculty feel frustrated.

4. Preparing for the future

We are almost done with the semester, and we are already planning for Spring 2021.

The pandemic is far from over, and, even though we are more knowledgeable about what to expect, a lot of questions are still in the open:

Will students come back under a strict Hy-Flex approach? Because of the stress that our health system is going through, we decided not to require any prove to allow students to stay home and attend remotely; this mainly caused the swift from a more or less 50-50 division to a more extreme 80-20 division of the students, having most of them attend class from their own homes, or work. One of the requests that faculty are already asking to our administration is to develop some kind of process for students to obtain permission to stay remote.

Will faculty decide to apply for exceptions to teach fully synchronously online? Since managing both settings at the same time has been so hard during this semester, many are considering switching to fully remote so they can enable the three modes of communication with a smoother transition.

Will faculty and students accept the possibility of adopting the school district approach of having everyone face to face at the same time? Even though research in our state has proved that most of the transmission of the virus has happened during family meetings and social gatherings where no masks were worn or social distance was not maintained, there is still plenty of evidence that show around the globe how transmission can happen in the classrooms too.

Everybody is trying to do their best, keeping people safe, and relying on science: wear a mask, wash your hands, practice social distance and stay home if you are sick.

Hopefully, we will come out of this pandemic being stronger.

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Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL)



“Measuring the COVID Experience: Metric vs Imperial”, or Using an Action Research Model and CLIL Task-Based-Projects to Bring about Content and Language Improvements during the Lockdown. A Case Study

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Abstract

This study describes an innovative CLIL action-research model which has been set up during the COVID-19 lockdown with a group of 9th-grade students of a scientific high school in Lodi (city notoriously famous for being one of the first COVID-19 epicentres in Italy). Its aim is to pedagogically improve the quality of distance education and to bring about learning improvements in both Math contents and the English language by exploiting the metric-imperial system conversions and using them to “measure the COVID experience”. Outcomes also include significant advancements in the students’ digital competence, new attitudes to scientific learning, cultural awareness, and critical thinking skills. To achieve these results, an action research approach has been followed. This has included an initial reflection on the remote teaching problem, setting research questions and objectives, planning, and selecting appropriate strategies for improvement, identifying signs of success, and monitoring progress. This study examines how the union of an action-research model with two CLIL task-based projects (focused on metric-imperial unit-conversions of temperature, length, width, mass, volume, and weight) not only has resulted in noteworthy advancements in contents, cognition, and communication but has also had a beneficial impact on the remote teaching modality and its implementation as a pioneering and revolutionary approach during the lockdown. Additionally, quantitative analyses and questionnaires have also proved how this approach is a powerful way of promoting motivation and interaction even in an online learning setting.

Keywords: CLIL, Action-Research, Distance teaching, Task-based learning, Key-Competences

Background to the study

This study describes an innovative CLIL action research model which has been set up during the COVID-19 lockdown with a group of 9th-grade students of a scientific high school in Lodi aiming to pedagogically improve the quality of remote teaching and use it strategically to bring about learning improvements in both math contents and language.

To achieve these preliminary results, an action research approach has been followed.

This has included an initial reflection on a problem, setting research questions and objectives, planning and selecting appropriate strategies for improvement, identifying signs of success and monitoring progress.

Phase 1: planning

1.1 Identifying the problem: how to engage students in pedagogically effective activities during the COVID-19 remote teaching

Since the COVID-19 lockdown, the priority of all schools and teachers has been to equip themselves with the most innovative technology, the latest digital tools and applications. Webinars, online courses, free access to digital platforms have filled the educators' monitors as well as days with the precise purpose of improving the virtual connection with their students. A great amount of new digital activities and exercises have been generously delivered, disregarding the learning progression, macro and micro planning and, input-output scaffolding. In other words: losing sight of pedagogy.

As a result, students have frequently found themselves overwhelmed by ineffective assignments and impersonal resources with unproductive consequences on their involvement and learning. Especially first-year students who, with the COVID-19 outbreak had not accustomed yet to the High School didactic system and educational strategies.

1.2 Participants and actors

First-year students of a Secondary School (9th grade) Lyceum, specializing in Scientific studies, together with English teacher (Language teacher); Math teacher (Content teacher)

1.3 Brainstorming

Being located in Lodi, the notorious COVID-19 "Red Zone" epicenter, our school activated the Ministerial distance teaching modality on the first day of the quarantine: February 21st. Students and educators found themselves dealing with new online practices whose pace was faster than expected and sustained. Paradoxically, in the quarantine alone, teachers generated more digital contents and data than ever before, doubling the volume of information that would be offered in the pre-COVID traditional settings. Tasks kept multiplying and proliferating, leaving students adrift and directionless, totally lost among hundreds of activities frequently scheduled with hectic deadlines.

As a result, a group of 9th-grade students asked to have an online meeting determined to present their confused and bewildering situation. They complained about the persistent – sometimes aimless – digital burden they were being assigned. They asked for a solution. Consequently, a "*Remote teaching and learning survey in COVID-19 crisis*" was anonymously delivered whose results confirmed their general dissatisfaction.

1.4 CLIL as the focus of our action-research model and objectives

It was therefore decided to set up the CLIL methodology as the perfect way to meet the students' needs and to restore classroom balance. Pedagogy is central to CLIL thanks to its perfect correspondence between the "4C's" (Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture); content scaffolding (which helps LOTS & HOTS reasoning and levels of thinking); a student-centered approach; the dual focus on content and language and the promotion of cognitive and social skills and habits. Also, CLIL practice aims at involving students being active participants in developing their potential skills, acquiring knowledge applying resourceful means for problem-solving. Elements that make CLIL methodology indispensable for educational success, beneficial in a remote virtual environment, and perfectly matching our general and formative objectives, which were:

- to avoid cold and boring online lectures

- to foster quality remote teaching
- to trigger cognitive progression
- to engage students by means of purposeful task-based learning activities
- to promote cooperative learning
- to get students to play an active role in their learning, despite the remote context
- to promote cooperation with their peers, instructors, parents
- to create a productive and safe online environment where the XXI century “knowledge triangle” (Coyle, Hood, Marsh, 2000, p. 5) was boosted with education, research and innovation as its key components
- to develop mathematical, digital, personal, social, citizenship and language key competencies and cultural awareness

1.5 Research Questions

1. Will students find it easier to follow the remote teaching if they take an active part in their learning process?
2. Will the virtual learning process (content + language) benefit if students are directly engaged in task-based activities, individually or collectively?
3. Will the COVID-19 nightmarish experience be mitigated and relieved if faced from a CLIL perspective?

Phase 2: Planning

2.1 Case Study

In order to lessen the digital burden, the students had been forced to during the lockdown and, to reduce the alarming distress that the COVID-19 virus was exerting, it was decided to carry out a CLIL task-based project focused on the infection itself.

Overwhelmed by COVID-19 figures, data and measurements, the chosen title of the CLIL project was “Measuring the Covid experience: Metric vs Imperial units” and it aimed at integrating Mathematics (DNL) and English (L2) with the specific objectives of getting the students: to recognize number-types and quantities; to differentiate between metric and imperial units of measurement; to estimate the length, distance, capacity, weight and temperature of different bodies; to apply conversion to everyday objects and to calculate funny, real-life COVID related measurements.

2.2 Action plan: general “4C’s” planning with Maths (DNL) and English (L2)

Content: “the COVID emergency”. Students were invited to read and listen to information; to exchange their fears and worries; and provide explanations to the infection referring to the documents they had heard and read. Activation of prior knowledge (using L1, if necessary) and progression were granted. Input was given by means of online maps, charts, documents and practical demos. The final expected outputs were two task-based activities (performed both in pairs or in groups).

Communication: Students were given pandemic subject-specific information (L2); they were presented with data, numbers, measurements, units, metric and imperial conversions (DNL). Students were invited to look for information on metric and imperial conversions.

Cognitive challenge: Contents were scaffolded to support gradual (LOTS & HOTS) reasoning (Cinganotto, Cucurullo, 2019).

Culture & citizenship: activities were designed to ignite others’ awareness.

2.3 Student-centered activities

Step 1 – Analysis of the COVID-19 spreading: facts and numbers (worksheets). The focus was on different number-types and units (authentic videos from *W.H.O.*, e.g., “Tracking the COVID pandemic”).

Students in groups explained figures helped by frames of vocabulary and worksheets with technical-language content and content-compatible language.

Step 2 – Investigation on Metric and Imperial units: their history, development, measurements and conversions were explained. TES and Khan videos and worksheets were assigned. Online peer work (*Google Meet/Whatsapp*) was performed.

Step 3 – Guided Task: groups looked for extra information on the origins of measurements and units. Frames on how to organize and classify large amount of facts were provided (to help with the Internet search).

Step 4 – Students presented online their findings trying to apply functions, vocabulary and structures related to measurements and conversions. Immediate feedback was given.

Phase 3: observing and monitoring

During this phase, the following CLIL strategies were used to implement contents and reinforce vocabulary: presentation of new information; use of repetitions; demonstrations and rephrasing; visuals; scaffolding and linking new information to previous knowledge; analogies and exemplifications (carried out with the use of visual and multimedia aids); simple game-like activities suited for the class (adapted for weaker or special needs students). The general purpose was to make inputs comprehensible and context-embedded. Also, digital resources were adopted: *puzzle-maker*; *kahoot*; *quizlet*, *padlet*.

3.1 Remote teaching strategies

In order to avoid cold and impersonal video lessons, remote teaching strategies were also taken into account, consisting in: group work; content variety; lectures avoidance; multiple resources; online discussions; tech tools and ongoing feedback.

3.2 Two task-based-projects

Finally, students were asked to put their findings and ideas into practice. Precisely they were required to design two task-based-action-projects using the topics they had studied and analysed. The driven objective was to let them explore real situations to make sense to the whole CLIL framework. These tasks were to be performed using the following web tools: *Canva* and *Adobe-Spark* and later pasted on *Padlet*.

3.3 Task-based n. 1: Making scones

With the parents' involvement and supervision (family groups were all forced at home due to the lockdown), students were first invited to search for a traditional “Scone” recipe; then to convert the ingredients from imperial to metric units, oven temperatures, included. After that, quantity approximations were required before setting off with the baking operation. Free choice and creativity were given to allow the novice bakers to build their own scones with a variety of add-ins like chocolate chips, berries, or nuts and spices. Finally, step-by-step photos and videos were to be posted in the class *Padlet*, with details explaining how the whole process (from the conversion to the baking of these flaky, flavourful, or crispy treats had taken place.

3.4 Task-based n. 2:

In the attempt of minimizing the COVID-19 impact, students were also required to “measure” real objects virus related and frequently mentioned during the lockdown.

Either in groups or individually they were encouraged to create a presentation of their choice (a poster, a leaflet, an info-graph, a table or a video) showing both the metric and imperial measurements they had crafted by means of these web tools: *Canva* or *Adobe-Spark*, *Padlet*.

Creativity has proved to be crucial to this project, as shown by the students' generous originality and inventiveness which has resulted in the following products: the size of their protective masks; the presumed size of the virus itself; the safe distance to be kept to avoid the Virus droplets; the safe body temperature; the amount of sanitizer needed to hygienically clean hands; the amount of weight students had put on since the lockdown or the length of their hair since they last went to the hairdresser'.

Phase 4: Final reflections and conclusions

Formative and self-assessment together with personalized feedback were constantly given. Rubrics with specific grading criteria were created and meant to assess content, language and presentation skills. The transparency and objectivity of the descriptors together with the immediacy and the ongoing feedback, made available and visible to all students from the onset of the two task-based projects, allowed the students to make the correct adjustments, where necessary.

4.1 Teachers' observation

The preliminary results all pointed to the benefits brought about by the CLIL methodology which, by creating a perfect balance between teaching, technology and pedagogy, has proved an effective strategy, even in a remote learning environment.

From the teachers' perspectives, much has been achieved in terms of meta-cognition: CLIL has helped students to become aware of their own and other students' learning processes which accounts for their confidence in applying these transferable learning strategies to their work in other subjects.

4.2 Students' observations

From the online debates and written questionnaires conducted with students, positive feedback has been noticed on content, as CLIL promotes a broader range of teaching and learning strategies; introduces new ideas and concepts in the curriculum subjects and CLIL promotes progression and expansion in contents and technical vocabulary, as well. In terms of language acquisitions, CLIL opens doors on languages, provides exposure to the language without additional time in the curriculum while favouring unconscious mastery of grammar structures and technical language improvements (e.g., to estimate, to count, to multiply). Digital competency alike has been perfected and mastered with the promotion of new apps and web tools, and advancement in online interaction. Last but not least, CLIL nurtures self-confidence in learners and encourages stronger links with the real world.

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Lessons Learnt from Remote CLIL and Online Interaction during COVID-19 Emergency

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Abstract

Starting from the remote teaching and learning experience that all Italian teachers had during the COVID-19 emergency period, this paper will focus on the main lessons learnt from remote CLIL activities planned and implemented by teachers within an online post-graduate CLIL course promoted by Università Telematica degli Studi IUL. A group of teachers described their remote CLIL activities during a “TeachMeet” webinar, attended by more than 200 participants, sharing five slides in five minutes, according to a presentation format adapted from the well-known Japanese format called “PechaKucha”. Some examples will be mentioned in this paper, referring to the different webtools used in order to plan and implement effective CLIL teaching and learning activities remotely, such as sharing boards, interactive synchronous webtools, online tools for debating, tools for cooperative writing etc. The activities described by the teachers showed the potential of learning technologies to enhance language learning and CLIL as an added value to face-to-face lessons and even more, during the remote teaching period. The common dimension of all the remote CLIL activities shown and described during the “TeachMeet” webinar is the focus on online interaction, the only way of communication among teachers and students and among peers during lockdown. Online interaction is one of the new descriptors introduced by the Companion Volume of the Common European Framework of reference (CEFRVC) published by the Council of Europe in the final version in 2020. Starting from the description of the scales on online interaction descriptors provided by the Companion Volume, the paper will try to show how remote CLIL teaching and learning experiences during the COVID-19 emergency fostered the students’ online interaction in the foreign language, enhancing communicative skills through multimodality.

Keywords: CLIL, remote teaching and learning, webtools, online interaction

1. Introduction

During lockdown due to COVID-19, Italian teachers, as well as the majority of teachers all over the world, were forced to teach online and the Internet was the only way to reach their students. This was a very demanding and challenging situation in unprecedented times and a lot of teachers were not prepared to teach remotely as they needed specific training. That is why INDIRE (National Institute for Documentation, Innovation, Educational Research in Italy) and Università Telematica degli Studi IUL, the online university co-funded by INDIRE, organized a wide range of webinars and other initiatives, aimed at fostering the creation of a Community of Practice, where expert teachers could share their case examples and good practices with their peers, aiming at a mutual personal and professional enrichment and support.

That was the case of the “CLIL TeachMeet”, an online event organized within a

postgraduate course on CLIL promoted by Università Telematica degli Studi IUL. The course was addressed to teachers from primary and secondary school, passionate about CLIL and willing to learn more about this methodology and to plan and experiment CLIL activities with their students, also using technologies for remote teaching and learning.

2. Background

CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) has been compulsory in Italy since 2010 [1] [2], and it is also recommended and encouraged at primary and lower secondary school.

Even if the majority of Italian schools usually opt for English as the language for CLIL, also other foreign languages can be taught, according to the specific school specialization. This is in line with the European language policy, summarized in the Council Recommendation for a comprehensive approach to the teaching and learning of languages [3], where CLIL in Italy is highlighted as a case example for Europe, due to the democratic and inclusive approach adopted, which entails delivering CLIL in all fifth classes of upper secondary schools, regardless of the level of competences of the students in the foreign language. The European Commission report [4] published in September 2020, mentioned the situation of CLIL in Italy as follows: “Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), or the teaching of a subject in a foreign language, is an essential part of the language, strategy in Italy” (p. 9). The afore-mentioned report stated that “EU Member States are more widely promoting and supporting teachers to adopt innovative language pedagogies in their classrooms. In addition to CLIL, online language learning tools are also effective as they can provide non-judgmental and student-centred learning experiences” (p. 10).

The combination of CLIL and learning technologies is considered effective in the literature [5], as it can enhance students’ receptive and productive skills and can make them the real protagonists of their learning pathways. Learning technologies can also foster mediation and interaction as students can use international platforms, webtools, social networks to communicate with peers in Italy or in other parts of the world. Online interaction is one of the new descriptors introduced by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages – Companion Volume (CEFR CV), published by the Council of Europe in April 2020. “Online interaction” and “Goal-Oriented Transactions” are the two descriptors of the CEFR CV which are fundamental in remote teaching and learning.

3. Online interaction

The CEFR CV (p. 84) defines online discussion as a “multimodal phenomenon, with an emphasis on how interlocutors communicate online to handle both serious issues and social exchanges in an open-ended way. Key concepts operationalised in the scale include the following:

- instances of simultaneous (real-time) and consecutive interaction, the latter allowing time to prepare a draft and/or consult aids;
- participation in sustained interaction with one or more interlocutors;
- composing posts and contributions for others to respond to;
- comments (for example, evaluative) on the posts, comments and contributions of others; f reactions to embedded media;
- the ability to include symbols, images and other codes to make the message convey tone, stress and prosody, but also the affective/emotional side, irony, etc.”

Before COVID-19 emergency, INDIRE, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and with Brian North and Enrica Piccardo, among the experts of the Council of Europe co-authoring the CEFVR, carried out a pilot project with a sample of primary, lower and upper secondary schools in Italy. Teachers were guided to plan and experiment CLIL tasks with their students entailing online interaction with peers in the same school or in other Italian or European schools, using English as the language of communication [6].

In the picture below an example of online task is shown [7]: Italian students are interacting online with Finnish students asking and answering questions about different places in their respective countries, using a tool for geolocalization.



Fig. 1. An example of online task [7]

Online interaction in the foreign language was fostered and enhanced during lockdown in order to encourage students to use the language in a meaningful way in authentic contexts through the internet, the social networks and social media, also connecting the formal with the informal dimension of the learning pathway.

As far as online interaction is concerned, in June 2020 a survey was launched at international level, promoted by INDIRE in cooperation with the Italian Ministry of Education and with Brian North and Enrica Piccardo, aimed at investigating how teachers planned, monitored, implemented and assessed language learning and CLIL activities based on online interaction during the pandemic. 1160 teachers filled in the online survey, the majority of them were Italian (92,5%). Among the different data collected through the survey, it is interesting to report the teachers' opinion about the students' reactions to online interaction during Covid-19. They thought their students were satisfied (38.6%) and quite satisfied (33.0%): these encouraging figures show that remote teaching and learning were perceived as effective and fruitful anyway, despite the challenges due to the pandemic.

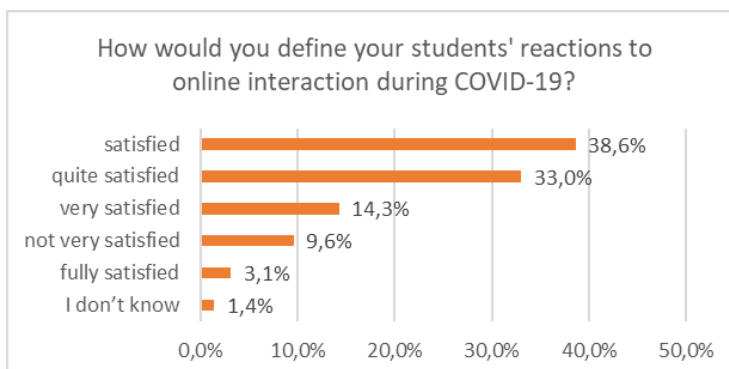


Fig. 2. Students' reactions to online interaction during the pandemic

4. CLIL “TeachMeet”

A webinar in the format of a “CLIL Teachmeet” was held in June 2020, within an online postgraduate course on CLIL promoted by Università Telematica degli Studi IUL, Italy, and it was attended by more than 200 teachers. Teachers from primary, lower and upper secondary schools were invited to present their remote CLIL teaching experiences, by sharing a five-slide presentation in five minutes, taking inspiration from the well-known Japanese storytelling format, named “PechaKucha” [8].

The presentations were very interesting and allowed teachers to share webtools, activities and techniques for remote teaching with their peers.

An example of webtool, which has become popular during the pandemic is “kialo”, shown in the picture below. A teacher of English, Michele Gabbanelli, described his teaching experience with his students during a debate [9], an attractive and engaging methodology, fostering students’ oracy and public speaking skills. The webtool allows the students to post their arguments in favour or against a given claim, that was in this case: “It’s become appallingly obvious that our technology has surpassed our humanity”.

It is a way to foster written debating skills in a multimedia and multimodal format.

Online oral debate sessions on the same topic in synchronous meetings can integrate and complete the learning experience.

Online interaction, as highlighted in the CEFRCV, can be effectively enhanced through online debates both in the written and in the oral mode.

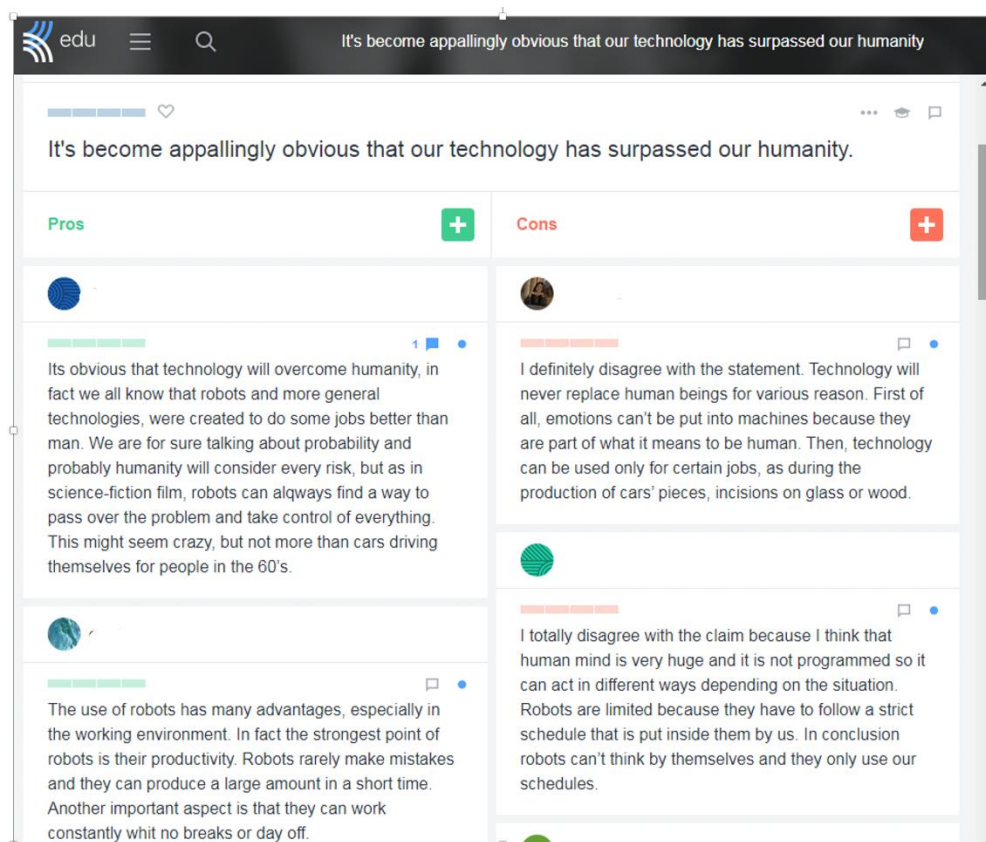


Fig. 3. An example of webtool for written debates

Another example of presentation was held by another teacher of English, Francesca Ripamonti and was aimed at eliciting reflections on the key role of learning technologies for language learning and CLIL within a Mathematics remote task-based project in English. The planning of the activities, described in the picture below, followed Do Coyle [10] 4Cs model: Content (Mathematics: metric vs imperial), Communication (pandemic subject-specific), Cognition (scaffolding, reasoning etc.), Culture (others' awareness).

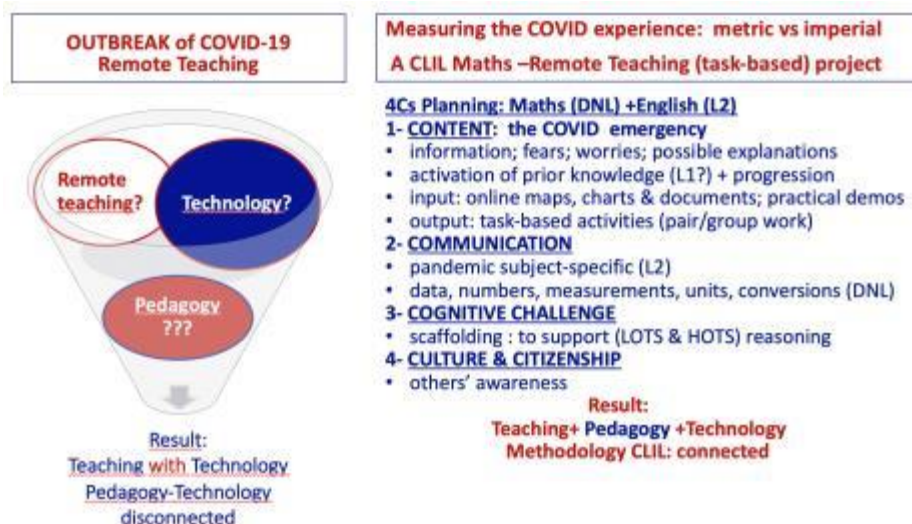


Fig. 4. An example of remote CLIL pathway in Mathematics

A wide range of other interesting inputs and practical examples were provided during the “CLIL TeachMeet”, which was much appreciated by the participants as a way to share experiences and practices within a Community of Practice, trying to overcome problems and challenges of remote teaching together.

Conclusions

During the pandemic due to Covid-19, despite all the challenges and difficulties Italian teachers had to face, as well as teachers from all over the world, they did their best to teach CLIL remotely, using a wide range of webtools, platforms and resources. Learning technologies turned out to be fundamental during this period, as already highlighted in the literature. In particular, online interactions among students allowed them to keep in touch with their peers in a virtual mode, as it was not possible face-to-face, and to use the foreign language in authentic and meaningful contexts.

Different online initiatives were organized in Italy by the Ministry of Education, by INDIRE and by a wide range of other stakeholders, such as Università Telematica degli Studi IUL, in order to support teachers and encourage them to share their experiences among a Community of Practice.

Examples of online initiatives held during the pandemic were presented in this paper, to show the teachers' effort to teach CLIL remotely, with the use of technologies: in particular, some teaching experiences presented during an online “CLIL TeachMeet” were highlighted.

The background of the paper is represented by the European language policy summarized in the Council Recommendation for a comprehensive approach to the

teaching and learning of languages (2019) and in the European Commission report published in September 2020. The online interaction descriptors introduced by the new CEFR CV have also been mentioned as an important reference for this paper.

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The Possibilities of a Common Uniform Understanding of CLIL within an Institution

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Abstract

The present paper provides an overview of the CLIL training development at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, particularly the structure and principles of CLIL classes conducted in the specialities of Police Service, Border Guards, Customs and Taxation, Rescue Service and Emergency Dispatchers (both vocational and professional higher education level). The paper could be divided into three major sections, firstly, a brief overview of the demographics in Estonia forming the basis for the need of foreign language instruction in Russian and English. Secondly, the curriculum development in the past ten academic years and, in particular, its implementation in the past three years (the standard period of studies in higher education curricula). It also features the role of professional standards as set by the Estonian Qualifications Authority and the requirements by the state agencies commissioning the respective student places. The third part of the presentation focusses on the preliminary results of the internal questionnaire and focus interviews conducted among the lecturers participating in CLIL classes in Russian and English. The study was conducted in order to explore the possible variations in the understanding of CLIL principles among language and speciality lecturers. The current small-scale study aims at exploring to what extent the selection of practical methods and the role of the language teacher in the class depend on the speciality lecturer's understanding of the CLIL concepts.

Keywords: CLIL implementation, curriculum development, vocational and higher education, cooperation between language and subject teacher, subject and language competences

1. Instruction at EASS

Our topic is related to the CLIL training at the Estonian Academy of Security Sciences.

Our institution provides instruction for specialities of Police Service, Border Guards, Customs and Taxation, Rescue Service and Emergency Dispatchers both on vocational and professional higher education level. However, at first, it is important to mention that although Estonia has one official language, it is actually a bilingual country with around a third of the entire population using Russian as their first language. There are regional and age-related differences in the Estonian language skills with more such people living in the eastern parts of the country and around the capital and with mostly older generations lacking the respective skills.

Younger generations of Russian-speakers know the Estonian language rather well due to changes in educational policy, integration programmes etc. On the other hand, younger generations of Estonians no longer speak Russian which used to be the first foreign language taught at school during the Soviet period. However, in the internal security services, the knowledge of Russian is as important as Estonian, and in the capital Tallinn, also English plays an important role due to tourism and foreign workforce.

As the graduates of EASS are awarded also the respective qualification by the Estonian Qualifications Authority, our curriculum development relies strongly on the cooperation with the respective state institutions (e.g., Police and Border Guard Board, Tax Office etc). For the given reason, our academy has implemented a particular foreign language system in which students first get 60 hours of English/108 hours of Russian of general foreign language instruction on levels A1-B1 followed by 54 or 72 hours of work-related foreign language classes on B2 level (LSP), and since 2011, there have also been additional CLIL classes increasing in number as follows:

In academic year 2012/2013 – CLIL classes in 9 speciality courses,

In 2013/2014 – CLIL classes in 15 speciality courses,

Since 2017/2018 – each year at least 18 academic hours of CLIL in Russian and English.

The colleges and academic departments are free in selecting the appropriate subject courses that will have additional CLIL classes. Lecturers have been provided respective training and, in theory, they should be well equipped for the CLIL instruction. It should be noted that the increase in the number of CLIL classes is partly also determined by the positive feedback from the EASS students on the effectiveness (in their opinion) of language and subject integrated classes.

2. The aim of the study and sampling

One of the main reasons for conducting the study was to find out how our subject teachers understand the essence of CLIL concepts and practise. In other words, although CLIL has been implemented in our academy for almost ten years already, in our daily practise as language teachers we have encountered various understandings of and approaches to this kind of instruction. For instance, some subject teachers seem to presume that in CLIL classes, the language teacher simply does all the work, in other cases, the subject teacher merely provides a scientific article on a related topic and asks the language teacher to “do something” with it, or the entire process is undertaken just to tick the required box in the curriculum on *ad hoc* basis. There are naturally also lecturers who have grasped the key aims and methods and work together with language teachers to make the most of the given opportunity. The main tool for the current small-scale qualitative research was an anonymous questionnaire compiled by authors including altogether 19 questions with both close and open-ended questions. In the current presentation, we will not consider the responses to two questions (about the basis for selecting the teaching methods) that will be left for the next stage of the study.

There were 15 respondents in the preliminary questionnaire including 12 subject lecturers whose mother tongue is Estonian, two with Russian as their first language, and one bilingual lecturer. In terms of level of instruction, seven of them taught at both vocational and higher education level, while four respondents respectively taught either only vocational or higher education level. Four lecturers had experience in CLIL classes in English, five in Russian and six in both given foreign languages. The majority of respondents had taught CLIL classes in the Police and Border Guard College, one in the Financial College (i.e., in the field of customs control), one in the College of Justice (i.e., in the field of prison service) and one respondent did not define the speciality. With the exception of one teacher, all respondents had experience in working with more than one language teacher.

3. Conceptual framework

It can be assumed that the certain discrepancy in the understanding of CLIL by all participants in the educational process arises from the CLIL scholars' noted flexibility of the approach as an "innovative fusion" of both subject and language education and it can be adapted to different contexts [1]. However, Coyle *et al.*, claim that for the CLIL approach "to be justifiable and sustainable, its theoretical basis must be rigorous and transparent in practise" [2]. Thus, Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter critically analysed the existing meanings of CLIL, which do not distinguish it from the other forms of content-based L2 education clearly enough [3]. Along with the lack of conceptual clarity in the various definitions of CLIL, they note, referring to the leading CLIL scholars [4], in particular the differences regarding the distribution of the volume of content and language as 50% and 50% or 90% and 10%, or the impossibility of achieving proper balance between content and language at all [5].

As an initial theoretical and methodological setting, we relied on the following differences between the concepts of CLIL and EMI (English, or other L2 as well, as a medium of instruction) (see Table 1) [6].

Table 1. Differences between the concepts of CLIL and EMI

Comparable aspects	CLIL	EMI
The essence of the method	Integrated content and language learning	English as a medium of instruction
Learning methods and environment: language and subject (content)	CLIL lecturer provides the environment, context of where and how the vocabulary is used	EMI lecturer teaches subjects through the target language. EMI lesson is a regular lesson with emphasis on the subject, not the language.
The role and responsibility of content and language lecturers	Content lecturer can do CLIL tasks. Language lecturer provides language. Teaching is carried out in cooperation with the language and subject lecturers.	All activities are carried out only by the content lecturer. Language lecturer is not involved. Language lecturer may help the content lecturer prepare for the course.
Teaching techniques	Language teaching support (from language lecturer to content lecturer)	No language teaching techniques Clear instructions in English (classroom English)
Feedback	Feedback can be given in both the language taught in and the trainees' mother tongue	Little or no feedback on language (feedback on concepts and vocabulary, not grammar)
Learning materials	Authentic learning material (environment); 95% of content and 5% of language assessment	Authentic material (little or no emphasis on language)

4. Findings

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to choose the statements that best correspond to their understanding of CLIL instruction. The statements were as follows:

1. An educational approach in which the subject is taught through the medium of a foreign language.
2. CLIL is the simultaneous learning of a subject and a foreign language.
3. CLIL is the synthesis of the aims of foreign language and subject instruction.
4. CLIL is primarily the instruction of professional terminology and key topics in a foreign language.

5. CLIL is primarily the instruction of a subject enriched by the foreign language component (added value).

The first statement is traditionally taken as the definition of instruction conducted in a foreign language (e.g., EMI). The fourth statement primarily corresponds to LSP, i.e., language for specific purposes (see Table 2).

Table 2. Distribution of the preferences in the specified statements

Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 3	Statement 4	Statement 5
1	11	7	11	9

As can be seen from the answers, lecturers mainly understand CLIL as the simultaneous instruction of a subject and a foreign language (11 respondents) or as a subject instruction further enhanced by the foreign language dimension (9). However, it is worth noting that the same number of responses (11) also agreed to the statement that actually corresponds to LSP – as the given aims (i.e., study of terminology and key concepts in a foreign language) are actually covered by our professional foreign language courses, it partly explains our practical CLIL experience where subject teachers did not always consider their own input as relevant in proportion.

When asked about the differences between a regular class and a CLIL lesson, they mostly highlighted the merit of practical use of the foreign language in a work-related situation (6) which is ideally made as realistic as possible, e.g.:

In the given class, students solved situations in a foreign language, whenever possible we included so-to-speak outsiders to act the parts. Thus, it was a practical class with as realistic activities as possible.

The speciality and language instruction together support the student's development, give them an understanding how to use the knowledge of both in their future work.

In regular language instruction, the topic could be a lexical or grammatical issue. In an integrated class, the topic could be a particular situation.

However, five respondents stressed the importance of reinforcing professional terminology. One respondent highlighted the supremacy of communication over the subject instruction.

Similar understandings were revealed also in the responses to the question about the aims of CLIL implemented at EASS. In seven responses, lecturers prioritised the importance of preparing the students for real work situations that can be unpredictable and therefore require that the foreign language be internalised (i.e., practised in various “fieldwork” situations) rather than merely learned as a list of terminology. Three respondents highlight the synthesis of the aims of both foreign language and subject instruction enhancing the student's development in both. For instance, they considered CLIL to be the synthesis of the aims of the speciality content and foreign language instruction. For two lecturers, it was still primarily professional foreign language and terminology acquisition rather than the internalisation and practical use of functional language.

Respondents were also asked about their CLIL experience so far and the features contributing to the success or failure of a CLIL class. Six respondents listed the learning environment among the features they liked most about their CLIL experience – it differed from the regular classroom setting and attempted to simulate real work situations. On two occasions, the learning environment was also attributed to taking pressure off from using a foreign language. Seven lecturers stressed the inclusion/involvement of students in classroom activities, and with the presence of two teachers in the instruction, it was not easy for students to hide themselves at the back of the room. Also, the support of

the academic staff was underlined encouraging students to simplify their language use rather than cling to the stiff and complicated legal jargon acquired during LSP classes.

Four respondents could not mention any negative experiences. On four occasions the negative features contributing to the failure of a CLIL class were related to the modesty, low motivation, passiveness or even the hostility of students. One respondent mentioned the importance of explaining the essence of and need for such classes to students, thus hopefully improving their involvement in the case studies even if they are bystanders or observers (see Table 3).

Table 3. The positive and negative features noted by the respondents

The positive features	The negative features
<p><i>Taking the tension off from the students when they need to use the foreign language in a work situation.</i></p> <p><i>Learning environment and the inclusion of students.</i></p> <p><i>In general, it was interesting, because in the classes that I attended there was more emphasis on the subject and the language instruction merely supported it.</i></p> <p><i>All students were involved in the simulations as CLIL was conducted in groups and all students had to participate.</i></p> <p><i>The language classes are still regular classroom lessons, but in CLIL you cannot sit quietly in the corner – you must resolve the case studies.</i></p> <p><i>The learning environment and the involvement of students were a change, also the cooperation with the other lecturer was fun for me as well as for the students.</i></p>	<p><i>The timidity of students.</i></p> <p><i>The students' occasional passiveness.</i></p> <p><i>The general problem with CLIL is that it is chronologically either before or after the language instruction. CLIL should be better planned, that is, they should have earlier knowledge in language and in their speciality and only then we start the integrating.</i></p> <p><i>Sometimes, the motivation of some students to learn languages is very low, if not non-existent, or they even have a hostile attitude to it.</i></p> <p><i>The low involvement of students, when 2-3 are involved in resolving a case study, most of the others think that it's not for them.</i></p>

When asked about their understanding of a successful CLIL class, four lecturers highlighted the students' unassisted performance in resolving the case studies in simulations. Three respondents prioritised the successful cooperation between language and subject teacher, while three lecturers stress the importance of students realising the value of such skills and opportunities resulting from active participation. The components of a failed CLIL class mainly included the students' low motivation (3), stress (1) or lack of understanding of the aim of the CLIL class. One respondent highlighted the problem of unmotivated students but did not consider the class as a failure for the given reason.

On two occasions, respondents mentioned the students' insufficient subject knowledge or language skills in resolving the case studies. One respondent mentioned the lack of cooperation with the other teacher, while another lecturer brought out the lack of support from the subject teacher. General lack of communication was mentioned once (see Table 4).

Table 4. Respondents' comments on the success and failure of CLIL classes

Success	Failure
<p><i>When the students can actually use what they have learned.</i></p> <p><i>Students can calmly resolve their speciality case studies in a foreign language using professional terminology.</i></p> <p><i>When the cooperation with the other teacher went smoothly, all planned activities were accomplished.</i></p> <p><i>The students have actively participated in the class and understood the need for the foreign language skills.</i></p> <p><i>Active communication.</i></p> <p><i>Students acquire knowledge in the speciality and also terms in the foreign language. The learning motivation is high.</i></p>	<p><i>Students in stress.</i></p> <p><i>Low learning motivation.</i></p> <p><i>Lack of communication.</i></p> <p><i>The student doesn't understand the situation and cannot express themselves.</i></p> <p><i>There is no smooth cooperation with the other teacher.</i></p> <p><i>Students do not understand the need for such a class.</i></p> <p><i>The lecturers work hard and learn, students are passive and have no interest.</i></p> <p><i>When the CLIL class is conducted only by the language teacher with no support from the speciality lecturer.</i></p>

5. Discussion

As it was mentioned above, the current small-scale study aims at exploring the extent to which the selection of practical methods and the role of the language teachers in the class depend on the speciality lecturer's understanding of the CLIL concepts. There was a question about the principles that the respondents follow when choosing teaching methods for CLIL classes with most of them basing their selection on the inclusion of the students into a more active learning process. They also highlight the importance of efficiency so that each student could make the most of the little time allocated for practical classes. There was similarly a tendency to choose teaching methods on the basis of the learning outcomes and the practical use of work-related skills. On the other hand, also the importance of cooperation with language teachers in selecting methods was stressed in order ensure the balanced synthesis between language and content.

Thus, as shown by the current research, there are no uniform criteria in the choice of teaching methods and techniques among our respondents, i.e., the teachers of CLIL, the main task of which is focusing on the content and language goals. The diversity of teaching methods applied by various scholars and educators has been described in various handbooks of CLIL [7]. However, lecturers tend to rely on particular individual or group needs and level of language skills rather than the methodological tools suggested by practising educators and CLIL researchers. Thus, the lack of common criteria in the CLIL methodology could be problematic in crafting a system accessible to every educator in our establishment.

We also wanted to know about the lecturer's understanding of the distribution of the volume of content and language during preparation and conduct of CLIL classes. Here we detected a little discrepancy, as although theories of CLIL mainly state the division should be 90:10 with the emphasis still on the subject instruction, our respondents had a different understanding. Namely, seven of the respondents said that the workload of the speciality and language teachers in preparing for the CLIL class should be equal, while only three of the respondents said that the language teacher merely provides the terminology and/or language support. One of the respondents stressed the importance of cooperation so that neither of the teachers would be left only as a passive bystander.

There were similar tendencies in the responses to the questions about the workload distribution in conducting the CLIL classes with seven respondents preferring 50:50

division, one respondent stating 60:40 with the weight on the subject lecturer. One of the respondents believed that it all depends on the aim of the particular class. So, the responses correspond to the frequent problem that has been voiced also by other practising colleagues in other language teaching conferences – it seems that as the lecturers are paid equally for CLIL classes, also the contribution is automatically expected to be of such proportions. This, in addition to the misconception of CLIL as LSP revealed in the definitions above, once again highlights the need for recurrent (preferably annual) revision and discussion to ensure clarity in understanding the principles and features of CLIL in our institution.

Citations

- [1] See Coyle, Hood & Marsh 2010.
- [2] *Ibid.*, p. 1.
- [3] See Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter 2014.
- [4] Authors refer to Marsh 2002, Mehisto 2008, Ting 2010 and other scholars.
- [5] See Cenoz, Genesee & Gorter 2014: pp. 244-245.
- [6] Here we draw on our earlier article, where we compare the specifics of CLIL and EMI, see Soidla *et al.*, 2016: pp. 44-45.
- [7] E.g. Dale & Tanner 2012.

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Curriculum Development

English Language MOOC to Improve Speaking Skills: A Needs Assessment Study

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Abstract

MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses) are seen as a turning point for language learning [8]. For language learners, MOOCs present a noticeable change for learners from different backgrounds with flexible and practical training [4]. Based on this idea, Speak English-MOOC project¹ has been developed jointly by Bartın University, Anadolu University, BEST Institut für berufsbezogene Weiterbildung und Personaltraining GmbH and Universidad Politecnica De Madrid, and is funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the EU during 2019-2021. The purpose of the project is to design a 6-week English language MOOC for A2 level adult learners focusing on speaking skill. To develop this content, the first activity was to analyse the needs of the target learners to make decisions on the goals and content of a language MOOC. Within this phase, the purpose was to identify what hinders learners to speak English, what motivates them, what kind of topics they would like to speak, what skills they would like to focus on, what type of activities they would like to be engaged with, and what kind of materials they would like to use. To do this, a questionnaire was developed and administered to a total of 191 adult language learners in all partner countries. Overall findings of the need's assessment revealed that a majority of the respondents felt uncomfortable while speaking in English. Furthermore, delivering formal speeches or handling negotiations in English caused a serious spike in the level of anxiety. Lack of fluency, fear of making mistakes due to lack of vocabulary (e.g., phrasal verbs and colloquial expressions), and imprecise pronunciation were the most commonly stated concerns by the respondents. All in all, the respondents also noted that they would like to be fluent language users who talk with a certain level of confidence and who can handle any situation that may come up during travels to foreign countries. Therefore, based on the results from the in-depth analysis of target learners' needs, the project aims to meet these needs by creating an online content for learners to practise aspects of speaking skill with tasks that reflect everyday situations and interactive contexts.

Keywords: Language MOOCs, Needs Assessment, Speaking Skill

1. MOOCs and Online Language Learning

Today, MOOCs are seen as a widely discussed revolutionary model of education [3] and a popular implementation of technology [5]. Language MOOCs (LMOOCs) are defined as “dedicated web-based online courses for second languages (L2) with unrestricted access and potentially unlimited participation” [1, p. 1]. Under the light of

autonomy, diversity, openness and interactivity principles [2] they depend, LMOOCs appear to constitute a great potential to provide a meaningful language learning environment with no space and time limitations. Thus, MOOCs that appeal to diverse public are available at many well-established platforms and locally built ones. However, very few MOOCs are dedicated to language learning [1; 4].

LMOOCs provide remarkable opportunities to facilitate foreign language development [1] such as development of learner autonomy [9] and learning strategies, appropriate use of language through authentic materials and activities [11], and social development as well as professional development. Thus, LMOOCs can be regarded as a turning point for language learning [8] for many reasons. Having said that, many questions remain to be addressed as very few studies investigate LMOOCs, yet none research has been conducted to investigate one focusing on developing speaking skills.

To address this gap, we aim to promote speaking skills of a large number of adult L2 learners in-or-out of formal education through Speak English-MOOC Project, and in this paper, preliminary findings of this ongoing process are presented following an introduction of the project. Being the first LMOOC focusing on fostering speaking skills in Turkey, Speak English-MOOC is designed to help learners to improve their interactional and social skills through engaging materials and varied interactional activities. The expected impact will be building up confidence among L2 learners while speaking English.

2. Speak English MOOC – English Language MOOC to Improve Speaking Skills Project

Although English is indicated as de facto the first language in Europe and globally, the level of attainment is poor in most countries. On the other hand, there are megatrends, external factors, transforming the world around us. Among these trends are the aging population, labour market shifts, skills mismatch and economic shifts. Above all, in 2020, it has been the latest pandemic that shaped all areas of our lives. Like all other areas of our lives, these megatrends have implications on education as well.

Distance education has, thus, emerged as an extremely important option. MOOCs are a form of distance learning. Despite the enormous number of courses provided, the number of Language MOOC initiatives is relatively small. With this data at hand, Speak English – MOOC – English Language MOOC to Improve Speaking Skills Project (*Project no: 2019-1-TR01-KA204-074155*), an Erasmus+ Strategic Partnership Project in Adult Education, was developed by Bartın University in Turkey in partnership with Universidad Politécnica de Madrid in Spain, BEST Institut für berufsbezogene Weiterbildung und Personaltraining GmbH from Austria and Anadolu University in Turkey. In the project, a 6-week Language MOOC Content for adult learners with a special emphasis on developing English speaking skills will be developed. To develop the content, several activities were defined, starting with defining the needs of the target group to set out the framework of the Speak English-MOOC content. In this paper, the results from the needs analysis carried out in three countries are given.

3. Method

3.1 Participants

191 adult EFL learners from various backgrounds and language learning experiences participated in the study (30 from Austria, 35 from Spain, 126 from Turkey). In the selection of the participants, convenient sampling strategy was adopted. In order to identify the needs of potential users, a heterogeneous participant pool was aimed.

3.2 Instrument

In the study, an online questionnaire was developed in English investigating learners' demographic information and English language background, needs in ICT skills, factors that hinder and motivate learners while speaking English, topics and situations that would make them willing to speak, activities they would like to be engaged with and materials they would like to use to practice speaking English. To elicit participants' ideas on these issues, the questionnaire included multiple choice, checkboxes, and short answer questions. A group of experts checked the content for face validity and reliability.

Austrian and Spanish participants responded in English whereas the ones in Turkey responded in Turkish. For this, the questionnaire used in Turkey was translated into Turkish and it was also submitted to further expert opinion.

3.3 Implementation and Data Analysis

Final versions were uploaded onto an online platform to ease its accessibility. It took approximately 10 minutes to answer the questionnaire and anonymity of the respondents was guaranteed. After needs assessment was conducted, the collected data were transformed into a shared database. The analysis adopted both quantitative and qualitative approaches. For items eliciting quantitative data, simple descriptive analysis was adopted by calculating the means and percentages. For qualitative data, content analysis was conducted. All qualitatively stated ideas were listed, sorted out and delineated in order to reveal participants' needs in a MOOC platform.

4. Findings

The questionnaire aims to dwell on essential points to be identified for the design of the LMOOCs. The demographic data indicate that the age range is between 18 to 42 and older. 44.8% are females and 55.2% are males. 61.2% of the respondents hold a Bachelor's degree, 30.8% have high school diplomas, and almost 8% have a postgraduate degree. Respondents' occupations are too diverse to be classified. 54.6% have experience studying English outside the school. A large portion of the respondents accumulate within the A2-B2 band. More than half of the respondents had never been abroad. While the possibility of using MOOCs to improve English language skills actually is not well known among the participants, their ICT skills and knowledge are on a level high enough to allow them to take part in online learning activities. Nevertheless, the majority of the participants have no online language learning experience (60% in AT, 60% in ES, and 75.8% in TR). Regarding what motivates and hinders learners in language learning, many Austrian participants aim to achieve a higher level of self-confidence when speaking English with the intention to travel abroad and deal with any situation without feeling uncomfortable. The main motivation to improve English skills for Turkish and Spanish participants is to have confidence speaking English to anyone and in any situation.

The main needs to speak English for the participants are found to interact fluently with natives and to describe in detail various social topics such as personal/social life, making purchases/arrangements, requesting, ordering, complaining, asking for/giving permissions highlighting/summarizing, helping etc. in their professional fields and in an online learning environment. Relatedly, learners mostly prefer interactive activities (76% in AT, 69,4% in TR), listening (63% in AT, 77,1% in ES), pronunciation (50% in AT, 62,9% in ES) followed by language learning games, collaborative tasks, video recordings, voice chatting, vocabulary activities, watching videos and having discussions. That is, learners prefer a variety of activities they find interesting or entertaining. Moreover, integration of technology into activities keeps their attention so

they do not get distracted. As for the materials learners would like to use, it is seen that learners prefer reading passages (76% in AT, 54.3% ES, 50.8% in TR). Other activities favoured by the participants are videos (73% in AT, 85.7% in ES, 80.6% in TR), games/puzzles (63% in AT, 25.7% in ES, 58.9% in TR), authentic materials (50% in AT, 77.1% in ES, 79.8% in TR), audios (33% in AT, 71.4% in ES, 42.7% in TR) and visuals (30% in AT, 20% in ES, 62% in TR). The results denote that most of the learners would like to be engaged with materials that represent real life, facilitate learning with visual triggers and technology use.

5. Discussion & Conclusion

The general results suggest almost all respondents have confidence in their ICT skills to follow online learning while most respondents are not aware of MOOCs. Few have tried using MOOC for language learning but a vast ratio did not continue and finish the MOOC program due to lack of time, unappealing and irrelevant content, mismatch between respondents' and courses' proficiency levels. This is in line with Wang-Szilias & Bellassen's study as technical problems, lack of time, and workplace commitments are considered the main barriers in completing the MOOC. Moreover, most feel uncomfortable while speaking in English regardless of the situation. Yet, delivering formal speeches or handling negotiations in English causes a serious spike in the level of anxiety. In general, not being fluent and making mistakes due to lack of vocabulary and imprecise pronunciation are two basic concerns. Like many foreign language learners, they would like to be fluent language users who talk with a certain level of confidence and who can handle any situation that may come up during travels to foreign countries and thus survive in their social life. This supports Richardson *et al.*'s [11] definition of active learning, when learners take initiative and become more conscientious, which has a positive impact on the learning, as more interactions are needed when learning a new language. Hence, it is important to shape the language teaching and learning process according to their survival desires and needs, which will give them opportunities to speak. Likewise, the learners want to deal with a variety of activities that they enjoy. Like Waard & Demeulearenae's [13] findings, the students prefer to be engaged in different activities rather than doing the same kind of stuff. They are more intrinsically than extrinsically motivated, and this might come from the freedom to choose what they wanted to learn. Besides, individual works and collaborative tasks should be promoted and assisted with well-chosen visuals and audio materials. This finding is in line with [13] that students prepare for their futures, develop specific vocabulary in a professional area of their interest, and also become more efficient in planning their own learning and appreciating the benefits of peer and social learning.

Also, today technology holds a big deal in every part of life, which requires the integration of technology into activities to keep learners' attention high as seen in the results. Furthermore, learners generally would like to be engaged with real life materials and games, which is in line with [14] because many students find them quite efficient in helping them recognize and memorize characters without being assessed. Also, videos and audio materials are preferred mostly together with the ones that relate to technology use rather than the materials they feel isolated. Thus, the design of MOOCs should take these into consideration to reach the objectives.

It is proved that MOOCs can potentially play an important role in bridging the gap between formal and informal learning and in widening participation. They fulfil the brief of making educational resources freely available to a wider audience, and they foster innovation in pedagogic approaches, allowing universities to test new ways of delivering courses.

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Writing Transition: A Corpus-Supported Study of the Freshmen's Written Argumentation Competence Building

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Abstract

In Romania, writing is the primary means of assessing student knowledge ever since the adoption of the Bologna Process. Often, students are expected to have learned academic, as well as professional writing, in high school, or to learn it intuitively at university. Previous studies indicate that, in Romania, the genres learned in high school only slightly overlap with the genre's students are asked to produce at university. In the present paper, we use corpus linguistics methods to analyse and compare the Romanian students' entrance-level writing, reflecting the high school norms, with their first-year examination writing. As our aim is also to capture the diversity of linguistic and educational challenges the students are confronted with when building their written argumentation competence in their mother tongue, we contrast writing processes in Romanian (L1) in the frame of a course in literary theory. The research methodology involves the compilation of two corpora: (a) a corpus of novice writing, NoviceRO (30 essays), and (b) a corpus of first year writing as part of a compulsory Introduction to Literary Theory class, LitRO (30 essays). We look at rhetorical and linguistic patterns related to argumentation in terms of frequency and effective logical and textual integration. Our findings provide insight into the pedagogical complexities of accompanying the Romanian students in their transition from pre-university towards university writing norms.

Keywords: high school versus university writing, corpus-based academic writing studies, written argumentation, Romanian freshmen writing, literary essay writing

1. Introduction

When students transition from high school to university they have to adapt to a series of new teaching and learning environments, all reflected in the way students write [1, 2].

Romanian students might experience this transition even more profoundly than students from other national educational settings, considering the fact that the Romanian pre-university teaching methods are rather prescriptive and education rather theoretical [3, 4]. Thus, freshmen, who are used to being given theory-driven instructions for home and evaluation assignments plunge into higher education curricula where autonomous and integrative learning is encouraged. Almost all university activities involve writing: from note taking, to progress and exam papers, students write constantly. More than that, ever since the adoption of the Bologna Process, the law (i.e., No. 288/ 2004) stipulates that each of the three university cycles should end with a thesis. In spite of this, L1 academic writing (AW) courses in Romania are not guided by national educational policy and writing support is provided according to each university's internal policies. Often, students are expected to learn AW intuitively at university, in parallel to disciplinary knowledge, or to have learned to write academically in high school.

2. Writing as learning assessment

2.1 Writing in high school

The Romanian language and literature high school (i.e., from the 9th until the 12th grade) curriculum covers, a wide range of sub-disciplines and topics. Along with a variety of functional and didactic genres (e.g., narration of personal experiences, descriptions, summaries, character portrayals, reading reports, analysis papers, structured essays, free essays, etc.), students are required to write argumentative essays. The argumentative essay is prominent in high school largely because it is often a written task in the high school graduation exam (Romanian *Bacalaureat*). The exam essay is evaluated by looking at several pre-established academic writing parameters such as giving personal opinions or using connectors and opinion phrases correctly. Essay writing challenges arise precisely as a result of exaggerating – for convenience or other reasons – the importance of these elements at the expense of understanding the text, and of carrying out as little research as possible to support the argumentative approach as a whole. In the absence of these other components, producing an argumentative text is a superficial process, a mechanical adaptation of a template, where the emphasis falls on the use of learned connectors. Personal input becomes secondary.

2.2 Writing at the university

Recently, a study [5] conducted by academics from the West University of Timisoara, interested in studying the various forms of university writing, has emphasized that first year students have rather precarious writing skills. The aim of the research was not only to assess the Romanian traditional writing model as implicit, practiced by imitation or characterized by little or no theoretical and methodological reflection, but it also pleaded for introducing (academic) writing courses in the university curricula and for developing this discipline as an instrument for improving the research and the communicational skills of the students doing a BA or MA degree [6].

3. Writing transition

3.1 Context

At the Department of Philology, students who wish to study Romanian as one of their major or minor specialization (many of them have English as their minor specialization) must pass an entrance exam where one task is a written essay of approx. 500 words.

The topic of the essay is the textual analysis of a literary text not studied previously but authored by one of the writers studied in high school. These essays form the NoviceRO corpus.

During first-year courses, freshmen will usually have to write similar essays in the form of individual work tasks for various disciplines. For example, one of the general courses, which is compulsory, is *Introduction to Literary Theory*. It is a discipline that aims at familiarizing the first-year students with the specific “language” of Literary and Cultural Studies. These essays form the LitRO corpus.

3.2 Data and methodology

The NoviceRO corpus comprises 30 essays written as part of university entrance exam, on topics related to literary works studied in high school, amounting to 10,119 total words (2,343 types). The LitRO corpus also contains 30 essays, written by freshmen as part of the summative examination of a literary theory class. It is made up of 10,808 total words (2,411 types). The texts selected to be included in the corpus were randomly selected, irrespective of the marks awarded to the students for their performance. The

30 essays in the LitRO corpus were selected according to the students' major and minor (Romanian and English).

In order to perform corpus-based analyses, we used the online concordance and visualization tool Voyant Tools [7]. The main tool features used were Cirrus, Terms, Trends, Phrases, Contexts and Correlations. Our conclusions are based on frequencies of occurrence and co-occurrence of types/tokens as well as n-Grams and collocations.

3.3 Results

Considering that the NoviceRO corpus contains the texts students write as they enter university, the corpus captures the implementation of the linguistic instructions they have been given in high school. First, we could notice several argumentation patterns specific for the discipline of literary studies:

- a) use of syntactic structures that define the literary genre: “apartine” (EN *belongs*) or “textul este” (EN *the text is*); the frequency of use and individual preference for variations within the lexical field of “apartine” (EN *belong / belonging / can belong*) can be visualised in Figure 1. A total of 37 lexical-field occurrences could be identified. The most frequent collocation for *belong*, at R1 position (i.e., first position to the right) is *genre* (collocation pattern: “apartine genului” – EN *belongs to the genre*). The second R1 co-occurrence is “curentul literar” (EN *literary movement*).

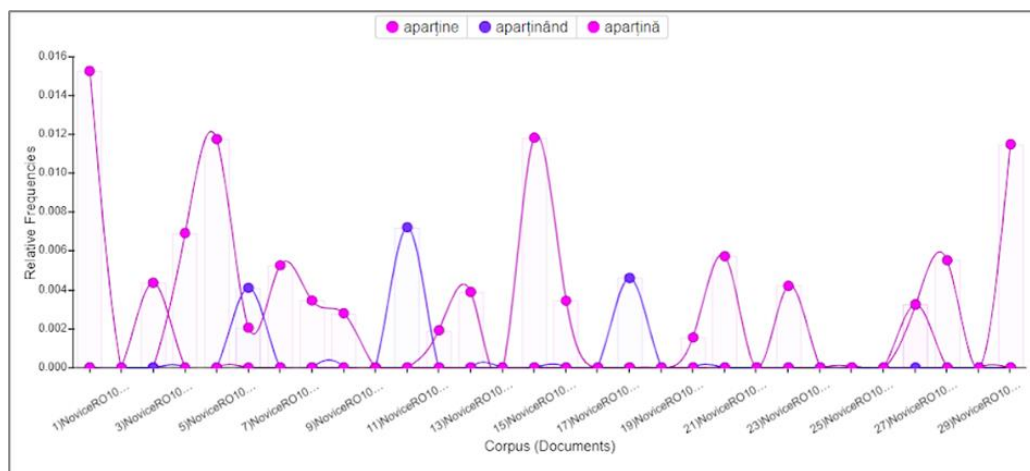
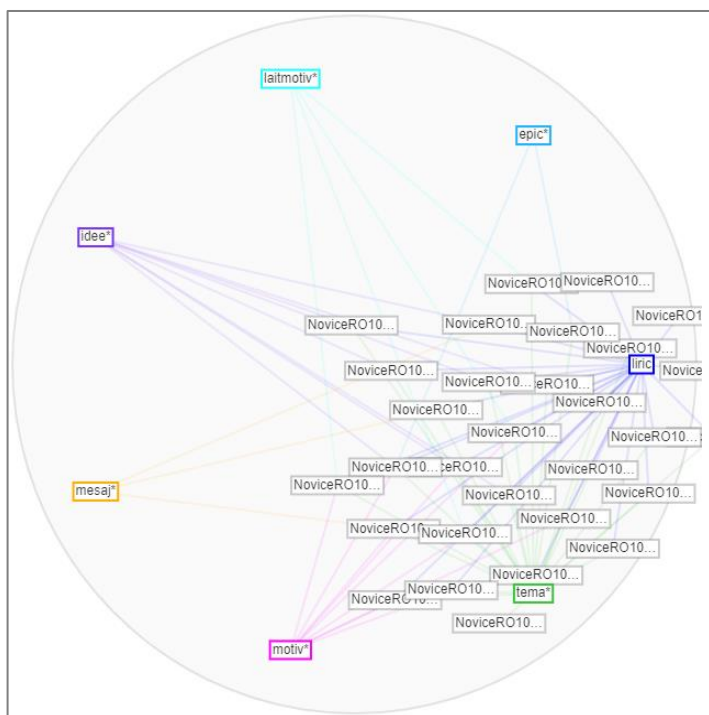


Fig. 1. Use of “apartine” (EN *belongs*) in the NoviceRO corpus

- b) use of syntactic structures that express opinions on the poetic intentions of the author: “autorul/autoarea își exprimă” (EN *the author expresses his/her*);
- c) use of syntactic structures that define the topic: “tema” (EN *topic*), “tematica” (EN *thematics*). Most construction (N=69) are represented by the configuration “tema” (EN *the topic*) followed by the Genitive (e.g., “poeziei” – EN *of the poem*).
- d) use of standard opinion phrases: “în opinia mea” (EN *in my opinion*), “consider că” (EN *I consider that*), “pot afirma” (EN *I can assert that*);
- e) use of syntactic structures that describe the outline of the text: “textul este structurat” (EN *the text is structured*).



A secondary level of analysis brings to light salient thematic key words. These vocabulary items represent the core of the lexical profile of student texts as most of their written discourse centres around them. Some of them are highly frequent (e.g., “tema” – EN *topic*, “motiv” – EN *motive*) while other are less frequent but also discipline-specific (e.g., “lyric” – EN *lyrical*, “laimotiv” – EN *leitmotive*).

Fig. 2. Use of thematic key words in the NoviceRO corpus

Contrastively, looking at the data in the LitRO corpus, other features seem prevalent:

- a) syntactic structures used for argumentation in entrance-exam papers are still present but less frequent, e.g., *belong* (N=9);
- b) higher lexical diversity (e.g., *illustrate* as description verb);
- c) better use of disciplinary vocabulary (e.g., “figuralitate” – EN *figurality*).

4. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the two written-assignment corpora (NoviceRO and LitRO) aimed at contrasting high school norms with first-year university writing norms through the lenses of the linguistic strategies the students adopt in order to construct arguments. The case study was conducted for the didactic genre of literary analysis. After calculating frequencies for all tokens and recurrent phrases in each corpus, results could be extracted on the patterns of syntactic structures, opinion-giving phraseology and thematic key words. What is noticeable is the fact that standard phraseology taught in high school as a must-use-list for literary text analyses (highly frequent in NoviceRO), was replaced by a tendency to focus on argumentation itself rather than on the linguistic markers that shape it. It was indeed one of the main objectives, and a challenge at the same time, that university teachers pursued, namely that students should be taught to use language to express valid and personal arguments rather than construct arguments within given phraseological parameters. This was inferred from the decrease in frequency of standard phrases and an increase of phrases that are unique (i.e., the student’s personal writing style is more refined). Another observed phenomenon was the drastic reduction of arguments that refer to the author, i.e., what the author intended in the piece of literature analysed, in freshmen’s writing, counterbalanced by an increase

in the ability to critically bring arguments in favour of a personal opinion without theorising too much on the topic. In general, the transition from high school to university writing brings about transformations in point of lexical diversification and density, sentence conciseness and an improvement in the overall academic writing style. One of the studies is that freshmen writing can be corrected to move away from prescriptive writing norms prevalent in high school in the direction of opinionated writing. Another conclusion would be that transition process towards improved academic writing can be assessed with the help of a contrastive corpus approach, such as the one presented in this study.

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E-Learning



E-Learning and Student Engagement in a Teacher Training Course

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Abstract

Digital technologies in higher education facilitate the learning/teaching process, creating a student-centred environment (Johnson et al., 2016). According Alexander et al., (2017), teachers need to develop digital literacy as e-learning cannot take place without e-teaching. Both teachers and students should have relevant training and support in order to use new technologies in an efficient and effective ways (Guri-Rosenblit and Gros, 2011). During the present crisis e-learning has been playing a significant role. This study investigates the issues of student engagement in on-line environment, the development of cognitive, social and self-directed learning skills of students, future EFL teaching, during a teaching methodology, teaching practicum course. The participants were 40 university students (3rd and 4th year). Their age ranges from 18 to 25 years old, their L1 is Cypriot Greek and they all reside in Cyprus. We have analysed students' engagement and participation in on-line classes, oral and written mode. The on-line sessions via Microsoft teams were recorded and observed regarding the frequency, quantity and quality of students' participation in discussions, question-answer sessions and blogging via Blackboard. We also investigated the attitudes of the students (via questionnaires) towards e-learning and the use of digital tools such as chat, camera, video, blogs, comments, group work, channels and break out rooms and their perception of their value in terms of the learning/teaching process, development of their critical thinking, reflection and analysis skills, continuous professional development. The analysis of the data showed that overall students have a positive attitude towards e-learning, but they prefer either blended learning or face-to-face learning, especially in a post-COVID time. The students tend to use written mode of communication (chats, blogging) rather than oral (audio, camera). They believe that blogs facilitate their development as teachers and practitioners via creating on-line community in a user-friendly way. The students have the opportunity to interact more with their peers and the tutor, express their views, exchange ideas, gain new knowledge and experience, increase the level of their digital competence, especially in the current COVID situation.

Keywords: E-learning, digital skills, students' engagement and participation

1. Introduction

Digital technologies in higher education facilitate the learning/teaching process, creating a student-centred environment (Johnson et al., 2016). According Alexander et al., (2017), teachers need to develop digital literacy as e-learning cannot take place without e-teaching. Both teachers and students should have relevant training and support in order to use new technologies in an efficient and effective way (Guri-Rosenblit and Gros, 2011). Young generation of students can be characterised as “digital natives”, “millennial students” or “Homo Zappiens” (Ubachs et al., 2017), thus, they can be easily

trained to use digital tools at university (Alexander *et al.*, 2017; Johnson *et al.*, 2016).

Students can be autonomous learners, but educational institutions can help them to construct knowledge via guidance and assistance of the teachers and experts (Andrade, 2015). The outbreak of corona virus disease (COVID-19) has affected the higher education sector. During the present crisis e-learning has been playing a significant role.

This study investigates the issues of student engagement in on-line environment, the development of cognitive, social and self-directed learning skills of students, future EFL teachers, during a teaching methodology, teaching practicum course.

2. E-learning and digital tools

Web and digital literacy are essential for teachers and students in our modern world.

Multiple language and teaching resources can be accessed online. Information communication technology (ICT) should be integrated into the classroom (Spiro, 2013).

Both teachers and students need to learn to adopt and adapt new materials, strategies and tools (Godwin-Jones, 2003). Blogs are considered to be a useful on-line tool for learning, teaching, training and education. The students and teachers can share their thoughts and ideas, can express their feelings and opinions in an online environment (Deng and Yuen, 2011). No special technological skills are needed in order to post a blog entry. Blogging promotes creativity, critical thinking, reflection, collaboration, interaction and active participation. Blogs can help to gain and share knowledge as well as to increase digital literacy of both students and teachers, change their attitudes towards the Information and Communication Technology (Goktas and Demirel, 2012). According to Rourke and Coleman (2009), blogs can change writing practices, teaching and learning culture and promote self-expression. In the process of writing, bloggers “become part of a discourse community in a complex multimodal setting” (Raith 2009: 276). The students are involved in cooperative learning, they negotiate and construct meaning, develop their L2 writing skills, reflection and analysis (Spiro, 2013).

3. Methodology

The participants were 40 university students (32 female and 8 male, 3rd and 4th year).

Their age ranges from 18 to 25 years old, their L1 is Cypriot Greek and they all reside in Cyprus. We have analysed students' engagement and participation in on-line classes, oral and written mode. The on-line sessions via Microsoft teams were recorded and observed regarding the frequency, quantity and quality of students' participation in discussions, question-answer sessions and blogging via Blackboard. We also investigated the attitudes of the students (via questionnaires) towards e-learning and the use of digital tools such as chat, camera, video, blogs, comments, group work, channels and break out rooms and their perception of their value in terms of the learning/teaching process, development of their critical thinking, reflection and analysis skills, continuous professional development.

4. Results

The analysis of the data showed that overall students have a positive attitude towards e-learning (17.5%), but they prefer either blended learning (20%) or face-to-face learning (57.5%), especially in post-COVID time. Below are some of students' views in favour of face-to-face teaching:

...you can feel the connection with your professor and it is easier to ask questions and participate... (S1)

...this is the classic way that I am used to concerning learning, participating, and observing... (S5)

...nothing can replace this kind of interaction between the teacher and the student... there are no connection or audio issues... (S18)

At the same time the students do understand the value of on-line teaching and learning:

...the opportunity to feel comfortable and express yourself without being watched by others... online classes are the best solution during COVID situation. (S36)

...more comfortable both for students and for the teachers because we are all in our house, a familiar environment...it helps to feel healthy and protected from any kind of virus. (S15)

...with COVID19 I think that it is best for us to do most of the things on-line. (S27)

The participants have reported that the most popular tools that are used for teaching and learning at the university are Microsoft Teams (85%), Zoom (65%) and Blackboard (65%). The students tend to use more written mode of communication: written chat (77.5%), written blogs (40%), rather than oral: audio (32.5%), video/camera (7.5%), this is based both on the analysis of the data obtained via questionnaires and recorded teaching/learning sessions. With respect to digital tools, the most popular are written chats and recorded sessions as well as blogs, videos, and Turn-it-In, on-line assignment submission tool, see Figure 1.

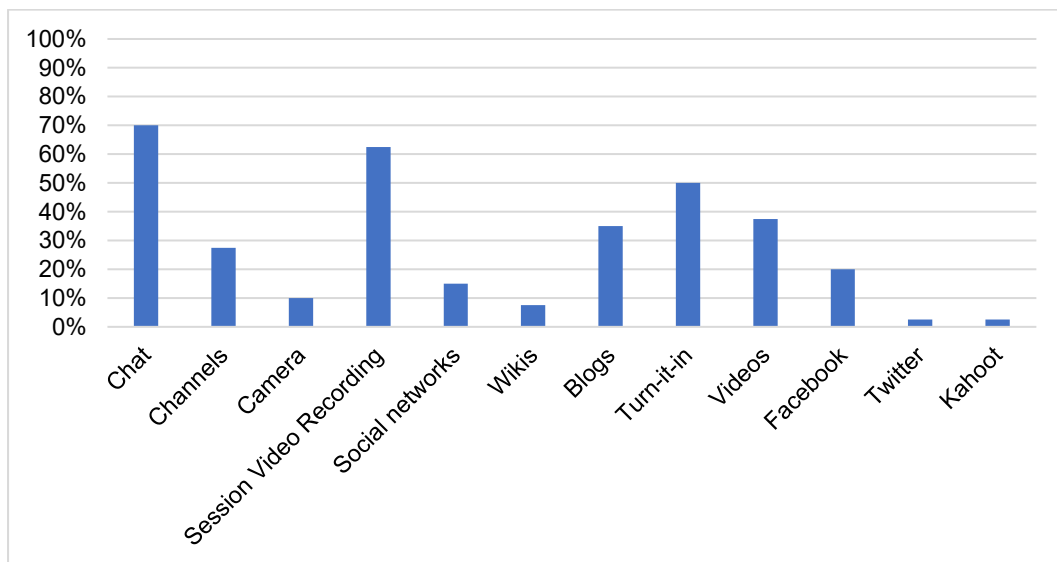


Fig. 1. Which tools you would like/prefer to use?

Overall, the students consider themselves to be digitally literate (mean score of 4.05 out of 5), but they still would like to improve their digital competence (3.51). They support the view that blogging is a useful pedagogical and educational tool (3.6), it is a creative activity (3.75) and a useful skill (3.54). It helps them to develop reflective skills (3.89), though it is also a type of assessment (3.35). Blogging gives them the sense of belonging to a community (3.21) and they find it great to share their ideas with their peers in a blog (3.51). The respondents stated that they have freedom to express their views and ideas in a blog (4.32). Blogs help them to comprehend the material better (3.45) and to read more on the relevant topics (3.45); tutor comments and feedback are useful (4.18).

Overall, blogging facilitates teacher-student communication (3.32).

As it can be seen in Figure 2, the main purpose of blogging, according to the students, is to share their thoughts, feelings and ideas, to develop their critical thinking, reflection and communication skills, self-directed learning and to create on-line environment for teaching and learning.

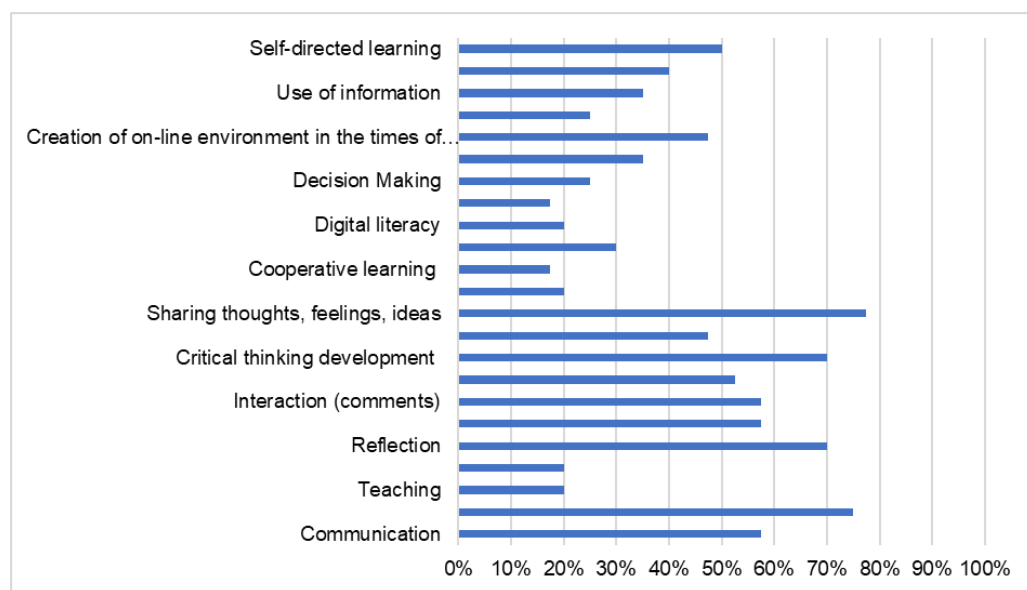


Fig. 2. What is the purpose of the blogging?

The students have the freedom to discuss various topics in their blogs and reflective journals:

...profession of the teacher, behaviour of the teacher...suitable and efficient tasks...effective ways to make a lesson funny and not boring for students... (S2)

...critical thinking... creativity... to share our experience and feelings more... about our dreams, current achievements, goals and everyday life problems... (S17)

...the topics covered in class force me to revise what we have been taught... (S25)

In general, it seems that students have a positive experience with on-line learning and use of digital tools such as blogging:

I found blogging the perfect place to share my thoughts and views related to our course

and the topics that are being addressed... (S40)

It also encouraged me to think in ways that I would not think before. It provides me with feedback... (S31)

I gained a lot of knowledge and confidence to share my thoughts with my colleagues and I also learn a lot by reading what everyone else has the same about the topics we are dealing with. (S18)

They also have some suggestions of how to improve their on-line learning experience:

Group discussions... quick assessments at the end of lectures...(S9)

...watching some educational videos...quizzes can also be interesting (S11)

We can also play games like Kahoot... (S24)

Movies about cultural differences, videos about teaching experiences or Ted Talks about the teaching environment from experienced teachers. (S36)

5. Discussion and conclusion

The analysis of the data showed that overall students have a positive attitude towards e-learning, but they prefer either blended learning or face-to-face learning, especially in a post-COVID time. The students tend to use written mode of communication (chats, blogging) rather than oral (audio, camera). They believe that blogs facilitate their development as teachers and practitioners via creating on-line community in a user-friendly way. The students have the opportunity to interact more with their peers and the tutor, express their views, exchange ideas, gain new knowledge and experience, increase the level of their digital competence, especially in the current COVID situation.

More research is needed in order to get insight into both students and teachers' views regarding on-line teaching/learning environment and digital literacy and their impact on the development of students' critical thinking, reflection and analysis skills as well as on their continuous professional development.

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Elements for Successful Online Language Learning

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate which elements contribute to a successful online language learning from the students' perspective. The context of the study was the pilot language courses which were created within the KiVAKO-project (KiVAKO is an acronym in Finnish meaning strengthening the language capital at higher education institutions) [1]. The KiVAKO-project is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture [2] and its aim is to develop and build a nationwide online language course offering on a shared platform. The project started in autumn 2018 with 86 language teachers of 26 universities and universities of applied sciences. The project covers the following languages: Chinese, Estonian, Finnish Sign Language, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish on the levels CEFR A1-C1. In addition, a UniTandem course was created for peer language studying. After piloting the eight courses in the autumn term 2019, the students were asked to respond to an online questionnaire for feedback. The research data consist of the replies of this questionnaire, and they were analysed according to the qualitative content analysis method [3]. The findings suggest that the course design, study materials, teachers' actions and assignments affect the students' positive perception of the online language course, whereas technology, study materials, course design and assignments are the aspects that hinder the learning experience the most. This study provides recommendations for educators to contemplate in designing an online language course.

Keywords: online learning, language learning, higher education

1. Introduction

In Finland, language course offering in tertiary-level education is becoming increasingly one-dimensional. The English language dominates, and less frequently studied languages such as Italian, Spanish, German, French and Russian are not often studied in higher education institutes either. This is problematic because contemporary working life increasingly operates at the global level and requires versatile language skills; even fluent English skills are not enough.

The KiVAKO-project, which is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, aims to bridge this gap between higher education and working-life in terms of language skills. The target of the project is to create nationwide online language courses which will be available to all higher education students in Finland regardless of their home institutions. The duration of the project is three years and the participants are 86 language teachers of 26 universities and universities of applied sciences. Eight of the language courses were piloted in autumn 2019.

The challenge with online language learning is that students are eager to enrol in courses, but they easily drop out as well. Therefore, the study module must be designed

in a manner that it engages and motivates the students to complete it. Several learning designs models such as Compton's [4] and Richards' [5] ones were introduced to the teachers participating in the KiVAKO-project, but the teachers were given free rein to craft their module according to their own pedagogical preferences. The language courses were created in teacher teams and one or two team members implemented the course on the Moodle platform.

2. Methods

In this paper, we investigate the elements students considered having impact on their online language learning in the piloted KiVAKO-courses. This study addresses two research questions:

- Which elements do students perceive advancing their learning in an online language course?
- Which elements do students perceive hindering their learning in an online language course?

Our research settings are the eight pilot online language courses which were created and implemented within the KiVAKO-project. To provide an overview, Table 1 depicts the number of students who enrolled, were accepted, started and finally completed the courses. As this is a nationwide project, the students' demographic details are not in our disposal.

Table 1. The number of students in the piloted KiVAKO-courses in the autumn 2019

Course	Enrolled	Accepted	Started	Completed
KiVAKO-Chinese & Chinese characters 1	50	30	30	17
KiVAKO-Spanish 1	220	30	30	27
KiVAKO-Italian 1	112	30	28	18
KiVAKO-Korean 1	89	30	25	22
KiVAKO-Portuguese 1	30	30	28	14
KiVAKO-German 1	103	30	26	19
KiVAKO-Russian 3	16	16	8	7
KiVAKO-Estonian 1	77	30	29	18

3. Data and analysis

The research data comprise a post-course questionnaire which was sent as an online link to all the students completing the KiVAKO-courses. After finishing the course, each teacher posted the link to the questionnaire on their own Moodle platform. The questionnaire covered five open-ended questions and 20 statements to which the participants responded according to their opinion using the Likert-scale items (1 = totally disagree to 5 = totally agree). Out of 204 students who started the courses, a total of 142

completed them; and 65 of whom (46%) answered voluntarily to the anonymous post-course questionnaire.

The qualitative data, i.e., the students' responses to the open-ended questions were analysed adapting the content analysis method [3]. The analysis was conducted with the help of the software Atlas.ti (version 8.4.18). At first, the data were read several times after which all mentions regarding both research questions were marked as segments.

Thereafter the segments were named descriptively; these segments were all together 358 of which 185 included mentions regarding advancing learning whereas the mentions concerning hindering learning totalled 173. In the next stage, the segments were examined inductively, resulting in the following subcategories describing students' perceptions; the elements advancing learning included: course design, instructions, teacher activities, learning materials and assignments. The elements hindering learning comprised the following subcategories: instructions, teacher activities, course design, learning materials, students' competences, technology and assignments.

4. Results

4.1 The elements that advanced learning

The elements that advanced learning is depicted in Table 2.

Table 2. The elements that advanced learning

Category	Amount (%)
Assignments	36 (19.46%)
Course design	51 (27.57%)
Instructions	14 (7.57%)
Learning materials	43 (23.24%)
Teacher activity	41 (22.16%)
Total	185 (100%)

Course design was the element the students considered to be the most effective one advancing their learning according to the responses to the online questionnaire. Logical course structure was considered as beneficial, and the students appreciated division according to topics. Further, a transparent timetable and related grammar were considered as positive elements. In addition, the students appreciated relevant webinars, and the possibility to organize their own learning activities regardless of time and space, even if they considered clear timetables to be a supportive element to learning on an online course.

Both relevant and timely, as well as multifaceted and challenging learning materials were considered to enhance learning. The possibility to download the learning materials to the students' own device was appreciated. Further, the students valued the learning materials which were clearly structured, in particular those produced by the teacher, e.g., animations, videos, and recordings.

Aligned learning activities and assignments had a positive impact on learning. Digital games were considered as a supportive element in language learning, and especially

assignments including voice recordings or videos were valued. Oral language skills were enhanced particularly in interaction with peers.

Teacher support and guidance were valued by the students, and clear instructions as well as timely feedback were considered to have an enhancing impact. The teacher's supportive interaction style contributed positively to the learning atmosphere.

Additionally, the students valued clear instructions both concerning the learning materials and the assignments.

4.2 The elements that hindered learning

The elements that hindered learning are depicted in Table 3.

Table 3. The elements that hindered learning

Category	Amount (%)
Assignments	28 (16.19%)
Course design	28 (16.19%)
Instructions	13 (7.51%)
Learning materials	34 (19.65%)
Student	9 (5.20%)
Teacher activity	24 (13.87%)
Technology	37 (21.39%)
Total	173 (100%)

According to the students' responses, technology related elements were those which hindered the learning most. This included technical difficulties, such as poor sound quality in peer assignments, and the requirement that an answer had to be perfectly correct in order to be accepted by the system on the learning platform. The auto-correcting assignments where misspelling was interpreted as a wrong answer was regarded as a technology-based hindrance as well and cause of frustration. Even some technology-based features which were related to the layout of the course material were mentioned in this category.

Learning materials were criticized to inhibit learning if they were hard to find. Even insufficient amounts of the learning materials or irrelevant requirement levels in them were considered as elements which did not support learning. Especially lack of teaching grammar or timely access to the learning materials were mentioned as negative elements.

Course design was considered as contributing negatively to learning if the amount of online teaching was insufficient or the requirement level was incoherent. Additionally, too quick increase in the requirement level and lack of alignment in course design had a negative impact. New study modules presented at the end of the course hampered learning, as well.

The assignments and learning materials caused a similar negative impact on learning; if grammar exercises were too few, one-sided, irrelevant or they did not cover

all the competence areas of language skills, they were considered as unsupportive.

Especially the amount of oral exercises as well as those developing writing skills were considered as insufficient and thus hindering the learning.

As for teacher activity, lack of guidance, feedback and teacher presence had a negative impact. Insufficient or unclear instructions were considered to have the similar, negative consequence.

In addition, certain elements depending on the students themselves inhibited the learning. Inexperience in online learning, the student's own learning style or former inadequate competences were mentioned. Even lack of commitment to the studies could hamper learning.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Our research investigated the elements the students perceived either advancing or hindering their learning within the KiVAKO-project piloted online language courses. The paramount negative effect was caused by shortcomings of technology, followed by weaknesses in learning materials, course design and assignments. In addition, insufficient teacher activity or limitations in students' previous language competences inhibited learning. In comparison, the students regarded that skilfully structured course design advanced their learning the most; clear timetables as well as the alignment between assignments, learning materials and learning objects with enough interaction with peers and teachers provided opportunities for positive learning experiences.

Additionally, teacher presence, their timely, positive and encouraging feedback benefited the students' learning process. Our results corroborate previous research regarding benefits of carefully crafted course design [4] sufficiently learning materials and suitable digital tools [6, 7] as well as in terms of feedback and facilitation which enhance learner autonomy in online language learning [e.g., 6].

We recommend language teachers to design their online courses to cover all competence areas of language skills and particularly pay attention to the quality of learning materials and assignments to match the learning objectives. The learning materials should be timely, relevant and multimodal, similarly the pair, group and individual assignments should utilise multimodality: videos, recordings and written format. Additionally, timetables, deadlines and sections according to topics are essential to a successful online language course.

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From Face-to-Face to Virtual Sessions During Lockdown

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Abstract

In December 2019, the outbreak of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) caused by SARS-CoV-2 suddenly emerged in China and has now spread in many countries around the world. As it was immediately declared as a pandemic, most nations in the globe, including Mexico, decided to start school closures in order to avoid risk of contagion among students, teachers and families.

The University of Veracruz started its school closure in late March to comply with the social distancing and lockdown instructions issued by Mexican authorities. With the implementation of this measure, all students and teachers moved to online sessions and activities.

This paper presents the description of the migration from the face-to-face modality to the virtual mode of a Basic English course at the Poza Rica Language Center. It focuses on the steps followed to carefully prepare students to work in a different learning environment. It also aims at knowing the participants' opinion about online learning and virtual lessons during confinement. To achieve this aim, an action research qualitative study was carried out on 53 learners.

The study subjects were non-university students who attended courses aimed at the general public such as high school students, professionals and housewives. The results suggest a high acceptance of the work done by students who finished the course but they also show a high dropout rate.

Keywords: coronavirus, learning environments, lockdown, pandemic

1. Introduction

The SARS-Cov-2 coronavirus is a virus that appeared in China. Later it spread to all the continents of the world causing a pandemic. Currently, Europe and America are the most affected continents (Secretaría de Salud, "Información General", par. 1).

This new virus causes the disease known as COVID-19, which is highly contagious, so the World Health Organization, through the Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan against the new coronavirus, called on world leaders to take the necessary measures to prevent its further spread, through national strategies to contain community transmission. These strategies include community-level measures that reduce person-to-person contact, such as suspending mass gatherings, closing non-essential workplaces and educational establishments, and reducing public transportation (World Health Organization p. 10).

In Mexico, the Ministry of Public Education in conjunction with the country's Ministry of Health agreed on preventive measures for COVID-19 for public educational institutions at all levels, including participation in voluntary isolation and the adoption of

distance learning (Secretaría de Educación Pública. “Boletín 72”, par. 1).

The University of Veracruz, as a public institution of higher education, followed the instructions of the federal authorities by suspending face-to-face classes in all its academic entities and continuing to teach distance classes.

Therefore, the present research work aims to describe the experience of the migration of a Basic English course that began with face-to-face classes to the virtual modality.

The background and objectives are presented first and then the methodology implemented to migrate to online classes and evaluate students is described. Finally, it gives an account of the results obtained with the emergent work through the percentages of approval and disapproval and desertion of the students, as well as their opinion about their learning experience during confinement.

1.1 Background

In March 2020, the University of Veracruz, in compliance with the federal government's provisions regarding isolation and social distance measures to stop COVID-19, published the first statement to inform the university community about the suspension of academic activities on March 21 as of April 19, professors having to maintain remote communication channels between students, academics, workers and authorities (Universidad Veracruzana, “COVID-19 Disposiciones generales, par. 2).

Faced with this situation, the General Directorate of Language and Self-Access Centers held urgent meetings with Coordinators to define the steps to follow regarding the remote work that should be carried out in an emergency manner and complying the following guidelines:

1. To be aware of institutional emails and internal messaging groups of the entity, at least during their working hours.
2. Constant communication with students.
3. The work of the academics with their students can be, without being limited to: answering doubts about the course, sending reinforcement activities, presenting them with the pages of the CAAs of all the regions, online consultancies, etc. For this they can use the platforms of EMINUS, Zoom, social networks among others.
4. All must submit a weekly report of activities carried out, it will be available on the institutional portal (Universidad Veracruzana-DCIA. “Plan de contingencia”, par. 2).

Upon arrival on April 19 and observing that due to the growing number of infections the conditions to return to face-to-face classes were not met, work began on new evaluation criteria and the possibility of continuing with online classes. To do this, through meetings using the Zoom application, an agreement was reached not to apply written face-to-face final exams in order to promote social distancing, so the new evaluation criteria were as follows:

PORCENTAJES DE EVALUACIÓN CURSOS INGLÉS 4 HABILIDADES (Conversación básico, intermedio y avanzado)			
Rubro	Evidencia de desempeño	Ámbito de aplicación	Valor
Portafolio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actividades y tareas • Mapas mentales (funciones/temáticas) • Glosario – pictionary/memoranda (visual con texto) • Autoevaluación (cuestionario) 	Aula o virtual	40%
Quizzes (en línea y presencial)	4 (1 por habilidad o 1 evaluando todas)	Aula o virtual	20%
Composiciones escritas	2 (sugerencia) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Básico – descripciones • Intermedio – tópico/tema • Avanzado - ensayo 	Aula o virtual	10%
Presentación oral (con rúbrica)	2 (audio o video) (Avanzado ver conferencia y dar reporte)	Aula o virtual	20%
Workbook	Round up/extra grammar plus	Aula o virtual	10%
Trabajo durante contingencia	EXTRA (para alumnos que en tiempo y forma cumplieron)		10%

Fig. 1. Centro de idiomas PR. Criterios de evaluación

The portfolio item, whose evidence includes activities, tasks, mind maps, glossaries, etc. with a value of 40%.

4 quizzes online with a value of 5% each, giving a total of 20%.

2 written compositions with a value of 5% each, giving a total of 10%.

An oral presentation either by audio or video with a value of 20%.

The tasks of the workbook with a value of 10%.

An extra 10% for those students who have done all the work during the contingency.

Once these criteria were defined, it was determined that as of May 2020, remote classes would start through the platforms chosen by the academics, extending the school calendar until the end of July of the same year to give students the opportunity to engage and catch up on this emerging modality.

1.2 General objective

- To know the opinion of the students about their learning experience from a face-to-face mode to a virtual mode.
- To describe the steps to carry out the migration from a Basic English course that started with face-to-face classes to the virtual mode.

2. Methodology

2.1 Action-research

This qualitative study was implemented using the action-research methodology; which, according to Latorre (2003), constitutes an inquiry strategy that starts from the detection of a specific problem to which a pedagogical treatment is applied in order to obtain data that must be tested experimentally to modify an educational reality.

This method is done by collecting information in daily teaching practice and analysing it with the objective of making decisions about how it should be in the future (Wallace, 2008, p. 4).

We followed the procedure of Bizquerra (2009), which indicates that action-research is carried out through a systematized process that includes the following steps: problem,

diagnosis, design of a change proposal, application of the proposal, and evaluation.

2.2 Problem and diagnosis

The students of the Poza Rica Language Center who enrolled in face-to-face courses during the period February-July 2020 found it necessary to migrate from this modality to a virtual learning environment when they had only been in classes for a month.

In the case of students with basic English at the first level, it was observed that most of them did not have the experience of taking English classes online, so a change proposal was designed that would allow them to first know the institutional platform for distance classes and later work formally in their virtual course.

2.3 Proposal of change

The Eminus platform of the University of Veracruz is a system that manages flexible learning environments and allows the presentation of online courses. It is supported by the use of multimedia and collaboration tools for synchronous and asynchronous communication.

It also offers a reliable variety of educational resources for teachers and students since the system guarantees the protection of the information handled by all users. In addition, it is very easy to create, manage and publish a course on the platform with additional materials such as videos, slides and spreadsheets, which can be accessed by students from all over the world.

Eminus has a variety of advanced technologies for online collaborative work as well as different communication, collaboration and administration features. Colunga (2007), lists some of the most important:

- Learning tools such as: content viewer and learning objects, content management, evaluation modules.
- Communication tools such as: forums, chats, virtual classroom and videoconference for synchronous and asynchronous communication. The platform also has a “help center” and has sections for practice activities and assessments.

Therefore, students were proposed to work through the Eminus institutional platform, for which they began with a short induction course to learn how to work online through it, where the students were made aware that the remote classes would be held synchronously at the same time, they had using the “Classroom” tool.

This tool has a space designed for interaction through audio, video, images and text.

Documents and images can be displayed within a presentation area and on which simple annotations can be made (Universidad Veracruzana. Eminus, Students’ manual p. 40).

2.4 Application of the proposal

All registered students obtained a special user account to access the platform in which they first carried out review activities as an induction to work online and later took their remote classes synchronously, where the topics of the course were explained to them.

Once each of the lessons was finished, the participants proceeded to carry out various activities consisting of writing short paragraphs and making audio-recordings of conversations in English which they should upload to the “Evaluations” section.

Later they had to carry out the activities in their workbook and upload them in the “Practice activities” section.

At the end of each module of the course, students took an online quiz type exam through the Eminus “Evaluations” section.

2.5 Evaluation

The evaluation of this emerging pedagogical intervention was carried out through the opinion of the students about the experience left by having migrated from one modality to another due to the SARS COV 2 pandemic. To do so, a questionnaire of 20 open and closed questions was designed and divided into 4 sections:

The first section focused on knowing the opinion of the participants regarding the accessibility of the Eminus platform. The second focused on the instructional design of the remote course. The third questioned about the development of self-recordings and paragraphs for the practice of oral and written skills, and the fourth section was made up of 4 open questions about the experience of having migrated from one modality to another.

2.6 Participants

This pedagogical treatment was worked with 53 students enrolled in the Basic English 1 course at the Poza Rica Language Centre, of the University of Veracruz, Mexico during the February-July 2020 semester. Most of them were high school students, but there were also professionals and housewives. Due to the pandemic, they have had to migrate from an in-person to a virtual modality.

3. Results

The results obtained are presented through two important moments for achieving the objectives of the pedagogical treatment that are described below.

3.1 Development and analysis of the intervention

At the beginning of the February-July 2020 semester, the participants in this intervention had enrolled in the first level of a Basic English course in the face-to-face mode, but due to the suspension of face-to-face academic activities by COVID-19, it was necessary to migrate to the virtual modality through a pedagogical proposal which considered the use of the Eminus institutional platform and an instructional design appropriate to emerging needs.

At the beginning of the intervention, the migration of most of the students was achieved firstly to an induction work that consisted mainly of performing speaking and writing exercises as a review of the topics seen in person and as practice to learn to upload the tasks and activities in the corresponding sections.

In this process, the first dropouts from the course began, which according to conversations by WhatsApp with these students, were mainly due to: problems with the internet and lack of time due to the excessive work of their schools. Of 77 students enrolled in 3 first level English groups, 24 dropped out, leaving 53 students.

After this induction, the remote classes began, continuing the program from where it had been in the face-to-face mode before confinement. In remote classes, topics were explained and English language skills were practiced just as in the face-to-face mode.

During these synchronous sessions a low attendance rate was observed by the students. It is worth mentioning that due to the conditions caused by the pandemic, there were students who could not work regularly because they could not pay for the internet or because they had too many activities derived from their formal education.

However, the students who attended these classes managed to finish their course successfully. At the end of this it was observed that of the 53 students who remained, 45 students managed to accredit it and 8 students could not do it.

3.2 Students' opinion about the project

One of the objectives of this work is to know the opinion of the about their learning experience when migrating from the face-to-face mode to the virtual mode. Participant responses are summarized below:

3.2.1 Students' opinion on the Eminus platform

Most of the students (97%) had not previously worked with the Eminus platform but considered that this platform was suitable for their learning of the English language.

Most of the participants believe that the platform's Classroom tool was adequate to replace their face-to-face classes and that it facilitated their learning.

3.2.2 Students' opinion on the instructional design of the remote course

Over 50% of students believe that the general distribution of the course on the platform (Remote Classes, Assessments, Workbook Tasks and online exams) facilitated their learning.

Most of the participants considered that the evaluations and activities carried out on the platform (speaking, writing, grammar exercises, revisions) contributed to the reinforcement of the topics seen in class and that the online exams were adequate to assess their learning.

3.2.3 Students' opinion on the activities carried out for the development of oral and written skills

Most of the students indicated that the self-recording activities for the practice of oral skills were to their liking and useful for developing oral production. They also stated that they had made a great effort to deliver self-recordings with good pronunciation. In the same way, the majority stated that the activities carried out to develop their writing skills helped them improve it.

3.2.4 Students' opinion on the experience of having emigrated from face-to-face mode to virtual mode

The most pleasant experiences for the students were the following:

1. The self-recordings, since they were helpful in improving their pronunciation.
2. The synchronous classes, because the schedule was respected and they were able to participate and work as in a face-to-face class.
3. Take classes in the comfort of your home.
4. The Eminus platform, since everything was well distributed and easy to use,
5. The facilitator, since she had good didactics, explained well and cleared up doubts.

The least pleasant experiences for the students were the following:

1. In a minority, students stated that they did not like virtual classes very much because they preferred face-to-face sessions.
2. Another part of the virtual course that some students did not like was the deadline for delivery of evaluations, since they forgot the delivery dates.

4. Conclusions

The objective of this work on the migration from a face-to-face course to a virtual course due to the COVID-19 pandemic was to describe how this emerging change of modality was made and to find out the opinion of the students about this experience.

The results included a description of the way in which the migration from the face-to-

face modality to the virtual modality was carried out and the opinion of the participants about it.

From the above, it may be concluded that the strategy implemented for the migration of the course was of great support for students who managed to successfully complete their first level English course, since they were able to understand how to use the Eminus platform, perform the activities in a timely manner and attend remote classes.

It should be noted that these students showed great commitment and interest in virtual work, mainly with regard to the practice of oral skills asynchronously, since most of them made the suggested self-recordings, which gave them greater opportunities for practice and improved their pronunciation in the target language.

It was perhaps unexpected to find that despite the high dropout rate, 45 out of 77 students enrolled, which is equivalent to 58%, managed to finish the course that was originally supposed to end at the beginning of June and that due to the confinement conditions ended until the end of July. Although there was a high dropout rate, more than half of the students were able to pass the next level.

Finally, the need to have public free internet in open areas such as parks or sports fields is highlighted, so that those students who have connection problems due to lack of budget or other issues, can go out to take their classes and carry out their tasks, taking the precautions necessary for healthy distance.

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Shifting Online Curriculum to Incorporate Integrative and Applied Methodologies

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Abstract

Emerging technologies offer the promise of integrating new approaches into the education environment to stimulate learning. Innovative developments are increasing the demand and opportunity to employ cutting-edge strategies rooted in an online platform. While this modality of connection with students offers immeasurable value, it also presents additional challenges for more hands-on, active learning. We intend to introduce several methodologies geared towards enhancing an applied approach to online instruction. These tactics are particularly beneficial when employed in the STEM fields, where demonstrative or investigative techniques in lab activities and project-based learning may be curtailed by newly introduced transitions to a completely online classroom. While experiential learning has always been the standard of excellence in the STEM classroom, in recent years, great strides have been made towards improving remote inquiry-based techniques [1]. We will focus on presenting educational opportunities that support flexible learning while emphasizing planning of pedagogy to promote positive outcomes. We believe these strategies will foster best practices to reinforce content, reach learners in multiple modalities, and secure student success by approaching conventional content in non-traditional ways. This study will highlight preparation for lessons in the online classroom and design and incorporation of specific course and learning objectives. Curriculum will be discussed as it relates to STEM fields, focusing on transferable skills and student achievement. Supporting materials, data, and recommendations will focus on the challenges of divergent student backgrounds and preparedness as we articulate objectives and outcomes of online education.

Keywords: Online Curriculum, Inquiry-based Learning, Applied Methodology, STEM Education

1. Review of the literature

The implementation of new technologies in online education has the power to dramatically increase opportunities for learning by including innovative strategies and techniques for online learning platforms. Applied learning, a practical approach that is supported by research to increase student motivation, foster student-centered instruction, and provide real world context, has the potential to be neglected by online learning platforms. An effort must be made in the transition to online learning environments to include applied learning because it represents an opportunity for high-impact cognition, where students explore content and directly apply new knowledge [2].

Rottman and Rabidoux suggest three examples of effective online applied learning in order to strengthen student learning and increase achievement. These three examples include cooperative learning, service learning and simulations. Even more significant during the COVID-19 crisis is that education is not constrained to our classrooms and

strategies must be employed to reach beyond traditional means to engage students and challenge them to excel. As we explore these challenges, increasing learner and educator responsibility can provide opportunities to support hands-on, active learning.

According to Stavredes, collaboration in problem-based learning in the virtual classroom develops a community of inquiry where learners use critical thinking to engage in discourse and are able to build and integrate knowledge through research activities and multiple perspectives [3]. In public school science classrooms, due to COVID-19 school closures, programs such as SimBio are developing remote lab experiences to ensure continued learning. For example, the focus is on bridging the science classroom to home with hands-on labs or social distancing in the classroom in order to challenge students and continue lab experiences [4]. The pedagogical potential to explore the available tools and information to remain current and incorporate essential investigative lab techniques in the virtual environment is crucial for the online educational environment.

2. Shifting to online curriculum

Technological advances have been designed to foster online content, but until recent times these resources have primarily been used as supplemental, supportive material.

However, recent global events have initiated a sea-change shift to fully online or hybrid format courses, demanding an increased understanding in how to optimize the use of these platforms and a transition in the way these tools are used to facilitate instruction. This shift to the online environment holds the promise of reaching a wider audience base, particularly for the community of English Language Learners (ELLs) where increased clarity and functionality can make a foundational difference in knowledge transition. As institutions of education reassess how to meet the needs of their faculty, staff, and students, the shift to online curriculum will be a significant part of building safe and efficient learning environments. When paired with the experience of the traditional classroom, new technologies have the capacity to round out a more holistic approach to creating the modern educational experience.

Many learning environments have already started the process of adopting online applications and platforms to increase transparency, clarity, and ease of grading. A full integration of these technologies into the educational curriculum, spurred by recent demands for health and safety, will enable both users and facilitators to participate in a more accessible and integrated system. This forced transition is also highlighting areas of need in online education functionality and speeding the processes of mechanistic improvements. This demand is spurring on the development of technologies and promoting the use of beta versions for a number of different platforms that will ultimately act to reinforce learner content and improve the user experience.

3. Integrating methodologies for an applied approach in the online platform

The online platform has a number of advantages that can assist in meeting the educational goals of a learning environment. Incorporation of course goals should be designed into the course framework from the beginning and mapped to measurable outcomes. These technologies provide a platform where all functional modalities of a learning environment exist in one place. This structured environment requires an increased clarity of course goals and expectations where instructors can define parameters for course products including rubrics and timelines. The online forum has the capacity to promote clear, near-instant contact, where direct, one-on-one interactions are encouraged between instructors and students and can assist in building

interpersonal relationships among students as well. This integrated system allows for content delivery in a wide range of modalities in order to reach a broader range of participants, including language learners. This online framework can facilitate new opportunities for content originality, creativity and growth.

4. Experiential learning in STEM and remote inquiry-based techniques

Technological innovations in recent years have created a myriad of options for addressing course goals. The wealth and volume of these choices can be daunting to educators who are attempting to transition to the learning environment for the first time.

Delivery mechanisms including blended, hybrid, asynchronous and synchronous online can be tailored to the course content, level, audience, technical proficiency of both students and instructors, and technological availability and support for the institution and/or location. These advancements can be a significant means of crafting an integrated environment that has the capacity to reach a wider student body, including ELLs.

For STEM disciplines, online instruction can be a powerful tool for supplementing or reinforcing content to increase student comprehension. Studies indicate that in introductory or elective courses, students will perform better when the delivery platform includes a face-to-face element like the blended, hybrid or traditional classroom environment. However, for more advanced courses, transitioning to a fully online environment has not been shown to impede student performance [5, 6]. The online platform has been suggested as a way to “close the gap” in minority participation within STEM fields [7]. Online methodologies should be employed to enhance content and support student performance, and a blended or hybrid approach has been identified as more appropriate for the introductory level in STEM disciplines [6, 8].

Recent developments in information and communication technology allow for classes to be taught in a variety of ways, and teachers are faced with the challenge of selecting the appropriate delivery mechanism specific for their course content and audience, and to utilize the best available tools to assist with the selected delivery mechanisms.

Instructors may offer web assisted, blended, hybrid, asynchronous and synchronous online, or accelerated courses, but the choosing the right mechanism depends on content, level of the class, technological availability, and technical literacy of the instructor. Technological advancements can be powerful instruments for reaching ELLs if they are used in the proper context.

When designing a course for the online environment or focusing on supplementing course instruction with technological advancement to reach a targeted audience, a myriad of resources exists to enrich course design. Instructors can select a text with a paired online software package targeted to improve student comprehension. Many of these online supplemental packages incorporate strategies to focus on the material the students struggle with the most. Educators can take advantage of online tools like Kahoot or Polleverywhere that combine face-to-face instruction with online quizzes and polling to reinforce content and create a fun, real-time response mechanism for student communication. In the STEM disciplines, courses can be designed to blend face-to-face content delivery with simulated online lab software.

In STEM fields, there are a number of different tools and resources available to enrich course design. Many recent textbook editions will have associated paired online learning platforms that can be recommended for improving student comprehension. Online simulated labs, polls, documentaries, and activities provide a mechanism for students to interact with course content in different and fun ways. Institutions like botanical gardens, zoos, natural history museums, observatories, research stations, and universities have

designed collection-specific content to curate a remote experience that increases the participant's understanding in a given field. These exhibits can range from virtual exploration of collections to virtual activities and assignments. Some of these collections promote access to data sets that can serve as the baseline for experimentation and project-based learning. Citizen science projects like iNaturalist or app games (like Gene in Space) that have been developed to help social networks play games to aid in genetic research. By embracing learning games, applications, and tools that are fun, instructors can encourage the use of new technologies to spur on creativity and engagement of participants. In the proper context, these tools will enrich the entire learning environment and increase inclusivity the classroom.

5. Conclusions and future recommendations

It is essential to develop new methodologies to engage students in the virtual classroom in order to stimulate learning and ensure that innovative active learning is taking place. Numerous intriguing technological advancements are emerging every day leading to a global culture that encourages active engagement and strengthens student performance. Further study is needed to focus on the variety of online methodologies and remote inquiry-based techniques that will lead to engagement incorporating demonstrative or investigative techniques in lab activities and project-based learning.

Transforming the virtual classroom is tantamount to student success as educators focus on integrative and applied methodologies for achievement.

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The Recognition of “Soft Skills” through the European Open Badges Platform Project

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Abstract

The article is a study based on the European Open Badges Platform (EU-OBP) project, under the Erasmus+ Programme, which is being implemented in seven European countries: Cyprus, France, Germany, Romania, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden. The project coordinator is EuroEd Foundation, Iasi, Romania. The EU-OBP project aims to assess, develop and promote a common European platform for digital badges, targeted at adult education organizations, adult educators and adult learners. The European open badges platform will enable adult education organizations and adult educators to award digital badges to the public. Adult educators will gain new IT competences and get familiar with innovative tools for the recognition of soft skills and key competencies whereas learners will be awarded badges valid at a European level which will help them with future job seeking or further educational needs. The article outlines the objectives, methodology and outputs of the project and focuses on the main research findings on the use of open badges in Romania and other neighbouring countries.

Keywords: open badges, adult education, recognition, soft skills

1. Introduction

The rapid and profound changes produced by globalization, migration or the unprecedented development of Information and communication technologies (ICT) have affected traditional education. Education no longer happens only in schools. Now there are new ways by which people acquire reliable competences informally or non-formally through their experience and which need to be recognized and validated. It is ICT that may offer practical solutions if wisely used. Open Badges are one of them. Open Badges can ensure the recognition of other ways of learning and the validation of the 21st-century skills, which are not learned at school and are not recognized by university degrees and professional credentials.

A badge is a file in the shape of an icon or medal and consists of metadata about the badge description, a list of criteria to earn the badge, the issuing organization, the issue and expiration date and the web address linked to evidence proving one's skills or achievements. Thus, an open Badge (OB) contains verifiable and interoperable digital credentials. A Badge offers evidence-based credentials easily communicated and understood by observers [1]. Employers, educational institutions or associations can access the metadata saved within each digital image and check its validity online. Open

badges are available as open standards which any organization can use to create, issue and verify digital badges. They are innovative tools for recognizing acquired soft skills to employers or educators and could be included in the EU-based Europass CV system.

There is a wide range of organizations and institutions awarding Open Badges: schools, universities, non-profit organizations, employers and companies, government agencies, libraries, museums, event organizers and science fairs, companies and groups focused on professional development.

2. The EU-OBP Project

The EU-OBP Project and its European Open Badges platform [2] aim at assessing, developing and promoting a common EU platform for digital badges, targeted at adult education organizations, adult educators and adult learners.

2.1 Target groups

The target groups are adult education organizations, adult educators and adult learners, decision-makers in the adult education field, researchers in HR and training, educators' associations, adult education associations and NGO's.

The project meets the needs of adult education organizations and educators by creating an easy to use, motivating digital tool which enables them to identify and file achievements of non-formal, informal and formal learning. The project also meets the needs of adult learners by encouraging them to reflect on their skills acquired in non-formal and informal learning environments and to share their accomplishments with peers and educators.

2.2 The objectives of the project

- a) The EU-OBP Project upgrades results from two Erasmus+ projects (iYOT, www.iyot.eu and OBADE, www.open-badges.eu) with the participation of previously included organizations and two new partners.
- b) The project's partners will research available projects, platforms or organizations to create the complete EUOBP web platform with 'Reader', 'Toolbox' and 'Guidelines' sections, available as open sources.
- c) The project's partners aim to promote Open Badges as a way of recognition of the "soft skills" and the eight key competences in the EU area. At least 500 Open Badges for adult education will be available on the platform by the end of the project. The project will also provide the participating organizations with a series of good practices and tailor-made tools and methodologies corresponding to the current European situation.

Moreover, the platform will display a series of tools (reader, toolkit and guidelines) that can facilitate the promotion of open badges and their role in the open education and their social impact so that future employers will take them into consideration.

2.3 The main outputs of the project

The EU-OBP reader is a comprehensive material and tool for professionals involved in the management and organization of lifelong learning development, working in adult education in their local environment. It is based on previous research on digital badges and their availability and usage and gives those interested in issuing badges insights into the process of the real implementation of open badges. The reader discusses opportunities for using badge in adult education and presents some best practices from formal and non-formal adult education. The last section underlines some strategies for the exploitation of open badges in educational organizations across Europe and

addresses issues related to policy and practice.

The EU-OBP toolkit comprises a collection of good practice ideas on the implementation of Open Badges in organizations at different levels. Each participating partner collected examples of best practice within the national context and other three neighbouring countries; the research covered 28 EU countries and realized an overview of good practices existing in Europe. The identified practices include organizations that issue open badges in Europe, individual websites with digital badges support and individuals who use the open badges system as part of their curricula or in lifelong learning educational activities.

The EU-OBP web platform is the core of the project's results. It displays all identified open badges implementation practices in Europe and instructions on how to use and implement open badges at diverse organizational, teaching and participatory levels. The Web platform EU-OBP aims to raise European organizations' awareness about the role and impact that open badges can have in our society and to encourage them to look for opportunities for implementation.

EU-OBP guidelines provide its readers with the detailed procedures and activities needed for the implementation of open badges at diverse organizational, teaching and participatory levels. Adult learners benefit from a special section which gives them tips on how to implement open badges in their Europass profile, social networks and LinkedIn page.

3. Main research findings on the use of Open Badges in Romania

The beginning of Open Badges in Romania was rather timid illustrated by a few European projects where participants in their online courses were awarded open badges (PrimeTech project [3], DIGICULTURE project [4] addressing adult learners with low digital skills and low-qualified adults involved in the creative industries sector). In other countries, for instance, Italy, Open Badges seem to have a lot of popularity among students who find online courses extremely useful. In Bulgaria, the education institutions develop online platforms that offer certified courses, which include interactive presentations and tests for automatic assessment.

Most of the institutions that were identified by the research either using open badges or in the process of implementing them into their Curricula are educational institutions and organizations: schools or universities. They are interested in upgrading their employees'/ students' language or digital skills. They implemented the open badges they had designed for their employees/students according to their needs.

With the unprecedented development of technology when more and more people require fast and effective training, open badges are likely to become reliable indicators of accomplishment or skills acquired online. However, there are no comprehensive studies to look into this new system of evaluation, at least in the countries covered by the research. There is no feedback analysis of beneficiaries either. Moreover, to our knowledge, there is no association of Open Badge holders meant to support their interests in terms of recognition of the credits OBs stand for.

Badges are still at the beginning although they are simply digital versions of paper credentials showing proof of qualification, skills, etc. There are organizations and institutions which find this system poses some risks (in terms of trust mainly) and so do they find the entire digital environment. Findings show a relation between recognition of OBs and the digital environment of the enterprise. Paper-based certificates are perceived as more reliable than their digital versions.

Our society has changed dramatically influencing learning and assessment: OBs align with the changes but challenge the traditional system in terms of reliability and

credibility. Findings show that OBs are easily recognized when they support, supplement or add something new to the curriculum, that is when they meet existing needs.

Moreover, they are successful when they are designed by the very organization that implements them. OBs that replace existing sections raise questions about their accreditation. Open Badges should meet learners' needs and expectations as learners get them at the end of an online course they choose. OBs will fly when they meet the existing needs of the organization and thus enter the mainstream.

4. Conclusions

The success of Open Badges depends on collaboration, communication and shared views among all stakeholders. We need standardised formats of Obs. The research findings show no standardized forms of open badges. To be recognized and enter mainstream they should comply with certain rules and follow a certain required format.

The criteria for earning an OB should rely on commonly agreed-upon standards. It is also likely that links to credible universities and organisation will add to its value.

The creation of an Open Badge depends on the needs identified by the organization in its context. A successful OB is designed and supported by an interested organization.

Thus, it is much easier for universities to recognize Open Badges because they create and implement the open badge program for their students helping them to acquire the necessary skills outside classes. They know that getting an Open Badge is based on hard work and study and badge earners are not passive recipients.

Also, the success of OBs depends on their promotion supported by testimonials from stakeholders and OB holders who must find their voice and contribute to their development and recognition. European projects may play a significant role in raising organizations' awareness about the impact the OB implementation may have on education. Open Badges can become an alternative way for learners to get validation for any kind of achievement in formal, informal, and non-formal settings across different stages of their life [5]. This validation makes them interesting and useful for employers, motivating for learners putting effort into meeting their learning goals and encouraging for anyone interested in lifelong learning. The unprecedented development of technology requires that more and more people need fast and effective training. Open Badges can fill a gap in the existing offer of certification and recognition and they are likely to become reliable indicators of accomplishment or skills acquired online [6].

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Enhancing Student's Motivation

A Multilingual Language Platform that Redefines the Boundary between Learners and Teachers

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Abstract

This paper introduces a project for an innovative online system of language learning that seeks to improve motivation through narrowly targeting a multilingual or otherwise language-loving audience that is to either benefit from a significantly reduced cost of lessons or generate actual profit. A subscription-based online platform is to enable learners to form pairs and conduct classes in accordance with both the desired language at hand and the two users' proficiency levels as defined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) or a relevant equivalent. The learner whose level is lower in the selected language is to only pay for the "gap" between their and the other learner's proficiency. In other words, let us assume that A and B have decided to study Italian together. A's level is A2, whilst B's level is C1. Therefore, as the difference in proficiency between the learners is three levels, A will be asked to pay three times the price per level as defined in the platform. In contrast, A may choose to study with C, whose level is also A2, in which case there will be no monetary exchange (similarly to a "language exchange" situation). In order for proficiency levels to be evaluated as accurately as possible, all users are to be considered as having a 0 (pre-A1) level unless they can demonstrate language ability via a recognized language certificate. Additionally, users that prove especially high multilingual ability (e.g., owning two C2-level certificates in different languages) are to benefit from a special "mentor" status that comes together with a higher rate of profit when attending classes in any language (encouraging their desire to learn multiple languages and resting on the principle that "language" can be taken as a common concept, its acquisition being continuously enhanced through the study of any specific language).

Keywords: multilingualism, student-teacher relationship, online language learning, language certificates

1. Introduction

The current paper presents an innovative system that seeks to significantly improve motivation for learners who view the study of languages as a pastime and would normally be constrained by time and finances to spend sufficient time engaging in the activity. By removing the strict distinction between "students" and "teachers", the system is to define a plurality of learner types, whose interaction can be selected in a way to meet academic needs as well as to optimally minimize lesson costs or allow monetary profit.

Firstly, the benefits of such a system will be outlined, focusing on its impact on learner motivation and teaching quality. Then, the platform's proposed implementation will be presented. Finally, plans and suggestions regarding future work on the project will be taken note of.

2. Benefits

The system's key sought benefits will be examined via two positive characteristics, pertaining to, respectively, the “learner” and the “teacher” roles: motivation and teaching quality.

2.1 Motivation

The concept of motivation is underlined for two main reasons: firstly, since the system is already aimed at a motivated niche audience and secondly, due to an engagement to actively work towards sustaining and increasing learners' motivation.

Let us note that “motivation” can be broken down into several definitions as well as types. Notably, it may be intrinsic or extrinsic, the former denoting a feeling of enjoyment and a perception of the activity in question itself as a “reward”, and the latter implying an involvement of external, instrumental goals. For the purpose of this study, we are mainly referring to intrinsic motivation, as the assumed target audience enjoys the process and results of learning a language.

Alizadeh is firm in stating that motivation, which “arouses, incites, or stimulates action”, is key for success in general and in foreign language studies in particular [1, p. 11]. He goes on to note that motivation tends to be “infectious” within a group of learners [1], a rather desirable effect in the case of a community of passionate participants. To go further, an important element that adds to the level of motivation is the maximal reduction of common restrictions that the audience is likely to have experienced. Namely, the price of lessons is reduced and, by extension, time is optimized as language lessons are turned into a source of income.

2.2 Teaching Quality

Two distinctive characteristics of the teacher that stem from the project's concept are their general non-nativeness and their multilingualism.

The non-native teacher has been viewed as “deficient or less-than-native speaker” [11, p. 187] and has subsequently developed an inferiority complex in regard to their work [3]. However, as Baskota points out, the ideal teacher as described by students is not necessarily native [3]. Some of the non-native teacher's key strengths include their empathy with and closeness to the student [3]. Medgyes, in turn, specifically points out that non-native teachers have an edge in that they are teachers and learners at the same time [9, p. 434].

Garcia notes that up until recently, even the very fact that a teacher or learner speaks an additional language from the one being studied (notably, English), has been viewed as a hindrance [6]. Offering a deep discussion of what he defines as a monolingual bias, Dufva criticizes the very concept of “foreign language” or “a language” as contrasted with a view on language as a Bakhtinian “plurality of usages and perspectives” [4, p. 110] and “an essentially ‘multi-lingual’ phenomenon” [p. 115].

Indeed, recent experimental research supports the claim that multilingualism or prior experience with language learning is highly beneficial for the acquisition of new languages. According to Anamaria-Mirabela, “academic and cognitive skills transfer readily between languages” [2, pp. 168-9]. In his study, Medgyes discovers “knowledge of other foreign languages” to be a primary criterion of what makes one a good language learner [9]. To go further, Hirosh and Degani present a detailed literature review of past research on the topic, distinguishing between a number of unanimous direct and indirect benefits that multilingualism has on the study of languages [7]. Whilst the former ranges from an ease in acquisition of vocabulary to high learning skills and are best applicable to related languages, the latter involve abstract qualities like general phonological

flexibility [7, p. 900] and an improvement of literacy that is valid “even across different alphabetic orthographies” [7, p. 909].

3. Implementation

3.1 Platform Layout

In terms of visual representation, the platform is to be simple to use as well as intuitive and, as such, it is likely to resemble related websites that involve visible user profiles as well as a scheduling facility. The majority of information is to be accessible solely upon secure login, and profiles are to be generated for each learner and filled in to their personal preference, naturally specifically including information about their language skills and goals. Lessons are to be scheduled internally (such as through the opening and reservation of user time slots) and possibly carried out with the help of an external application, such as Skype or Zoom. The content of individual lessons is to be generally defined by the learners themselves, whilst the creation of learning materials in offered languages may be a future option to consider.

3.2 Monetary Exchange

As mentioned, the system is to replace the traditional price unit “per lesson” by a set price per proven level of language proficiency. Thus, two enthusiasts with no certified language skills can choose to “learn together” without monetary exchange. The closer the process is to “learning together” rather than one user teaching another, the lower the price is going to be. When users’ levels diverge, the learner with the lower level (as defined by CEFR or an established equivalent) is to pay the defined price per level multiplied by the difference in levels. Let us assume that the price per level is set at 3.00 euros. If an A1 learner and an A2 learner are having a class together, then the former is to be asked to pay 3.00 euros to the latter. If the A1 learner decides to have a class with a C1 learner, then they would need to pay four times the price (i.e., 12.00 euros).

In order for community and loyalty to be encouraged, the learner receiving money from the exchange is to be granted the whole payment, whilst the platform’s profit is to be based on subscription fees alone. It would be relevant for the fee to be lower for learners who are willing to demonstrate higher involvement, such as through studying multiple languages.

3.3 “Mentor” Status

The concept of special statuses for experienced learners is not novel to online language exchange environments [8]. In the case of the described system, certain users are to be rewarded for their learning effort and for their close inscription within the system’s “philosophy”. The status “mentor” is to be granted to users who have satisfied a defined condition of proficiency, such as through presenting two C2 level certificates in different languages. One may regard this competence as equivalent to twelve learning levels as per CEFR; therefore, alternatively, different combinations of certificates can also be presented (e.g., two C1 certificates and one A2 certificate).

In practice, a “mentor” is to benefit from a higher price per lesson than their non-badged counterparts. Moreover, this distinction is to apply to all languages on offer (even ones that they have no prior experience with), thus underlining the presented assumption that proficiency in languages can be taken as proficiency in “language” as a general concept.

Although standardized language exams may have drawbacks, such as the reliance on a student’s single performance and difficulty in reaching agreement between national institutions and testing bodies [5], language certificates are used globally to this date and

viewed as beneficial by students [2]. For the purpose of this study, it is important to note that the CEFR framework is engaged in seeking internal coherence between languages and bases much of its research on plurilingual rating and cross-language comparison of test items [10, pp. 16-18]. This being said, it would be optimal if specially prepared level-determination exams are organized and conducted within the platform, especially in view of promising recent trends, such as the introduction of the IELTS Indicator online exam.

4. Conclusion and Future Work

This paper has presented the theoretical framework behind a conceived system that involves the learning of multiple languages as combined with an opportunity to reduce costs or make a financial profit. As explained, the project's main goal is to both seek and enhance learners' motivation. However, the described system has not been tested through practical experimentation. In order for the platform to be launched as a trial, a number of language enthusiasts would need to be involved. Consequently, their experience may be analysed with the help of a questionnaire that addresses the system's performance in relation to key concepts like quality, satisfaction, and problems encountered. The focus should be on qualitative rather than quantitative evaluation; both because of the noted focus on intrinsic appreciation and due to the time restriction, that is unlikely to allow for learners' progress to be evaluated objectively solely based on experimental use.

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An Interdisciplinary Approach to Language Learning through Community Engagement

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Abstract

Research overwhelming demonstrates that students learn, comprehend, and retain concepts much more effectively by actively participating in lessons rather than by passively absorbing them. The conversion of lessons into meaningful and relevant community engagement projects offers students experiences that start them on a journey toward linguistic excellence and multicultural competency. The more students understand a community with whom they are engaging, the more they will want to become immersed in that community, speak their language, eat their food, enjoy their music, and more importantly, befriend, understand, and respect the people within that community. Navigating successfully through the projects helps students acquire important leadership skills while becoming linguistically competent and globally minded. In an era where diversity and cultural understanding is critical, it is incumbent upon language professors to go beyond the signifiers of the vocabulary and the grammar and immerse students in situations they will experience in real life. Language professors should ask themselves this question, “Will my students remember the vocabulary and the grammar taught to them from a textbook and a chalkboard or will they remember the satisfaction they felt at being able to employ the class content in the resolution of a real-life problem?” This paper will help answer that question by highlighting three major community-based language projects created at Penn State Berks. It will illustrate how the connections between course content and projects are made and how the outcomes of those projects help to continuously mold language instruction on our campus. It will conclude by demonstrating how those projects were adapted and converted to virtual opportunities when the world was suddenly confronted with the Covid-19 pandemic.

Keywords: Enhancing Student Engagement, Project-Based Learning

1. Introduction

Motivation is the cornerstone of a successful language learning classroom [1 Jones, 2020] [2 Alshenqeeti, 2018]. Class materials and activities must be fresh, exciting, and *relevant*. They must provide relevance for the student seeking to apply the classroom content to the outside world. Enter Community Engagement, which integrates meaningful and relevant community service with instruction and reflection. The learning derives “from active engagement with the community and work on a real-world problem.

Reflection and experiential learning strategies underpin the process, and the service is linked to the academic discipline” [3 Bringle and Hatcher, 1999].

Penn State Berks (PSB) is located just outside the city of Reading. Since 2010, the Hispanic/Latino population in Reading has been steadily rising. Statistics indicate that 60% of Reading’s population is now Hispanic/Latino [4 Malone, 2016]. Hispanics account for 85% of the population in the Reading School District. [5 Public School Review, 2020].

The Spanish department at PSB has created over 17 different community engagement experiences that linguistically and culturally complement every Spanish class taught on campus. This paper describes the three programs that offer the highest degree of interdisciplinary collaboration.

2.1 Migrant Education After School Program

Since the early twentieth century, Latino immigrants from Mexico, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic have been relocating to the city of Reading to work in the mushroom fields and manufacturing jobs [6 Garcia, 1997]. As manufacturing jobs declined, workers found work in neighbouring county nurseries, fruit processing facilities, dairies and poultry and beef farms. This type of work is very often seasonal, so families are forced to migrate from county to county in search of the next seasonal opportunity which means their school age children may attend as many as four or five schools in one academic year. The [Migrant Education Program](#) (MEP) exists to provide instructional support and services to students whose education is interrupted by their migrant lifestyle.

Students from PSB served as tutors for the program.

Prior to the start of the tutoring sessions, Spanish language students who were also enrolled in civic engagement and social justice classes analysed the history of the program and how it came to be an integral part of the Reading School District. Spanish students taking education classes assisted by providing tutoring tips as well as age appropriate lesson plans. PSB students tutored the children in reading, math, language arts and other general homework assignments. In turn, the students learned first-hand about the plight of Hispanics in Reading and their struggles to obtain an education.

To participate in the project, students had to commit to a minimum of one afternoon per week, for three consecutive weeks; however, several students committed to tutoring the entire semester. Those who stopped after three weeks cited conflicts with their jobs and/or their participation on a sports team. Those that stayed the entire semester indicated that they had created such a strong bond with the children that they did not want to disappoint their tutees by leaving them before the semester had ended.

For the Spanish language students, tutoring the children became an exciting extension of the classroom. They applied the vocabulary and grammar they learned in the classroom to a real-life setting and spoke Spanish in real time with real people. A successful community engagement project should challenge students to perform outside of their comfort zone, but only insofar as the challenge is motivating, not frustrating [7 Lear & Abbott, 2009] [8 Knouse & Salgado Robles, 2015]. Thus, the beginning language students were tasked with helping first graders solve simple math problems. This allowed students to feel comfortable and increase their self-confidence. As the semester progressed and students advanced in their Spanish studies, they were able to tutor the children in more complex assignments such as language arts and help them read and write simple sentences. Language students who were at the intermediate or advanced levels of the Spanish, assisted the children in subjects that required more in-depth conversation such as geography and science.

The tutoring experience afforded the language students repeated and individual oral/aural practice. In addition, they received relevant writing practice by submitting a reflection composition after each third week rotation. The compositions provided a unit of measure to compare their progress in Spanish against those who were not in Spanish community engagement classes. Surveys administered to participants indicated that the project motivated them to use the target language more often and more willingly than those who were not enrolled in community engagement class. Out of approximately 50 participants per year, surveyed for the past five years, 48% reported that they were very satisfied at how the program increased their comfort level in speaking Spanish, that the

experience helped them understand and empathize with the migrant children, and that they would be willing to repeat the experience in the future. These results point to motivation and relevance as important factors in creating a positive attitude toward learning and applying Spanish outside of the classroom.

2.2 Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges 2

Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges 2 is a collaborative project between Penn State Berks, the Reading School District, and Latino artists from the Reading Community that utilizes the arts and humanities to explore themes of discrimination, cultural poverty, health, and community re-entry. It is a semester long project that culminates in an evening celebration of multicultural dance performances, live music, spoken word, child created art, and live portrait painting. The project represents community-based learning at its best, exemplifying the promotion of intercultural competence through an experiential exchange [9 Zapata, 2011].

The project increases cross-disciplinary teaching and collaboration as evidenced by the various English, Spanish, History, Criminal Justice, Civic Engagement, African American studies, and Rehabilitation and Human Services that participate in the project.

Working with Latino community organizations increases our students' understanding of diversity, inclusion/exclusion, and marginalization. The participants involved in the project had an opportunity to design, interact, perform, report, record, discuss and learn, and most importantly, "be involved in creative, progressive change in [our] communities" [10 Dewald 2015]. Following the model set forth by Hatcher, Bringle and Hahn [11 2017], this collaboration of multicultural experiences and issues embodies inclusivity, creates a message of social justice awareness, advances the awareness of critical issues in our community, and enhances teaching and research outcomes.

The impact this project has on students in Spanish language and classes is immense.

This project provides a total immersion experience in which students engage in the target language and the culture of the Latino community. Whether serving as a bilingual ambassador the night of the event, greeting the spectators, distributing the program booklets, participating in rehearsals, running the art competition, translating the program booklet, painting with children of incarcerated parents to create the art show, or performing a bilingual spoken word number, language students are continuously deploying the four basic skills of language learning: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. In-depth class discussions and reflection papers, in Spanish, provide important outlets for students express their emotional reactions to the project. This program provides powerful, real-life lessons that cannot possibly be taught from a textbook [12 Moreno-López, Ramos-Sellman, Miranda-Aldaco, & Gomis Quinto, 2017].

Approximately 80 Penn State Berks students participated in this program. Their reflection papers inform us that for 100% of the participants, the project created a positive change in attitude toward the way they viewed Latinos and formed a better understanding of the Spanish language and culture. Students, community partners and spectators were surveyed to measure the impact of the program and its culminating event. Out of the 200 total people surveyed (students, community, and spectators), 100% indicated that the semester long project created a strong and positive impact on all involved and that it was "uplifting and empowering." 50% of participants found the experience to be life altering. 100% of the students indicated they would be happy to participate in the program again.

2.3 Anti-Litter Campaign

The Schuylkill River Trail and Bare Park are commonly frequented by Latino neighbourhood children. PSB created an anti-litter campaign to keep the areas green,

safe, and usable. The campaign consisted of several sustainable activities: a designated clean-up “day” that occurred twice a year, once in the fall and once in spring; a spring nature festival and a fall educational Fun-Day Fair at the Olivet Boys and Girls Club to highlight the importance of the park and the trail. English students developed a schedule of neighbourhood meetings to discuss and promote the campaign. Communication Arts and Science students provided the publicity for the meetings and the campaign itself.

The Environmental Sciences students informed residents and participants how to properly recycle. Biology students tested the river water and studied the birds that lived along the trail. Since the residents of the area were primarily Spanish speaking, it was essential that Spanish students be present at all the events to provide translation and interpretation. They served as language ambassadors to Spanish speaking families who assisted with the campaign and translated the campaign materials into Spanish.

The project was well suited for the content taught in the Spanish Intermediate Level because half of the readings and the classified vocabulary found in their textbook dealt with health and wellness, environmental awareness, and civic responsibility. Since the course content could be tied directly to the project, a service-learning section of Intermediate Level Spanish was created. Students were given a choice to either take a “regular” Spanish class or to enrol in the service-learning section. Out of 75 students, 24 of them enrolled in the service-learning class. Incorporating service-learning into a course requires thoughtful pre-planning and thorough follow-up. The service activity is not an additional component, but an alternative way to teach course concepts.

Successful learning and effective community contributions depend upon a well-integrated package of syllabus, orientation, reflection, and assessment [13 Ballard and Barry, 2009]. The syllabus clearly outlined the expectations of the service-learning course. Not only would students have to be engaged in community activities, but they would also be expected to create the content for the festival and the fun-day fair.

Since the textbook provided the context for the project, their progress in the language could be monitored by regular classroom assessments such as tests and writing assignments. Those that favourably viewed their role in the project performed better than those who did not. They invested more time in learning the vocabulary, practicing the grammar, and understanding the readings that dealt with environment. They also participated more in class and worked steadily toward the success of the campaign.

It was, without a doubt, an ambitious project. However, out of the 24 students surveyed in the Intermediate Spanish class, more than half the students reported it was a positive experience. Those that viewed it as a negative experience cited reasons such as “took too much time” and “interfered too much with other classes.” About 96% of the students felt that the project was an effective way for them to advance in the Spanish language.

3. The switch to virtual engagement

As this paper has illustrated, using the target language in a rich and meaningful way with heritage speakers in a service-learning setting can increase student motivation and productivity in the study of a foreign language [14 Barrenche and Ramos-Flores, 2013].

With the onset of the pandemic in March 2020, our in-person programs came to an abrupt halt. At first, professors and students were all-consumed in learning how to transfer the traditional, in-person educational experiences into remote instruction.

However, once everyone adjusted to the new reality and had time to think outside of a zoom call, creativity rose once again. Obviously, The Migrant Education After School Tutoring Program could no longer function as it did in-person. To continue a relationship with the program, PSB created a Virtual Bilingual Storytelling Program in its place.

Students selected short and simple readings readily available in both English and Spanish on the Internet, rehearsed them, and recorded themselves performing a dramatized reading of the story. Other students collected the individual readings and turned them into one continuous video, with an introduction that provided context to what the children would be watching. The video was then made available on a YouTube channel, accessible to anyone with an Internet connection.

The Breaking Barriers Building Bridges program was the most difficult to replicate in a remote environment. However, participants of the program created an alternative. They contacted several Latino community leaders and asked them to participate in a series of public service videos that could be broadcast to the campus and community alike. To date they have created and recorded bilingual videos such as Voter Registration Information, Dominican Cooking Demonstrations, Caribbean Dance Lessons, and a Post-Election Reflection.

The anti-litter campaign had to completely recreate itself. Instead of in-person clean-ups, festivals, and fairs, the students now provide important translation services to the city of Reading for pamphlets that they distribute to the public on issues ranging from sanitation to public health.

4. Conclusion

The in-person projects described herein have been employed in Spanish classes at Penn State Berks for the past five years and will continue to be offered for as long as student and community interest exists. Based on students' enthusiastic willingness to convert the programs to virtual platforms, it is reasonable to conclude that these programs are a successful tool in transferring the old-fashioned, rote language teaching methods to contemporary real-life experiences [15 Philp & Duchesne, 2016]. They provide the meaningful and relevant experiences that today's students seek in applying classroom content to real life situations. When students are motivated, they become more productive. Not only have PSB students become more proficient in using their language skills outside the classroom, but they have also become more civic minded and culturally sensitive. As evidenced from the students' proactive reaction to the pandemic, the interdisciplinary approach has also taught them to think more of just themselves, molding them into responsible and global minded citizens that will create tomorrow's positive and equitable communities.

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Analysis of Learners' Perception of Learning Diaries in Hybrid EFL Instruction: Do Individual Learner Variables Make a Difference?

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Abstract

In the domain of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), motivation has been established as an important factor in e-learning success [1]. Moreover, language learning motivation can itself be related to other psychological variables as well as to the acceptance of reflection tasks (such as learning diaries) that can be implemented in EFL instruction as a means of promoting self-regulated behaviour [2], [3]. It can therefore be assumed that learners' experience with writing learning diary entries in hybrid EFL will be associated with their perception of the online activities and various psychological variables including metacognitive strategies as a determinant of self-regulation.

The emphasis of the paper is on (a) learners' perception of keeping a learning diary as a component of the pedagogical design in an EFL hybrid setting and its respective correlation with (b) learners' perception of other online learning activities and (c) psychological variables that can account for learners' engagement in performing reflection tasks.

The paper examines several individual characteristics of learners in a hybrid undergraduate EFL course. Respondents in the reported study performed two collaborative grammar e-tivities – creation of a textual grammar report on a given topic. The collaborative e-tivities were accompanied by individual reflection tasks (pre- and post-activity learning diary entries).

The survey data revealed a fairly positive average assessment of the learning diaries. Also, a positive correlation between the respondents' evaluation of learning diaries and grammar e-tivities was established. The correlation analysis also confirmed the hypothesized interrelationship between the respondents' learning diaries perception and all individual learner characteristics. Such findings indicate the importance of considering various factors that may have an impact on learners' readiness to engage in reflection tasks in hybrid grammar instruction. They also highlight the potential of learning diaries as a reflection task format in enhancing the metacognitive and motivational aspects of EFL grammar instruction in a constructivist hybrid setting.

Keywords: CALL, individual differences, reflection, learning diaries, grammar, e-tivities

1. Rationale of the research

In CALL research there is awareness of multiple criteria needed for evaluation of the effectiveness of online instruction in a given context. Some of the factors that determine the success of pedagogical approaches in online L2 instruction are also related to learner variables (see the model of CALL in [4]). In online learning settings learners need to make decisions about how to plan their learning, how to practice what they have learned

and how to reflect on the learning process. Reflective activities (such as learning diaries or self-reports) can be used by learners to synthesize their learning experience [2]. In collaborative writing tasks, for example, which themselves foster reflection among participants [5], individual reflective tasks can be used for capturing learners' individual feedback [2]. In addition to raising the students' awareness of their own learning (i.e., metacognitive awareness), reflective techniques in the L2 classroom also have a motivational potential [3]. An important criterion in evaluating the effectiveness of using technology to support instruction in a hybrid setting are learner perceptions of different aspects and components of the hybrid L2 setting (learner satisfaction, improvement of learner experience, etc.) [6].

The research presented in this paper is at the intersection of the following domains of research on both conventional and hybrid ESL/EFL instruction and CALL: (a) learner autonomy; (b) role of reflection tasks in hybrid EFL/CALL; (c) Individual differences (psychological learner variables); (d) learner assessment of online pedagogical tasks.

2. Aim

The research in this paper was aimed at the use of quantitative survey data to establish the students' perception of the reflective task, as well as its possible relationship with their perception of the performed e-tivities (grammar reports) and several individual characteristics.

The following research questions were therefore defined for our study:

- **RQ1:** What are the average ratings for the students' assessment of individual learning diaries that accompanied their performance of out-of-class e-tivities?
- **RQ2:** Is there a relationship between (1) the students' assessment of individual learning diaries and (2) their overall perception of three aspects of conducted grammar e-tivities and each grammar e-tivity in particular?
- **RQ3:** Is there a relationship between (1) the students' assessment of individual learning diaries and (2) the selected psychological variables?

3. Method

3.1 Sample and procedure

The respondents in this study are first-year students (N=97; 89% male and 11% female; aged 18-23, mainly aged 19) enrolled in an English for Information Technology undergraduate course at a Croatian university. During one semester students worked in small teams outside class to create **two written grammar reports** on two different advanced grammar topics that were otherwise not covered in the course (Conditionals: Unreal conditions; Causative *have*; Subjunctive and unreal past; Reported questions and commands; Participle phrases).

The grammar reports were integrated with reflective tasks – **learning diary entries (logs)** aimed at raising students' awareness of: the language task (structuring, drafting and writing up a report), their knowledge and complexity of the grammar topic, collaboration with teammates, importance of time management and other constraints inherent in the performance of the out-of-class task. By writing semi-structured diary entries (*two* for each e-tivity – one before the creation of the grammar report on a selected topic and the other after submitting the grammar report) students engaged in individual reflection on the aforementioned issues before and after each e-tivity. At the end of the course, respondents were asked to fill out a survey questionnaire.

The prompts for the semi-structured diary entries that were submitted as Word documents via LMS Moodle included a *pre-activity* and *post-activity* log. The **pre-activity**

log included the following prompts: (a) What I think I know about the topic; (b) Things I am good at concerning the task / grammar topic; (c) My goal (What I want to learn about the grammar topic); (d) What I could do and why it may help me; (e) Things I may find difficult while doing the task. The **post-activity log** included the following prompts: (a) How well I achieved the goal; (b) What I learnt about the grammar topic; (c) What I learnt about learning; (d) How I dealt with the difficulties with doing the task.

3.2 Instruments

The survey conducted at the end of the semester, after the performance of the e-tivities included the following 8 scales (answers were provided on a Likert scale ranging from 1 – “I totally disagree” to 5 – “I totally agree”):

(1) **Students’ self-assessment of learning diaries after the performance of e-tivities**; self-created scale (9 items); example of an item: “Keeping a language log on the written grammar e-tivity made me think about how to perform the given e-tivity as best as I can”;

(2) **Students’ evaluation of three aspects of e-tivities**: mainly adapted from [7], [8], [9]; (a) *E-tivity content* (6 items); example of an item: “The e-tivity content was well-adjusted to the needs of the students in the course”; (b) *E-tivity methodology* (7 items); example of an item: “Explanations were clear (including appropriate examples) and concise”; (c) *Interaction among participants during e-tivities* (7 items); example of an item: “Activities required a variety of interactional patterns: teacher-student, student-teacher, student-student”;

(3) **Students’ evaluation of each of the two e-tivities**: self-created scale (7 items); example of an item: “The performance of the written e-tivity (grammar report) was motivating for my learning of English”;

(4) Individual characteristics: (a) **Motivation for learning L2** (as an affective learner variable including both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation); (12 items) adapted from [9], [10], [11]; example of an item: “I participated in the e-tivities in the English course for the pleasure I experience in knowing more about the English language”; (b) **Metacognitive strategies in online language learning** (9 items); adapted from the survey for assessment of learner strategies in using internet resources [12]; example of an item: “When I finish learning on the computer I check if my work is correct/how well I have done”; (c) **social strategies in online language learning** (7 items) adapted from [12]; example of an item: “When I don’t know the answer while doing an exercise on the computer I ask someone else for help”;

(5) Learner variables related to self-regulated behaviour: (a) **Effort invested in using online resources in the EFL course** (14 items); mainly adapted from [8], [13]; example of an item: “Considering the amount of time I have studied English, I am satisfied with my progress”; (b) **Personal goal-setting** (6 items) – mainly adapted from [8], example of an item: “I like to embrace challenging educational goals, such as learning by means of new internet technologies”.

4. Results and discussion

The statistical methods used for the analysis of quantitative data in accordance with the research questions included: (a) descriptive analysis (Research question 1) and (b) correlation analysis (Pearson correlation) (Research questions 2 and 3).

4.1 Students’ assessment of the learning diary tasks

Average ratings regarding the students’ assessment of an exercise consisting of two individual learning diary entries submitted before and after the completion of each

grammar e-tivity are presented in Table 1. As can be concluded from the data presented in Table 1, the highest average ratings (in the range from 3.34 to 3.57) of written diary entries were given by the students in relation to task accomplishment elements (practical: performance of e-tivity and use of previous experience; reflectional: assessment of success in e-tivity and assessment of procedure needed to complete an e-tivity) of written grammar e-tivities. Also, all of the rated elements received at least an average rating of 3.00, which could be interpreted in the following way: writing diary entries was considered useful by some of the students who performed them in the “English language I” course.

Table 1. Results of descriptive analysis of data related to the assessment of learning diary tasks (responses on the Likert scale ranging from 1 – “I totally disagree” to 5 – “I totally agree”; the order of evaluation elements in Table 1 is from highest to lowest average rating by the students; N=97)

Evaluation element	Evaluation area	M	SD
Writing diary entries on the written grammar e-tivity enabled me to perform the given e-tivity as best as I can.	Performance – task accomplishment	3.57	.92
Writing diary entries on the written grammar e-tivity motivated me to apply my previously acquired experience in completing the given task.	Performance – task accomplishment	3.47	.98
Writing diary entries on the written grammar e-tivity enabled me to assess how successfully I completed the given task.	Reflection – task accomplishment	3.38	1.09
Writing diary entries on the written grammar e-tivity made me think about how to perform the given e-tivity as best as I can.	Reflection – task accomplishment	3.34	1.15
I believe that writing diary entries on the written grammar e-tivity generally contributed to the success of the “English language I” course.	Relation to course success	3.33	1.11
Writing diary entries on the written grammar e-tivity helped me to understand a specific English grammar topic.	Theoretical content – reflection	3.23	1.04
I believe that writing diary entries on the written grammar e-tivity generally contributed to motivating other students.	Student motivation	3.11	1.01
I believe that writing diary entries on the written grammar e-tivity generally contributed to the acquisition of content for other students in the “English language I” course.	Student content acquisition	3.05	1.08
Writing diary entries on the written grammar e-tivity was motivating for my English language learning.	Self-motivation for language learning	3.00	1.00

4.2 Correlation between students’ assessment of individual learning diary tasks and collaborative grammar e-tivities

The results of correlation analysis that are presented in Table 2 reveal a rather high correlation of the students’ evaluation (assessment) of learning diary tasks with their perception of two grammar e-tivities ($r=.649$ and $r=.685$), as well as a moderate correlation (in the range from $r=.306$ to $r=.446$) with their perception of the overall aspects of grammar e-tivities (e-tivity content, methodology and interaction among participants in e-tivity performance).

Table 2. Correlation (Pearson correlation coefficient) between students' evaluation of learning diary tasks (logs), and aspects of e-tivities (for both e-tivities together) and each particular e-tivity

	E-tivity content (both e-tivities)	E-tivity methodology (both e-tivities)	E-tivity interaction (both e-tivities)	Grammar e-tivity 1	Grammar e-tivity 2
Assessment of the learning diary tasks	.402**	.446**	.306**	.649**	.685**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

4.3 Correlation between students' assessment of individual learning diary tasks and individual learner variables

Correlation coefficients between the assessment of the learning diary tasks, on the one side, and individual learner differences (L2 Motivation, Effort in using online resources, Personal goal-setting, Metacognitive strategies in online language learning, Social strategies in online language learning), on the other side, are presented in Table 3. The highest correlation was found between *Assessment of the learning diary tasks* and individual learner variable *Effort in using online resources* ($r = .476$). Also, a moderate correlation was found between *Assessment of the learning diary tasks* and *Social strategies in online language learning* ($r = .465$), as well as with *Metacognitive strategies in online language learning* ($r = .460$). Somewhat lower but statistically significant correlation was found between *Assessment of the learning diary tasks* and *L2 motivation* ($r = .392$) and a low correlation was found with *Personal goal-setting* ($r = .244$). The aforementioned results of the correlation analysis clearly indicate the interconnection of the evaluation (assessment) of the learning diary tasks with individual learner variables that were included in research that is presented in our paper.

Table 3. Correlation (Pearson correlation coefficient) between students' evaluation of learning diary tasks (logs) and five self-assessed psychological individual learner variables

	L2 motivation	Effort in using online resources	Personal goal-setting	Metacognitive strategies in online language learning	Social strategies in online language learning
Assessment of the learning diary tasks	.392**	.476**	.244**	.460**	.465**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

5. Conclusion

The aims of this paper were: (1) to use the quantitative data collected in a survey to empirically explore various factors related to students' perception of written reflective tasks (learning diary entries) that accompanied out-of-class collaborative online activities (e-tivities) in hybrid EFL grammar instruction; (2) based on the results of the quantitative data analysis (survey questionnaire), to discuss the role of reflective tasks integrated in EFL hybrid grammar instruction.

We therefore hypothesized that students' individual perception of learning logs would be interrelated with their perception of aspects of grammar e-tivities, on the one side, and several individual factors (motivation and several variables related to respondents' self-regulated and strategic behaviour), on the other. In the correlation analysis of the survey data significant positive interrelationships were confirmed between the assessment of learning diary entries and the perception of grammar e-tivities, as well as between the assessment of learning diaries and motivation, effort, goal-setting, metacognitive strategies and social strategies of the subjects in our study. Such findings indicate that students' readiness to engage in reflection on computer-supported grammar activities may also depend on their individual psychological factors, as well as their perception of the online (grammar) task itself. When the learner evaluation of their experience of submitting diary entries as part of creating grammar reports is concerned, favourable average ratings were also obtained. It needs to be noted that the established correlations do not reveal any causal relationships (for example, it cannot be claimed that writing diary entries made students more motivated or made them perceive the grammar e-tivities more favourably). However, on the basis of the results of our study it can be concluded that learner diaries may represent a worthwhile contribution to student engagement and promoting their self-directed learning skills, as well as to their metacognitive and metalinguistic development. Integrating diary entries (logs) as a technique for scaffolding learner autonomy in language instruction may be of particular importance for students' involvement in out-of-class online activities, such as the writing of grammar reports as an activity within the constructivist approach to grammar instruction in our research.

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Language Counselling and Learner Advising in and out of the Classroom

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Abstract

This paper will provide an overview of Language Learner Advising and illustrate some of the theoretical underpinnings. It will identify the key areas of adviser intervention with a particular focus on the promotion of learner autonomy, learning-to-learn skills, language awareness, learner motivation and the use of reflective dialogues. This paper will draw on examples of best practice from higher education with reference to the ongoing debate on the blurring boundaries of the classroom brought about by the use of technology.

Keywords: language learning, counselling, advising, language awareness

1. Introduction

The practice of “Learner Advising” was initially developed following the establishment within many European Universities of Language Centres for self-access and independent learning in the 80's [1] and in correspondence with a growing interest in language learner development in terms of learner strategies and autonomy in the 90's [1], [2], [3]. Over the years, the literature has often referred to learner counselling and advising interchangeably. This ambiguity was addressed in 2015, however, by Mynard and Carson [4] who argued for a preference for “advising” on the grounds that, although the two fields share a lot in common, the term “counselling” carries with it an additional idea of therapeutic or psychological support which can be misleading in educational contexts. Finally, even though there is a natural overlap between the knowledge base and skills of *language teachers* on the one hand and of *advisers* on the other, the literature has increasingly emphasised the importance of providing advisers with specific training in the interest of quality and effectiveness of the advisory process both for the end user, i.e., the learner, and in terms of professional development for language experts and teachers working in the field of advising [3], [4], [5], [6].

2. Learner advising

In the literature, the term “learner advising” refers to the following activity: individual sessions between language teaching and learning experts with students in support of independent language learning. This activity initially took place in relation to self-access language laboratories or libraries affiliated with universities or adult learning centres [1], [2]. Indeed, it was often the case that students who were not enrolled in official language courses where they could rely on direct contact with teachers would often make use of “advisers” within the self-access centres for information about language-learning resources, materials and their learning. Issues that were often addressed with advisers included advice on learner strategies and content specific information. Furthermore, as many of the language learning centres provided digital learning support and

technological resources for learning, advisers would often be approached by learners for guidance in the use of technology. Over time, language learning centres also became a point of reference for students enrolled in more structured language learning contexts such as in full scale language courses either within the various university departments or in courses run by Language Centres for non-language specialists [7], [8]. Thus, learner advisers began to provide services for a broader range of students with diverse needs. In many instances, advisers were hired by the Centres for the sole purpose of language advising [7]. In other cases, language teachers would also act as advisers either for their own students or for the general self-access public [8].

Finally, the rise of the use of technology within formal teaching contexts, i.e., within the classroom, has led to the unavoidable blurring of the boundaries between teaching and advising as well. The more online and technologically driven options students have, the greater the opportunities for independent learning and learning outside classroom.

This shift in learner options and practices has also led to a shift in the role of the language teacher with “facilitating” and “advising” becoming a key activity and an integral part of teacher expertise. An example of this is the blended learning approach of the “flipped classroom” whereby student/teacher “in-class” time is devoted to answering student questions and participating in conversations about the subject initiated by students themselves rather than to the presentation of concepts and materials which can be catered for asynchronously with the use of digital resources [9].

3. The reflective dialogue

At the heart of the advising experience is what is referred to in the literature as the “reflective dialogue” [10], [11]. Advising draws on two fundamental areas of expert knowledge: content knowledge and knowledge about the learning process including the affective dimension of language learning. While it can be argued that both types of knowledge should be part of any language teacher’s professional expertise, it is nevertheless fair to say that often the everyday conditions in which most language educators work are such that the focus is often on the transmission of knowledge and content for large numbers of students rather than on the learning process as it is experienced by the individual learner. And, it is indeed within the framework of the conversation between trained expert and novice that both aspects can be fully taken into account. The dialogue between adviser and advisee, while intentional is its purpose, is often loosely structured allowing for the learner to develop an awareness of their specific needs in relation to their language learning. Indeed, one of the key characteristics of learner advising is that it is student-led or student-determined as a way of encouraging and developing learner autonomy. The adviser’s role is primarily to support the learner in increasing their awareness about their learning in relation to their individual needs and goals. In some cases, students may require greater adviser intervention and probing, in other cases, for example, learners will display adequate self-determination and awareness and use the adviser more as an opportunity to check their learning is on track.

Over the years, with more adviser practices being put in place, a number of studies and protocols have been developed which provide for a degree of structure to the reflective dialogue in terms of both what goes on in individual sessions and how the process can be structured over time. However, whatever the degree of structure and whatever the duration and the context, reflective dialogues are generally characterized by the following elements: a conversation-based dialogue where both adviser and learner can ask and answer questions; a comfortable and welcoming environment where the learner feels it is appropriate to discuss issues that may concern the affective dimension of learning; adviser expertise is readily accessible to the learner through the

framework of the conversation; the adviser is able to direct or redirect learners through the use of specific questions about the learner's beliefs about language and learning, about their learning strategies and habits and about their study plans in relation to their aims and goals. The ultimate aim of reflective dialogues should be that of ensuring that the learner is sufficiently autonomous and aware of the language learning process in which they are engaged in relation to their needs.

3.1 Learner identity

The degree to which reflective dialogues have an impact on the learner will depend on a number of factors but in particular it will vary with the learner's needs. Advisers may also find that their degree of ease in addressing certain issues with learners may vary and that they may require additional training. Indeed, language learning often is a powerful trigger of emotions and may bring to the surface entrenched learner beliefs about learning, their perceptions and beliefs about their abilities, preconceived ideas about the target language and culture and about one's own language(s) and identity. In this sense, advising can be seen to have an important transformative potential for learners as a means of increasing their understanding of self in relation to the other as part of the language learning process. The importance of this reflective activity and its implications in terms of learning and teacher expertise is also the subject of research in the related field of "Language Awareness" [12]. Awareness raising activities are indeed in no way confined to individual teacher-learner encounters. For example, many language awareness activities are frequently carried out in the foreign and second language classroom at all levels of education. In the classroom context, reflection upon learning, language and learner identity takes place as a collective learning process and is based on and benefits from teacher-led group discussion and reflective activities.

4. Conclusion

The field of Language learner advising has come a long way since its outset but its core contribution to language education remains the same: individual and personalized support to language learners in the interest of their learning, ongoing development and autonomy. What we are seeing today, however, is a more systematic weaving together of the different fields of study (i.e., from research into language learner motivation, agency and self-determination, learner strategies, autonomy, language awareness, and to studies on affect) into a more uniform structuring of the field which, in turn, has led to a more robust understanding of what are considered Learner Advising best practices [11]. An additional development is the change in mode of delivery of reflective dialogues and learner advising encounters. Indeed, what was once a face-to-face practice is now an online option as well. Furthermore, a practice which was initially devised as an "out of class" option of independent study programmes is now making its way as a form of support in more structured educational contexts. And, with a rise in online language learning and in the scope and number of digital learning spaces and materials available to learners and teachers it can be argued that the advising process itself has become more complex. At the same time, with the introduction of technology-driven pedagogic innovation such as flipped classrooms, blended learning contexts and mobile learning, educators and language teachers are undeniably being nudged to question their roles and the structures which traditionally have shaped teacher-learner interactions and expectations.

To conclude, in spelling out some of the issues surrounding learner advising it is hoped that the pedagogical potential of adviser-learner interactions and reflective dialogues will inspire language teachers to seek greater opportunities for Learner

Advising within some of their mainstream practices not only as a way of enriching the experience for learners but also as a professional response to the changing educational landscapes we work in. As a flexible and adaptable pedagogic framework, it can be argued that Learner Advising is well suited to meeting many of the language learning and teaching challenges we are currently facing in and out of the classroom, online and offline.

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Learning English with We Are the Champions by Queen Lesson Plan

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Abstract

Why listen to songs in an English class? And why listen to We Are the Champions by Queen? The answer is because we can use song lyrics to improve listening skills, pronunciation, accent, spelling, expand student vocabulary, work on items of grammar and inspire students at the same time. The activity will show how songs are beneficial, meaningful, authentic, encouraging and motivating. They can spark interest in learners of all ages.

The activity will show how to create an enjoyable and anxiety-free environment by generating fun warm-up, main and follow-up activities.

The activity will discuss how several aspects of a language can be addressed and recycled in songs. In order to do that, a methodology will be introduced on how to get lyrics ready for a gap fill activity to do with students as main activity in order to create interest and learning.

The activity will also discuss some results based on experience with students of different levels of English as well as with teenagers, university students, young adults and adults. It will also show how songs can be used as a relaxing and fun activity at the end of the lesson, on special occasions and so on.

Keywords: listening skills, pronunciation, accent, meaningful, motivating, inspiring

Introduction

The following lesson plan is about listening to *We Are the Champions* by Queen and teach English language skills with it.

The activities consist of a warm up activity, gap-fills and a follow up activity.

There are several aspects of a language that can be addressed and recycled in songs. The purpose of the lesson plan is to focus on some language points such as language components, vocabulary, pronunciation, accent, spelling, metaphors and sayings.

Songs and activities have been tested in class for several years with students of different levels of English as well as with teenagers, university students, young adults and adults. The activities have always proved to be enjoyable and successful.

Songs are beneficial for various reasons in English classes: they are meaningful, authentic (students learn best when they are exposed to real-life contexts; Paul, 1996: 6), easily available and suitable for different levels of language learners, they generate interest, they are encouraging, inspiring and motivating. A number of studies conducted in the field of ESL learning show that motivation is crucial to successful ESL learning (Andrew, 2003). Songs can make you fall in love with a language. They are a flexible input tool. They make the learning of new words and structures more natural and long lasting.

Furthermore, songs assist learners in developing their vocabulary and provide meaningful contexts for teaching it because they deal with relevant topics and include forms and functions that can reinforce common themes and structures that are being covered in the language program (Abbott, 2002).

The activity can be easily done remotely by using an online telecommunication application that specializes in providing video chat and voice call between computers, tablets, and mobile devices over the internet such as Skype, Microsoft Teams, Zoom or Google classroom.

The activity can be also done as self-study.

Instructions

Topics

Fighting and winning.

Methodology

Humanistic approach and learner centred.

Activity Type

Listening.

Language Focus

Grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, accent, spelling, metaphors and sayings.

Needs Analysis

What can be done to help students develop listening skills?

They can listen to songs and focus on their lyrics in order to get familiar with new words, expand their vocabulary and work on the pronunciation of the words they come across in the lyrics. In order to do that they will listen to songs and do a gap-fill activity at the same time.

Target students

Middle school, high school and university students, young adults, adults.

Skills

Listening.

Purpose

At the end of the activity, students will expand their vocabulary, improve their listening, pronunciation, accent and spelling skills. They will also focus on some items of grammar.

Materials

Video, lyrics, smartphone where they can use a monolingual/bilingual dictionary or a paper monolingual/bilingual dictionary.

Time

About 30 minutes.

According to the time the teacher has, he/she will only listen to the song without doing the warm-up or follow-up activity.

Before class

Get a list of ten amazing facts about the song / singer or music group. Have them on a word file so that you can show it on a screen or share it in a video call application while teaching remotely.

Get lyrics ready for a gap-fill activity by taking out words you want students to focus on such as irregular past simple of verbs, words students often mispronounce, phrasal verbs, most commonly misspelled words, non-standard and informal English such as *gonna* and *wanna*, comparatives, superlatives, modal verbs, words which are part of a saying so that you and the students can focus on it and so on.

How to get lyrics ready

What follow is how and why I have selected and taken out some words from the lyrics:

1. Paid

Why have I taken it out?

Because, I wanted students to focus on irregular verbs and so on *paid* which is the irregular verb of *pay*.

2. A few

Why have I taken it out?

Because students often struggle remembering the meaning of *a few*. When we come across it in the lyrics, I give students the translation and then tell them, for example, the difference between *a few* and *many*.

3. Friends

Why have I taken it out?

Because *friends* are one of the most mispronounced words by English learners.

When we come across it in the lyrics we can work on pronunciation.

4. Keep on fighting

Why have I taken it out?

Because I want to motivate and inspire people. I want to tell them to work hard and never give up.

5. Brought

Why have I taken it out?

Because, I wanted students to focus on irregular verbs and so on *brought* which is the irregular verb of *bring*.

6. Roses

Why have I taken it out?

Because it is part of the idiom *Bed of roses*. Students can learn a new idiom from the lyrics of the song.

7. Cruise

Why have I taken it out?

Because *cruise* is one of the most mispronounced words by English learners. When we come across it in the lyrics we can work on pronunciation.

8. Challenge

Why have I taken it out?

Because I want to motivate students by telling them not to be afraid of accepting and facing challenges.

9. Lose

Why have I taken it out?

Because I want to share with students the fact that in life sometimes, we win, other times we lose.

Procedure

Provide students with the lyrics you have prepared before class. Play the video of the song. Students listen to the song twice. The first time they try to fill in the blanks while the second time the teacher will pause the song just after the gap to be filled and check whether students have understood the missing word or not.

All the activities are conducted in the target language which is English.

Warm-up activity

Some amazing facts about the song/singer or music group.

Main activity

Gap filling activity. Students fill in the blanks while listening to the song twice. They get a feedback from the teacher when they listen to the song for the second time.

Follow-up activity

Crossword or word search. Students find hidden words in a crossword or word search. Most of the hidden words are the ones that have been removed from the lyrics so that students can recycle the vocabulary they have worked on in the gap-fill activity.

Conclusion

Songs are valued because of their linguistic, pedagogical and entertaining features.

Listening to songs and focusing on their lyrics affects the learning process and help develop many aspects of the language. It can be motivating for students because they get to finally know what their favourite singer or music group say and mean in a song.

Creating an atmosphere in which students understand that making mistakes is a vital part of the learning process encourages them to take risks and promotes their self-confidence. The most vivid memories are related to significant situations. The learning process is facilitated in lessons that can be remembered for the meaning of the input offered.

Furthermore, songs are effective tools for both short and long-term memory stimulation.

Queen_We Are the Champions

I've	my	dues
Time			time
I've	done	my	sentence
.....	committed	no	crime
And		bad
I've	made	a

I've had my share of sand kicked in my face
 But I've come

We are the champions, my,
And we'll on 'til the end
We are the the champions
We are the the champions
No time for
'Cause we are the champions of the

I've taken my bows
 And my curtain calls
 You've me fame and fortune and that goes with it
 I thank you

But it's been no bed of,
 No pleasure,
 I consider it a before the whole human race
 And I ain't gonna

We are the champions, my,
And we'll on 'til the end
We are the the champions
We are the the champions
No time for
'Cause we are the champions of the

We are the champions, my friends,
And we'll on 'til the end.
We are the the champions.
We are the the champions.
No time for
'Cause we are the champions

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Learning Languages behind the Screens: Motivation and Formative Assessment

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Abstract

Language teachers face increasingly diversified groups of students in terms of skills, interests, cultural backgrounds and experience in learning languages. The challenge to adapt the lessons to these diverse groups of students got bigger when we were forced to stay behind the screens of our devices, due to Covid 19. Adaptability and collaboration are becoming the words that best describe our new reality. We need to be ready for changes and also our lessons need to fix whatever new situation that may appear. In addition, we need to keep students engaged and motivated from the isolation of their rooms. More than ever, it's important to connect students to real life, giving them choices and opportunities to show their thinking, their understanding and their progress. They seem to wake up when we allow them to discover, connect with their previous knowledge and reflect on a large variety of topics from a wide cultural context, when they choose topics for research and ways of showing progress. It seems essential to find the way to engage the students by awakening curiosity, developing reflection and by encouraging independence as learners. Therefore, it may be a good opportunity to focus on formative assessment rather than on test scores to ensure real learning in this virtual environment that has suddenly taken over. Sure enough, the use of technology allows infinite possibilities of research and creativity, although we are still not able to bring the direct and dynamic interaction of the classrooms to the screens. The educational revolution that is taking place nowadays will probably bring in the near future another concept of school capable of adapting to sudden and constant changes without forgetting, hopefully, that emotions are fundamental in the learning process.

Keywords: Motivation, formative assessment, collaboration, online interaction

1. Introduction

The new situation in which we are living due to Covid-19, has taught several lessons to all of us, but essentially, we learnt that the only way to survive is through collaboration.

There is no way we can get out of this alone, as a country, as a community or as an individual, because we are all interconnected and the actions of one of us have consequences for others. The best defense against a pandemic is shared information and solidarity as the spread of the epidemic in any country endangers all of humanity. In other words, we won't be safe until we are all safe. As Yuval Noah Arari says in his article [*In the battle against Coronavirus*](#), it must be remembered "that epidemics spread rapidly even in the Middle Ages, long before the age of globalization" and in order to be protected by isolation, we would need to go back to the Stone Age. Therefore, if human beings need to come together to face adversity, as educators, we need to make a significant effort to keep students in touch with reality and promote collaboration and interaction as much as possible, and even more, when circumstances force us to stay behind the

screens and human contact is reduced to what is considered strictly necessary. After all, what are we preparing students to do and how do we want them to feel?

2. Stimulating curiosity

Curiosity is what triggers the entire learning process. When curiosity is awake, paying attention is an unconscious and immediate reaction, which is fundamental to create knowledge. This emotional spark that represents curiosity should be considered by teachers in a conscious way while planning lessons. Thanks to neuroscience, we know that the emotional brain has neurons and circuits that get activated when something different appears in the environment. We get alert to what is different. Unfortunately, it's not always an easy task to surprise young people who live with their eyes glued to the internet, with something new. However, we can invite them to discover paths that they would hardly choose for themselves, through questions whose answers require reflection and not just a simple Google search. If we also get them to collaborate with students from other countries to be able to draw conclusions at the end of the road, they will develop not only knowledge, but skills that will help them to be better communicators and also critical thinkers, who are respectful and curious with other cultures.

More than ever, teachers have an essential role to make curiosity spark in students' brains, to shake something inside that incites them to pay attention, think, share and wish to know more. If learning is the result of our thinking, therefore, it has to be conceived as an active process by teachers whose role is now to facilitate opportunities for thinking and make this thinking process visible in order to provide continuous and constructive feedback.

3. A practical example in the French class

a. Introduction:

In order to put these principles into practice, a collaborative project was proposed to high school students from different backgrounds, but following the same language program.

Context: the experience took place with a group of 16 years old students, in their first year of the IB Diploma Program. Language B course is an acquisition language course for non-beginner students. The level of language proficiency of the students covered a range between B1 and B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

The American School of Valencia, in Spain, and the Campion School, in Athens, agreed to put students together to work in mixed groups in order to explore and share thoughts about one of the topics of the program, *Identities*, and more specifically, *Language and Identity*. At the end of the experience students had to be able to answer and develop the question *How does language reflect our identity?*

b. Steps:

i. Introduction to the topic *Language and Identity*

It is a common and useful practice to start the class with a provocative resource to make students react while creating an environment that encourages dialog. Students, not the teacher, should find themselves the controversial point and develop their thoughts or opinions.

To introduce the topic *Language and Identity*, students were asked in class *Who are you? What identifies you?* The most immediate answers were their name, age and

nationality. This is not a surprise; our name is the first thing we would all answer to the question *Who are you?* Then, they were asked if they would be someone different if they had a different name. The general answer was no, because it's just a word and we are more than that. It may be true, but the idea was to make them think about the importance of words so they were exposed to a video from France Info, [C'est du racisme à bas bruit](#), where a man called Mohamed Amghar was called Antoine in his enterprise by the will of his boss from the moment he signed his contract. This video was the hook that brought the students to ask themselves hundreds of questions about language and identity.

ii. Groups and initial support

The purpose of the first online meeting was to introduce each other, to communicate the work groups, the goals, content and dates of the project.

Three subtopics of research were planned as follows:

- Language and identity.
- Linguistic discrimination.
- Endangered languages.

Each of the groups had questions to answer and clues of research with links of articles, videos, audios, interactive maps and other resources.

iii. Making thinking visible and continuous feedback

Ron Ritchart & Mark Church in *The power of making thinking visible*, affirm that planning for thinking improves learning, deep understanding while developing students' engagement with others, with ideas and with action. Students become active communicative learners and teachers become students of their students in their role of facilitators. Formative assessment is not a task, it's a practice, and true formative assessment is the ongoing effort to understand students' learning. Besides, according to the authors, continuous good feedback needs to emerge from conditions of mutual learning and collaboration and needs to be based on strengths and weaknesses. In fact, students will ignore feedback unless it's seen as useful and meaningful.

In our project, we followed the basis of Ron Ritchart & Mark Church's Understanding Map, making students follow a path while collaborating and sharing with their peers and teachers.



1. Discover the resources.
2. Comment, ask questions and ensure understanding with peers.
3. Make connections with previous knowledge.
4. Consider different points of view.
5. Build explanations supported with evidence.

Each group of students shared a Google Docs and a G. Slides to write their individual notes and were meant to share the information and ensure understanding with peers during their G.Meets. Teachers helped them to think deeper with questions and with additional sources when needed. Shared documents and online meetings were the opportunity for teachers to have evidence of students' understanding and thinking and different ways of feedback were possible but basically a natural open dialog with a mutual feedback between teachers and students took place. Besides, as students are working with shared documents, they are also able to provide peer feedback. Continuous feedback allows students to identify strengths and weaknesses and shows what to do next by reflecting and asking questions to complete ideas, suggesting new research for a better understanding, showing a different point of view to develop critical thinking, or asking for evidence to make the link to real life.

Feedback is a teaching opportunity that makes us think in terms of collaboration rather than in correction and moves students forward in their learning.

iv. Sharing reflections and conclusions

The end of the project arrived and all the groups of students made their presentations that were followed with comments, personal reflections, anecdotes and questions about Greece and Spain (*Is it the same in your country?*).

- From teacher's point of view:
 - collaborating with students from a different country made them develop academic, social and personal skills and seemed to have a better understanding of the topic Languages and Identity;
 - it was enriching also for teachers to work together;
 - In terms of practice of the French language, students used French in the meeting when teachers were present, but tended to speak English when there was no teacher;
 - scheduling meetings was difficult due to incompatibility of school schedules and the time difference of one hour between Greece and Spain.
- Students feedback (after filling a form):
 - What they liked the most:
 - meeting with new people
 - learning about languages in a different way
 - learning about Greece/Spain
 - collaborate with other students abroad
 - learning from others
 - sharing ideas
 - What they would like to improve:
 - G. Meets were difficult to schedule
 - Other comments:
 - It was an enriching experience and they liked to meet and work with people from a different country;
 - they will repeat the experience;
 - 100% felt ready to talk/write about Language and Identity.

4. Conclusion

Although students need to be in the center of the learning process, teachers have an essential role to promote a culture of thinking and sharing in an atmosphere of security, empathy and respect that allow dialog and debate. But also, language teachers have the role of providing students with the link to the real world to understand the power of words

and to respect linguistic and cultural diversity. Technology represents a powerful tool to open windows to the outside when we don't try to replace the magic of human interaction.

Covid-19 is reminding us of the essential, and the essential in education may be now to focus on promoting curiosity and opportunities of learning experiences beyond the walls of the classrooms or the lockdowns. As we wait for the end of this pandemic, and even later, let's try to humanize education in the broadest sense of the word and make it meaningful so that students can have the feeling that schools are meant to help us to understand ourselves and others, and to become better human beings.

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Learning Online in Lockdown. Russian Students' Opinion

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Abstract

For the last decades University educators tried to find the ways to introduce various kinds of online learning and teaching in higher education. Researchers and practical instructors tried to analyse the advantages and drawbacks of these education, to create different tasks and educational trajectories to attract learners and teachers to a wider use of modern information communication technologies in educational environment. In 2019 the situation in the world has changed so greatly, that the higher education had to move online. All seminars, lectures, exams, the presentations of diplomas and graduation thesis had to be held online. All participants of higher educational institutions, namely, managers, instructors, researchers, and, naturally, students faced many challenges in the frames of this new educational reality. Apparently, the main goal of a University is to teach and train students. So, the question of how comfortable they feel under the new imposed conditions, how effective and efficient the education is in lockdown is of primary importance. To settle these questions a survey among the students at Law Institute RUDN University was held. The goal of this paper is to present the output of this survey and make some finding that might be useful for the perspective.

Keywords: Online education, modern challenges, imposed educational environment, lockdown

1. Introduction

Since February-March 2020 when the pandemic of COVID19 seized the world, the higher education institutions started a new era of distance learning. The heads of the Universities managed a new educational environment no matter what online platform it started to work at. The RUDN University (Peoples' Friendship University of Russia) realized the education and training on the Microsoft Teams platform. Formally, the online timetable was identical the onsite timetable. It included the same subjects; the time of the classes and seminars was not changed. But as the experience showed the workload increased greatly both on the part of the students and of the instructors.

For years academics and practitioners debated about the pros and cons of the online learning. This year they had an opportunity to scrutinize the advantages and disadvantages of this type of learning. This paper examines the students' opinions on the distance learning.

2. Literature review

Various aspects of education in the CORVID-19 environment were the subject of thorough analysis in the papers of the international professional community.

The impact of COVID-19 on the national and international Higher Education

environment is studied by various institutions such as DAAD [1], Institute of Education in London's Global University [2], American Educational Research Association [3], on the one hand, and, on the other hand, by many researchers e.g. Osler, A., & Stokke, C. [4], Berberich R., & Berberich B. W. [5], Scull J., *et al.*, [6] etc.

The consequence of the pandemic for the national higher education is observed by researchers from different countries e.g. Menon S., S., & Unni M. V. [7], Wilson S., Pallant J., Bednall S., & Gray S. [8], Abdullah, M., Husin, N. A., & Haider, A. [9].

However, the students' opinions on the efficiency of the imposed online learning have not been studied yet. Apparently, the lack of any information on the issue makes the current research quite topical.

3. What students think

The survey of the students was held in two stages, the first stage was carried out in two weeks after the beginning of the remote learning and the second one, in three months, at the end of the semester. The participants of the survey were the undergraduate students and the students studying at Master programs at Law Institute RUDN University.

Originally, the students came from various regions of Russia and many foreign countries such as Vietnam, Iran, China, Kirgizstan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan etc. The number of students interviewed was equal to 50 including 30 at Bachelor's degree level and 20 at Master's Degree Level.

When the period of lockdown started all students were advised to return home and continue their education online. At that moment, that decision was supported by all students due to several reasons: (1) it looked like the extension of the holidays. Everyone hoped that the lockdown would be over in no time and did not expect it would last for three months and a half. In fact, the lockdown in the University lasted till the end of the academic year, the students were not allowed to return to their classrooms and all exams, thesis defense and graduation events were held remotely.

(2) As Moscow occupies a vast territory (about 2,511 square kilometers) whereas Moscow region occupies 44,300 square kilometers [10], usually it takes many students more than an hour to get to the University in rush hours. If case of traffic jams this period can be longer. Apparently, everyone is happy to avoid early waking up and hard way to the University. Among other advantages of online education, the respondents mentioned the ability to have tea or coffee at online classes, more time spent with the family etc.

In June, the second interview was held. This time the students' opinion was not so unanimous. Admitting the obvious pluses of online learning, the respondents focused on its negative aspects e.g. distance learning resulted in a high increase of written papers and various tasks that had to be done for each online session. The students had to spend more time in front of the computer screen and consequently they had headaches and pain in eyes. Moreover, many young people really missed onsite interaction and communication. The internet connection is very poor in some towns and villages where students stayed for the period of lockdown, so during classes the internet disconnections and other technical failures could occur.

The output of the second survey showed that 50% of the respondents learning at Bachelor level of education assessed the efficiency of distance learning as negative, 45% considered it positive and 5% claimed that online and offline education should be interconnected. As far as master students are concerned, two thirds of the students were strongly against distance learning whereas the other part of the students supported the integration of online learning into offline learning.

4. Conclusion

The experience of learning and teaching in the lockdown environment showed that the University management, teaching staff and students coped with the challenge of educating and training under COVID-19. The education was realized in a complete scope. Though it took much extra time and efforts, but the quality of teaching and learning, in particular, foreign languages for specific purposes was almost the same in comparison to the regular teaching and learning. The students participated in the survey mostly expressed their negative opinion to the remote learning. However, they did not mention poor quality of the online education as the main reason for their negative assessment, in most cases they focused of the subjective reasons such as the absence of educational atmosphere and the necessity to overcome the personal laziness that is hard to fight with without a teacher.

Taking into consideration the students' opinions on the imposed online teaching and learning it can be emphasized that, apparently, online education has its pros and cons.

But transforming the words from the American serial "The X-Files", it can be said that: "The truth is somewhere in the middle". In the modern educational environment, the online learning has become an integral part of education, it should be incorporated into traditional higher education, enhance its quality and potential.

The academic year 2020/2021 in Russia started on September 1 as usual. However, as the risk to be infected remains quite high, most of the students, namely, the undergraduate students as well as the master students continue studying online. At the end of the summer semester everyone hoped that we could come back to our Universities and continue studying in a regular mode, but our hopes failed. Only the junior students i.e. the first-year students were allowed to attend the University personally. Naturally, they must wear medical masks and special gloves, and furthermore they must follow special regulations of in room behaviour.

How do the first-year students feel in an almost deserted University? What do the other students think about their learning after such a long period of isolation and the lack of real communication? These are the issues that can become the subject matter of further research.

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Memory Processes and Significant Learning

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Abstract

Neuroeducation has provided us with new approaches towards teaching-learning processes to leave traditional techniques behind and bet for a real change in education. Regarding to this, understanding how our brain works provides us with the tools for obtaining the desired effects for a more effective teaching practice which will ensure more motivating experiences and permanent knowledge for our students. Throughout the present article, we will point out varied approaches and theories about memory processes and we will deepen into concepts such as short-term memory, long-term memory and working memory, as well as their importance in learning. Moreover, in the following articulated text, a synthesis of Ebbinghaus' contribution about how to maintain knowledge in time. To conclude, we will mention some of the main substantive instructions to obtain our students' lifelong knowledge and how to implement the most efficient practice in class by means of basing our programming on our students' previous knowledge and awakening their curiosity and attention carefully planning motivating dynamics, which will be suggested in the following lines.

Keywords: neuroeducation, neurodidactics, memory, learning, teaching

Introduction

The aim of every teacher is making an eternal mark on their students, as well as transmitting knowledge in the most relevant way for them. In the present article, we will consider the contributions of neuroscience in education and different authors' approaches in memory classifications, outstanding short-term memory, long-term memory and the importance of working memory in learning processes. Moreover, we will analyse knowledge consolidation or loss, outstanding Ebbinghaus's forgetting curve, and mention some noticeable strategies in permanent knowledge acquisition.

Types of memory in learning processes

Throughout the history of education, many have been educated with the strong belief that if there is no pain, there is no gain. To our delight, pain, repetition and passivity have been displaced by more innovative techniques to develop our students' capacities through reflection and action.

Neurodidactics has highlighted the importance of meaningful learning based on learning by doing and awakening curiosity among our students. Moreover, learning is linked to emotion [13] and it must be connected to previous experiences or charged with emotional value to enhance memory and learning [5].

Many have been the researchers who have postulated about memory, such as Ebbinghaus or Lashley, Pavlov, Skinner Thorndike and Watson. [5]. William James distinguished between primary memory (immediate and transitory) and secondary

memory (long-term or permanent) and later multistore theory emerged [7], according to which three types of memory are differentiated.

- Sensory memory (SM). The stimuli that we receive in our sensory organs have a short duration and we will only store those that capture our attention and are meaningful to us.
- Short-term memory (STM).
- Long-term memory (LTM).

Short-term memory, Long-term memory and Working memory

Short term memory (STM)

Short-term memory (STM) is the prelude to long-term memory (LTM) as we can keep a limited quantity of information for a short time that will be discarded or sent to the LTM depending on its relevance. Thus, the STM has an essential role in the reading and listening comprehension, since remembering the beginning of the text will help us to understand the following information.

As our brain uses different areas for STM and LTM, in cases where the areas involved in short-term memory are affected, long-term memory can remain intact.

Milner's research classifies the phases of memory into three [9]. The first one is the coding of information, for which the individual's concentration, attention and motivation are essential. This will be followed by information storage and retrieval.

Long-term memory

Within long-term memory (LTM) we will distinguish between explicit or declarative memory and implicit or procedural memory. In long-term memory, conscious memories pass from the prefrontal cortex (STM) and the hippocampus will help transform them into long-term memory memories [5].

- **Explicit memory** helps us to incorporate objective knowledge in a conscious way. It is subclassified into semantic memory, which we can be verbalized and whose function is to store general facts and knowledge of the outside world and its meaning, and episodic memory, which treasures our personal experiences [17]. Thus, semantic memory allows us to remember our home address or your child's first day of school.
- **Implicit memory** is the one in which learning happens unconsciously, for instance, when we write with a pencil, walk or wash our faces in the morning. In this type of memory, the hippocampus or the medial region of the temporal lobe does not intervene, but the striatum, the amygdala or the cerebellum [5].

Working Memory (WM)

Working memory is a type of STM in which the prefrontal cortex is activated to retain some information for a short period. It is developed during childhood and it is closely related to the student's academic performance, reflection and problem solving [5].

It is fundamental for the understanding linguistic information, emotion regulation, behaviour and any other situation that requires rearrangement and mental manipulation of the information, for the establishment of cause-effect relationships [20]. Likewise, WM is essential in the development of reading and mathematical competence and variables related to academic success should be studied, being essential in these skills of great importance for children's development inside and outside their schools [20].

Ebbinghaus forgetting curve

Hermann Ebbinghaus carried out significant memory experiments in terms of retention and obliviscence according to the number of repetitions and the passage of time [4] and revealed that forgetting information can occur between short intervals and it increases within time, in more elevated proportions at the beginning and slower as time draws on during the first week and, from there, even slower [4].

Ebbinghaus demonstrated that 75% of what had been learned had been forgotten after 48 hours and identified a number of factors [15] that could delay forgetting, such as:

The relationship with the previous content.

The format in which the information is presented (words, images, audio, etc.).

- The attention given.
- The level of rest.
- The study in intervals.
- The way in which stimuli are presented to us and how they are forgotten over time.

This theory, also supported by Bloom, defends the Decay Theory, which holds that the reason why we forget certain information is because it is not used and what we do not use disappears from our brain. To avoid this, we must guide learning towards meaningful repetition.

How?

Designing our teaching work to guide students towards reviewing and putting the information learned into practice. Thus, they will use the information learned in different ways, for example, through various dynamics in which they have to use what they have learned, group work exercises in which they build with the learned structures, individual work through diagrams, summaries, concept maps, etc.

How much and when?

With a first review after 24 hours and intermediate reviews between days seven and 15 from the first apprenticeship and a final review prior to the memory test or exam.

According to the Ebbinghaus study, 50% of information is lost within twenty-four hours so we should use it again on the same day and the next day.

What helps me to study and fix knowledge properly?

Considering it all, we must develop certain techniques or strategies that, in general, we could synthesize as follows:

1. Building on previous knowledge, so that new information is built on previous knowledge and logical connections are more easily made.
2. Choose the time of day to study. According to the Interference Theory of Jenkins and Dallenbach [8], the optimal moment to fix a knowledge would be before sleeping, since there are no more activities afterwards. However, the brain is sensitive to mood so it is also important to consider if we are "owls", with greater capacity for concentration in the late afternoon, or "larks", if we are more productive from the early hours of the morning after resting at night [16].
3. Periodicity of the review. Establish an appropriate review routine, with a first review within the first 24 hours of learning and with intermediate reviews between the week and fifteen days, and another before the memory test or exam.
4. Use of mnemonic rules to remember data sequences or sentence structures in a new language by relating information to images, words, symbols, etc. [12]

5. The usefulness given to knowledge improves learning. It is essential to give it a practical use. Thus, for example, the use of role play simulating real and motivating situations will be an incentive to open them to this learning.
6. Visualization and attitude [19]. Emotions are an essential factor and having a positive attitude visualizing success will help us to open our minds to new concepts more easily


Conclusions

Research on the functioning of our brain has provided us with a greater understanding of memory and learning processes. The contributions of neuroeducation have multiple benefits for our students and teaching must be based on the formation of the mechanisms of our brain in the learning processes to activate our students' prefrontal cortex through surprise and store information in their LTM, as well as promoting their attention and motivation through active participation in a positive and conscious learning environment, based on which, we can obtain relevant experiences and lasting knowledge.

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Peculiarities of Group-Work Activities in the Classroom

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Abstract

Current paper deals with the observation of group-work activities in the English classroom. Actually, the teacher must recognize learners' beliefs, preferences, hobbies or other identities for implementing them in class. Besides, before playing group-work activity in the classroom, it is necessary to explain its rules to the learners.

In the frame of this article we specify and analyse different types of group activities: Information gap, brainstorming, prism, jigsaw activities, drama, role-play, Interviews, projects, problem solving and decision making with their peculiarities and advantages. Besides, group work activities embrace games that are subdivided into Linguistic games (Focus is on language accuracy) and Communicative games (Focus is on meaningful exchange of information, ideas, and messages).

Thus, purposeful Implementation of group-work activities generates interaction in the language classroom, enhancing the development of the learners' language communicative competence.

Keywords: pair/group work, collaboration, oral discourse, cooperation, learner autonomy, competition, relaxation, motivation

Group work covers a range of techniques through which students get engaged in a task that involves collaboration, self-initiation and language use. As P. Ur states, pair work is also a group work, but it is easier, because students are often sitting in pairs anyway and simply turn towards each other. Pair work is more appropriate for the shorter collaborative tasks. Group work is more difficult to organize, because it usually involves moving students, and sometimes their chairs and tables [4; p. 233]. Besides group work is more difficult to control with an undisciplined class. In teaching practice, we usually differentiate small and large groups, based on the number of students. Large groupings give students more opportunities to speak. Group work must be carefully planned, well-structured and monitored. There are some practical tips that we, as a teacher must take into consideration before implementing in class, they are:

Revising and Evaluating Classroom Language

One of the first considerations related to organizing a group work in class is being ascertain that our students have an appropriate command of language knowledge through which they can carry out their group task. There are group works that are linguistically quite simple, and particularly for lower proficiency level learners. But at higher levels we often try to direct our students to discuss some particular points or questions, with no further explanation, assuming that our students know exactly what we mean by the words.

In order to make sure that a group task is accurately understood by students, not only

are clear directions important, but students must be able to carry out the discourse necessary to accomplish the task. This means that prior to the task, students have performed the various bits and pieces of classroom language that the task presupposes.

Selecting Appropriate Group Techniques

There are, in fact some important differences between **pair work** and group work.

Pair work is more appropriate than group work for tasks that are short, linguistically simple. Appropriate pair activities include:

- Practicing dialogues with a partner,
- Simple question-and-answer exercises,
- Performing certain meaningful substitution “drills”,
- Quick (one minute or less) brainstorming activities,
- Checking written work with each other.

Pair work provides opportunity to engage students in interactive (or quasi-interactive) communication. It is also appropriate for many groups works tasks. The first step in promoting successful group work is to select a task appropriate to students' interests, hobbies, their language communicative skills. Below we introduce group tasks with typical characteristics:

Games

Games are a vital part of [English](#) teaching classes. Embracing rules and elements of fun, they must be an integral component of the language syllabus, as a technique with clear goals, objectives, tasks and expected outcomes. Games are a good way of practising language. They motivate learners, promote classroom interaction, improve learners' language acquisition and their communicative skills.

Games can be used at all stages of the language instruction from controlled to free practice. Games can also serve as a diagnostic tool for teachers to note and specify the areas of difficulty and take appropriate constructive actions. Sometimes students are lazy and not motivated to do their tasks. So, for this account games lead the learners for participation in different activities. They get a chance to practise or use the new language items (vocabulary, grammar structures and rules, phonetic items) they have just learnt eagerly and willingly instead of forcing them to do as a task. The most particular effective point is that learners play and learn at the same time. Games motivate learners, encouraging their teamwork solidarity. So, while considering games as a technique we come across with the following factors, such as **rules, competition, relaxation, and learning**.

Generally, in contemporary foreign language teaching methodology games are divided into two main types:

Linguistic games – Focus is on language accuracy (vocabulary/grammar/spelling/phonology games).

Communicative games – Focus is on meaningful exchange of information, ideas, and messages.

Role play

Role-play can be described with at least four features:

- **closeness**
- **situation**
- **realism**
- **personality** [1; p. 117-118]

Role-play can be:

- **controlled** (the participants are responsible for the language they use),
- **semi-controlled** (participants are partly expected to use the prescribed language),
- **free** (participants are responsible for the message not for the prescribed language),
- **small-scale** (lasting for a lesson or less),
- **large-scale** (lasting for more than a lesson or perhaps for the whole term).

Role play requires learners to project themselves into an imaginary situation where they may play themselves or where they may be required to play a character role. In some instances, this is prescribed in detail and at other times learners are free to create the role, which inevitably leads to greater involvement in the activity [3; p. 158]. A situation or scenario may be realistic or unrealistic for learners, even it may appeal to the learners' sense of fantasy. Role play provides learners with opportunities to practise correct and appropriate use of a wide range of language functions, notions and structures in a variety of contexts. For example, a group role play might involve a discussion of a political/ecological issue, with each person assigned to represent a particular political/ ecological point of view.

Simulation

Learners who are familiar with role play may be introduced to simulation which is a more complex activity, usually requiring greater preparation and organization and more time to carry out. Simulation can take the form of role-play and problem solving. Role-plays can be based on roles and scenarios [2; p. 352].

Simulations may involve learners in imaginative activities, for example how to survive on a desert island in the face of various dangers and difficulties, or, more realistically, in accomplishing a task such as preparing the front page of a newspaper, a publicity campaign, or a radio/TV programme. Participants may also be placed in a situation of conflict where teams take on roles to defend or oppose a proposal before a decision is taken, e.g., whether or not to build a nuclear power plant, to abolish beauty contests, and so on. Simulations have rules which constrain participants, requiring them to act in a realistic manner in keeping with their roles [3; p. 158-159]. While they are often less flexible than role play activities and less convenient because they usually require a lot of time.

Simulations usually involve a more complex structure and often larger groups (of 6 to 20) where the entire group is working through an imaginary situation as a social unit, the object of which is to solve some specific problem.

Drama

Drama is a more formalized form of role play or simulation, with a pre-planned story line and script. Sometimes small groups may prepare their own short dramatization of some event, writing the script and rehearsing the scene as a group. Actually, dramatic performances have positive effects on language learning, but they are time consuming and the teachers must take into account this factor before involving them in the school curriculum.

Projects

Particularly for intermediate learners' projects can be rewarding. Projects are long-term, problem-focused and meaningful activities that bring together learners with their ideas and initiatives.

Many-year-professional experience has shown that projects are manageable and educationally effective. They are especially good teaching tools because they motivate students to learn about and use a wide variety of literacy and thinking skills-both critical and creative. For example, publishing a newspaper gives students opportunities to plan, write, reflect on, revise articles. It provides a way in which the students can share their work with others. Projects encourage students to become self-directed thinkers and performers.

Interviews

A popular activity for pair work, but also appropriate for group work, interviews are useful at all levels of proficiency. At the lower levels, interviews can be very structured, both in terms of the information that is sought and the grammatical difficulty and variety.

The goal of an interview could at this level be limited to using requesting functions, learning vocabulary for expressing personal data, producing questions, etc.

Students might ask each other questions like



Where do you live?
 What country (city) are you from?
 What is your favourite film/country?
 What is your hobby and learn to give appropriate responses?

At the higher levels, interviews can embrace more complex facts, opinions, ideas, and feelings, e.g.

Tell me about yourself.
 How would you describe yourself?
 What makes you unique?
 What are your greatest strengths?
 What are your greatest weaknesses?
 What are your goals for the future?
 Can you tell me about a difficult work situation and how you overcame it?
 How do you handle stress?
 What makes you uncomfortable?
 Are you a morning person?
 Are you more of a leader or a follower? [5].

So, the teachers' task is to identify learner's language communicative skills, their intellect, social, psychological peculiarities before elaborating topics or questions for class interviews.

Brainstorming

Brainstorming is a technique the purpose of which is to initiate/activate learners thinking process.

Brainstorming is a large or small group activity that encourages students to focus on a topic and contribute to the free flow of ideas. The teacher may begin a brainstorming session by posing a question or a problem, or by introducing a topic. Students then express possible answers, relevant words and ideas.



Why to use brainstorming in the classroom?

- Learners use their prior knowledge.
- All students get a chance to express their ideas.
- It eliminates fear of failures.
- Learners show respect for each other.
- They try something without fear.
- Learners introduce individuality and creativity.
- It eliminates the fear of risk-taking [6].

Information gap

Information-gap activities include a tremendous variety of techniques in which the objective is to convey or to request information. The two focal characteristics of information-gap techniques are

- their primary attention to information and not to language forms and
- the necessity of communicative interaction in order to reach the objective.

The information that students must seek can range from very simple to complex. At the beginning level, for example, each member of a small group could be given the objective of finding out from the others their birthday, address, favourite food, etc., and filling in a little chart with the information. In intermediate classes teachers could ask groups to collectively pool information about different occupations: necessary qualifications, how long it takes to prepare for an occupation, how much the preparation costs, what typical job conditions are, what salary levels are, etc. In advanced classes, a small-group discussion on determining an author's message, among many other possibilities, would be an information-gap technique.

Jigsaw activities

Jigsaw techniques are a special variety of information gap in which each member of a group is given some specific information and the goal is to pool all information to achieve some objective. Imagine four members of a group each with an application form, and on each form different information is provided. As students ask each other questions (without showing anyone their own application form), they eventually complete all the information on the form. Or the teacher might provide maps to students in small groups, each student receiving different sets of information (where the bank is, where the park is, etc.). The goal for beginners might be simply to locate everything correctly, and for intermediate learners to give directions on how to get from one place on the map to another, requiring a collaborative exchange of information in order to provide complete directions.

Problem solving and decision making

Problem-solving group techniques focus on the group's solution of a specified problem. They might or might not involve jigsaw characteristics, and the problem itself might be

- **relatively simple**, for example: giving directions on a map
- **moderately complex**, for example: working out an itinerary from train, plane, and bus schedules
- **quite complex**, for example: solving a mystery in a "crime story" or dealing with a political or moral dilemma.

Once again, problem-solving techniques direct students' attention on meaningful cognitive challenges and not so much on grammatical or phonological forms.

Decision-making techniques are simply one kind of problem solving where the ultimate goal is for students to make a decision. For example, a debate on environmental cataclysms is actually decision-making. As learners' main task is to provide solution to the problem.

Opinion exchange

Opinions are difficult for students to deal with at the beginning levels of proficiency, but by the intermediate level, certain techniques can effectively include the exchange of various opinions. Many of the above techniques can easily incorporate beliefs and feelings. Sometimes opinions are appropriate; sometimes they are not, especially when the objective of a task is to deal more with "facts".

Students can get involved in the content-centered situations or context. They can discuss issues that are authentic, for example:

- Women's rights,
- Factors in choosing a marriage partner,
- Cultural taboos,
- Political/religious orientation,
- Role of computer games on the child's development,
- Environmental issues (air/water/atmosphere pollution),
- War and peace.

One warning: While elaborating or selecting topics for discussion, the teacher must recognize their learner's beliefs, preferences, or other identities. Otherwise they could hardly dissolve chaos in the classroom with subsequent negative effects.

Planning Group Work

Possibly the most common reason for the breakdown of group work is an inadequate introduction and lead-in to the task itself. Once we have selected an appropriate type of activity, our planning phase should include the following seven "rules" for implementing a group technique.

- **Introduce the technique.** The introduction may simply be a brief explanation. For example, "Now, in groups of four, you're each going to get different transportation schedules (airport limo, airplane, train, and bus), and your job is to figure out, as a group, which combination of transportation services will take the least amount of time".
- **Justify the use of small groups for the technique.** If you think your students have any doubts about the significance of the upcoming task, then tell them

explicitly why the small group is important for accomplishing the task. Remind them that they will get an opportunity to practise certain language forms or functions, and that if they are reluctant to speak up in front of the whole class, now is their chance to do so in the security of a small group.

- **Model the techniques and give explicit detailed instructions.** In simple techniques modelling may not be necessary. But for a new and potentially complex task, it never hurts to be too explicit in making sure students know what they are supposed to do.
- **Divide the class into groups.** This element is not as easy as it sounds. In some cases, you can simply number off (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, ...) and specify which area of the room to occupy. But to ensure participation or control you may want to construct groups taking into consideration the following:
 - proficiency levels,
 - age or gender differences,
 - cultural or subcultural group,
 - personality types,
 - cognitive style preferences,
 - cognitive/developmental stages (for children),
 - interests.
- **Check** if the learners have comprehended their assignments.
- **Set the task in motion.** This part should now be a simple matter of saying something like, "Okay, get into your groups and start with your task".

Advantages of the group-work

- It involves students working collaboratively on a set of tasks or activities in or out of the classroom. It is a pleasure to cooperate with others to produce a joint result, and students enjoy the sense of team building and team solidarity.
- Group work increases the opportunities for all learners to speak the target language, they practise their speech fluency and learn from each other.
- The teacher is free to monitor the individual learners and give them constructive feedback.
- Group work fosters learner autonomy. More students can contribute ideas to a group discussion task. Actually, they are not directly controlled by the teacher.
- There are more participants if the activity is a game. Groups can work as teams in a competition. Students get up and move providing welcome break from the routine of sitting in the same place all the time.

Reservations

- Both teachers and learners may encounter reservations while doing group-work. As for the teachers they may have some fear about losing control with groups in class. Students can make a lot of noise or they might use the L1 too much.
- As for the students – some learners neglect group activities and they prefer teacher led traditional classes. They don't enjoy collaboration or cooperation in class. They appreciate individual learning style.

So here the teacher's task is not easy. They must understand that if the learners are engaged in interaction, the noise in class is not a necessarily bad thing, particularly if they perform the task effectively. Or the teacher can allow the use of the L1, if the learners face some technical restrictions, e.g., time limit or understanding this or that issue, related to the task completion [2; p. 133]. Here the most important factor is the correct design of the task with its goal, structure and outcome. [4; p. 234]

So, to conclude with: Purposeful Implementation of group-work activities generates interaction in class, fostering the development of learners' language skills and their diverse competences-both communicative and intellectual.

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The Impact of the Cooperative Learning of Idioms on EFL Learners' Fluency

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Abstract

Idioms, indeed, constitute a notoriously difficult area of foreign language learning and teaching because, by definition, idioms are conventionalized expressions whose overall meaning cannot be determined from the meaning of their constituent parts, and they are conceived as the natural decoders of cultural aspects in real life settings and a major component of native-like communication. Thus, the issue of teaching idioms in EFL classroom needs a special pedagogical method to foster the learners' communicative skills. The current research paper attempts to scrutinize the impact of the cooperative learning of idioms upon EFL learners' fluency. Therefore, it follows a one group pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental design, with a sample group of fifteen (15) first-year students at the Department of English at M'sila University. Their fluency was evaluated before and after the intervention sessions within which the participants were requested to implement peer-to-peer tutoring for a whole semester. The findings indicated that learning idioms cooperatively fosters the learner's fluency through facilitating the vocabulary retention (many words within one unit), and enabling him to understand the thoughts, emotions and views of the native speakers, and providing the learner with information about the underlying parameters of English. Moreover, it raises his awareness of figurative language to have better communication strategies. Thus, the consideration of culture in designing and developing course materials is highly recommended to reach higher level of oral proficiency in English language.

Keywords: Idioms; Fluency; EFL learner; Peer-to-peer tutoring

1. Introduction

Language is a social practice that people do to express, create and interpret meanings, and also to maintain social and interpersonal relationships. As far as the learning of English as a foreign language is concerned, any EFL learner seeks to be like the native-speaker who is, according to many scholars, the one who has intuitive knowledge of the language (Davies, 1991; Stern, 1983), able to produce fluent spontaneous discourse (Davies, 1991; Maum, 2002; Medgyes, 1992), communicatively competent (Davies, 1991; Liu, 1999; Medgyes, 1992), and able to communicate within different social settings (Stern, 1983).

To achieve these features, a non-native speaker needs a specific instruction that can afford him a multifaceted method that can cope simultaneously with fluency and the proficiency of communicating adequately in varying social contexts. In this regard, a great deal of literature emphasizes the culturally appropriate language use (Peterson and Coltrane, 2003), where the knowledge of linguistic features is not fully adequate for successful communication; however, it must be supported by an awareness of sociocultural context, tendencies, conventions, and norms in which the communication

occurs. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there is an interwoven relationship between language and culture, which is highlighted by various manifestations of conventionalized language such as formulaic chunks that are used to reflect culture in real life settings.

Research studies, for instance; show that formulaic chunks constitute at least one-third to one-half of English language (Conklin & Schmitt 2008). Idioms, as one type of these formulaic expressions, appear to be the natural decoders of cultural aspects in real life settings, and represent figurative interpretations of customs, traditions, historical events, standards, stereotypes, and even emotional models of communication (Grant & Bauer, 2004).

Since the way native speakers use English in the real world is largely idiomatic and it is assumed that a fluent non-native speaker is expected to be similarly idiomatic, and should know the appropriate use of the idiom in a given context. And because few, if any, studies have not investigated the effect of learning idioms on learners' fluency, we thought, in the current paper, of a teaching method that focuses on enhancing EFL learners' fluency via the cooperative learning of idioms far from the traditional teaching method by addressing the following question: Are there any significant effects of cooperative learning of idioms on L2 learners' fluency?

2. Method

To scrutinize the impact of the cooperative learning of idioms upon EFL learners' fluency, one group pre-test/post-test quasi-experimental design was conducted. The fluency of the participants was evaluated before and after the intervention sessions within which the participants were requested to implement peer-to-peer tutoring in learning idioms for a whole semester.

2.1 The participants

The research sample consisted of fifteen (15) male and female first-year students from the department of English at M'sila University in Algeria. The participants were divided randomly into three sub-groups to receive the treatment.

2.2 Data collection instruments

For the study purposes, Skehan's fluency measurement categorization (2005) was adopted with adaptations. The selected transcripts taken from the participants' oral performances were analysed focusing on measuring the rate of existence of three major parameters during one selected minute from the audiotapes:

- 1) **Speech repair:** a) *repetition*, b) *correction*, and c) *reformulation*.
- 2) **Speech breakdowns** including: a) *unfilled pauses*, and b) *filled pauses*.
- 3) **Speech rate.**

The measures of fluency conducted in this study are:

- Mean length of pauses where a pause is an unfilled silence of longer than 0.25 a second.
- Mean number of filled pauses, e.g., *em* and *er*.
- Repair measures: mean number of repetitions, self-correction and reformulation aspects per minute.
- Speech rate: number of words per minute.

2.3 The procedure

The procedure of the research went through three phases.

Phase 1:

In the first-phase, each student was asked to think of one specific topic and talk freely about, while the researcher tried to record them and analyse their recordings to measure their fluency before the treatment sessions.

Phase 2 (Treatment sessions):

Along a whole semester, the participants received ten treatment sessions within which they were requested to work cooperatively to understand the idioms and to contextualize them following the following steps:

1. The teacher introduces a set of idioms. As most idioms belong to simple categories, e.g. similes, binomials, proverbs, metaphors, and euphemisms, the teacher asks the students to find some sample idioms under the chosen category.
2. The teacher asks the students to refer to some resources such as Internet or a good dictionary to help them finding out more about the meanings and origins of idioms, and collecting information about their use.
3. Then, each group writes cooperatively conversations or plays with the given idioms.
4. Once all groups have finished, each group forwards to act out the conversation they have written. This way, they practise the idiom phrases; and they hear each other's' examples, and discover the different ways of incorporating idioms in conversations and plays.

Phase 3:

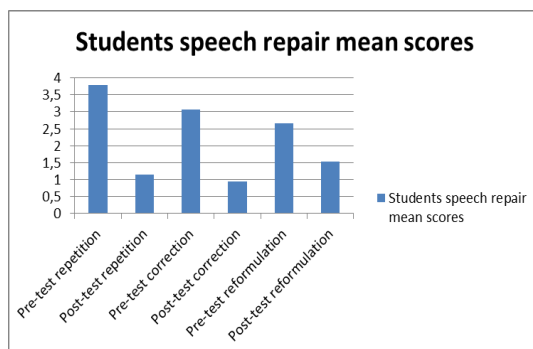
To depict the progress that might occur in the students' oral performance, a post-test was conducted by requesting them to elaborate a conversation or a play and then perform them to be analysed later to measure their fluency enhancement.

3. Findings

The obtained results of the pre- and post- tests of the different fluency aspects are as follows:

3.1 Pre-test and post-test' results of speech repair aspects

The mean scores of the students' results prior and after the training sessions are indicated below in a graph followed by a speech repair paired samples test table



Graph (01). Students' speech repair means scores

Table (01). The Speech Repair Paired Samples Test table

		Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Speech Repair	Pre-test/repetition	3.53	1.175	4.409	
	Post-test/repetition	1.07	1.100		0.001
	Pre-test/correction	3.07	1.981	5.323	0.000
	Post-test/correction	0.93	1.100		
	Pre-test/reformulation	2.67	1.175	2.605	0.021
	Post-test/reformulation	1.53	1.356		

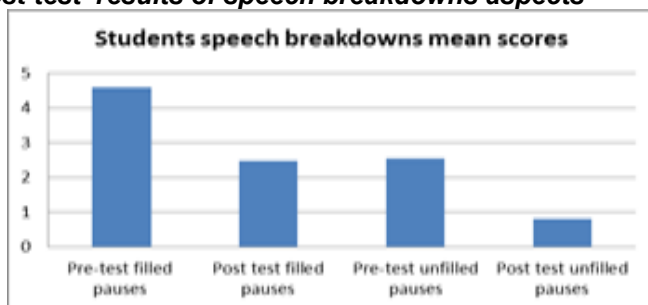
3.1.1 Results Analysis

The above graph and the Paired Samples Test table show the significant difference between the mean scores that the participants obtained in the pretest and post-test of the repetition aspect, where we've got a t value of 4.409, which gives us a p-value or 2-tailed significance value of 0.001 and this is a significant result.

As far as the correction aspect is concerned, we've got a t value of 5.323, which gives us a p-value – or 2-tailed significance value – of 0.000. A standard alpha level is 0.05, and 0.000 is smaller than 0.05, so there is a significant difference between the scores in the pretest and the post-test of the correction aspect.

The results show also a significant difference between the scores reached in the pretest and post-test of the reformulation aspect, where the t value reaches 2.605, which gives us a p-value – or 2-tailed significance value – of 0.021. And because a standard alpha level is 0.05, and 0.021 is smaller than 0.05, so there is a significant difference between the reformulation pre and post-test outcomes.

3.2 Pre and post-test' results of speech breakdowns aspects

*Graph (02). Students' breakdowns mean scores**Table (02). The Speech breakdowns Paired Samples Test table*

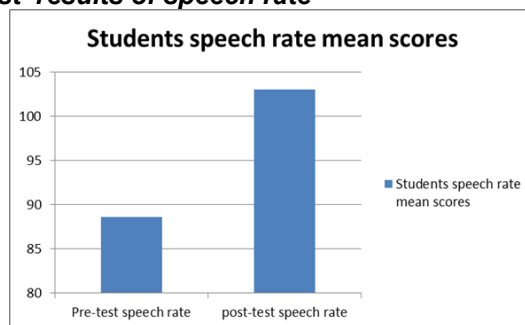
		Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Speech breakdowns	Pre-test/Unfilled pauses	2.53	2.066	4.377	0.001
	Post-test/Unfilled pauses	0.80	1.207		
	Pre-test/Filled pauses	4.60	1.724	4.904	0.000
	Post-test/Filled pauses	2.47	0.990		

3.2.1 Results Analysis

In table (02), the unfilled pauses aspect the students' reach the outcomes that reach a t value of 4.377, which gives us a p-value – or 2-tailed significance value of 0.001 which really confirms the significant result. for any plausible alpha level. A standard alpha level is 0.05, and 0.001 is smaller than 0.05, so there is a significant difference between the scores in pretest and post-test conditions.

With the filled pauses fluency aspect, the participants got the scores that lead to a t value of 4.904, which gives a p-value or 2-tailed significance value of 0.000 which represents a significant difference between the scores in pretest and post-test results.

3.3 Pre and post-test' results of speech rate



Graph (03). Students' speech rate means scores

Table (03). The Speech rate Paired Samples Test table

		Mean	Std. Deviation	T	Sig. (2-tailed)
Speech rate	Pre-test/Speech rate	78.20	24.223	3.314	0.005
	Post-test/Speech rate	89.47	23.787		

3.3.1 Results Analysis

From table (03), the t value is 3.314, which gives us a p-value or 2-tailed significance value of 0.005 and because the standard alpha level is 0.05, and 0.005 is smaller than 0.05, so there is a significant difference between the scores achieved in pretest and post-test outcomes.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this research paper indicated that learning idioms cooperatively did not only enhance learners' fluency, but it also helped them understand the native speaker way of thinking. Moreover, they showed that this technique facilitated the vocabulary retention and it provided the learners with enough information about the underlying parameters of English, and raised their awareness of figurative language to meet the communicative demands. Additionally, the interactive nature of the context led them to be highly motivated to acquire more communication strategies, and get rid of some awkward behaviours.

Therefore, the consideration of culture and more specifically idioms is highly recommended in designing and developing course materials to reach higher level of

fluency in English language. With idioms, teachers and materials' designers face the difficulty of making principled decisions about which idioms to instruct, and which teaching method should be employed. For that reason, it is probably beneficial to use a mixture of procedures in order to create a variety of tasks and activities that appeal to different learners' levels and needs.

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The Motivation as a Way of Students' Involvement in the Distance Learning of Foreign Languages

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Abstract

The paper is devoted to the problem of maintaining the motivation and the involvement of both students and teachers in the educational process within the distance learning. The consideration of the peculiarities of students' motivation is to help the teacher to develop effective ways to maintain, improve it and it keeps the high number of students engaged in the distance learning of foreign languages. There are four main components of the motivation (the classical model of the motivation by J. Keller): the attention, the significance, the confidence, the satisfaction. And this model can be combined with the teaching language methods and used within the distance learning. It must be the base for teachers in the process of the creation and maintenance of the motivation in the distance learning of foreign languages. And the success is guaranteed by students' emotional involvement in the learning process. So, the set of creative online and offline tasks aimed at the team building in order to unite the distance learning group should be the important part of the distance learning of foreign languages.

Keywords: motivation, distance learning, foreign languages, engaged students

In 2020 the distance format of life has absorbed all of us without exception. We have plunged into the depths of numerous language courses, webinars, websites, online platforms, etc. The range of offered types of distance learning has also expanded: from individual classes to seminars and lectures that virtually simulate visual classroom communication. In this situation there are some questions which are actual: is it possible to learn a foreign language without the direct contact with the teacher, without the classic "dialogue pair", without interaction with other students? In which way can we build the effective cooperation "teacher – student/students"? Is the success of such distance training guaranteed? And what motivation must be in such distance learning of foreign languages? All these questions are of great concern to teachers and students who are already responding to the challenges of modernity in the process of teaching/learning foreign languages.

For the first time some foreign researchers (J. Keller (1987), T. Gao, J. Lehman (2003), B. Tuckman (2007), J. Visser, T. Plomp (2002), Ch. Schlosser (2008) and others) spoke about the motivation in the distance learning in the late XX – early XXI centuries [1, 9]. In Russia at the same time such researchers as G. Sharaborova, A. Mikhailov (2009), I. Arefieva, T. Lazarev (2011) and others thought about the issues of the motivating students in the distance learning [1, 9]. Even A.N. Leontiev long before the era of digitalization said that motives are "the engine of activity" [6, 10]. The motives for language acquisition are the main sources of energy in the educational process. If it is interesting, the memory will work better, the attention and the productivity will increase.

And students are engaged into the educational process by all these factors.

Within the distance learning the peculiarities of students' motivation should be taken into the consideration by a teacher. And this can help him to develop effective measures of maintaining and increasing the level of the motivation.

Serious risks of online learning in this case can be presented by both possible technical difficulties and a large amount of material prepared by a teacher for classes, as well as a significant percentage of the necessary independent work of students.

At the beginning of the training the motivation is high. There is enough energy and desire to learn a foreign language. And at the start of the training such energy is usually enough, as the motivation has always been and remains the main mover in achieving goals, including educational ones. And what happens then? The answer is obvious: then the level of the motivation is decreasing. If it is not supported, it can fall to zero.

Therefore, the significant element of the motivation is its orientation. If there is a goal, the motivation is ordered and directed to it. The main goal in the language learning is to speak this language, to fulfil the communication needs. In this sense such basic categories of the methodology as the principles of teaching a foreign language [2] do not lose their relevance. The strict adherence to these principles will help a teacher to implement the fundamental one: the principle of communication, the postulation of which provides a practical orientation of learning and hence the orientation of the motivation.

There are four main components of the motivation, the classical model of the motivation by J. Keller: the attention, the significance, the confidence, the satisfaction. In the opinion of the scientist, each component can be influenced, thus the effective motivation system can be created. And to our mind this model can be combined with the teaching language methods and used within the distance learning.

The first way of the motivation increasing is to attract the attention of students to the distance course and online-classes. The teacher must capture the initial attention of students and keep it throughout the course. If the first task is easily fulfilled, the second one is not so simple. A variety of content types can save students from the boredom and the effect of "falling asleep" and "turning off" during an online lesson. So hyperlinked presentations, audio, video, flash animations, interactive games must be used.

Infographics, created or taken from the internet, can offer students the set of tasks.

And the teacher can use the whole infographics or some parts of it: every part gives a kind of tasks. For example, it can be: restoring some logical sequence; connecting an image with the corresponding definition, explanation; restoring some missing information; schematic representation of the listened information; connecting the listened information and given images; transforming the received information into messages, reports, notes for a web page, etc. [3].

The component "attention" can be kept also through the changing of kinds of activities in the virtual learning environment, the variability of tasks within each module, the personal experience of students, the use of problem-solved pedagogical technologies (flipped class, interactive Mind-map, debates, cases) which stimulates the participation in online dialogues, discussions.

Did the teacher manage to catch students' attention? If yes, it is great! However, the motivation may decrease if the content of the lesson does not have a practical way out for students through a system of some training exercises / tasks / tests and, further, into communication. The teacher's influence on the "significance" component means helping to understand the specific benefits of learning for each student personally, determining the significance of the learning for his personal growth. In our opinion, the use of the "Language portfolio" technology is necessary and effective in this case, and the "What can I say already" section is the main element of it. By filling in this section, students can think about, realize and describe their achievements at this stage of learning a foreign language, can see/verbalize the results of their classes, determine where and how they

can apply the acquired knowledge, skills, qualities and methods of action in their professional or other activities.

It is important that from the very beginning students have the sense of self-confidence and in their personal success. And this confidence should be strengthened by a teacher, who should emphasize in every possible way students' ability to cope with the educational material and achieve intermediate goals. Supporting students' self-confidence is the third way to increase the motivation. Have you explained the material?

Excellent. Now every student should have an opportunity to get some intermediate result, to give a good answer, to do an exercise / task / test, to solve a case-task. During the distance learning the component "confidence" can be influenced by the definition of the deadlines for completing tasks, the organized structure of the training course, the provided information about the quality of completed homework.

Even if the first three factors of maintaining the motivation were successfully implemented in practice, students' motivation will inevitably fall towards the end of the course. This is indicated by accumulated fatigue, a large amount of new information.

Therefore, the "satisfaction" component also needs some constant "feeding" from a teacher who gives these distance classes. It is important to pay special attention to the results of work, which generates the satisfaction. This can be done by various means: marks, points, oral comments.

And here again the reflection is necessary. First of all, the compliance of learning outcomes with students' expectations must be. They may be happy with their results; they may feel proud that they chose this particular foreign language to study and "went all the way". The satisfaction with learning outcomes is also promoted by the actions of the teacher who supported students throughout the learning process and helped them to achieve success.

While learning a foreign language, students should understand the stages of learning (from the initial stage to advanced) and the levels of a foreign language (elementary, basic, etc.). The achieving a certain level is encouraged in any form, which also increases the motivation. The successful completion of studying should be highlighted.

It can be congratulations on the computer screen/gadget, some music in honour of the finalist. If there was a whole group of students, the teacher can praise and congratulate students in front of everyone at one of the last online classes.

The path from the goal to the learning outcomes is a consistent upward movement, the steps to the success in the process of learning a foreign language. And the success is guaranteed by students' emotional involvement in the learning process. During the distance learning students can hardly establish themselves emotional and psychological contacts with each other and the teacher. The set of creative online and offline tasks aimed at the team building in order to unite the distance learning group should be the important part of the distance learning of foreign languages. They are project technologies, game aspect training, individual projects and projects of "small groups", business and role-playing games, solving cases and situational problems, virtual quests, etc. [5, 8].

Thus, this model (the attention, the significance, the confidence and the satisfaction) must be the base for teachers in the process of the creation and maintenance of the motivation in the distance learning of a foreign language.

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Using Self-Directed Learning and E-Learning to Support Students in Reaching their Individual Learning Goals. Language Teaching in Times of Covid-19? Challenge Accepted

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Abstract

Heterogeneity in EFL classes and exceptional situations, such as the current Covid-19 pandemic, necessitate extraordinary flexibility in language-course design. Teachers are confronted with challenges they have not been adequately prepared for. To meet the standards of excellent teaching practice, especially in times that make face-to-face classes impossible, teachers are required to employ strategies that guarantee learning success and keep students motivated.

Self-Directed-Learning (SDL) in combination with E-Learning offers the students the freedom to choose their individual learning goals and -tools and provide the learners with autonomy in regards to time, place and pace of studying. The self-directed learning approach embraces and reaches the diversity as it provides students with the opportunity to take initiative and responsibility for their learning progress. They can select their own learning goals and activities and pursue them at any time, in any place and using any materials and tools they want, guided and supported by their teacher.

The combination of self-responsibility and independence results in higher student motivation even in difficult learning situations.

Keywords: Self-Directed Learning, COVID-19, learner autonomy, E-learning, student motivation, online teaching

1. Introduction

Language classes in tertiary education have become more and more heterogeneous in the last decades. Courses with learners at different language levels, from diverse cultures and ethnical or professional backgrounds, of different ages and native languages, are the daily routine of language teachers. However, if an obstacle, such as the abrupt transition from face-to-face classes to distance learning, appears, teachers may be easily overwhelmed, for although the teaching conditions change completely, the needs of the students do not, and the outcome according to the curricula should still be guaranteed.

2. Implications of COVID-19 for The University of Applied Sciences Burgenland

From Mid-March 2020, universities and other educational institutions in Austria were affected by a decision of the national government that was made due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Based on this decision, which stipulated a transition to Distance Learning, the University of Applied Sciences Burgenland (UASB) provided all lectures

online only from that day. In the beginning of April, it was decided to continue Distance Learning for the entire summer semester 2020 to avoid the risk of infection during on-site courses.

As considerate the decision by the university's management might have been, as challenging it was for students and teachers equally. At the very beginning of the semester, when all the courses had been planned and prepared and just had started, teachers were informed that no face-to-face lectures would be held and that they needed to give all lectures online with immediate effect.

Changing lesson plans on short notice is a necessity sometimes, and teachers should be flexible enough to adapt to changing situations fast; however, it became obvious very soon that the situation might be difficult to handle. Some teachers/lecturers had never or hardly ever used online tools before and were completely overwhelmed by this situation.

3. Major differences between face-to-face and synchronous online language classes

The challenge is that many aspects of face-to-face language classes are lost or become much more difficult in an online setting. The most obvious difference between face-to-face and synchronous online teaching is the physical distance in online sessions and the loss of sensing the mood or the energy in a classroom that incurs with the absence of this said room. Sometimes, the physical distance is aggravated by a visual absence of some of the participants. This may be due to technical problems or because the environment does not allow the attendees to activate the cameras. It also might happen that students do not turn on the camera simply because they do not want to.

Closely connected to the visual dilemma are the problems that occur with the audio devices. Speakers or microphones might not work, and students are sometimes unable to listen to the lecture or participate appropriately.

Interactive communication is an integral part of any face-to-face language class, and students are encouraged to speak and participate in discussions, negotiations, etc. The technical problems mentioned above can impede any kind of oral participation in online classes though, and lively discussions on Zoom or Teams are practically impossible, as one needs to make a decision between annoying audio feedback and muting most of the microphones.

Other difficulties are the organization of group-work, pronunciation practice, learning games that are played in a physical classroom or giving different instructions to different students.

What is definitely underestimated is that is simply impossible to teach an online lesson following a face-to-face session lesson plan, and the course outline has to be restructured.

However, students who have been introduced to the Self-Directed Learning (SDL) approach and have been working with it for some time are used to studying independently, and teachers who have incorporated this methodology in their courses will be versatile users of online tools, sources and technological devices and, thus, flexible in their course design.

4. SDL, E-Learning, and online teaching

SDL is a hands-on approach to learning and teaching that requires students to diagnose their learning needs, define their learning goals, find appropriate resources, choose learning methods, and document and evaluate their learning outcomes [2]. Thus, learners are empowered to become independent, mature and authentic students. For

teachers, SDL is an approach where they need to support learners in developing these dispositions and where they become “facilitators of learning, resource providers, guides, evaluators, critical thinking promoters and supporters, in addition to their role of a language expert” [1].

The fact that students have the freedom to choose what aspect of English they would like to improve each semester, creates a feeling of being taken seriously as a learner.

The requirement to provide the teacher with a thorough and clear documentation as well as a self-evaluation and reflection upon their learning process, makes them feel much more responsible for their own learning success. Students become used to making their own decisions regarding content, time, and place of learning, which gives them a huge advantage compared to students who have to reach collective goals determined by the teacher.

E-Learning seems to perfectly complement SDL as it deploys electronic technology to access learning tools, information and different communication channels that are needed to work on individual tasks to reach the learning goals.

Fortunately, the English classes of the International Business Relations (IBR) and International Wine Marketing (IWM) MA programs had implemented Self-Directed-Learning (SDL) and E-learning many years before the lockdown in spring 2020, which mitigated the difficult transition from face-to-face to online learning and teaching. The result was that students extremely enjoyed their English classes despite the exceptionally difficult circumstances, especially in comparison to the other subject courses. Students were already being used to doing approximately 50% of their course work online (synchronous or asynchronous) and, therefore, did not show any reluctance to increase this to 100%. They had been familiar with WebEx, the online platform the UASB provides for online teaching, Moodle, and numerous other online language-learning tools they had used before.

Teachers, similarly, adapted quite fast to the changed circumstances, and the UASB was rated as Austria's best UAS regarding online-teaching with 87% satisfied students [5]. An internal study also showed that students were satisfied with the transition, however, they felt they had to invest more time and they missed the social interaction of face-to-face sessions [3].

5. Tips for making online sessions fun, motivating, and successful

To guarantee student satisfaction, some simple pieces of advice might help. First of all, synchronous and asynchronous online sessions need to be planned differently.

Asynchronous online sessions might be used for activities such as desktop research, forum discussions, watching videos on the internet, voice recordings for pronunciation practice, vocabulary and grammar training with different kinds of online resources, speaking sessions with peers on skype or reading online articles, to name just a few.

These sessions can be used for any activity that does not necessarily require the presence or intervention of a teacher. Anyway, it is of extreme importance that students know exactly what the teacher expects them to do in these sessions. Instructions for asynchronous online sessions must be very clear and specific, should not be longer than one screen, always come in the same form, and they should include the purpose of the task as well as the goal [4].

In the synchronous online sessions, teachers should strive to create an atmosphere that resembles a face-to-face session as much as possible, and even though it might be tempting, the teacher's speaking time should not be more than in a face-to-face setting.

Unless there are any technical problems, it is recommended to turn on the cameras to evoke the feeling of being in a physical classroom. It is a good idea, however, to mute

the students' microphones to avoid annoying and loud background noises, and only students who want to say something unmute their microphone for the time they are speaking. Group work may be done in breakout sessions, which are a feature in most of the platforms used for online teaching. However, it is also possible to use WhatsApp groups to let students work in small teams. Tools like Quizlet and Kahoot can also be incorporated into online teaching sessions to do quizzes and vocabulary work; however, if a teacher shares their screen, time-delays may occur.

Apart from choosing adequate activities and appropriate contents, one should not forget to plan regular breaks, at least 10 minutes after 45 minutes, to keep students focused and concentrated. Another option is to assign students some work they can do individually, deactivate cameras as well as microphones, and meet after an agreed amount of time to discuss the set task.

Never forget to give feedback to all work that is done in synchronous or asynchronous online classes to avoid that students become demotivated and/or lost in the cloud.

6. Conclusion

(Language) teachers might have to get used to teaching online much more than they had to do before the COVID-19 pandemic. No one can know when we will return to living our lives as they used to be, or if we will return at all. This means that educators will have to be prepared and find ways to teach adequately in online classrooms without any loss of efficiency and quality. After all, students will not change their needs and expectations, and they have to earn their ECTS credits.

It is the teachers' responsibility to change the structures and the time management of their courses, to accordingly adapt tasks and activities, and to ensure that the students will not be deprived of the benefit and progress, regardless whether they are being taught face-to-face or online.

Implementing SDL and E-Learning as much as possible, also in times when students can be on-site, is a very efficient way for students to get used to working independently, without the constant presence of a teacher. Students learn to rely more on themselves, reflect more on what they do, think critically, and it seems that self-directed students are in a continuous learning mode, strive for improvement, can cope with occasional failures better and are constantly improving and growing. These facts also seem to support their positive approach to the transition to online teaching.

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ICT for Language Learning



Beyond Conventional Digital Approaches in the Humanities: Corpus Linguistics for Language Related University Disciplines

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Abstract

Diving into digital education seems to be the reality in recent times. Universities and humanities departments in particular have willingly embraced technology-rich teaching methods for a long time now [1]. Nevertheless, the general development is towards the implementation of basic digital literacy approaches rather than towards creating new discipline-adapted content that can improve the students' digital-intensive research skills [2]. This paper illustrates how the discipline of corpus linguistics can create fruitful synergies between language related disciplines in the humanities: literatures studies, both in the native and foreign languages, translation studies, gender studies, media studies, cultural studies and linguistics. The aim of the study is to demonstrate the potential of exposing students in the humanities to digital-intensive research methods, such as corpus linguistics, to enhance learning motivation and improve disciplinary competence at the same time. The first part of the study is dedicated to the presentation and exemplification of the teaching and student research methods that have been implemented with first- and second-year undergraduate students at a Romanian university who conducted a three-month internship at the Centre for Corpus Related Digital Approaches to Humanities (CODHUS). The second part includes details on the teaching scenarios and outcomes of pedagogical interventions, based on the use of corpora, in two undergraduate courses. The paper concludes with a discussion on the impact of applied corpus linguistics methods for modern teaching in the humanities as well as their integration into the larger field of digital humanities.

Keywords: applied corpus linguistics, digital humanities, innovative teaching, ICT for language learning, Romanian university students

1. Introduction

Digital approaches have gradually entered academic usage due to a multitude of society-driven factors such as the emergence of technology-supported activities in all sectors of life. It is now unconceivable to attend a lecture or finish an assignment without a variety of electronic means that either enhance communication or assist during task completion processes [1]. Policy making strategies, such as the ones promoted by the Bologna Process, have also adapted to the new reality and incorporate an array of measures that are relevant for digitalisation strategies Europe-wide. Nevertheless, the general development is towards the implementation of basic digital literacy approaches rather than towards creating new discipline-adapted content that can improve the students' digital-intensive research skills [2]. Until digital transformation becomes the norm, universities struggle with the integration of innovative computer-mediated methods and tools on a continuum ranging from reluctance to accept transformation

because of disciplinary traditions (e.g., humanities), to implementing only communication-related digitalisation solutions (most universities), up to creating synergies for a complete transformation of the research and teaching mission. In Romania, this polarisation is quite present, considering that the whole educational system is still undergoing reform away from a communist methodology (beginning of the 1990'), towards embracing European values (entering EU in 2007) and continuing with nowadays' challenge of completely having to switch to the online environment during the ongoing pandemic.

In the present study, we aim at capturing recent best-practice examples of introducing and applying digital approaches in research and research training in a rather traditional domain, humanities, at a Romanian University (i.e., West University of Timisoara/WUT, Romania). We report on the experience at the newly-founded centre CODHUS – Centre for Corpus Related Digital Approches to Humanities (<https://codhus.projects.uvt.ro/>), after completion of a first round of students' internship stages, and after offering two intensive undergraduate courses and one workshop for faculty members.

2. CODHUS: at the intersection of Digital Humanities and Corpus Linguistics

2.1 Digital Humanities in Romania

The results of a survey (DIGITS-Digital Humanities Survey) on Digital Humanities (DH) topics carried out last year among our contacts) show that respondents had the most diverse answers regarding the definition of the DH field, ranging from digital libraries to digital research tools [2]. But a very common answer indicated the “complementarity of technology and humanities” by “facilitating the studies and research in Humanities with the help of digital resources and tools”.

Proceeding from these basic assumptions, and accounting for the relative scarcity of digital-method use in the humanities in Romania, the [CODHUS](#) research centre was founded in 2019 at WUT. CODHUS is set up as a research lab with its primary function being that of producing novel results, whereas its secondary function involves “training the next generation of scientists” [3]. A rapidly implemented measure was the open call for internships and voluntary research stages for the WUT students in humanities. This transposed CODHUS in an institution that is involved in “knowledge making” and transfer. By doing that, the lab is also building “epistemic cultures” [4], since the Romanian educational environment is very traditional (i.e., mainly instructor-centred).



Fig. 1. Digital Humanities initiatives in Romania

Currently, in Romania, there are five universities where DH initiatives have been launched (Figure 1). Only two of them are organized as DH centres (DigiHUBB and CODHUS) whereas only CODHUS has corpus linguistics as its main focus.

2.2 Why Corpus Linguistics?

Even though nowadays the DH field extends beyond applying computational tools in linguistics or literature, language data remain probably the core area of humanities computing. Hinrichs *et al.* [5], for instance, argue that, regardless of the digital methods used, “textual resources [...] play a central role in most humanities disciplines” (p. 559).

As one of the oldest digital methods to use linguistic data, corpus linguistics “embraced the digital nearly since the inception of modern computer science” (p. 115) [6]. We therefore consider that corpus methods, either in the form of standard corpus linguistics approaches or extending towards the concept of a “corpus” as archive/collection of data, are essential in creating expertise in DH.

3. Corpus related expertise – internships and courses

3.1 A new type of internship

At WUT, internships are mandatory for most of the students (as “practice” included in the curriculum), and the educational plan states key competences that are to be developed for Philology students, such as (inter- and pluri-cultural) communication, translation competences, computer literacy skills, innovative thinking skills etc.

Thus, in November 2019, immediately after CODHUS foundation, an open call was launched and, by January, 9 interns from the 1st and 2nd year of their BA and one volunteer (3rd year BA) were selected to start their activities at CODHUS. All of them studied English as their major or minor.

(a) The [first training](#) (February 2020) focused on the fields of DH and corpus linguistics, introducing students to a user guide in annotating and coding texts, since most of them would be involved in processing collected texts and building the [ROGER](#) bilingual corpus. This practical session was essential in accustoming trainees with linguistic data preparation and analysis.

(b) The second training (March 2020), was based on self-compiled corpora and focused on using Lancsbox [7], in case studies on expert corpora and corpus-based pedagogical interventions for the improvement of students’ academic writing skills.

Trainees were taught to search frequency lists, N-Grams, keywords in contexts/concordances, GraphColls, then perform their own in-depth analysis of their findings.

(c) From March until June 2020, students were assigned several tasks under the tutors’ supervision: text digitization, text processing and corpus building. Moreover, each of them chose a topic for an individual research paper, where typical corpus linguistics methods were implemented.

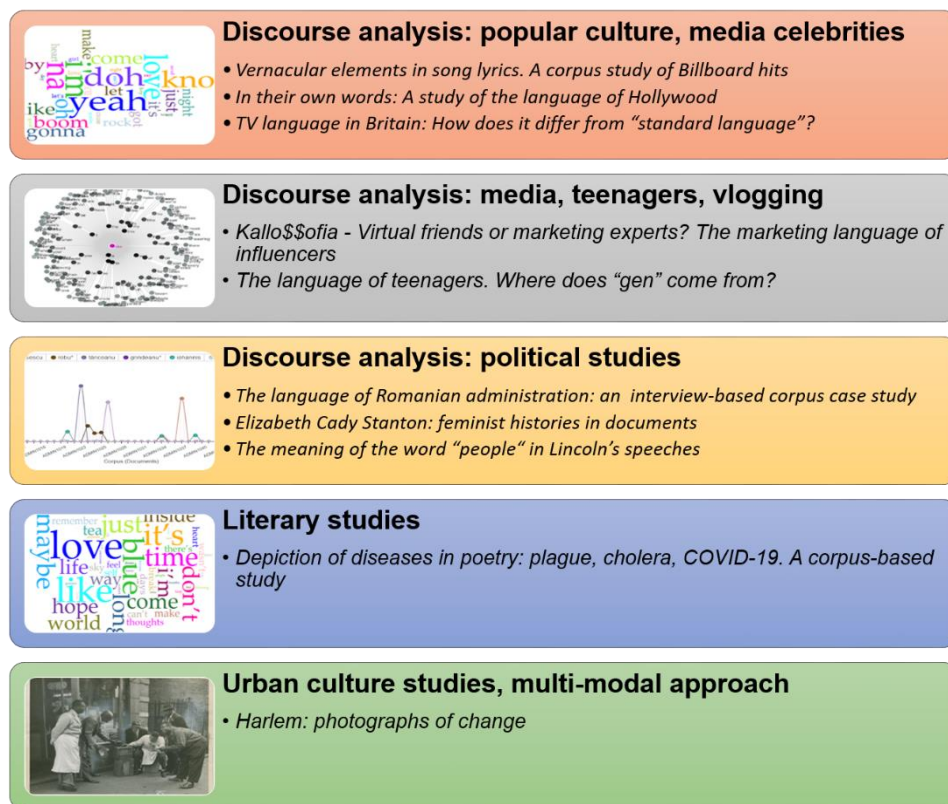


Fig. 2. Research topics chosen by CODHUS interns and volunteers

After the internship, in their reports (online [here](#)), students mentioned that they perceived their internship as rewarding and helping them understand the potential of doing research using digital approaches, something that they had considered, before their experience at CODHUS, to be incompatible with the profile of the discipline.

3.2 Topics and results

As mentioned before, all the trainees were asked to carry out their own exploratory study. In order to assist students during corpus collection and analysis process, or to discuss methods and results, CODHUS tutors organized individual online meetings. An overview of the interns’ research topics (Figure 2) shows that most of the studies included English language discourse analyses. Students compiled their own rather smaller (~100 texts) corpora of texts, using resources available online, several extracted from digital libraries.

Whether discussing linguistic features of Billboard’s hits, those of common musical themes, or particularities in the speech of Hollywood actors in interviews, students tended to analyses phenomena related to real life or their personal interests (e.g., discourse strategies in Hollywood).

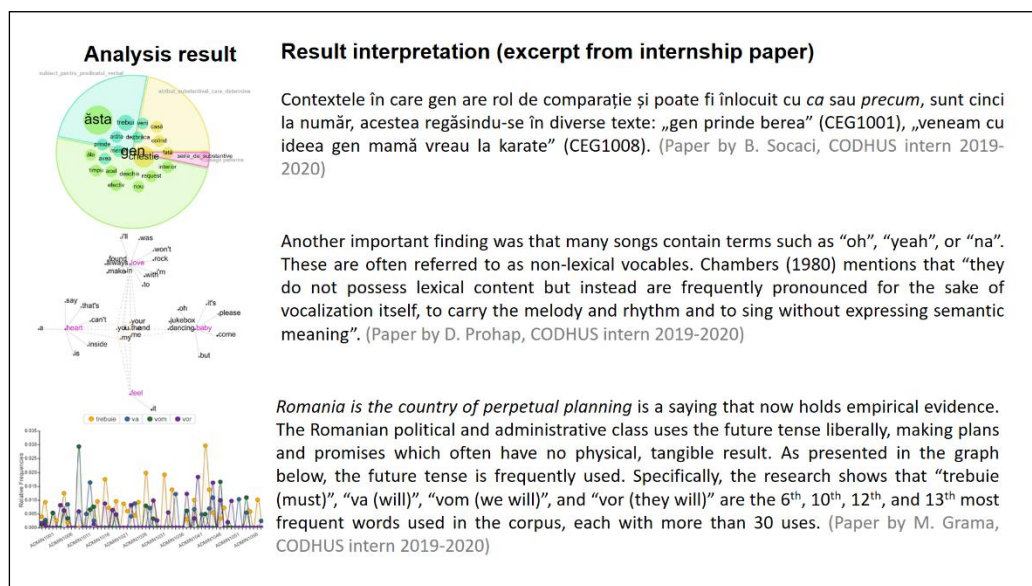


Fig. 3. Research results in internship papers (examples)

Trainees demonstrated awareness of the language transformations (e.g., examining teenagers' popular vlogs), but also well anchored in the political domain, by scrutinizing political strategies reflected in discourses of either the Romanian or the American administration. The literary topics were not neglected: one of the papers focused on differences in depicting plague, cholera and coronavirus in poetry. Another paper (cultural studies topic) designed a multi-modal analysis of the effects of urban revitalization through a collection of nine photographs depicting Harlem from the 1930s to the 2010s.

3.3 Corpus linguistics for conventional language courses

Besides internships, CODHUS offered an introductory course for both students (i.e., freshmen) and faculty members, in two sessions: in 2019 and 2020. This happened because the centre gained in popularity and more and more colleagues teaching languages manifested their interest in letting their students learn about and experiment with the new digital methods. The offer included: a module on *Digital Tools for Academic Writing* for our colleagues from different departments, and, for students, an *Introductory Course in Corpus Linguistics* (1st semester) and a course on *Corpus Based Literary Studies* (2nd semester).

Each course session ended with a student satisfaction online survey which indicated their high interest in the topic [8]. This demonstrates, once again, that the integration of new research-based digital methods in traditional language courses can be performed successfully, having, at the same time, high motivational impact.

Conclusions

After only one year of activity, CODHUS succeeded in its mission in more than one way: it became a place of encounters for students, teachers and researchers that manifested interest in the use of digital methods for the humanities disciplines, while also raising awareness, at institutional level, on the potential of language related cross-disciplinary studies. In this paper, we have exemplified the multitude of research-support

training activities that a DH centre can perform without much financial and administrative resources. Philology students performing their internships at CODHUS have reported a positive and rich learning experience:

I also found the individual research part interesting because I have never had the opportunity to do such an activity before. I believe that the programs used and the knowledge gained during the internship will be useful in the future.

(Internship Report by D. Prohap, undergraduate intern at CODHUS in 2020).

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Evaluating Deviant Art as an Educational Tool for Collaborative Learning

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Abstract

The widespread use of technology has reshaped the field of language teaching and has transformed the learning experience for language learners. The implementation of multimedia tools has nurtured opportunities for more student-centred, real-world-like learning environments where students can become more autonomous and collaborate with their peers. Pedagogically, the collaborative nature of these tools is founded under the social constructivist theory according to which learning takes place through social interactions and language use, and knowledge is shared and becomes more meaningful. The multimedia tool involved in the present study is Deviant Art, an international online community for art enthusiasts, featuring artwork, photography and videography. Within this social community, artists can connect through their art, share their work, engage in constructive feedback and keep their own journal about their work. The present pilot study focuses on the evaluation of Deviant Art as an educational tool, as it was used in the course English for Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) in the Fall Semester of 2019, at the Cyprus University of Technology (CUT). The evaluation was based on the experience of 11 first-year students of the Department of Fine Arts. The aim of the paper was to investigate students' perceptions on Deviant Art as an educational tool for creating collaborative learning opportunities and to examine up to what extent they intended to continue with the Social Networking (SN) tool after the termination of the course. Data was collected through the students' reflection journals, the instructor's field notes and through an online questionnaire, submitted at the end of the semester.

Keywords: Deviant Art, ICT, collaborative learning, ESAP, Higher Education

1. Introduction

In a collaborative learning environment, participants work together on a task simultaneously [3] while collaboration skills and knowledge creation among students are seen as an instructional motive for using technology in the lesson. Higher Education (HE) has attracted a number of studies on using technology as a supportive tool for language learning. Some of the major characteristics of collaborative learning are a) promoting active learning, b) the teacher having a facilitator's role, c) students sharing their experiences in small groups and d) students reflecting on their processes [4]. The theoretical underpinnings of integrating collaborative tools in HE courses lie on the social constructivist theory according to which learning is co-constructed, emphasising the dynamic interplay among learners, teachers and the various educational tasks they are asked to perform [5].

Lomicka and Lord (2016) point out that academic studies on the use of SN tools are often criticised for their lack of empirical analysis. However, they do introduce new technological tools and change traditional forms of language learning. For the purposes

of the study, Deviant Art, a SN tool for artists and art enthusiasts, aimed to initiate opportunities for community building and learning with like-minded students and artists while using English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Pedagogically, it enabled the students to use their applied knowledge on art into practice through constructive comments and feedback. The purpose of the study was to connect art students and artists in the widespread art community, to build a sense of community among them and to provide opportunities for constructive feedback based on theories of art and art movements taught in the English language. Moreover, it aimed to examine up to what extent the students' activity with the tool would continue after the termination of the ESAP course.

Results showed that students were positive in their responses towards the collaborative nature and community-building features of Deviant Art but were reluctant about using it after the course finished.

2. Deviant Art

Deviant Art is a SN platform that features artists' work in photography, general artwork and videography. It was first launched in August 2000 and it is still active. Users, which are called Deviants, can choose their own username while registering for the first time and connect with as many Deviants as they like. Even though registration to the community is free, harnessing the capabilities and features of the platform like remuneration of one's art sales requires a paid membership [1]. Moreover, Deviants can navigate through an abundance of topics ranging from 3D Art to Literature, peruse on their fellow users' work and keep their own journal.

3. The Study

3.1 Context and Participants

The use of Deviant Art was part of the Fine Arts ESAP course in the Fall Semester 2019. The course curriculum was designed by the author and all lessons took place in an interactive computer lab at CUT. The choice of lesson content and the tools for the course aimed to familiarise students with topics related to their field of study and to develop their hard and soft skills.

The 11 participants were all first-year students at the Department of Fine Arts of CUT.

Their age varied between the ages of 18 to 40 and were 4 males and 7 females. All the participants spoke English as a foreign language (FL) and were frequent Internet users. They all retained their own social media profiles but had not used any multimedia tools for educational purposes before. Only one participant had an account with Deviant Art prior to the commencement of the semester but was not active.

3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data for the study were collected through the students' reflective diary which probed for information about their progressive engagement with the tool. The reflective diary was put into effect on the end of Week 3 and lasted until Week 13, the final week of the semester. The instructor's field notes also provided for a more reflective and personal point of view of the students' experience with Deviant Art and helped the instructor gain more insight into the students' process. The data were, manually, analysed and coded by the instructor. Finally, a questionnaire, submitted to the students at the end of the semester, enhanced the reflective content from the students' perceptions and intentions. The questionnaire was created on Google Forms and included closed-ended questions.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Analysis of the students' reflective journals and instructor's field notes

As stated in the previous section, the students' reflective journals enabled them to engage in an ongoing process of development and familiarisation with Deviant Art as a collaborative and multimedia tool. As for the instructor's field notes, they strengthened the students' reflections and, personally, helped the instructor understand the process through which the students went through throughout the semester.

Table 1. Students' perceptions of Deviant Art as an educational tool for creating collaborative learning opportunities

	Total Responses	Total Responses (percentage)
Positive	8/11	72,7%
Negative	1/11	9,1%
Neutral	2/11	18,1%

Table 1 shows the students' perceptions of Deviant Art as a tool which can create opportunities of collaboration. A significant percentage of the students (72,7%) expressed positive perceptions about the tool and its collaborative opportunities. Regarding constructive comments, feedback and connecting with other artists, some of the comments that validated the students' positive perceptions were:

"It was great to exchange comments on art and thoughts with another person or artist in English" (Student 1).

"Comments helped me evaluate my work, improve my level and find a solution to improve my account's image" (Student 6).

"They helped me get to know new things and get tips to improve my work ... yes, it helped me because I could connect with other artists worldwide who made some comments on my work and helped me...we chatted for a while, that's the truth" (Student 7).

"It's definitely interesting and it helps my work. Getting to know other artists, for them to see our work and for us to see their work and establish communication and dialogue among universities concerning our drawings and our work" (Student 4).

"Well, some of them responded to my comments. To be honest, it was only comments with positive messages ... we used English to talk about art, that helped me" (Student 2).

In contrast, Student 3 had a negative perception: "No, actually, I didn't really like Deviant Art. I prefer traditional ways of learning about art, like galleries, newspapers, magazines, etc."

Students also believed the tool enhanced their online presence as future artists among the artistic circle: "My online presence is automatically a worldwide presence.

The spectrum is bigger" (Student 5), "Whether we like it or not, this is the new way of communication... it's a daily thing for everyone... we need to survive as artists so this platform can help us" (Student 2) and "With this platform I can have the master key to open helpful doors in my way to the top" (Student 1).

Table 2. Students' intention of continuance with Deviant Art after the termination of the course

	Total Responses	Total Responses (percentage)
To a great extent	5/11	45,5%
Not at all	1/11	9,1%
To a moderate extent	5/11	45,5%

Table 2 reveals up to what extent students intend on continuing their activity with the SN tool after the course finishes. Analysis revealed positive intention for almost half of the students (45,5%), "It's something I will continue working on. It helps enormously in the artistic department" (Student 7) and "Yes, I want to attract more people and to become better at my work" (Student 6). An equal percentage revealed they would remain active to a moderate extent after the termination of the course. 4 Students considered it time-consuming which could contribute to their reluctance: "It requires a lot of quality time...making comments, too" (Student 4), "I'd like to find more time to get to know it because it's very useful. I have other priorities now and Deviant Art takes time" (Student 5). However, only 1 student (9,1%) maintained a negative intention, "I made little progress with Deviant Art since the beginning of the semester ... it's not a friendly platform for me to continue" (Student 3).

4.2 Analysis of the questionnaire

The consolidation of the questionnaire corroborated the data derived from the students' reflections. As seen in Figure 1, 6 out of 11 students (54,5%) consider success in the tool as "moderately easy" which reflects the uncertainty levels of Table 2 as to whether they would continue using it.

19. Is it easy to become successful in the Deviant Art platform?

11 responses

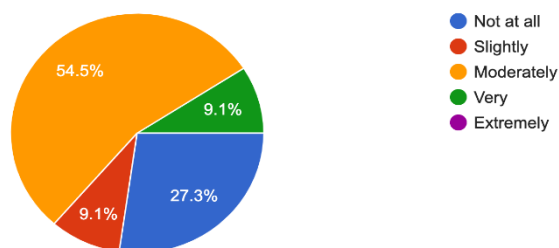


Fig. 1. Students' responses concerning whether it is easy to become successful in the Deviant Art platform

20. What are the drawbacks of the Deviant Art platform? Tick the three most important answers for you.

11 responses

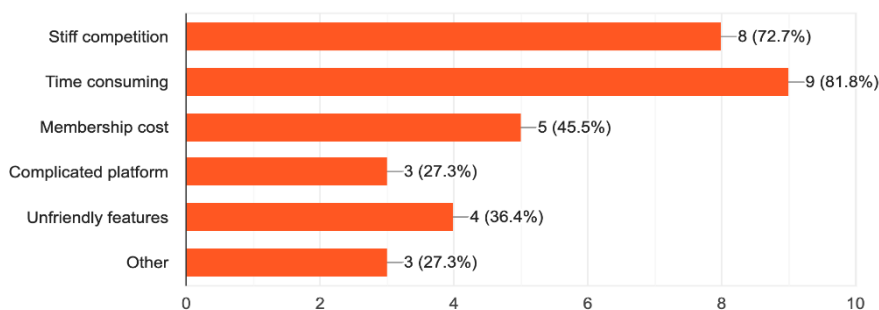


Fig. 2. The 3 most important drawbacks of the Deviant Art platform according to the students

Similarly, Figure. 2 sheds some light on the students' negative perceptions of the tool.

Its time-consuming character, stiff competition and membership cost are among the 3 most important drawbacks for the students. Again, this validates the students' reflections of the tool and the time requirements it poses.

21. Would you like to remain active in Deviant Art after the completion of English for Academic Purposes?

11 responses

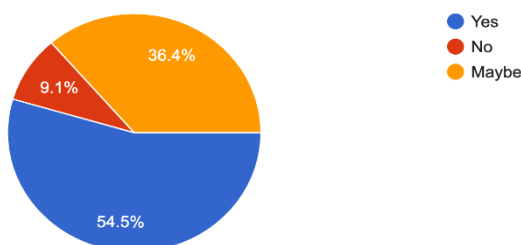


Fig. 3. Students' answers on whether they would like to continue their activity after the termination of their course

Finally, 6 students (54,5%) would like to remain active in Deviant Art while 4 (36,4%) answered "maybe". This reinforces the qualitative analysis (Table 2) and the students' moderate intention of future Deviant Art activity.

Conclusions

This paper describes Fine Arts students' positive evaluation of Deviant Art as an educational tool for creating collaborative learning opportunities whereas additional quantitative analysis substantiates their moderate intention of remaining active after the termination of the course. Despite being a pilot study, the small number of participants constitutes a limitation. Finally, more extensive research on the features could enlighten our knowledge of the tool and could further determine its pedagogical character.

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Exploring EFL Students' Attitudes toward Internet-Based Courses in Comparison to On-Site Courses

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Abstract

In spite of its ubiquity, the role of technology in education has been challenged and characterized by skepticism; however, the present critical situation in the world (Covid-19) reaffirmed its paramount importance in several aspects of the present life especially in educational arenas. Utilizing a focused essay technique, this study aimed to explore the college students' attitude toward the four-month internet-based courses offered by their university instead of on-site courses due to the Corona pandemic. The participants of the study were MA (N=7) and undergraduate (N=21) ELT (English Language Teaching) male and female students within the age range of 19-32. Two themes a) advantages and b) disadvantages of internet-based synchronous and asynchronous courses emerged as a result of content analysis. The findings may provide courseware designers, faculty in higher education and administrators with insights to pinpoint the barriers and enhance the efficiency of these forums to promote learning in the changing world.

Keywords: Internet-based learning, technology, synchronous, asynchronous

1. Introduction

Technology has been in use in education and language learning for a long time.

However, it had an ancillary role in comparison to face-to-face classroom until the Corona pandemic hit the whole world and transferred the education to the virtual world.

Although generation Z learners are known as digital natives, who have smartphones and are familiar with social media at very young age [1], when it came to fully on-line courses in educational arenas, including universities, they expressed reluctance to participate. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand university students' attitude toward on-line courses they took during this pandemic. Studying attitudes is significant because they may be conducive to behavioural intentions [2]. The results might reveal misconceptions and barriers to using technology in education and pave the path for making better use of it in future.

The research question addressed by this study is:

What is the EFL undergraduate and postgraduate students' attitude toward on-line courses offered by the university during Corona pandemic?

2. Methodology

2.1 Context and Participants

The study used a qualitative methodology to explore EFL university students' attitude toward on-line courses. The data were collected in two undergraduate (N=21) and postgraduate (N=7) classes, majoring in English Teaching in Islamic Azad University, Maragheh, Iran. The classes were made up of male and female students within the age range of 19-32.

2.2 Instrument

Participants were asked to write about their attitude toward on-line learning.

Implementing a focused essay technique, they were required to answer why they liked it or why they didn't like. What kind of problems they faced and their experience in general? In focused essay technique "a respondent is asked to write a few lines about a specific event in some detail" (p. 570) [3]. A time period of one week was given to students to write their focused essays in English. They were also asked to write their names, major and age in their document. Having gathered the writings electronically, they were all transferred to a word file. Using Creswell's [4] six steps of content analysis, the essays were analysed and two main themes emerged: a) advantages b) disadvantages (see table 1).

Main categories	subcategories
1. Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Comfort b. Taking advantage of telecommuting c. Having access to the content d. Learning new technical and behavioural skills e. Learning in a multimedia environment
2. Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Lack of order and discipline b. Glitches c. Social isolation d. Lack of computer and the internet literacy e. High cost and unavailability of devices

3. Results

The following two categories and some subcategories emerged as a result of analysis:

Advantages

Comfort

Some students (21%) found on-line courses very convenient and comfortable because they did not have to dress for the class. They also said they enjoyed the comfort of their own room and devices. In addition, on-line learning can provide a chance for students to be involved in meaningful language practice in low-risk, face keeping contexts [5]. As one of the students said, “When I’m in the classroom, I feel anxious to join the discussions even if I know my opinion is good enough, but in the on-line class, I felt confident enough to talk and when I was not inclined to talk, I would write a text in the chat box.” (ID, 4, undergraduate).

Taking Advantage of Telecommuting

Most postgraduate students (32%), especially those who had to travel to the campus from different cities, expressed their satisfaction with on-line classes believing that it gained them time, so they could spend enough time on their studying and work. They also said it saved money because they did not have to pay for accommodation and transportation.

Accessibility of the Content

Both undergraduate and graduate students (21%) supported the idea of accessibility of the lesson content. As the presented lessons were saved and used for later references, it provided the chance for students to download them when they were not able to participate synchronously. One of the students who was also a teacher at school said “Sometimes I had to miss the class because it interfered with my school; with on-line classes I can manage both my job and education” (ID, 7: postgraduate).

Learning New Technical and Behavioural Skills

Both undergraduate and postgraduate students (23%) believed that on-line classes caused them to learn new computer skills. One of the students wrote “At first, I found the system very frustrating and challenging; I missed face-to-face classes, but at the end of the course, I found that I had learned a different skill besides my own subjects” (ID, 2: undergraduate). In addition, some of them (18%) reported that they learned how to be self-disciplined and self-motivated to follow the courses.

Learning in a Multimedia Environment

Both undergraduate and postgraduate students (28%) commented that in on-line classes the instructors presented the lessons in different modes such as power points, videos and audios, text which enhanced their comprehension and made the lesson enjoyable. One of the students commented “Some Instructors do not usually use technology even power points presentations in face-to-face classes and they just use white boards and textbooks but even those instructors had to present their lessons through power point in on-line classes” (ID, 20: undergraduate).

Disadvantages

In spite of the fact that the students benefitted from on-line classes, they also complained about the shortages and problems they experienced during this period.

Lack of Order and Discipline

Strangely enough, all students (100%) commented that on-line classes lacked the

order and discipline of face-to-face classes. Some of the students (15%) wrote they fell asleep during the class or they did not attend the class because they would have access to the material asynchronously. One of them complained about the distractors at home such as TV, the people at home, noise and many other fun things. The other one wrote “We need high motivation, self-discipline and time management skills to be successful in these classes. I can’t benefit from these classes. I need a serious environment to study” (ID, 24: undergraduate).

Glitches

Similar to previous studies [1], some students (35.7%) complained about the failures in the system. They wrote that the speed of the internet was not fast enough, and they experienced several times of disconnection which caused them to quit the class. One of the students wrote “I needed to log in thirty minutes sooner than the class time or I wouldn’t be able to connect” (ID, 16: undergraduate).

Social Isolation

Social isolation has been defined as “lack of meaningful social contacts” [6]. This contact at university context is between instructors and students and among students.

Both undergraduate and graduate students (42.8%) complained about social isolation. They commented teachers would see the students’ facial expressions and gestures in face-to-face classes, so they could adjust their lectures, but this was not possible in on-line classes. Some of the students (17%) wrote that interaction between teachers and students in on-line classes is mechanical and devoid of any emotions, which is boring and depressing. One of the students wrote “I want to interact and collaborate with my teachers and peers face-to-face. I feel isolated in my room behind my laptop” (ID, 3: undergraduate).

Lack of Computer and the Internet Literacy

Some undergraduate students (17.8%) mentioned lack of computer and the internet literacy as one of the barriers to participate in on-line classes. They stated they experienced anxiety and frustration which led to their loss of self-esteem and self-efficacy.

High Cost and Unavailability of Technology

Both undergraduate and postgraduate students (32%) wrote that the devices (laptops, smartphones, the internet) they required for on-line classes were unaffordable.

One of the students commented “I live in a rural area; we do not have access to the internet and we cannot afford the devices. How are we going to keep up with the education?” (ID, 18: undergraduate).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Although technology had been incorporated to educational arenas for a long time, it had never been used as the only way of education until Corona pandemic spread throughout the world. Unfortunately, participation in on-line classes was not satisfactory enough; 30% of undergraduates and 50% of postgraduates (MA and MS) students at the university took part in the classes. As a result, this study aimed to discover the undergraduate and graduate EFL students’ attitudes who participated in on-line classes toward fully on-line courses they took during Corona pandemic in order to discover any preconceptions, misconceptions, and barriers in these classes so that they could be dispelled and eliminated for higher efficiency in future. A focused essay technique was utilized to gather data; two themes and ten subcategories were found as a result of content analysis. Both undergraduate and postgraduate students expressed their satisfaction with comfort, taking advantage of telecommuting, accessibility of the lesson contents asynchronously, and learning in a multimedia environment in on-line classes.

However, there were complaints about lack of order and discipline in on-line classes.

This might be rooted in the fact that the frequent approach to teaching in Iran is teacher-centered because teachers are reluctant to relinquish power and do not believe in the efficacy of learner-centered approach [7]; therefore, students become accustomed to and prefer this method of presentation and expect a serious learning environment.

Another point which caused dissatisfaction among students was glitches. It is hoped that technology designers and manufacturers will find a way to prevent technical and mechanical failures and design more user-friendly systems to facilitate participation in these forums. The next problem which caused frustration was social isolation. This corroborates with previous studies that the feeling of social isolation is one of the factors in withdrawal from online courses [8], [9]. Another obstacle mentioned by the students was lack of technical and the internet literacy. Today's world requires multiliteracies to thrive; "multiliteracies go beyond dealing with the technical aspect of the electronic medium and include engaging with others through the new technologies and using these creatively as well as critically" (p. 35) [10]. Therefore, it is incumbent on educators to equip students with these literacies to prepare them for this fast-changing world. The last barrier mentioned by the students was the high cost of technology. Previous studies revealed that there is a relationship between students' socioeconomic goods at home and their score on ICT competence tests [11]. What concerns educators is that in spite of the benefits online classes can provide, it will deprive low-income people of education, which will not do justice to this group of people. The results of this study are not generalizable due to the small number of data and its restriction to just one university.

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Reflection of Distance Language Teaching Experience during the Quarantine

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Abstract

Online, Distance, Remote, Virtual or Blended Learning (with their similarities and differences, as these terms are by no means interchangeable) have been fixtures in scholarly and pedagogical discourses in recent years. However, in the spring of 2020, in the advent of the pandemic, most European teachers and students faced the necessity of using new technologies for learning, as well as for language learning. They had to shift to the online and distance methods almost overnight. Abrupt and rapid changes in the teaching-learning procedures, coupled with everyday routines, did not leave much time to process the needs of both students and faculty. Nevertheless, they revealed existing inconsistencies, problems and hinted at further necessary transformations – at times opposite to what was discussed and believed before the pandemic. This paper is a practice-based self-study aimed at outlining contentious issues in the implementation of online learning. While we focus on the Russian Language classes, we contextualize our own teaching experience during the COVID-19 quarantine with the already emerging broader scholarly discussion on the learning-teaching experiences during the pandemic in forms of testimonies, webinars, online discussions and social media support, resource groups and institutional recommendations.

Keywords: Teacher's Self-Reflection, Distance Learning, Blended Learning, Russian Language Learning and Teaching, ICT in Language Learning, COVID-19

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic caused a long list of changes at all levels of modern society, including education ([1], [2], [3], [4] and others). A big number of European schools and teachers have to shift the education process into the virtual space rapidly. As far as language learning is concerned, discussions about online, distance, remote, virtual or blended learning, including their definitions was extensively discussed, analysed and used by language teachers for quite a long time. The researches and concepts introduced at different publications and thematic academic meetings, including the Innovation in Language Learning (former ICT in Language Learning) Conferences (www.conference.pixel-online.net), show different resolutions for the distance language learning and teaching. Nevertheless, in spring 2020, teachers and students faced the new reality of emergency compulsory teaching and learning at a distance. In this paper, we present our reflection of experience of teaching Russian Language courses for adult students during spring and autumn 2020 in a Czech public university.

General reflection on the experience

The following circumstances summarize our reflection of teaching and learning process during the COVID-19 pandemic based on our experience of teaching, emerging publications and debates [4]:

- The move to the distance teaching and learning was rapid and sudden and therefore unprepared: most often than not, the *in-situ* teaching process was with minor adaptations reproduced online. Even though it has been over eight months now since the confinement was proclaimed globally, a profound revision of the experience is still ahead of us to make a prognosis for the future of education. What is certain is that it has to be reconsidered;
- The situation was changing everyday creating additional anxieties and uncertainties to both students and teachers;
- Not only teachers were unready for the new technological challenges, many students also had to learn almost overnight to use online resources. Not everybody had the appropriate equipment and internet connection. Not every household had a sufficient amount of the pieces of equipment. Abrupt transition online nearly simultaneously of the schools of different levels all over the world, often on the same platforms created significant pressure on the platforms;
- The universities and schools increased pressure on the teachers: teaching routine was complimented with rewriting lesson plans, additional meetings to control the process, in some cases with obligation or need to take the courses on online, with extra-hours to adapt the needs of students. In sum, universities and schools in many cases put extra duties on teachers, rather quantitative than qualitative [5];
- Borders between private and public space have been blurred [6], so were the borders between the intellectual property of teachers;
- The confinement concerned not only schools but at different moments the entire population, personal (e.g., family relations, parenting, care for family members) became a more obvious factor of work-related efficiency ([5], p. 13).

Now to a more case specific circumstances:

- The Russian courses at the university in question have never been taught online before;
- Most students of the courses in question had no or a basic level in Russian and required teacher's support;
- The teacher and some students had experience with technologies that can be applied for distance learning [7], [8];
- A technical support was provided for both students and department members, as well methodological help;
- The students' contact with the Russian language is usually limited by the classroom and learning tasks.

The list is not exhaustive but demonstrates the challenges the education faces with the pandemic: it requires different tactics, new skills beyond mere knowledge of the computer programs. It challenged the linearity of the teaching-learning process.

Findings

According to the survey made by Kalibro Project in April 2020, 86,7% of the participating Czech school teachers continued using printed textbooks and workbooks or their scanned copies (66%) in their distance classes. 90,5% of the respondents

preferred emails and phone calls (49,5%) for communication with their students [9]. That reveals the teachers continued to employ the tools that they used before the lockdown.

Some surveys [5, 9] confirm that teachers combined different tools and sources.

Similar strategies were chosen for the Russian Language courses discussed in this paper. Printed materials or their digitized forms were used as basic teaching materials; they were complemented with online teaching materials, mobile and web applications; face-to-face classes were replaced with regular video calls using different platforms and an online digital learning management system. This model was chosen as an urgent substitute of the common to the student's face-to-face education, while the adaptation of the courses, tasks, instructions to new online reality was time consuming. Some researchers mentioned, "In contrast to experiences that are planned from the beginning and designed to be online, emergency remote teaching (ERT) is a temporary shift of instructional delivery to an alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances" [2].

The offer and quality of the free online materials and sources that can be applied for distance Russian Language learning can be qualified as good, but the offer of such sources designed for Czech audience has to be expanded. The lockdown stimulated Czech publishers to work in this direction.

The new form of learning demanded from the students self-learning, and as consequence discipline, time-management and responsibility. The possibility to organize their personal learning process according to their needs was estimated positively by some students who participated in the survey conducted for this study. However, some students mentioned the lack of conversation and instant feedback provided by face-to-face learning. From the teacher's point of view, the distance did not let us monitor and support the education process, give opportune feedback, efficiently discover and correct mistakes and assess the students.

Moreover, students with the appropriate for the course language level had less learning problems, and did the course well. On the other hand, they might have better results at face-to-face learning or with a well-designed distance course. Students with lower language level had more learning difficulties.

While ICT facilitates teaching in the new conditions, it requires learning new skills and therefore time. Connection and technical problems, inability to use the technologies properly impeded comprehension of the material, demotivated students, reduced their attention. Colleagues noticed a lack of feedback from students and that they often had to speak to a black screen. Several students had to cancel the Russian language course or needed more time to complete it. In addition, both students and teachers reported about the fatigue of the continuous online presence.

The urgency of the situation possibly made the decisions-making process less collaborative and more top-down. The enhanced use of technologies was favoured over the improvement of learning methods and finding more efficient ways of teaching and learning. "For higher education institutions around the world to be competitive (again), evidence of faculty preparedness in terms of professionalism is necessary. <...> Universities, now more than ever, should invest in teacher professional development of their faculty, for them to be updated on effective pedagogical methods with or without the use of online technologies" [3].

Conclusions

While the chosen education strategies were most likely emergency driven and temporary, reproduction of the face-to-face teaching does not seem to be efficient.

Administrators, teachers and students were not prepared for the different educational conditions. The lockdown caused by the pandemic challenges the entire educational

system. Methodologies, assessment, decision-making and responsibility require complex reorganization based on collaborative, participatory and dialogical rather than top-down approach to teaching-learning: “alternative solutions to providing learning programmes remotely should be planned and delivered with the support of teachers, the education community and in collaboration with students and their families” [1].

Some online Russian language courses as well as other student- and needs centered education projects could be a good starting point (for example, web quests [10]).

Exploration and use of flipped classroom [11], [12], studies on multimodality [13], [14] and “literacy practices across multiple spaces and contexts” [15] in language education is seen as another possible solution.

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Using Artificial Intelligence in Learning English as a Foreign Language: An Examination of *IELTS LIULISHUO*

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Abstract

EFL (English as a foreign language) learners seem destined to make errors and continuously need testing of their changing language levels. However, the unbalance between supply and demand always exists in the process of learning English. Teachers sometimes are also tired of doing repetitive jobs to correct the same mistakes of non-native speakers. Therefore, many researchers tend to improve the efficiency of teaching processes by using computer-assisted instruction. Specifically, artificial intelligence software is an unstoppable trend to solve this problem. This study aims to find which characteristics are following the elements of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) pedagogy, mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) principles and some concepts of AI-powered foreign language software, as put forward by Chapelle (2003), Stockwell (2013) and Pokrivcakova (2019). The results showed that IELTS Liulishuo has affordability to use as an online platform for foreign English learning. More importantly, it shed some lights on CALL and pedagogy and the design of applications of foreign language learning. [3], [12], [11]

Keywords: computer-assisted language learning, mobile-assisted language learning, learning English as a foreign language, artificial intelligence, IELTS.

1. Introduction

1.1 Computer-Assisted Language learning and Mobile-assisted Language Learning

The computer was probably regarded as a satisfying method of an innovative to learning a language. As suggested by Levy (1997), CALL is ‘the search for and study of applications of the computer in language teaching and learning’. At the same time, Levy (1997) and Chapelle (2001) discovered the feature of CALL, which contains a lot of other disciplines. One of the prominent theories of Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) pedagogy contains L2-input exposure, interaction and linguistic production. [2], [3], [6]

Through the rise of mobile devices, more and more people focus on learning on a small screen. Kukulska-Hulme (2013) defined that MALL is the use of “mobile technologies in language learning, especially in situations where device portability offers specific advantages”. Among numerous studies of MALL, it is possible to summarize some principle and apply them for learning on mobile devices.

Elias (2011) puts forward eight principles, and four of them are more targeted to language learning, which refers to: 1) equitable use, “deliver content in the simplest possible format;” 2) flexible use, “package content in small chunks;” 3) tolerance for error “scaffold and support situated learning methods;” 4) instructional climate, “push regular reminders, quizzes, and questions to students”. [4], [5]

Due to the reason that MALL owns a large amount of the same content with CALL, it is best to combine themselves instead of setting them apart. (Stockwell, 2020).

Therefore, this paper aims to examine whether the IELTS Liulishuo conforms to those principles of CALL and MALL. [12]

1.2 Artificial Intelligence in foreign language learning

AI-assisted devices in foreign language learning is a sub-class of computer-assisted language learning (CALL). With the rapid growths of natural language processing and technology able to deal with big data, AI has a large number of improvements in foreign language education. The shift from CALL to ICALL (Intelligent CALL) has been unstoppable and brought a significant change in the quality of student-computer interaction (Kannan & Munday, 2018). Pokrivcakova (2019) summarizes that there are seven categories in applying artificial intelligence into foreign language learning.

Applying AI-assisted language learning platforms is one of significant category among them.

Within this class, it also can be divided into two classifications: the conventional graphical user interface with speech recognition and language interface with dialogue function (Lotze, 2018).

There is a considerable amount of applications and platforms still use the conventional graphical user interface. The main reason lies in the fact that they are not that difficult to build. They make learners stick on different practices and make them in small chunks such as filling gaps, drilling, matching exercises. The drawback of this way is that they lack enough creativity and individualized content. Meanwhile, those platforms cannot give feedbacks in detail in terms of grammar, pronunciation and other categories.

Stockwell (2013) has analysed some relations among CALL, MALL and ML (mobile learning), but none of the researchers summarizes the relations among CALL, ICALL (also can be understood as AI-assisted language learning) and MALL. They are independent concepts but also rely on each other inalienably. [7], [11], [12]

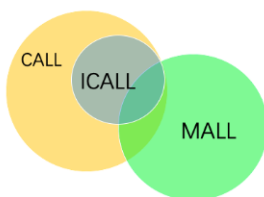


Fig. 1. The relationship among CALL, ICALL and MALL

2. An Overview of IELTS Liulishuo

IELTS Liulishuo is a commercial application created by Shanghai Liulishuo Information Technology. Although it is a kind of an artificial platform under the category of conventional graphical user interface with speech recognition (Lotze, 2018), it still cuts a new edge in targeting highly exam-oriented learning materials.

It aims to improve two productive skills, including speaking and writing, combined with instant feedback on IELTS band in some close tasks. At the same time, users can also test themselves by participating in the mock exam and receive a test report with correction.

2.1 The mock IELTS speaking test

In IELTS Liulishuo, learners can enter into a simulation test with an interactive

interface of a real examiner's video. After the test, learners can get a thorough report with correction in terms of four band descriptors involving grammar, fluency, vocabulary and pronunciation.

2.2 The close module courses of speaking and writing (Fee-based)

According to different scoring criteria and different topics such as environment, education, transportation and others in the IELTS test, the designers create many close curriculums integrated with speech recognition. The types of exercises include gap filling, drilling, matching activities, translation. Furthermore, every module has pre-test and post-test with scoring and feedback to enable the learner to visualize the advancement instantly.

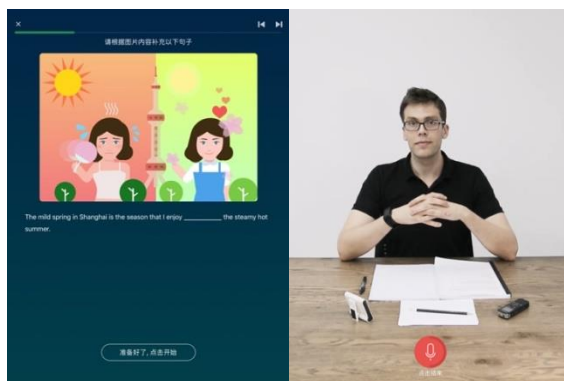


Fig. 2. The screenshot of IELTS Liulishuo

3 Evaluation

The author aims to examine the IELTS Liulishuo's characteristics under the principles of CALL, MALL and AI. Specifically, it will be concentrated on CALL pedagogy put forward by Chapelle (2003): L2-input exposure, interaction and linguistic production and the four MALL principles suggested by Elias (2011), including equitable use, flexible use, tolerance for error, instructional climate. [3], [1]

3.1 CALL pedagogy elements in IELTS Liulishuo

IELTS Liulishuo contains basic frameworks of CALL pedagogy suggested by Chapelle (2003), namely, L2-input exposure, interaction and linguistic production.

In the section of pre-designed courses of speaking and writing, learners can immerse in L2-input and also in the mock test part. Specifically, those L2-input exposure manifest in the drilling of sentences, answers of IELTS speaking questions topic-related vocabulary matching, translation activities and the video of IELTS examiner in the mock test. [3]

When it comes to interaction, the features of the application lie more in the feedback.

After every mock test, learners will be given thorough feedback with scores and corrections in four different categories required by the official of IELTS. However, sometimes the correction is not that accurate, or the app may overcorrect learners' answers. For example, the pronunciation of "celebration" with no mistakes was also corrected by the app. Therefore, more direct and precise interaction is encouraged to improve, such as chatbot and more immediate feedback.

Meanwhile, learners output their utterances answering different topic questions in the

pre-test, post-test and some practices within every module as linguistic production.

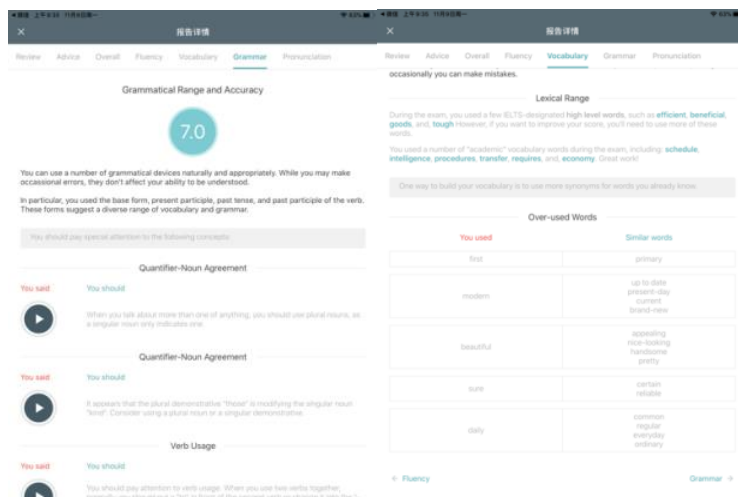


Fig. 4. The screenshots of correction after a mock test of IELTS Liulishuo

3.2 MALL principles in IELTS Liulishuo

As for equitable use in the software, many tasks are genuinely designed for the accessible format to practice such as matching activities, gap filling and drilling, and every task provides a pre-designed correction if users have wrong answers. Similarly, as an innovative platform, IELTS Liulishuo also packs different knowledge point in terms of standards of scoring in chunks, which meets the criteria of flexible use. For instance, every task will probably cost every learner 15 minutes to finish it. Nevertheless, if learners want to get a higher score in a post-test, they may have to review the content for several times and imprint the knowledge into their mind.

In terms of tolerance for error, it means to scaffold, and support situated learning methods. It does claim that the app can be personalized through setting different learning plans, including target scores and exam date. Nevertheless, learners can only be delivered four modules each day maximumly and even setting different scores; the modules provided by the app have no difference. It is better to revise the scheme to enable students to see the whole list of different modules or improve the scaffolding to the real personalized stage by recording and analysing learners' discourse.

As for the instructional climate, it refers to "push regular reminders, quizzes, and questions to students" (Elias, 2011, p. 148). (See also Browne & Culligan, 2008.), which can also be derived from the push and pull mechanisms (see Stockwell, 2013, for a discussion). IELTS Liulishuo does not have an ideal performance in creating instructional climate; in particular, it fails to continuously remind learners to study every day in a fixed time. In the future, it can provide social networking within the app, including some gamification design such as leader boards and competitions.

4 Conclusion and recommendation

In conclusion, IELTS Liulishuo fits the CALL pedagogy and some principles of MALL, which endows affordability for EFL learning, specifically, the learning of the IELTS test.

The most significant value of this application is combining the AI technology with exam orientation, being more specific, IELTS test. However, there are still some

shortages such as tolerance of errors, innovative space, individualized content and highly collaborative learning processes. Significantly, sometimes it will have false corrections toward learners' speaking, which are not allowed learners to send immediate and efficient feedbacks to improve the feedback. The author also noticed that every report of a mock IELTS test is in English using some specialized words such as "infinitive". It is not user-friendly enough for non-native speakers, especially for those beginners, which lead to the demand of two versions of feedbacks for testers including L1 and L2. Although the improvement of AI-assisted EFL apps has been boosted, we still need to continuously examine the affordability of those mobile applications through the change of time, examining different concepts and investigating the perceptions of both instructors and learners. In the future, more individualized courses according to different levels and paces of learners and a better instructional climate with gamification design in exam-oriented applications are explorable.

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Reinvigorating Language and Literacy Development through Blogging and Vlogging

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Abstract

While research on language immersion education has heralded benefits such as cognitive skills, academic achievement and language and literacy development, many studies have also identified challenges to its successful implementation, particularly as they relate to students' productive skills. It has been suggested that the less than optimal levels of students' immersion language persist in part because immersion teachers lack systematic approaches for integrating language into their content instruction. Technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) encourages students to seek linguistic information in input, assess it in relation to their own emerging linguistic knowledge base, share it collaboratively through production-based tasks and, ultimately, transform it into their own rule-based and formulaic linguistic knowledge [1, 2]. This paper reports on how students in six post-primary schools used TELL to further develop and enhance their productive skills in a minority language. Five of the schools were in English speaking communities which provide immersion education in the minority language, Irish (Gaelic). The sixth school was in an Irish speaking community where the language of instruction is Irish and caters for both native speakers and learners alike. The students, who were in their transition year (approximately 15 years of age), created blogs based on a two-week work experience placement in their preferred profession. This information was subsequently used to create innovative vlogs to capture their experience and to inform their peers of their experience. Data were collected from a variety of sources e.g. questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, student blogs and vlogs. Findings suggest that all students improved their language production skills in a very creative and innovative way. In addition, the process of creating blogs and vlogs provided students with a sense of audience and ownership which positively improved their self-efficacy. This process also enabled students to work collaboratively and learn from and with their peers through peer-modelling. This paper will conclude with a discussion on the implications for teacher and classroom practice in a minority language context.

Keywords: blog, vlog, language development, literacy skills, minority language, immersion education

1. Introduction

Irish, or Gaeilge, is an autochthonous (indigenous) language spoken in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland. The Republic of Ireland has two official languages: Gaeilge and English. Irish is the first official language of Ireland and an official language of the European Union. However, English is the mother tongue of the majority of the population. Faced with the slow but constant decline of the use and transmission of the national language, the political authorities have engaged in a maintenance and revitalization plan which comprises of different components. Key acts of legislation also

impact on the popularity and development of the Irish language. Schools play a critical role in supporting the maintenance, revitalisation and development of the minority language. This paper reports on how students in six post-primary Irish-medium schools used technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) to further develop and enhance their productive skills in Irish. The paper begins by defining Irish-medium education (IME), paying particular attention to students' linguistic outcomes. The benefits of TELL are then reviewed. Finally, the research design used in this study is presented before turning to the presentation of the results and a discussion on the findings.

2. Irish-medium education

Irish-medium education (IME) is a form of bilingual education in which students receive subject matter instruction through the medium of a minority language, which they are learning at school. Some IME schools are located in Irish language speech communities or *Gaeltachtaí*. This IME model strives for the rejuvenation of the indigenous language (i.e., Irish) through the education system. While IME in the *Gaeltacht* was traditionally provided to Irish language mother tongue (L1) students, clear threats to the sustainability of Irish as a community language in *Gaeltacht* regions have been well documented [3]. Nowadays, IME in the *Gaeltacht* caters for a range of socio-linguistic needs in diverse socio-cultural school contexts. This linguistic diversity and complexity coupled with the increasing use of English in *Gaeltacht* communities presents serious and significant challenges for the *Gaeltacht* education system. IME outside the *Gaeltacht*, or Irish-medium immersion education, is normally provided to students for whom Irish is not their L1. While linguistic capacity is formally developed through the processes of instruction in this IME model, creating opportunities for language use outside of the immersion school environment is a persistent struggle. The pervasive presence of a majority language (English) beyond the school is a challenge that all IME schools face. IME caters for one in every 12 students in the Republic of Ireland with 8.1 per cent of all students at primary level and 3.6 per cent of all students at post-primary level attending IME [4]. Notwithstanding their increased popularity and relative success, these programmes remain complex to implement and are not always as successful as what we would hope them to be [5], [6]. Immersion students' productive language skills are underdeveloped in areas such as grammatical accuracy and complexity, lexical specificity and sociolinguistic appropriateness [6], [7] and there is also evidence that young native speakers are not achieving native speakers' norms or full acquisition or enrichment of the language [3]. In fact, some native speakers are achieving higher levels of accuracy and competence in English than in Irish giving rise to subtractive bilingualism [3]. Among all the challenges that IME face, research indicates that the primary issue lies in the difficulty to create well-balanced programmes where both content instruction and language/literacy instruction can be targeted simultaneously [5]. Meeting academic content demands while simultaneously developing proficiency in the minority language poses tremendous challenges for IME teachers. The Policy on Gaeltacht Education 2017-2022 identifies a range of targets aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning through Irish in IME. The Digital Strategy for Schools 2015-2020 also aims to support teachers' professional learning, and as a consequence student outcome, through the strategic integration of technology in teaching, learning and assessment. An underlying aim of this study was to develop and enhance Irish language and literacy skills and support language acquisition through the use of technology in IME post-primary schools.

3. Technology-enhanced language learning (TELL)

TELL is fast becoming an area of research which traverses all the disciplines in education. TELL not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also promotes autonomous, self-directed learning and learner motivation [8]. It also promotes second language (L2) learning performance and provides learners with a more efficient means for language learning [9], [10]. Moreover, TELL allows teachers to design a more student-centered and flexible approach to language learning which stimulates autonomy, reflection and research skills [11]. Collaborative writing tools, such as blogs and video blogs (vlogs), are used to practise and develop writing and speaking skills in the L2 classroom [12], [13]. Research shows that collaborative writing through a task-based technology-enhanced approach enhances L2 literacy development. Blogs and vlogs enable learners to feel empowered and motivated to communicate [14] and enhance students' engagement and their desire to produce writing of a high quality [15]. As the research suggests, the incorporation of blogs and vlogs in L2 literacy teaching and learning offers promising potential to greatly enhance L2 acquisition and learning.

4. Research Design

This qualitative study examined how TELL (i.e. blogs and vlogs) impacts students' Irish language and literacy development in Irish-medium and *Gaeltacht* post-primary schools. Transition year students (age 15-17 – fourth year in post-primary education) from six IME contexts participated in the study. Students were invited to write blogs and subsequently create vlogs based on their work experience in a setting of their choice.

The writing process played a vital role in blog creation and refinement. Teachers scaffolded the language and literacy learning journey by providing overt instruction and tailored feedback. They also choreographed situated practice of terminology and literacy skills. Researchers facilitated four professional development (PD) seminars during the two-year period. Seminars focused on the development of the knowledge base and pedagogical skillset of the participating teachers so as to enable them to support their students to engage with the TELL initiative. Topics explored at seminars included: TELL principles and practices, Irish language and literacy development, the writing process, instructional design of blogs and vlogs, monitoring, evaluation, review and development.

A number of data collection tools were used to capture the breadth and richness of participants' understandings, experiences and development of Irish language and literacy skills through TELL. Data were collected from an extensive online teacher questionnaire, individual interviews with teachers, researcher field notes from PD seminars, focus group interviews with students and student blogs and vlogs. Data analysis unearthed themes in relation to the development of student technology-enhanced Irish language and literacy development in Irish-medium and *Gaeltacht* post-primary schools.

5. Findings

Findings suggest that this TELL initiative fostered students' linguistic capacity in Irish, created authentic opportunities for language use and nurtured a desire in students to use Irish in meaningful, natural and relevant ways.

5.1 Fostering linguistic capacity through TELL

Data from focus group interviews revealed that this TELL initiative triggered students to seek assistance regarding grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure prior to

posting. Students also reported that the blogging and vlogging experience afforded them the time and opportunity to reflect on their language use in authentic and meaningful ways. Increased language awareness enabled students to become more proficient users of the language over time. In interviews too, teachers reported that this TELL experience prompted students to think more about their productive skills and gave them an authentic reason to attend to language in meaningful, relevant, realistic ways. This experience in turn ensured reflection, heightened language awareness and personal empowerment.

Samples of students work also demonstrated improvement over time in terms of accurate language use. A growing understanding of language as a system, governed by rules and patterns was also evident. This TELL experience stimulated students' meta-linguistic awareness and enabled them to appreciate the systematic character of the Irish language in intense but refreshing ways.

5.2 Creating authentic opportunities for language use through TELL

The collaborative nature of the initiative was central to developing students' linguistic resources in Irish. During focus group interviews, students explained how using Irish in a meaningful way with their peers stimulated by this TELL experience developed their language skills and gave them more confidence in using it in authentic ways. In focus groups, they also reported that they became more language-aware and language-informed users through student-student interaction and peer collaboration and were prompted to self-monitor and self-correct as they engaged with the collaborative blogging and vlogging experience. In interviews, teachers reported that this TELL initiative stimulated students to provide focused and timely linguistic feedback to each other, to engage in appropriate social discourses and to scaffold the language learning journey.

They also reported that technology motivated their students in fresh, new and exciting ways to engage with the language learning adventure.

5.3 Nurturing desire for language use through TELL

Data from focus group interviews revealed that students became motivated and self-directed learners and had a positive attitude towards Irish language use. Increased language awareness coupled with an engaging and collaborative TELL experience generated a desire by learners and indeed the learner community to use the Irish language in authentic, innovative and a real-life manner with their peers. In interviews, teachers also reported that students became more motivated through student-student interaction as they engaged in real-life, meaningful discourses through TELL. They also reported that the integration of a multiliteracies approach, i.e., the transformation of a blog to a vlog, provided students with the opportunity to connect with a wider, authentic audience, which in turn motivated them to refine and enrich their co-creations. Students felt empowered by the realisation that they had the power to share their ideas and knowledge with their peers through blogs and vlogs. In interviews, teachers also reported that the sharing of these multimodal texts with peers encouraged students to demonstrate a higher level of thought to their work and to take greater care to edit before publishing.

6. Discussion and conclusion

In this TELL initiative, digital technologies were used in visionary, innovative and meaningful ways to motivate, creatively engage and ensure language and literacy success for all IME learners. Students' linguistic ability was nurtured through the process of instruction. As students became more proficient users of the Irish language, their engagement with the TELL initiative stimulated them to use their language with their

peers in meaningful, natural and relevant ways. This collaborative TELL experience also generated a desire to use Irish in a focused way for communicative purposes. Overt instruction alone does not translate into authentic language use in or outside the IME classroom. As the findings of this study reveal, authentic opportunities for practical, real-life language use are also necessary. It is therefore important for IME teachers to deliberately plan for and cease TELL opportunities which align the participatory culture with real word literacy practices. Such experiences will enable students to construct meaning and participate in meaningful dialogue with peers. In so doing, students may also gain unhindered access to relevant environments to practise and use their growing knowledge of Irish with peers. This experience in turn, generates agency and provides motivational orientation. Minority language functions require constant reinforcement in and outside the school context. As students are constantly engaging in the process of meaning making and sharing multimodal texts in their out-of-school lives, new media, e.g., blogs and vlogs, provide promising potential to sustain, deepen and extend Irish language use and foster the inherent capability of all IME learners of achieving success in Irish language and literacy development.

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Language Teaching for Social Inclusion



Culture of Proximity | Designing a Script as Post-Colonial Linguistic Discourse

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Abstract

Expanding on the common knowledge that many colonised nations have adopted the language of their colonisers as prominent means of communication – the author delves into aspects of post-colonial knowledge propagation from the point of view of India. The positions of power held as traders and eventually administrators by the few British residents of India, has affected how the language itself has been perceived locally, over generations. As a direct result of lineage, economic background and social standing, the author among numerous others has been raised with a revering mindset towards English. Despite her unease with the colonial history of the language, the author acknowledges that the impact of English in India, as a language and script, should not be perceived as all bad – it is a very important means of communication for the country as often English is the only common language between people from different parts of the country. This aspect of the colonial language is often omitted from post-colonial linguistic discourse.

As we walk this tightrope, our post-colonial knowledge propagation and production has been a curious one – about 1-2% of the Indian population is fluent in English more than other local languages, these few now take pride in the standardisation through knowledge and seek to run a Nation of many languages. Not just the language, but the script too has evolved into a symbol acquired through privileges of family and/or education. As a counter, the author has created a pseudo script, Setu – bridging the gap between some local scripts with the Roman alphabet. One can read about it on <https://muditapasari.com/portfolio/setu-a-pseudo-script/>. The constructed script is a representation of everyday experiences being navigated by many Indians. The paper unpacks how a diverse nation correlates its methods of knowledge propagation and dissemination, with a colonial language as a vehicle of exchange. The author believes languages and scripts hold the power to change perspectives and hopes to raise awareness about the bizarre by creating something bizarre. This paper outlines the morphology of the Setu script and the impact it can have on native, post-colonial knowledge structures.

Keywords: post-colonial, navigating languages, knowledge creation, linguistic discourse

1. Context

“India has been a country of many languages. If we dig into the past, we will find that it has not been possible for anybody to force the acceptance of one language by all people in this country.” – Syama Prasad Mookherjee [9].

As of today, the Indian Constitution lists 22 official languages for the Republic of India, as compared to 14 in 1950. English has been among 38 other languages waiting to achieve official language status.

As per the constitution, the use of English for official purposes was to cease post a 15-year transition period. Due to the unease observed in many non-Hindi speaking parts of India, the Official Languages Act 1963, allowed for the continued use of English alongside Hindi for all official purposes. The fear of exclusion, resulted in the spread of Anti-Hindi Imposition protests across the country.

After multiple attempts to shift to Hindi as the language of parliamentary and official functioning, we have realized that English is here to stay. It's been 70 years hence and we continue to navigate this strange dichotomy presented to us.

1.1 Hindi and English

The founding members were aware of language diversity becoming a concern. There are large parts of northern and central India which are comfortable in using Hindi, but many others are not. These possibilities of contention were brought up during the Constituent Assembly Debates, to ensure that Hindi would not act as yet another imperial factor forced on the rest of the nation.

In TT Krishnamachari's words from the debate on November 5th, 1948: "There are various forms of imperialism and language imperialism is one of the most powerful methods of propagating the imperialistic idea... "The use of Hindi, which was an alien language to his Tamil speaking people, would also mean the enslavement of people who do not speak the language of the legislature, the language of the Centre..." [7]

This unease was true for many others across the country, who would prefer the use of English – the language inherited from our colonizers.

Another example can be seen from a Debate on the 13th September, 1949, where Lakshmi Kanta Maitra is speaking in English. His stance is that Sanskrit should be adopted as the official and national language of India. When asked to speak in Sanskrit, he said:

"I am not here to parade my knowledge of Sanskrit. I am not going to commit the blunder of some of my friends, who, in their zeal, despite the request of others to speak in English so that they might be understood by everybody, persisted in the language of their bobby. I am not going to do that. I want to make myself understood by every single honourable Member in this House." [9]

This itself tells us a lot about communication across state boundaries in the Indian subcontinent. To understand this further one must look at the creation of identity around the idea of languages in India.

2. Multiplicity of Language Exchanges

Language has multiple faces, some good and some we would rather overlook.

For those of us, trained in it, the English language leaves us in a double bind. While it gives us larger access and encourages interrelationships within the nation, it also increases the socio-economic divide based on vestigial colonial ideas of competence and relevance.

While one seeks to decolonize the mind, is one also willing to give up access and communication?

2.1 Language as Identity

The founding members of the Indian Republic working on reorganizing internal state boundaries suggested against language being the main deciding factor for fear "it would 'create new minorities". The JVP Committee "concluded that language is 'not only a binding force but also a separative force', thus endangering national unity and security." [6]

Keeping this in mind, the state boundaries were to be drawn creating heterogeneous language states, but due to widespread protests across the country, the committee reluctantly decided otherwise. After 14 such states were formed, “the most feared danger of ‘balkanization’ induced by the creation of new minorities again came to the fore with violent language riots”, which has resulted in many future bifurcations. [6]

According to DeVereaux, “a hybrid society is characterized by diversity, with a wide range of social and cultural influences contributing to mixed-identities. In the negative sense”, he described the possibility of “prejudicial behaviour, or favouring the in-group over the out-group.” [3] This is precisely what was seen manifesting within a multicultural and multilingual young nation like India.

2.2 Language as Communication

Summarising the concept of languages in the time of globalization, Lo Bianco talks about three kinds of processes leading to nationing, “vertical effects as the young of the nation grow into citizenship, horizontal effect as the new comers are admitted into citizenship and extra national effects through processes of FL (foreign language) study”. [1]

In the Indian context, this phenomenon is observed within state boundaries. As Ramalingam Chettiar said in 1949, “because Hindi is no more national to us than English or any other language.” – each state governed by a language sees the following processes:

1. learning the most prominent dialect of the state language,
2. learning of English, as a required language,
3. learning Hindi as an FL elective.

This act of learning English, has allowed people from across the country to communicate with one another. Maybe compulsory learning of Hindi would have done the same, but would it have infringed social liberties of the many non-Hindi speaking Indians?

Like Errington said, “Actions of colonial agents outran their own intent”. [4] Once used to oppress and rule, seeing English as a vehicle of unification and allowing for blurring of cross-cultural boundaries, is a strange phenomenon.

“The need to communicate cross-culturally is now a given in the world.” [3] – DeVereaux’s words hold true within the international context, but for India, this has been a bone of contention for over 70 years. Unable to agree on a common language of communication, we seem to have made peace with using the multiplicity of languages offered to us. To be able to access places and knowledge created within different parts of the nation, we often use English as a translation pitstop, which allows for easy transfer of information and understanding.

If not for English, today we would be miscommunicating with and misunderstanding our co-citizens. This aspect cannot be disregarded when considering the language our oppressors have left behind.

2.3 English as a Privilege

Having discussed the advantages that English allows within the Indian context, one must sober down and look at the obvious problems it leaves behind.

From a post-colonial lens, one would want to strive to decolonize the mind by training it to think like one’s native originality, rather than in the ways and language of the oppressors long gone. But for an urban, middle class Indian, this point of view does not hold water. English continues to hold a position of power in the country, allowing those of us with a command on the language to be able to access knowledge and discourse which still remains veiled from the masses. As predicted, it has increased the divide

between the population, which cannot be simply willed away. Nieto has keenly observed, “Language is the entry to participation in the social discourse, which leads to membership in society at large.” [8] By conducting legal and official communication in English, many are excluded from contributing to a healthy democratic process. The language still holds colonial power, only now it is working from within the nation, instead of without.

3. *Setu* as Discourse

During the debates while drafting the Indian Constitution, some speakers suggested the adoption of the Roman script to write the Indian languages as an official way ahead.

Although then considered outlandish, what if we were to imagine a writing system which represents the double bind navigated by many Indian citizens today.

“Given the discourse of “identity” such hybridity can be an articulation or fusion of two or more disparate elements to engender or create a new distinct identity.” [2] says Gei on the ideas of the indigenous. *Setu* is a script designed to represent this very existence.

3.1 *Limitations of Setu*

Setu in Hindi means bridge. Despite trying to make visible a bridge between English and Indian languages, I am limited by my knowledge of few scripts, hence the language is influenced by the descends of the *Nagari* script. This is not an attempt to subvert the importance of other Indian scripts, it is merely a limitation of knowledge. If required, this script could be adapted further or redesigned.

Setu is designed to be written both left to right and right to left, to accommodate the two writing patterns on the subcontinent. It takes into account only the two writing movements, not all letter forms.

No aspect of the script means to disrespect or disregard any written form of knowledge on the subcontinent. Rather the attempt is to throw light on the continued multiplicity of our lived experience which often gets missed during linguistic discourse.

3.2 *Designing Setu*

Setu uses 9 distinct forms derived from *Nagari* and then applied additive methods to create letter forms using “a semiotic approach, stressing non-linguistic aspects of the structure and use of writing (as in Wrolstad 1976).” Whereas when using the letter to form words, like many Indian languages, “the representational conventions of writing as a mapping from speech to script” is used. [5] Together, this technique is meant to expose the experience of living in the binary of the local and colonial, which now has adapted itself to everyday lives.

Using sound and letter form understanding of the Roman script and *Nagari*, each letter has been designed to be written with fluidity and comfort. Tested in up to 18 Indian languages, the script is additive and logical. Easy to learn for those who write languages descended from the *sanskrit* alphabet system.

Although can be used to write English, phonetic languages from the Indian subcontinent are easier to scribe. Script manual or samples of writing can be requested, but are beyond the scope of this paper.

3.3 *Using Setu*

For a moment let us look beyond intellectual discourse. Let us indulge in wishful thinking instead. If one were to map the possibilities that such a script could bring, what would they think of?

Imagine *Setu* being used as a script all over the national highways in India. All text is

in local languages; yet as I drive through, I am able to navigate with ease. I do not speak the language, but I would read proper names with directional signs and understand. This would be very similar to the experience one would have in Europe, to not be able to necessarily understand all words but make sense of the written form.

It would grant access, start communication and slowly break down structures designed to exclude. It would give us a common ground to start on, to appreciate our differences under the umbrella of similarity this script has to offer. It would help us navigate our multiplicity through a thread of familiarity.

Or maybe as DeVereaux said, “On the positive side, it is about embracing one’s multiple identities to form a coherent sense of self.” [3]

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Language for Specific Purpose



Conventional Education vs. Remote Education – “Just Put it Online?” A Report from Japan

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Abstract

The recent Covid-19 pandemic has forced educational institutions around the world to take measures to protect their students and teaching staff while ensuring the continuity and quality of their instructional process. Despite Japan's image of a technologically progressive country, with a generally proactive approach in the face of natural disasters, the country lacks the preparedness for addressing the complex issues of teaching remotely, especially during extraordinary circumstances. The paper draws from the author's experience teaching English for TOEIC for one semester to Japanese freshmen enrolled in a private business university using remote teaching. It discusses the concept of Emergency Remote Teaching and the different challenges it poses compared to face-to-face teaching, such as the cultural specificities of a Japanese ESL classroom. The study suggests several strategies to motivate students and maintain a high student participation rate. The conclusion it reaches is that simply transitioning classroom teaching methods to the online medium is not as facile as it is generally assumed, but implies a sustained effort, proactiveness, and careful consideration of the factors that make teaching and learning successful and fulfilling experiences for teachers and students.

Keywords: Teaching English for TOEIC, online education, Japanese classroom interactions

1. Introduction

The Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) is one of the most important tools to assess Japanese university students' English skills and it has increasingly been used by many companies as an instrument to inform HR decisions regarding “hiring, promotion, and training of employees in international businesses” [1].

As major Japanese companies are seeking to keep up with the fast pace of globalization, universities are called upon to equip students with the skills sought after by businesses [2].

At Nagoya University of Commerce and Business (NUCB), the TOEIC IP test (paper) is administered three times a year (June, September and December) to all English majors and to Business majors taking English elective courses. Up to 2020, TOEIC preparation was incorporated in the English Fundamentals course or was offered as an elective to senior years or non-English majors. In April 2020 a new course named “TOEIC Progress” was introduced to the Faculty of Foreign Studies (FFS). The course is offered for a full academic year (four terms), and it is taught once a week in two consecutive sessions of 100 minutes each. TOEIC Progress A (entry level, with a TOEIC score target of 500) is offered to all first-year students in the FFS. Five TOEIC Progress A classes were offered with sizes of up to 29 students/class. Due to the Covid-19 crisis, the academic year 2020 (which in Japan starts in April) debuted online, and all the

courses, which had been originally devised for face-to-face teaching, were transferred online and were delivered synchronously using an online conferencing tool.

The present paper seeks to answer two questions. First, is conventional education transferrable online? Second, what are issues and challenges that the teacher should be aware of when attempting to transfer face-to-face TOEIC education to online teaching?

2. Online education transferability – pros and cons

2.1 Pros

Considered convenient and attractive for a variety of reasons, online education has been hailed as having a positive impact on learner motivation and outcomes by transporting the students to a new cognitive environment, and promoting active engagement of students in learning [3]. Some authors have found no significant difference between classroom-based instruction and distance learning [4], [5]. In the same vein, Surry & Ensminger consider that it's the method of instruction, not the delivery medium which causes changes in achievement [6].

2.2 Cons

Mechlenbacher *et al.*, have found several differences between conventional instruction and online learning [7]. Online learning is more isolating and self-directed, and more intrinsically motivating than conventional learning, which is more interactive and more extrinsically motivating. Huang points out that using technology to interact, even if face to face and in real time, is de-humanizing and conducive to isolation [8].

Regarding social dynamics, face-to-face instruction is more suitable for non-verbal communication, in which the teachers can sense the atmosphere and decide to change their approach. In an online environment it is difficult for teachers to discern whether the students are following the class or understand the explanations, or are doing other things while appearing to listen to the teacher's explanation. The classroom, with its design aimed specifically at learning, is relatively distraction-free, and has a more study-conducive atmosphere. Bernard *et al.*, caution that distance education "should not be an electronic copy of the paper-based material", and point out that although effective distance learning depends on "pedagogical excellence", appropriate tools should be developed and deployed [9]. Discussing the concept of Emergency Remote Teaching, which has been globally used during the coronavirus pandemic crisis, Hodges *et al.*, point out that it is "a temporary shift of instructional delivery to alternate delivery mode due to crisis circumstances. It involves the use of fully remote teaching solutions for instruction or education that would otherwise be delivered face-to-face or as blended or hybrid courses" [10]. They also add that in absence of careful preparation and training (which usually takes six to nine months prior to the course being offered), and under the pressure of "getting it online", such solutions cannot be expected to yield high teaching outcomes, as a successful course does not depend on teaching alone, but it also relies on a plethora of co-curricular and extra-curricular supports and interactions that assist the process of learning.

3. The Japanese EFL conventional classroom

The highly formal and conservative nature of student interactions in the Japanese EFL classroom is an important issue which is worth mentioning here. Japanese classroom atmosphere has been found to be largely different from that of other countries.

Students usually will only talk when called upon, are less assertive and less

responsive. They are more group conscious, prefer group activities and are less likely to request clarification and more wary of making mistakes because they fear embarrassment in front of the group [11]. They prefer communicative approaches when studying English, and like to be engaged and encouraged to participate actively [12]. As a matter of fact, some of these cultural particularities have been the most challenging issues which the author has encountered in her short online teaching experience.

4. Teaching for TOEIC online – strategies and outcomes

The author, who had no previous experience of online teaching, was assigned to teach three of the five classes of the TOEIC Progress A course, averaging 25 students/class. The sessions were conducted once a week, and the class was 200 minutes long, with a 20-minute break. Below are the materials and strategies the teacher used as well as the expected outcomes. At the end of each term, course evaluations were conducted by the university, in which the students were encouraged to express their opinions and suggestions for course improvement. Students' suggestions at the end of Term 1 addressed issues such as teaching TOEIC strategies, using English as the language of instruction, providing ampler time for individual tasks, and increasing the duration and frequency of collaborative tasks in breakout rooms. In Term 2, the author adapted the course to address the students' concerns and criticisms (the changes are italicized). The course evaluation conducted upon the conclusion of Term 2 yielded improved results and more positive comments from students.

	Term 1 (online)	Term 2 (online)
Learning Management System: Google Classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus posting • Announcements • Communication • Weekly Vocabulary quiz • Home/in-class assignments • Review material • Extra study resources • Final exam submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Syllabus posting • Announcements • Communication • Weekly Vocabulary quiz • Home/in-class assignments • Review material • Extra study resources • Final exam submission
Teaching Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Textbook, Audio files (online) <p>Additional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary book • TOEIC practice app • Videos (Voice of America Learning English, YouTube music videos) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course Textbook, Audio files (online) <p>Additional:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocabulary book • TOEIC practice app • Videos (Voice of America Learning English, YouTube music videos, <i>short TED talks</i>)
Language	English & Japanese	<i>Mostly English</i>
Method	Teacher centered, occasional group/pair work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher centered, group/pair work activity (<i>10-15 minutes/each activity</i>), <i>followed by classroom dialogues and/or presentations.</i> • <i>Adapting & scaffolding difficult listening parts (Part 4 and 5)</i>

Communication & Collaborative strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research of companies and discussion using questions modelled in the textbook • Group/pair work identifying mistakes in sentences and correcting them • Part 2 Question/Response practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pair/group discussions on given topics corresponding to the textbook units (Companies & Organizations, Work Routines, Travel & Entertainment, etc.) • Research and class presentations in pairs
Learning Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarization with TOEIC and question types • Learn to recognize and use the grammatical structures used to describe photographs (Part 1) • Intensive listening for perception & comprehension (Part 2) • Word categories • Use of prepositions, prepositional verbs (Part 5 & 6) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Balanced listening, reading, and speaking, input & output</i> • <i>Learning about TOEIC test-taking strategies</i> • <i>Learn to recognize distractors in listening parts</i> • <i>Develop speed in problem solving</i> • <i>Finding clues in context; scanning and skimming (Part 6 & 7)</i>

Table 1. Online TOEIC – Methods, strategies and outcomes

Conclusion

Teaching for TOEIC can be a challenging feat even in normal, face-to-face situations.

It is, however, erroneous to assume that the proved and tested methods which were successful in a physical classroom would be equally well-received in a virtual learning environment. Online education is a challenging experience for teachers and students due to its novelty, versatility, and potential for quality learning outcomes. Notwithstanding the current situation, and irrespective of the medium of instruction, teachers should aim for high quality education by empowering and motivating students through active and collaborative learning activities and tasks.

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Development of Learners' Soft Skills in ESP Instruction

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Abstract

We are facing unprecedented challenges – social, economic and environmental, driven by accelerating globalization and a faster rate of technological developments. These global trends are already affecting individual lives, and may do so for decades to come. The development of personal/professional skills, which consist of life/career competences and which are basically referred to as “soft skills” in subject-specific literature, have become an important part of any coursework required to earn Bachelors, Masters or PhD. Skills such as creative thinking, critical thinking, learning to learn, communication and collaboration are value-added skills essential to any career. Consequently, while earning their degree students ought to develop these skills within the framework of three foundational contexts: emotional development, digital literacy and discipline knowledge. Thus, the aim of the current paper is to define the domain of soft skills in the ESP context, as well as thoroughly elaborate and introduce a number of authentic ways and means, which can support the development of these skills in “ESP: Business and Management” course instruction. In order to devise the activities properly we had to provide answers to two basic questions:

- What competences do students need to thrive and shape their world in modern employment market?*
- How can these competences be effectively developed in “ESP: Business and Management” course instruction?*

As it has been observed, in ESP instruction the teacher should be committed to developing not only language – communicative competences, but also helping every learner develop as an individual, fulfilling his or her potential [1]. It follows that, the ESP course should be designed around students to motivate them and recognize their prior knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Students should be offered a diverse range of topic options, and the opportunity to suggest their own topics which should be challenging and enable deep thinking and reflection. In this way learners will be able to link their learning experiences to the real world and have a sense of purpose in their learning. The activities introduced in the current paper are adaptable and dynamic, they give learners opportunity to discover how a concept or a topic can link and connect to other concepts or topics within and across disciplines, and with real life as well.

Keywords: *English for Specific Purposes, soft skills*

There have been many initiatives to address the skills and competences our students need for the 21st century – each relating to different contexts. As it has emerged soft skills is the learning domain that contributes significantly to career readiness and leads to future job success. Efforts to teach soft skills, however, often lead to frustration and disappointment, not because they can't be developed, but because objectives are vague and traditional teaching approaches are not effective. With the changing educational

trends, versatility in educational courses, availability of masses of qualified personnel, the competition for job acquisition and job sustainability is becoming more and more tough [4]. To get an edge over the competitors, students are left with no choice but to add values to their hard skills with soft skills to exhibit their true potential. Hard skills are discipline specific academic skills, experience and level of expertise which indicate the knowledge of concepts, principles and methods, procedures and techniques needed for performing jobs, while soft skills are interactive, communicative, human and transferable skills that employees demonstrate unconsciously and routinely on the job [3]. Literature suggests that hard skills contribute to only 15% of one's success, while remaining 85% is made by soft skills. Most employers these days want to hire, retain and promote people who are dependable, resourceful, ethical, self-directed, having effective communication, willing to work and learn and having positive attitude. Though, the importance of soft skills has been recognized throughout the world, the terminology used to refer these skills varies from country to country. Thus, in Australia these skills are generally referred to as key competences, soft skills, generic skills or employability skills, in the United Kingdom: key skills or core skills, while in New Zealand these are referred to as essential skills; and finally: necessary skills or workplace know-how in the United States. Although, the nomenclature may vary, their centrality to competence of an individual and need and importance especially in today's techno-economic scenario has been accepted and readily appreciated. Thus, the current higher education and training system has to deal with the twin challenge of building both: higher order soft skills as well as specific hard skills because the manpower with only hard technical skills will have little value if it is poor in soft skills. The need of the present time is to find out from industry, business and service sector, their expectations of the type of manpower in terms of both discipline specific hard skills and soft skills and inculcate these in the students through various curricular and extra-curricular interventions. Giving sufficient weightage to soft skills in curriculum of the courses of higher education would not only strengthen the employable skills for workforce effectiveness and competency but also help in building better social and cultural relations leading to success and quality of life. So, effective communication is the buzzword today, whether you are at home, workplace and in society, at national or international level.

Thus, defining the main list of highly-ranked soft skills which ought to be developed in any ESP course we cannot but mention communication skills, collaboration skills or team work skills, creative thinking skills, problem-solving skills, critical thinking skills, learning to learn skills, as well as leadership skills and IT skills.

The use of learning methods for developing soft skills such as: experiential learning, role-play and demonstration, teamwork methods, case studies, problem solving and extra-curricular activities are highly recommended in ESP courses, as they enable the students to use the language in the changing socio-cultural context. The selection and implementation of any method, however, should be conditioned by individual students in terms of their previous knowledge, skills background, learning style, pace and convenience.

The activities in the current paper are designed around the field of Business and Management, nonetheless, they have general use and significance. At root they relate to how we deal with, and work with people in everyday interactions, including colleagues and members of the public. The activities that follow hereafter are introduced in receptive and productive stages, where the students are assigned corresponding tasks aimed at the development of their soft skills.

- ✚ **Talk about the given topic for one minute answering the following questions**

Job Interviews

- Are job interviews an effective way to recruit staff?
- How a candidate should prepare for the job interview?
- What kind of clothes are appropriate?
- What body language should be used by the interviewee?

- ✚ **Practice the given situation at class by means of a role play**

You are making arrangements for a one-day conference at a local hotel. The examiner is the conference organizer for the hotel and is visiting you to discuss the further arrangements. Find out:

- the capacity of the conference room,
- the cost of the room per-day,
- the equipment available.

Do you think the hotel is offering you a good price for the service?

- ✚ **Speak about your future career by completing the unfinished sentences**

Career Plans

Over the next two years....

I intend to...

And I'm going to try to...

If possible, I would also like to...

And I hope to..., although I know it won't be easy.

- ✚ **Pair work: Discuss the expressions below and match the words with their definitions**

Work skills

1. Active Listening
2. Proper Etiquette Tips
3. Business Letters
4. Reading Techniques
5. Communication
6. Reports
7. Memorandums
8. Speaking

... having a clear idea of your purpose, audience, subject.

... used to communicate the results of research; title is centered, in ALL CAPS two inches from the ...

... top; after the title, key the body in DS.

... a formal method used to communicate with people outside the office such as

customers and

... suppliers; they are usually printed on company letterhead or stationery.

... preview, skimming, context clues.

... responding with full attention, focusing on main ideas being communicated, using body language

... and facial expressions to respond, sitting up straight, leaning forward, smiling, or nodding.

... an exchange of information between sender and receiver.

... modulating your voice; using appropriate body language and gestures; maintaining eye contact

... with an audience.

... used for communication with others in the same office; brief, focused on a limited topic, informal

... in tone.

 **Group work: Study the diagram and present the roles of the Manufacturer and Customer**

Fig. 1. Venn Triple Diagram: Roles of the Manufacturer and Customer



 **Express your opinion in 5-7 sentences answering to one of the given questions**

- Have you ever played the board game Monopoly? Is it a good way to teach children about commerce? Can you think of other fun ways to learn about business?
- Have you considered running your own business? What kind of business would you like to run?
- Should the government do more to support small businesses and start-up's? What could they do?

 **Describe the differences answering to the given questions**

Managers VS Leaders

- How do they motivate their teams?
- What is the most difficult part of being a leader/a manager?
- Is competition among a team healthy? Why yes or why not?
- How do they go about resolving conflict?

- Who are the most important members of their teams?
- What managerial style do they use?

✚ **Prepare a presentation with one of these topics and present in pairs.**

- Time Management
- Positive Thinking
- When is it time to get a new job?
- Using credit cards responsibly
- Renting vs. Buying

✚ **Use the following phrases to complete the sentences below. Two of the phrases of inviting are informal. Which are they?**

Would like to	How about	Would like you to
Why don't you	Writing to invite you	Would you like to

1. going to Saint Sargis Church on this weekend?
2. visit a place of natural beauty like Garni?
3. I am going to organize a presentation about our new product and to be a part of it and give your comments about it.
4. We're to the ceremony of our wedding, which will take place in July.
5. I invite you to a concert taking place in the Republic Square.
6. come to my house to discuss the issues in a comfortable and more relaxing atmosphere.

✚ **Read the question below and give an answer by following how to write a notice**

You are Aram, the head of the Chess school. Your school is going to organize a competition between the players. Write a notice for your school notice board inviting names of all the interested students.

Key: Optional

NOTICE

CHESS SCHOOL

MARCH 03, 2020

INTER SCHOOL PARTICIPATING COMPETITION

Our school is organizing an inter-school participating competition on March 30, 2020; Monday, at 10 A.M. in the hall. All the interested participants may contact. The deadline is by March 15, 2020.

Aram, Head of the school.



Arrange the contents of the letter in the correct order of how to write a letter

1
2
3
4
5
6
7

The date

The body of the letter

The signature

The salutation

The close

The beginning

The common ending

As it has been observed, the activities in the current paper include and integrate subject-specific language knowledge with soft skills leading to a proper linkage between theory and practice and thus ensuring the successful development of ESP learners' soft skills.

Conclusions

Being vital for the majority of careers, soft skills are specific qualities that companies' recruiters consider desirable for employees to possess. They are often used as benchmarks to rate and evaluate candidates during the recruitment process, especially when reviewing application forms and at interview [2]. We ought to mention that Institutions of Higher Education in Armenia have also realized the importance of developing soft skills in students for making them relevant to the changed requirements of the world of work. Although the level of understanding amongst students varies, one point of consensus is there, that without appropriate soft skills, survival and growth in today's competitive world is not possible, as these skills lead to better performance in workplace. So, we are hopeful that the practical activities introduced in the current paper can serve as an example for the development of learners' soft skills in any specialty, as they incorporate not only subject-specific language knowledge, but also skills and qualities necessary for the implementation of daily business duties such as communication, collaboration, team work, creative and critical thinking, problem-solving, learning to learn, as well as leadership and IT skills.

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Functions of Literature in Teaching English for Specific Purposes

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Abstract

In foreign language education (FLE) and general English teaching, the value of using literature has long been established as a mainstream component. On the other hand, literature as art has led a fringe existence in teaching English for specific purposes (ESP), as ESP quite naturally and rightly encourages the use of texts stemming from students' professional and academic areas of interest. However, there may be certain niche roles of literature in ESP classrooms, and it is the goal of this contribution to probe into the suitability and ways of integrating short literary texts and extracts into ESP materials. It is argued that literature, in particular prose and fiction, can support, enrich, and endow ESP courses with reflective, motivating, and enjoyable input. For that purpose, the contribution provides short extracts of literary texts and recommends genres likely to contain subject matter with the potential to appeal to workplace-oriented students. Moving from ESP to a more global view, it finishes with reflections on the role of literature in today's society.

Keywords: ESP, literature, fiction, learner engagement, higher education

1. Introduction

Foreign language education (FLE) and general English teaching have traditionally comprised literature as a form of art in classrooms. According to [1], students in FLE should learn to use the language to build personal relationships, work in business, and embark on further studies. These goals are rather universal, as also ESP aims at such competencies, but the texts used in general English and ESP differ fundamentally.

Literature in ESP is closely linked to reading for information and comprises subject-specific texts (e.g., from biology or mathematics), journalistic texts (e.g., from newspapers or magazines), instructional texts (e.g., from manuals, guidelines, or standards), and descriptive texts (e.g., from travel guides or commercial brochures).

Literature in general English, however, is often connected with reading for pleasure and rests on popular literature (e.g., contemporary fiction) and literature as art in the forms of poetry, drama, and prose in the canon. Notwithstanding this established and reasonable demarcation, there may be niche roles of literature in ESP contexts as well.

This contribution pursues the objectives of reviewing functions of literature in FLE, proposing functions of literature in ESP, and identifying literary genres and periods suitable for ESP. It is argued that short prose texts and extracts from fiction can provide input for reflection, motivation, and enjoyment in ESP, thus enriching and refining courses geared towards workplace-oriented learners.

2. Functions of literature in FLE

In FLE and general English teaching, literature has mainly been employed to foster reading and reading skills. Several authors attribute beneficial educational effects to literature. Literature, for instance, can “amuse, sadden, thrill, frighten, and inspire” [2, p. 143], and there is “evidence that it is motivating and engaging” [3, p. 490; cf. 4].

Furthermore, teaching with literature is “not only about training, but also about education”, thus “developing the whole person” [5, p. 469]. In that sense, literature is a means “to expand and enrich the lives of our students and the society in which they live” [6, p. 171]. There also seems to be some inherent magnetism in literary fiction, when Gottschall claims that humans are “as a species, addicted to story” [7, p. xiv], which makes this genre particularly attractive for educational purposes.

However, there are certain disadvantages of using literature in FLE. It generally involves difficult language; long texts are time-consuming to teach; the cultural context of works may be alien to students; the enjoyment of texts may be spoilt by teaching; and students may consider literature irrelevant [8]. On the other hand, using literature in FLE has advantages, as it promotes education and entertainment, develops literary literacy and the joy of reading, facilitates the passing on of values and norms, contributes to personal growth and self-awareness, and develops empathy [9].

3. Functions of literature in ESP

Functions of literature in ESP may include the provision of input, stimulus, and entertainment in activities and materials. Literature may be used for starting or maintaining conversations, describing scenery and landscapes, introducing humour, initiating reflections on a topic, exemplifying meanings of words, and fostering entrepreneurship.

3.1 Starting or maintaining conversations

One possible way of employing literature in ESP is as input for small-talk activities.

For the simulation of a business dinner, for instance, literary quotations and short extracts related to food and drinks can be distributed on an accompanying handout to stimulate conversation and make students talk about literature in a playful way. An example of such an extract is a passage from travel literature from the turn of the 18th to the 19th century: “The Gambia abounds with fish, some species of which are excellent food; but none of them that I recollect are known in Europe. At the entrance from the sea sharks are found in great abundance; and higher up, alligators and the hippopotamus (or river-horse) are very numerous” [10, p. 5]. Finding suitable quotations on meals, eating, and drinking is rather effortless because culinary situations are often described in novels and stories.

3.2 Describing scenery and landscapes

Fiction abounds with descriptions of scenery and landscapes, which may be beneficial to certain ESP tasks. Extracts of this kind, for instance, may support descriptive writing tasks in the context of travel-related activities or advertising in business. A series of short texts depicting cities and landscapes could form the starting point and inspirational input for creating a tourism brochure. The following extract is a famous description of Lake Ontario:

The position the two had attained was sufficiently elevated to command a wide reach of the lake, which stretched away toward the northeast in a boundless sheet, glittering beneath the rays of an afternoon’s sun and yet betraying the remains of that agitation

which it had endured while tossed by the late tempest. The land set bounds to its limits, in a huge crescent, disappearing in distance toward the southeast and the north. Far as the eye could reach, nothing but forest was visible, not even a solitary sign of civilization breaking in upon the uniform and grand magnificence of nature. [11, p. 280]

3.3 Introducing humour

Humorous passages from novels and stories may be employed in ESP to introduce elements of fun and amusement to a course. Such extracts may ease and enrich character descriptions of business leaders, comparisons of the lifestyles of different people according to income statistics, or attitudes towards life and death. The example given here portrays a vivacious old lady:

Dagliesh recalled that Great Aunt Allie had moved in a predictable pattern with her retinue of servants, current lover and general hangers-on from one luxury Riviera hotel to the next, with stays in Paris or Rome as the mood suited her. He was not sure that this orderly programme of comfort and entertainment could be described as being restlessly driven round Europe or that the old lady had been primarily in search of peace.

She had died, he recalled, by falling overboard from a millionaire's yacht during a rather wild party given by him to celebrate her eighty-eighth birthday. It was perhaps not an edifying death by the Canon's standards but Dalgliesh doubted whether she had, in fact, been unhappy at the time. Great Aunt Allie (it was impossible to think of her by any other name), if she had been capable of coherent thought, would probably have pronounced it a very good way to go. [12, p. 78]

3.4 Initiating reflections on a topic

Literature can also initiate reflections on a topic. In ESP related to biology or geography, for example, biodiversity, evolution, and climate change may be suitable topics for reflection. Particularly when addressing the preservation of life, a quotation from Darwin may stand at the beginning of a group discussion: "When a species has once disappeared from the face of the earth, we have no reason to believe that the same identical form ever reappears" [13, p. 382].

3.5 Exemplifying meanings of words

Literature may further fulfil the function of exemplifying meanings of words in ESP. In the context of job applications, candidates need to underscore their personal characteristics and strengths. Words helpful for this purpose may be explained to students by means of short literary extracts like the following one illustrating the term *perseverance*:

Great numbers of dangerous places, and the fatigue which we have to encounter is incredible: the men in the water from morning until night, hauling the cord and boats, walking on sharp rocks and round slippery stones which alternately cut their feet and throw them down. Notwithstanding all this difficulty, they go with great cheerfulness.

Added to those difficulties, the rattlesnakes are innumerable and require great caution to prevent being bitten. [14, p. 176]

3.6 Fostering entrepreneurship

Finally, literature may contribute to the fostering of entrepreneurship. Extracts from novels or travel literature may be used for activities related to leadership, group discussions on entrepreneurship, comparisons of successful business leaders, or comparisons of landmark expeditions. However, teachers may need to explain the historical and cultural context of quotations they use in ESP groups. The following example is a self-reflection of the leader of an expedition through Africa:

Now that I have returned uninjured in health, though I have suffered the attacks of twenty-three fevers within the short space of thirteen months; I must confess I owe my life, first, to the mercy of God; secondly, to the enthusiasm for my work, which animated me from the beginning to the end; thirdly, to having never ruined my constitution by indulgence in vice and intemperance; fourthly, to the energy of my nature; fifthly, to a native hopefulness which never died; and sixthly, to having furnished myself with a capacious water- and damp-proof canvas house. [15, p. 56]

4. Genres and periods of interest in ESP

As the examples in Chapter 3 have shown, literary genres of interest in ESP are those where science, technology, business, logical reasoning, and intercultural issues play a role: travel literature, early scientific literature, detective fiction, thriller genres, spy novels, science fiction, mystery fiction, fantasy fiction, gothic fiction, dystopian fiction, romance novels, western fiction, and adventure fiction. Accordingly, current novels of the 21st century and modern classics of the 19th and 20th century are likely to offer intriguing quotations. Particularly the latter periods treat the times of the industrial revolution (with its topicality concerning climate change) and modern themes such as exploration, travel, economy, poverty, relationships, and moral conventions. Furthermore, these periods witnessed a proliferation of the novel, which means choice for teachers and a variety of writers and styles. The language of these works is closer to today's English than texts from earlier periods, and often film adaptations exist [cf. 16].

5. Conclusions

There is a tendency in today's society to read machine-selected text segments sent to consumers of information through digital media. This development bears the risk that adolescent students are socialised as unreflective receivers of messages and prone to manipulation, propaganda, and disinformation. Social media as well as online forums and blogs have been criticised for tolerating hateful speech and offensive posts, and the Internet has brought unprecedented possibilities of spreading dubious texts and fake news to the masses.

Literature, on the other hand, may afford learners the chances to rediscover the pleasure of reading, partake in an experience of art, bond with the target language, and encounter a diversity of genres. Students' familiarity with a wide variety of styles may thus facilitate their recognising ideological, discriminatory, and prejudiced writing and shield them from being spoon-fed with information by dubious entities. In addition, literature may encourage learners to take control of their reading, gain different perspectives on life, and deepen their understanding of cultural contexts. Furthermore, it may substitute real experiences with imaginary worlds and aid students to develop as global citizens, continue forming their identity, and master times of crises.

Even though such general and fundamental educational goals are not prominent in ESP, literature does have certain roles in specialised language teaching. Fiction, in particular, can assume supportive functions in activities and materials. The brevity of extracts is decisive, as short quotations from apt genres and periods may exert motivating and engaging stimuli for reading. It is the role of ESP professionals to both teach the language and educate students, yet literature cannot represent the main or predominant content in ESP, as ESP means workplace-related language instruction based on needs analysis.

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Project-Based Learning

JASM: Active Pedagogy for Foreign Language Learning in Higher Education

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Abstract

JASM project (Janela aberta sobre o mundo: línguas estrangeiras, criatividade multimodal e inovação pedagógica no ensino superior) consists of an experience of active pedagogy with students of the undergraduate course in Media Studies at the School of Education in Viseu (Portugal). The main objective of JASM is to promote the acquisition of multilingual and multicultural skills and to generate multilingual awareness. In addition to the cognitive dimension, students explore the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of language. Experiences of artistic creativity (media arts, multimedia art, among others) enable multimodal communication in English and French, starting off with information gathering pertaining to the cultural and linguistic diversity of Viseu. After conducting research on the countries of origin of the chosen nationalities as well as the underlying cultures, the students, working in groups, found out about the life stories of migrants on the basis of interviews. Experiences of artistic creativity made it possible to exercise multimodal communication. An object or a tradition mentioned in the stories told by migrants allowed them to build a fictional story around the said object or tradition. Photos were taken at all stages of this work. A storyboard of each fictional story was developed. The Korsakow system made it possible to create dynamic documentaries. The disclosure of this learning experience is made public on the project site and through an e-book. The students' language level (written and oral comprehension and expression) was assessed at the start of the project, using tests. The intermediate evaluation is of a qualitative type as well as the final evaluation (interview type, carried out with students and teachers) due to COVID-19 crisis. The progress of the learning process, as well as the involvement of the teachers could thus be documented.

Keywords: Project-based learning, higher education, foreign languages, interculturality, digital art

1. Introduction

From the perspective of constructivism and according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, individuals are active protagonists in their learning process, creating their own knowledge [1]. Different teaching practices are mobilised towards encouraging students to use new active learning tools, which ought to be consistent with the activities devised. Such activities involve experimentation, real-world problem-solving tasks likely to allow for knowledge building, reflection and discussion [2]. Baviskar, Hartle and Whitney [3] identify four essential constituents in the classroom to apply the constructivism strategy: collecting prior student knowledge, creating new challenges in order to revise existing schemas, encouraging activities to evaluate new information and showing and reflecting on learning.

An example of this student-centred learning is the project-based learning “characterised by students’ autonomy, constructive investigations, goal-setting, collaboration, communication and reflection within real-world practices” [4]. In the field of foreign language (FL) acquisition, the effect is the production of skills and a positive influence on the teaching and learning process: enthusiasm, creativity, autonomy for the students and motivation and satisfaction for the teachers [5]. The benefit for learners is the capacity to resolve advanced problems and to communicate proficiently [6]. Inquiry-based learning, another effective method to promote student motivation [7], requires the learner to ask questions which s/he will try to answer by carrying out research and direct observation. Classes should be divided into small groups, allowing cooperation to accomplish shared goals, solve problems and acquire sounder knowledge [8].

In the context of Higher Education (HE), teaching FLs to students attending courses other than FL ones is not exempt from the need to turn them into active learners.

Institutional constraints make certain approaches difficult. Project-based learning, inquiry-based learning, interdisciplinarity and cooperative learning are complementary ways to develop communication skills while using transversal and interdisciplinary skills.

Direct contact with the real world and objective productions mean that students are involved in collaborative work. FLs are important for the job market, from recruitment to career progression, with a view to greater responsibility and better salaries [9] and the mastery of communicative skills in several FLs streamlines the market economy, to reach new target groups, establishing new lasting relationships, mainly the emotional dimension of languages.

The objectives of JASM project are to develop multilingual skills and multilingual awareness in undergraduates, through the mobilisation of different dimensions of language in a creative, collaborative and interdisciplinary manner.

2. FL learning in higher education in the 21st century

FL teaching within a HE context cannot disregard the need to innovate and to take into account new variables linked to the labour market and to the society’s well-being.

Teachers in HE are constantly forced to follow strategies focused on the students which aim to foster student motivation and develop their autonomy. The teacher’s role is renewed in this approach to adapt to the path and needs of the learners.

Using modern educational methods facilitates student engagement, enhances analytical and innovative thinking, decreases apathy and leads to peer-learning [10]. The goal is to help students by incorporating authentic study, creation and innovation practices into learning to achieve working life competencies [11]. The combination of different active learning methodologies, such as embodied learning, multiliteracies, project-based learning and inquiry-based learning will enable a holistic approach,

leading to connected practices and techniques [12].

The core link among these methods is the fact that language is an inherent form of expression that relates to each one's identity and feelings, which frame the way people talk, interpret, or raise arguments. In this regard, art and multiliteracies related tasks can benefit from developing language competences, and vice-versa [13]. Actually, one can never learn a language apart from the acquisition and development of an intercultural competence [14].

3. FL activities, collaborative environment and inter-disciplinarity

To implement constructivist instructional strategies in the classroom requires a learning environment based on knowledge sharing and classroom management among teachers (seen as guides) and students (small group work). This student-centred learning associated with ICT encourages social experience (work collaboration) in realistic contexts and the conscious knowledge construction process where alternative solutions are evaluated [2].

A key factor that facilitates the process towards active learning is the possibility of matching the natural inclinations of learners to play, create, express, collaborate and discover [13]. Among the cluster of active learning strategies, embodied learning connects the physical, artistic, emotional, and social, exploiting two natural dispositions in the learners – creativity and expression – and promotes innovation in teaching approaches.

The JASM project emerges within a classroom setting, and follows on beyond the four walls of a traditional classroom towards enabling each of the groups involved to find information pertaining to the lifestyles, culture, expectations, etc., of some migrants of different nationalities of Viseu. The students are, thus, invited to practice language in context, experiencing the challenges and pitfalls of intercultural interactions with an extra motivation and the desired involvement for learning to occur.

4. The JASM project

The JASM project is carried out with 20 students attending the Media Studies Course at the School of Education in Viseu. Their career opportunities are to be found in the fields of journalism, production, organisation and management of information and institutional and organisational communication. Besides the study plan, students attend courses in photography, digital art and intercultural communication.

The project aims to develop pedagogical innovation in HE concerning FLs in courses other than language ones. FL learning through social, cultural and artistic stimuli is promoted through the production of FL content using project-based learning in the context of linguistic and cultural diversity. It also intends to encourage good interdisciplinary practices developing knowledge and know-how in a collaborative and cooperative manner, and leading students to develop a multilingual and multicultural awareness using varied, creative and multimodal approaches.

4.1 Methodology

Five groups of 4 students were formed (cooperative learning). The project was presented and the goals and methodology debated (project-based learning). Each group had to select a different nationality among the most representative ones: Angolan, Belarusian, Indian, Italian and Ukrainian (statistic data from Portuguese Foreigners and Borders Service in Viseu, 2018), and carry out a study on the country, and illustrative of cultural and linguistic diversity (inquiry-based learning). All student productions were

presented in both English and French to the academic community.

An extra photo seminar was held to support students' assignments (interdisciplinarity). The groups then had to meet a migrant living in the city. To do this, social networks enabled the exchange of information and the Local Centre for Support to the Integration of Migrants facilitated some contacts. The objective of the first appointment was to present the project and to conduct an interview (professional competences) so that students could write the story of the migrants' lives and take some photos, show important aspects of the life path of the person they interviewed and highlight facets of their personality. These assignments were also commented on during the FL course and were the starting point for the semi-annual student assessment.

The last phase, yet to take place, consists in the creation, by the students, of an animated film, based on a particular object or a tradition from the chosen migrant (exploration of material culture and digital scenography). A storyboard of each fictional story has been developed thanks to the Korsakow system, creating dynamic documentaries, under direction of a specialist on digital art. The productions will be disclosed on the JASM website, social networks, exhibitions, projections at events and will be published on an e-book.

4.2 Progress evaluation

The experience comprised a mixed-method design. Quantitative data were collected at the beginning, using speaking and writing tests. A first language level test was applied to the team of students involved (20), as well as to their colleagues in the class (12). The test was developed according to the CEFR levels, for written and oral comprehension and production, and it was inspired by the DELF, DALF and TOEFL tests. Response times were checked for each skills block.

The qualitative data were collected through interviews and observation. A second evaluation procedure was then carried out, based on an exchange of experiences between the students involved in the project and their colleagues, ascertaining of their feeling about their progress.

With the COVID-19 crisis, the final evaluation was also qualitative (interview type, carried out studies and teachers). All of the qualitative data were analysed descriptively.

5. Conclusion

As far as students are concerned the project enhanced curiosity, motivation, enthusiasm, creativity and autonomy, allowing linguistic, multicultural communication development, self-directed learning and collaborative skills.

From the teachers' point of view, the experience provided motivation and satisfaction as the JASM project evolved and progressed, in line with Vicheanpant and Ruenglerpanyakul's findings [15]. The teacher's role resembles, in this sense, that of a coach, rather than a traditional kind of teacher whose function is also to assess/examine.

This experience aims to open new perspectives towards a reflection on the teaching/learning process of FLs in HE, corollary to an experiment conducted with students of this level of education.

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Primary Education



Spoken Vocabulary Used by Elementary ESL/EFL Learners

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Abstract

According to language acquisition theory, the critical step in the language acquisition process is to distinguish between language purpose and language content. The development of elementary English learners' listening and speaking skills is the foundation of English acquisition. However, English as a second language/English as a foreign language (ESL/EFL) learner often have limited access to English outside of the classroom. Therefore, it is crucial to provide a word list that can help them receive useful spoken vocabulary guidance and promote the development of listening and speaking during limited classroom time.

However, no previous studies have analysed the spoken vocabulary of beginner American ESL/Taiwanese EFL English learners or linked their main characteristics. Therefore, this study explores the ESL/EFL spoken vocabulary from a corpus-based perspective and determines whether this spoken vocabulary is related to the sight words. This study creates a spoken corpus based on classroom observations conducted between 2018 and 2020 in Taiwan and the United States to observe the spoken language used by teachers and ESL/EFL students during the English classroom interaction time.

Therefore, this study explores spoken word lists from the perspective of spoken language corpora to understand the different contexts, spoken words, and patterns used by teachers and students in the classroom. The results show that beginner ESL and EFL learners have similar oral vocabulary choices, even if their native language backgrounds are different. The characteristics of oral vocabulary can help teachers guide students to distinguish between written and oral English. Oral speech can also promote the development of learners' reading ability while improving their listening and speaking skills.

Keywords: spoken corpus, spoken vocabulary, sight words (SW), high frequency words (HFW), English as a second language (ESL), English as a foreign language (EFL)

1. Introduction

In the context of English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL), the sight words (SWs) that teachers often teach to young learners are related to the oral expressions used in the classroom, which positively affect the development of students' listening and speaking abilities. A 2019 American education study pointed out that the reading scores of middle-low, middle- and higher-grade students in the fourth grade of elementary school are lower than in 2017. There is a gap in young learners' academic performance from non-mainstream cultural and linguistic minority backgrounds in the long run. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019)

Young L2 learners in Taiwan's elementary schools only learn the target language in an EFL environment [1] because they only have one to two hours of instruction each week in the target language in the classroom and have little opportunity to practice the target language outside of school. August (2005) claimed that to understand the target language within a limited time frame in the classroom, vocabulary choice plays a key role in developing a student's language ability. Hilton (2008) also pointed out that a lack of spoken vocabulary affected speech proficiency. Thus, to learn the target language efficiently according to second language acquisition (SLA) theory in an EFL or ESL environment, English Language learners should have sufficient vocabulary input.

2. Literature review

Word lists assist teachers in determining the vocabulary knowledge that is useful in the learning process of L2 students in the limited classroom time (Kan, 2020). However, an appropriate spoken vocabulary list helps not only language learners but also curriculum and textbook designers because word lists can help them select the right words to use when designing appropriate learning activities (Dang *et al.*, 2020).

Teachers of children in kindergarten to the third grade usually use high-frequency word (HFW) lists or SWs to improve beginner English learners' elementary reading skills.

While recent research has focused more on reading ability (Fry, 1980; Nation, 2013), Dolch's SW list (Dolch, 1936) uses written materials and includes spoken words commonly used by English-speaking children.

However, little research has focused on the spoken language, developed an academic word list (Dang *et al.*, 2017), or examined the differences in English language learners' "spoken vocabulary" [2]. Additionally, no previous studies have examined the differences between the oral language and main characteristics of beginner Taiwanese EFL and American ESL learners.

Therefore, this study identifies HFWs from the perspective of ESL/EFL spoken word corpora and discusses the spoken language characteristics. Classroom observations were conducted in Taiwan and the United States between 2018 and 2020 to observe the spoken vocabulary of native English teachers and ESL/EFL students during their English classroom interactions to answer the following research questions:

- [1] What HFWs are used in the young ESL/EFL classroom?
- [2] What is the overlap ratio of the EFL/ESL HFWs and Dolch's SWs?
- [3] What is the text coverage rate of Dolch's SWs in young EFL/ESL classrooms?

3. Research methods

This study's main participants were third-grade teachers and students in EFL elementary school classrooms in Taiwan and kindergarten to second-grade teachers and students in ESL elementary school classrooms in the United States. The 90 young learners (47 male and 43 female) in Taiwan had an average age of 10 years. The two female English teachers in the EFL class were from Michigan, USA, and Cape Town, South Africa. The participants in the ESL classes were teachers and students in 19 classes, and the average age of the students was 5 to 7 years old. Since the COVID crisis started to spread in early 2020, K-12 classrooms in the United States were transformed into online classrooms, which were accessible through the online "TCH" teaching channel. Over four semesters, 110 classroom observations were conducted.

The goal of a corpus linguistics quantitative analysis is to convert the vocabulary into a manageable list (Garnier *et al.*, 2015). Following Garnier *et al.*'s (2015) first step, this research identified the HFWs commonly used in classrooms by L2 learners and teachers

in different contexts and conducted a quantitative analysis of corpus linguistics to answer the first research question. The researcher then checked the overlap rate of the HFWs in each group and verified the coverage rate of SWs in different contexts to answer the second and third research questions.

4. Research results

The above process produced two spoken language corpora from the EFL and ESL classrooms. Of the 456,437 words generated from the EFL classroom samples, 6,772 types (different and distinct words) were identified. Similarly, observations of the ESL classrooms obtained 505,098 words comprising 4,883 distinct words.

Table 1. Spoken data from the EFL/ESL classrooms

Text file	File size	Tokens (running words) in text	Tokens used for word list	Types (distinct words)
EFL CLASSROOMS	456,470	81,170	81,170	6,772
ESL CLASSROOMS	505,098	93,569	93,569	4,883

After deducting the non-words, there were 6,636 words from the EFL classroom and 4,837 words from the ESL classrooms. In this study, HFWs are considered to be words that appear in the context more than 100 times (Coxhead, 2000, p. 221). After retrieving these, the researcher obtained 121 HFWs from the EFL context and 153 from the ESL context (see Appendix 1). An examination of the HFWs in the EFL/ESL groups with Dolch's SWs showed an overlap rate of 75.37%. The ESL HFWs and SWs showed an overlap rate of 71.37%.

Table 2. Overlap ratio of the EFL/ESL HFWs and Dolch's SWs

N	Text file	File size	Tokens (running words) in text	Types (distinct words)	Type/token ratio (ttr)
1	Overall	1,964	341	257	75.37
	Dolch's SWs	1,275	220	220	100.00
	EFL HFWs	689	121	121	100.00
2	Overall	2,247	380	271	71.32
	Dolch's SWs	1,275	220	220	100.00
	ESL HFWs	972	160	160	100.00

The results showed the coverage rates of the SWs as 41.04% in the EFL spoken corpus and 37.13% in the ESL spoken corpus.

Table 3. Coverage rate of Dolch's SW and the EFL/ ESL spoken corpus

N	Text file	File size	Tokens (running words) in text	Tokens used for word list	Types (distinct words)	Type/token ratio (ttr)
1	Overall	307,947	17,496	17,496	7,180	41.04
	EFL spoken corpus	306,672	17,276	17,276	7,167	41.49
	Dolch's SWs	1,275	220	220	220	100.00
2	Overall	232,034	14,358	14,358	5,331	37.13
	ESL spoken corpus	230,759	14,138	14,138	5,326	37.67
	Dolch's SWs	1,275	220	220	220	100.00

5. Discussion

The study found the overlap rates between Dolch's SWs and the ESL and EFL high-frequency spoken vocabulary lists to be 71.37% and 75.37%, respectively. Thus, despite the different language environments, around 75% of the spoken words were the same as the visual words, which reflected the influence of visual vocabulary on oral expression (Helman, 2008). These results indicated that the SWs that teachers guide the students to read will affect their spoken performance in class. Compared with Burns' (2009) experiment in ESL classrooms, he found a significant relationship between English proficiency and English visual words' acquisition rate. The results of this study show that sight words occupy 71% to 75% of spoken English in English language classrooms, providing direct evidence for the significant relationship between English proficiency and visual vocabulary.

Based on SWs, the researchers obtained coverage rates of 41.49% and 37.67% for the EFL and ESL spoken corpora, respectively. This finding showed that only 220 Dolch's SWs can cover 37%~41% of nearly one million words of the EFL/ESL corpora, thus emphasizing the current significance of Dolch's SWs in EFL and ESL classrooms despite being published 90 years ago. Generally speaking, young L2 learners use more of Dolch's SWs for their oral expressions, especially in the EFL context. However, since the SWs originated from written text, the results of this study also highlighted the similarities and differences between written and spoken English. Teachers should guide students to distinguish between the two types of expressions.

From a scientific perspective, the words in the EFL/ESL spoken corpora were ranked according to their frequency. Of the HFWs, 121 were used in the EFL classrooms and 160 in the ESL classrooms. These spoken vocabulary word lists are an effective way to have beginner English learners or immigrant families participate in the young English classroom as soon as possible.

According to Nation (2016), word lists based only on corpus standards might miss words that appear less frequently in the corpus but are useful for L2 learners. Therefore, to create a suitable word list for L2 learners, researchers have recommended using corpora, such as BNC or COCA, to verify the collected data and add low- and medium-frequency words that may be beneficial for L2 learning and teaching purposes. Overall, this study suggests that vocabulary for a beginner EFL/ESL L2 environment provides the most accessible starting point for incorporating HFWs.

The main limitation of this study is that the sample was limited to the spoken vocabulary of third-grade Taiwanese learners in the EFL classroom and American K-2 learners in the ESL classroom. Thus, future research should examine L2 learners in other EFL/ESL environments to confirm the spoken vocabulary used by L2 learners in different regions and eliminate possible bias.

6. Conclusion

This study obtained an overlap rate of 71%-75% between the visual vocabulary used by the EFL/ESL teachers and young L2 students in classrooms. These results suggested that even if learners have different backgrounds, young ESL/EFL learners use similar spoken English words in the classroom. In both Taiwanese EFL and American ESL classrooms, the spoken vocabulary tended to be based on visual vocabulary; thus, teachers should guide students to distinguish the similarities and differences between written and spoken English.

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Teachers' Professional Development



“Field Placement” – A Tool for Reflection in Language Teacher Training

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Abstract

Students wishing to become teachers of languages in Malta are required to follow the Master in Teaching and Learning (MTL) course offered by the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta. The two-year full-time post graduate course, which enables graduates to teach at Secondary level, according to the language of specialisation chosen, combines theory and practice by means of a Field Placement in schools throughout the 2 years of the course. This comprises a period of observation sessions in schools held once weekly, during which, with the help of a Teacher Mentor, student teachers are expected to discuss the different practices observed, followed by a five-week block practicum period in each of the two years of the course, giving particular attention to preparation and planning, reflective practice, professional skills and professional development. The Field Placement goes hand in hand with the Themes in Education interdisciplinary programme with the aim of fostering reflective inquiry and professional practice by helping student teachers focus on a number of issues and challenges which teachers have to deal with in their everyday work.

Keywords: Field Placement; Reflective Practice; Teacher Mentors; Teaching Practice

1. Introduction

Teaching has undoubtedly become one of the most complicated jobs in today's world.

Teachers are not simply tasked with forming the citizens of tomorrow (which in itself is a mammoth task) but, above all, to be agents of change in classrooms that are characterised by diverse populations and which in turn present multilingual and multicultural challenges. Pace (2016) [1] argues that this diversity in the language classroom makes teachers' work difficult since cultural diversity poses a pedagogical and social challenge to educators. Teachers as well as students bring into the classroom their own personal cultures, institutional cultures, and even cultures from specific social realities, and it is no easy challenge for the teacher to somehow integrate all this into a “class culture” to produce an environment that is conducive to learning. Teachers, according to Pace (2015) [2], need to be knowledgeable about how students coming from different countries, backgrounds and life experiences perceive the world and how they process the language/s and intercultural aspects being taught in class.

This means that future teachers are to be prepared not only with knowledge in their discipline but also with the ability to assume multiple roles in a multi-cultural society. This also explains why student teachers and newly qualified teachers consider classroom management to be the biggest challenge they have to face. Many, if not most of novice teachers complain that their teacher training University course did little to prepare them for the realities of different classroom situations, including dealing with diverse and, at times, unruly students, and often feel overwhelmed once they enter class. Another big

challenge is how to motivate low achievers and get them on board. Classes are very often made up of students with differing interests, abilities, skills and knowledge. For this reason, one size does not fit all and teachers have to find a way of meeting the variety of needs they are confronted with. Technology may seem to be the answer, but one has to not just know how to use the technologies available but, above all, how to make the best use of them in class for the benefit of the students. Consequently, teaching demands broad knowledge of subject matter, curriculum and standards; enthusiasm, a caring attitude, and a love of learning; knowledge of discipline and classroom management techniques, and much more. With all these qualities required, it is no wonder that teacher training has become a very difficult mission to accomplish, even more so if our aim as teacher trainers is to make of our student teachers' reflective practitioners.

2. Reflective Practice

Impedovo and Khatoon Malik (2016) [3] argue that the objective of reflective practice in teaching is to ensure a more precise and meaningful understanding of a situation and to provide effective, applicable actions for strengthening performance. This embraces the concept of the teacher as a learner and the teacher as a professional. Every teacher has a professional responsibility to reflect and evaluate his/her practice in order to be able to identify how to improve the quality of pupils' learning. Reflection inspires teachers to evaluate what happened and why; it encourages teachers to try out new ideas and promote changes in pupils' learning behaviour. Being reflective allows one to take a step back, look more holistically and try and understand both the success and potential failings of a lesson, a situation or a way of doing something. Unfortunately, some, if not many, individuals looking to get into the teaching profession still do not realise that being a good teacher does no longer merely mean having a sound understanding of the subject matter that one would like to teach. Teaching is much more than this. Teachers need more than ever before engage with their students, ask the right questions, motivate students to learn in a way that lasts, and above all they need to be able to look at their own abilities and the way that they connect with their students. Teachers need not only understand well what they do in class but also why they do it. In other words, they have to be reflective practitioners and be able to use critical reflections to improve instruction by identifying weaknesses and strengths and improving their practice.

Reflective teaching implies a systematic process of collecting, recording and analysing one's own thoughts and observations, as well as those of the students in class, that will then lead to making changes. It is a cyclical process through which, once changes start being implemented, the reflective and evaluative cycle is activated, leading to reflections on whether we need to do something in a different way or simply decide that what we are doing is, in fact, the best way of doing it. And this, after all, is what professional development is all about and explains why teacher educators should facilitate the reflection process and promote opportunities for student teachers to engage in reflective conversations and reflect on their teaching experiences. Pace (2014) [4] argues that encouraging reflective practice is important for preparing thinking practitioners who show that they can adapt to new technologies, new standards, and new environments. Orland-Barak & Yinon (2007) [5] on their part, perceive the emphasis on reflective practice as an attempt to merge theory and practice in teacher education.

Reflection is a highly valued attribute of effective teachers, for without the disposition to reflect on their performance, teachers are less likely to improve their practice or to be able to see the links between theory and practice. To enhance competence and improve professional development, teachers must reflect critically on the actions performed in

instruction. Miyata (2002) [6] argues that it is only when teachers reflect that they enhance the repertoire of pedagogical knowledge, whereas with regards to prospective teachers this has to be backed up also by feedback provided by their mentors and/or university supervisors. Reflective teaching means looking at what one does in the classroom, thinking about why s/he does it, and thinking about if it works – a process of self-observation and self-evaluation. By collecting information about what goes on in the classroom, and by analysing and evaluating this information, the student teacher identifies and explores his/her own practices and underlying beliefs.

3. The Field Placement

Several studies show how the single most important factor determining the quality of the education a child receives is the quality of his teacher. In many countries, a person who wishes to become a teacher must first obtain specified professional qualifications or credentials from a university or college. In Malta the path to obtaining a teacher's qualification and warrant is through the Master in Teaching and Learning (MTL) course offered by the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta. It is a 2-year full time course intended to offer an entry-level qualification for teachers, based on the study of pedagogy with the ultimate aim of offering student teachers the chance to collaborate with mentors and other colleagues in a process of growth and development from a prospective teacher to a reflective practitioner. The MTL places Field Placement at the core of the two-year professional Master course, with student-teachers having ongoing and meaningful experiences in schools and other learning settings. It comprises a period of observation and teaching in schools and/or other educational settings, under supervision, in each of the two years of the course. Every student teacher is, at the start of the course, assigned to a particular school. Here, for the duration of the whole academic year, s/he is expected to spend a whole day per week observing the Teacher Mentor and other teachers within the school and discussing the different practices observed. Gradually the student teacher starts taking up activities and lessons, always under the guidance of the Teacher Mentor, in preparation for the Block Teaching Practice or the so-called Practicum. This consists of a five-week block teaching practice period in each of the two years of the course, giving particular attention to preparation and planning, reflective practice, professional skills and professional development. The Field Placement goes hand in hand with the Themes in Education interdisciplinary programme with the aim of fostering reflective inquiry and professional practice by helping student teachers focus on a number of issues and challenges which teachers have to deal with in their everyday work.

As stated in the Field Placement Handbook, the Themes in Education Programme together with the Block Practicum play a pivotal role in the MTL programme as they provide student teachers the opportunity to explore the various challenges and issues of professional practice in actual school and classroom situations. The student teachers are divided in small tutorial groups. Each theme is presented and discussed over 2 tutorial sessions, one held before the observation session in school whereas the other tutorial is held the week after. The field placement, as stated in the handbook, encourages student teachers "to develop a reflective attitude towards issues of professional practice and to adopt the role of a reflective observer, drawing on theoretical insights in order to make pedagogical sense of the varieties of experiences that arise and are constructed within a school setting" (p. 13). For this reason, a whole range of themes dealing with issues and challenges which teachers have to deal with as they go about their work are presented. These include, among others, topics like: Becoming a teacher; Schools as communities of learning; Social and cultural diversity; Creating

positive classroom climates; Challenging/meaningful behaviour; Student teacher relationships; Working in teams with other professionals; Developing respectful schools and classrooms; Language across the curriculum; Parents and parental involvement; Promoting a Sustainable Society.

The main scope of the Field Placement is to help student teachers develop a process of thinking about one's practice before, during and after the concrete activities. As Collin, Karsenti & Komis (2013) [7] state, "reflective practice means that reflection, whether abstract or concrete, can never be disconnected from the situation that produces it" (p. 106). For this to happen, the student teacher needs not only to dedicate a large amount of time in planning and thinking about what s/he wants to realise, but, more importantly s/he needs to reflect to see if s/he is on the right track, what are the advantages and/or disadvantages of the decisions taken and the choices that were made, what could be improved, what hasn't worked and why. Such reflective practices help student teachers become more aware of themselves, of their beliefs and prejudices and of the surroundings in which they work. Together with the Teacher Mentor and the University Supervisors the student teacher reflects on his personal characteristics and discusses ideas, opinions and experiences in order to improve his practice.

This should lead the pre-service teacher to develop critical reflection prior to being immersed in a hands-on teaching practice, consisting of a 5-week Block Practicum in Year 1 and Year 2 of the course. During the first two weeks of the practicum, it is recommended that the class teacher and/or the Teacher Mentor remain in the classroom with the student teacher, following which the student teacher assumes full responsibility and manages the class on his/her own. Throughout this 5-week period, discussions between the student teacher and his/her mentor are ongoing. When and if possible, the Teacher Mentor is also present in class during the Faculty Examiners' visits as well as in the post-visit feedback sessions. The main scope is to encourage student teachers practise reflective thinking in the practicum setting as this enables them to seek for ways to improve their practice and consequently have a positive effect on their students. At the start of the practicum, most student teachers' reflective skills are focused on their performance as teachers and on self-survival, but with the help of the Teacher Mentors, student teachers are guided so as to focus and direct their reflections on the students' learning. This is further enhanced by the nature of the practicum assessment criteria, where importance is not only given to the classroom 'performance' of the student teacher, but also to the ability to reflect on his/her teaching experience.

The assessment sheets used during the practicum provide evidence of the students' progress and consist of a number of competences which a student is expected to achieve, giving the opportunity to Faculty Examiners to provide qualitative feedback to each and every student. The assessment sheet is made up of 4 main sections, namely Preparation and planning; Documentation and evidence of reflective practice; Professional skills; and Professional attitude and development. Great importance is given to pedagogically sound lesson plans, with specific and well-articulated learning outcomes. Lesson plans must also include cooperative learning strategies and reflect learners' diversity, including any necessary adaptations and/or modifications to suit learners' needs.

The second section of the assessment sheets is dedicated to documentation and evidence of reflective practice and focuses mainly on 2 aspects, namely class and student profiles and self-evaluations. Student teachers are required to write the profile of each class they teach, focusing particularly on student needs, levels of ability, challenges, the physical environment and targets set. They are also asked to identify a number of students from each class they teach and draw up their profiles, giving particular attention to their strengths, interests and needs. They are then asked to identify

any learning challenges they perceive in any of the students and to develop individual targets accordingly. Such profiles should help the student teacher better understand the students in class by identifying and noting their strengths, weaknesses, and preferences.

Profiles are developed in the context of particular learning goals, so that the student teacher can determine which student qualities may pose challenges or offer special opportunities for learning to take place in class. Student teachers are also expected to write self-evaluation reports. These can either be done after each lesson or at the end of the week, depending on the subject/s being taught, the number of classes and other considerations and as decided with the respective Faculty Examiner. In their self-evaluations, student teachers are expected to include information pertaining to their strengths and/or any weak points that they feel require further developments. Such reports are to show an in-depth insight into the teaching and learning progress and, above all, evidence of reflective practice, engaging with the literature, research and school policies. Self-evaluation reports are discussed with both the Teacher Mentor and the Faculty Examiner and include the setting of targets for improvement as well as strategies on how to achieve them.

In the third section, focus is on professional skills which include knowledge of curriculum and of the subject taught, the teaching and learning process, learning outcomes, assessment, classroom organization and management and the use of resources and digital technologies. It is of fundamental importance that student teachers not only have a good knowledge of the curriculum and a satisfactory understanding of subject-matter knowledge, but that they also understand the context in which learning is taking place. In this way it can be ensured that all learners in class actively participate in the lesson, putting in practice a variety of teaching strategies and integrating the appropriate digital technologies and resources in order to help students reach the desired learning outcomes. Effective assessment strategies and techniques are needed to verify if learning is actually taking place. Questioning techniques that assess learner understanding and learning, class-based tasks, peer and self-assessment by students are all essential to help learners move forward in their learning.

The final section of the assessment sheets of the practicum is dedicated to student teacher's professional attitude and development. It is particularly important that student teachers adhere to the Practicum Code of Practice and that, when and if necessary, they react positively to criticism and heed the Faculty Examiner's advice. It is also necessary that student teachers show a professional attitude in the way they act, interact with authority, colleagues and learners, the way they dress and, above all, the way they portray themselves both within the school premises and outside.

Conclusion

Teachers need reflection not only to change their everyday routines within a classroom, but also to realize what problems are arising and how to deal with them. The Field Placement embraces the concept of the teacher as a learner and the teacher as a professional. It can be viewed as a space where student teachers can represent their unique conceptions of what it means to teach by analysing, discussing and evaluating their own teaching practices and professional growth whilst providing opportunities for deeper conversations and discussions with Faculty supervisors, with their Teacher Mentor, between themselves and with their peers about the art of teaching. It aims to help student teachers reflect and be able to identify how to improve their professional activity in order to improve the quality of pupils' learning, evaluate what happens in class and why it is happening, and it encourages them to try out new ideas and promote changes in pupils' learning behaviour.

As Zalipour (2015) [8] puts it, “Reflective practice for teaching is for those teachers who are disposed to think about their teaching practices, and are willing to put reflective practice into action. Reflective practice challenges teachers who have unquestioned assumptions about good teaching, and encourages them to examine themselves and their practices in the interest of continuous improvement” (p. 4). Indeed, a reflective approach to teaching brings about changes in the way teaching is usually perceived and the teacher’s role in the process of teaching. It also encourages mentoring and peer mentoring partnerships that help support individual student teachers in reflecting on and describing their practice. Such a reflective approach to teaching involves changes in the way teaching is perceived as well as the teacher’s role in the process of teaching since teachers themselves are invited to develop changes in attitudes and in the kind of support they provide to their students. As Olaya Mesa (2018) [9] sustains, “becoming critical about oneself means to analyse classroom outcomes and teaching procedures in a thoroughly and routinized way to reach specific objectives, including the improvement of the teaching practices” (p. 155).

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Cultural and Lingual Responsible Pedagogy as a Part of Teachers' Professional Competence in Vocational School

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Abstract

In Finland, the number of multicultural and multilingual vocational school students has increased in recent years, which has not been taken into consideration in teacher education enough. Multilingualism is a growing feature in our society; hence teacher students need to be provided with adequate skills to encounter students from diverse cultural and linguistical backgrounds. In response to this need, Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education decided to fund DivEd-project [1]. The partners in the nationwide project are 8 higher education institutes. The aim of the DivEd-project is to find ways to prepare all teachers to work in the linguistically and culturally diverse world they live in, to develop and increase culturally sustaining and linguistically responsive pedagogy in Finland, increase awareness among Teacher Educators working with preservice teachers and to increase awareness and provide specific strategies to in-service teachers. As a framework, this study uses the linguistically and culturally sustainable teaching practices developed within the DivEd-project.

This study aims to presents vocational teacher educators' and vocational teachers' perceptions of multilingualism and multilingual educational practices. The participants are vocational teacher educators and vocational teachers. The data were collected by digital surveys and focus group interviews. The analysis was conducted through content analysis [2]. The findings indicate that teacher educators feel that they lack knowledge on linguistically and culturally responsive pedagogy. Moreover, they regard themselves in some extent incompetent in teaching multilingual and multicultural pedagogy for their vocational teacher students. However, both vocational teachers and teacher educators have positive attitudes towards multilingualism and multiculturalism in general. Therefore, teachers experience they need more training regarding multicultural and multilingual knowledge, competences and suitable pedagogical methods for teaching students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds [3, 4].

Keywords: multicultural, multilingual, teacher education

1. Introduction

Cultural and lingual sensitivity and teaching practices should be an essential part of vocational teachers' and teacher educators' professional competence in the contemporary multicultural educational context. Multilingualism and multiculturalism are growing features in Finland and for this need DivEd-project was created. It is funded by the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education, and its duration is three years. The project is nationwide, and the actors are eight higher education institutions which provide teacher training and professional teacher training programmes. The overall aim of the

DivEd-project is to prepare and train teachers to better respond to the needs of working in the linguistically and culturally diverse settings. Furthermore, the project aims to develop culturally sustaining and linguistically responsive pedagogy in Finland. It targets to increase awareness among teacher educators working with preservice teachers and to provide specific strategies to in-service teachers. [1] As a part of the project the project personnel created overarching framework for the teacher educators and formed a group of Community Ambassadors who conduct school visits in their corresponding municipalities. Their objective is to do needs analyses and provide professional development for teachers [1] As a framework, this study uses the linguistically and culturally sustainable teaching practices which were developed within the DivEd-project.

Because the practices have two aspects, there is a need to define both terms.

Linguistically sustainable teaching refers to the concept according to which teachers comprehend the interconnection between language, culture and identity and they value linguistic diversity in their teaching. [2], [3]. Culturally sustainable teaching in turn covers the idea that teachers' pedagogy should empower students comprehensively by utilising cultural referents to impart competences, knowledge and attitudes [4]. In addition, culturally responsive teaching enables students to connect their cultural knowhow to academic knowledge [5] and it enhances and develops students' home cultures in the school context [6]. This frame emphasizes the idea that educational settings are environments where students should have feeling of belonging, and they should feel themselves respected as individuals regardless of their background. Based on previous research, the DivEd-project selected seven themes to support linguistically and culturally responsive teaching. The themes cover the following: identity and cultural competence, teaching strategies, differentiation in assessment, multilingualism, linguistic requirements, collaboration between home and school and lastly educational.

2. Methodology

This study addresses two research questions: How do professional teacher educators perceive their competences regarding culturally and linguistically sustainable teaching practices? How do vocational teachers perceive their competences regarding cultural and linguistic sustainable teaching practices? This qualitative study uses a questionnaire and focus group interviews as data. The questionnaire was created with Microsoft Forms and it was sent to the professional teacher educators. The focus group interviews were conducted face-to-face, and they were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The participants were 8 professional teacher educators and 8 vocational teachers. The professional teacher educators (n=8) answered to the online questionnaire which included 13 questions regarding their perception of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices. The vocational teachers (n=8) were interviewed in pairs, and the interviews regarded their perceptions of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices. The data were analysed by content analysis method [7].

3. Findings

The results are presented according to the seven themes of culturally and linguistically responsive practices, one by one. This research had two groups of participants, professional teacher educators and vocational teachers., the results of both participant groups are presented together.

Identity and cultural competence

The vocational teachers estimated, that they understand the importance of tolerant and neutral attitude towards students' cultural background, but they felt they do not have enough knowledge of the ways to support students' identity building in terms of gender, religion, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, abilities and socioeconomic background.

Furthermore, the teachers' role to foster students' intercultural skills, that is, students' ability to understand people with different backgrounds was considered minimal. The teacher educators in turn reported that the support the holistic view of an individual and they guide and support their teacher students according to their teacher students' individual abilities and requirements. In addition, the teacher trainers emphasised the importance of understanding their own culture and identity when supporting teacher students in their identity building and in providing teacher students with methods to support their own students in turn.

Teaching strategies

Regarding the teachers' strategies in terms of interaction and collaboration as well as integrating all language competences – listening, reading, writing and speaking – into teaching, the vocational teachers stated that they were aware of the demands, but they saw that not all language aspects were easy to implement in practice. They regarded that listening skills are the most used in the classroom and reading should be focused on more. On contrary to vocational teachers, the professional teacher educators stated, that reading in several languages is a requirement in the studies. Moreover, both written and oral interaction are used in student collaboration and student-teacher interaction.

Further, teacher students are required to use sources in various languages in their own assignments and reflective learning diaries, which increases their multilingualism.

Differentiation in assessment

According to the vocational teachers, the students can demonstrate their competences in various ways and their language skills have no effect on grading. In addition, the students are allowed to use dictionaries when needed. The professional teacher educators regarded that they assess their students in various ways considering the students own abilities and language skills. They were prepared to chance the assessment methods according to student's individual needs and language skills.

Multilingualism

According to the responses, the vocational teachers encourage their students to use all the languages they can in order to deepen their learning and understanding of the subject matter. They stated that their students can use freely their mother tongue or another language in group work and interaction with other students. The professional teacher trainers considered themselves tolerant when it comes to students' own mother tongue usage in assignments or collaboration, but they encourage their students to use Finnish.

Linguistic requirements

The vocational teachers manifested that they recognize the lingual challenges their students face. In accordance, the teachers consciously use clear and simplified structures and vocabulary and avoid complexity that is typical to academic language.

Furthermore, the teachers emphasise the use of pictures and graphs in clarifying the message and explaining the content in several different ways. The teachers also reported that they asked the students questions in order to ensure their understanding.

The teacher trainers in turn stated that academic context cannot be simplified without

losing its profound and complex meaning. On the other hand, they regarded, that they aim to talk clearly and welcome clarifying questions from their students. And they also aim to pass the message using multiple modes and paraphrase their speech.

Collaboration between home and school

Since the students are adults, the teachers considered the collaboration between home and school irrelevant. The students are responsible for themselves. But the teachers take into account the students' background including cultural, social and lingual aspects, and collaborate with the students' inner circle if necessary. The situation is similar in the teacher trainers' context; their students are adults as well.

Educational justice

In terms of discriminating attitude and behaviour, such as racism, homo-phobic behaviour, gender discrimination, the vocational teachers stated that they must be alert of these factors. In several cases they have had to react to unwanted behaviour, but they did not report of preventive actions they had taken. The teacher trainers manifested that they actively brought the themes of educational justice in their training but would like to have more material and knowledge in doing so

4. Discussion and Conclusions

This research addresses the topical theme of cultural and lingual competences of vocational teachers and professional teacher trainers. It explored vocational teachers' and professional teacher educators' perceptions on the culturally and linguistically sustainable teaching practices that were developed within the Finnish Ministry of Culture and Education funded DivEd-project. The findings indicate that the professional teacher educators and the vocational teachers consider that they have in some extent knowledge and competences in terms of culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices.

They acknowledge the importance of the topics that cover identity and cultural competence, teaching strategies, differentiation in assessment, multilingualism, linguistic requirements, collaboration between home and school and lastly educational justice. Both participant groups understand the terms and concepts, but they regard that their knowledge is rather superficial. They feel they do not have enough knowhow to implement culturally and linguistically sustainable pedagogy in their teaching context.

Moreover, the professional teacher trainers regard themselves incompetent in teaching multilingual and multicultural pedagogy for their vocational teacher students.

However, both vocational teachers and teacher educators have positive attitudes towards multilingualism in general. Therefore, they acknowledge that they need more training regarding multicultural and multilingual knowledge, competences and suitable pedagogical methods for teaching students from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Additionally, the teachers and teacher trainers lack competences to prevent cultural clashes in their class.

For further research, a larger participant number is required to gain more generable results. As data, reflective reports or class observations could generate a more comprehensive picture of the practises the professional teacher trainers and vocational teachers utilise in their teaching.

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Meaning in Reading: Could Romania's PISA 2018 Results Become a Wake-Up Call to Innovate Practices?

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Abstract

The Romanian students' reading results in the PISA 2018 assessment did not bring a spectacular shift in the trend of the last decade: Romania continues to score below the EU average and below its Eastern European neighbours' levels. While the data from previous cycles were not extensively reported to the wider public, in December 2019, when the results were released internationally, the Romanian Ministry of Education organized a press conference. The published figures were met with highly negative emotions and a fierce attack against the new national curriculum for lower secondary education. But could the official curriculum be the culprit? It had only been implemented at grade 5 level (11-year olds) when the 15-year olds took the PISA test! Where does the reading issue lie, then? Our paper analyses the PISA 2018 data in order to identify the students' actual problems in reading with the aim to capitalize on the poor results and innovate for better outcomes. Our methodology consists in isolating the items with the highest and the lowest scores in the Romanian database and thus identify the reading processes and the item typologies that appear to be difficult for our students. Next, we compare these processes and respective PISA assessment tasks with the Romanian curriculum provision and the reading practices. Finally, we conclude on how to improve the latter on the basis of the evidence PISA offers. Our team has a long-term goal to enhancing the students' motivation with meaningful reading texts and contexts and supporting teachers to leave behind the academic grammar – literature approach in reading practices.

Keywords: Reading practices, motivation for reading, language curriculum, PISA

1. PISA – beyond the traditional academic reading

PISA, the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment, looks into the 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics and science knowledge and skills to meet real-life challenges. The programme does not assess school subjects per se but how the students apply what they know in novel situations and demonstrate effective learning strategies [6]. This becomes increasingly important in a fast-paced and unpredictable world. The focus is no longer to replicate what we learn in school but face problems and find solutions that we cannot anticipate today [7]. In this context, the reading literacy refers to the "understanding, using, evaluating, reflecting on and engaging with texts in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential and to participate in society" [3, p. 28]. PISA measures the reading performance according to 1-6 levels; achievement at level 2 and below indicates functional illiteracy.

Romania has participated in the programme since 2006. The reading stats [4] show: a relative constant overall reading performance along the PISA cycles; results below the

OECD and EU respective average; more than 40% of the students at level 2 or below while only 2-3% are at levels 5-6. A comparison with participant countries from the former communist bloc also places Romania in the lower ranks. Similar results and comparisons are to be found in the PIRLS 2011 International Report [1] that focuses on reading at the end of primary education!

The PISA data have been made public since the first participation. Neither the decision makers nor the media have paid a lot of attention to the figures. Consequently, the situation has been a matter of concern among experts, but never impressed a larger audience ... until December 2019 when the Ministry of Education organised a press conference as soon as the 2018 international data were released! “The disaster of the school system” was a top item of news for weeks and the search for its roots began. The new national curriculum [9] for low secondary education (11-15-year-olds) was a good “scape goat” candidate since the 15-year-olds constitute the target PISA population.

Moreover, the new curriculum had already been contested by many for the changes it had brought about. The problem is that the teens who were represented in the PISA 2018 sample had studied according to the old curriculum [10]. Nevertheless, this piece of evidence was disregarded in the heat of the moment and in the context of a rather poor culture of authentic assessment, subsequent reflection and evidence-based decision making. Despite the prevalent negative emotions played out in the media, the December 2019 PISA event raised awareness about the students’ need to improve reading competence in a world that shifts from continuous to non-continuous texts.

Two main issues concern our discussion:

- how to teach and assess reading comprehension so that many more students reach a functional as well as proficiency levels when they approach the variety of nowadays texts;
- which are the contexts in which students are more inclined to read/really need to read?

2. Reading comprehension and misrepresentations

On the basis of the common framework, PISA allows a variety of comparisons and rankings but the data in the tables and graphs can determine little if any change in the absence of more in-depth analyses. The fact that Romania is among the last three countries from the former communist bloc in the overall reading hierarchy can raise awareness on the issue of reading comprehension. Nonetheless, the global data cannot support teachers to do any better. Since it is not a flattering image, many actors in education resort to blaming *the otherness* (official curriculum, top down measures, bureaucracy, poor resources, financial crisis, lazy students, uninvolved parents etc.) and no specific action is taken in practice since others are expected to trigger change!

For a specific, detailed insight into the results, we have chosen a research approach previously applied by the Romanian TIMSS and PIRLS team for their analyses [2]. It consists in: categorizing the items according to the cognitive process they focus on, the type of text and context they refer to; then identify the items with the highest and the lowest scores in the Romanian database. We thus flag the reading processes and the item typologies that appear to be the easiest/the most difficult for our students.

Essentially, we try to explore how the Romanian students specifically answered each of the categorized questions: Which are the items where the students misrepresent the text? Which are the items where the students successfully grasp the meaning? What are the characteristics of these items in terms of processes, text and context? In this respect, we refer to the typologies summarized in the PISA framework (i.e., processes: scan and locate, represent literal information, integrate and generate inferences, reflect on content

and form; texts: single/multiple, continuous/non-continuous/mixed; scenarios: personal, public, educational, occupational).

3. Highlights from the process-specific data analysis

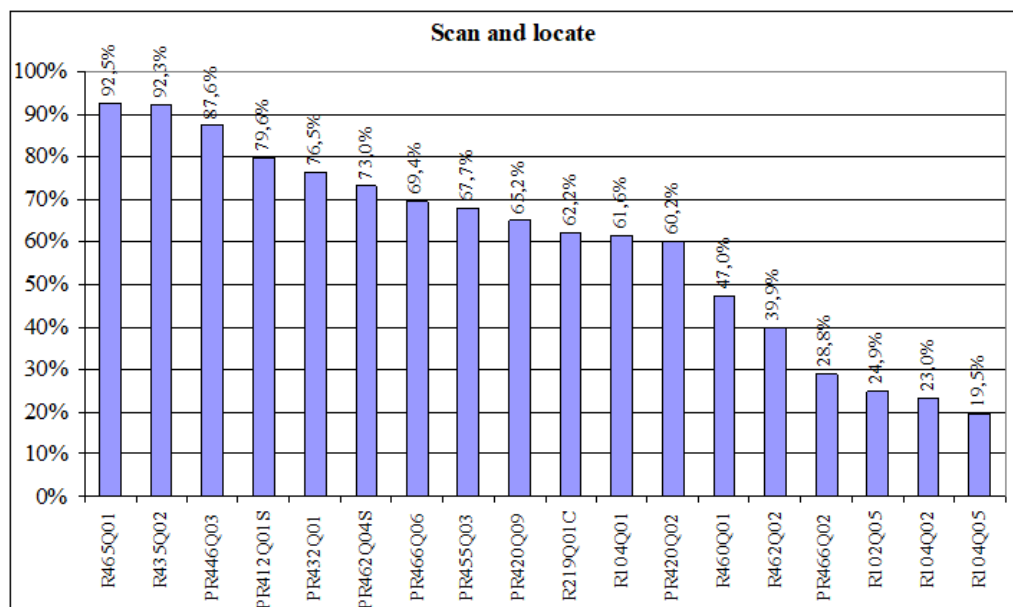
In order to answer the questions above, we selected from the database the items with over 75% and under 50% success rate. The graphs below indicate the number of each item and the performance for the Romanian school population. We could not offer examples of the items as such since they are confidential but we subcategorized them for the purpose of our analysis.

3.1 Scan and locate

This process focuses on identifying factual information in the text. Our expectations are that students manage it better than more sophisticated reading processes.

Nevertheless, as seen in Fig. 1, there are 6 items out of the 18 in this process category where less than half of the students had been successful. In these particular cases, the students have to more rigorously scan for the information in a non-continuous text (i.e., the one that combines more than a symbolic code: linguistic and visual or linguistic and numerical or table + graph + text).

In terms of context we detect that all these problematic questions are relevant for better life adaptation. The items refer to the advantages of learning, a practical problem solution, benefits from advertising. This type of text/context is included in the Romanian curriculum but it is less present in the textbooks. Hence it is far less ordinary in the reading practices in the class. This explains the lower scores when the text is from this category.



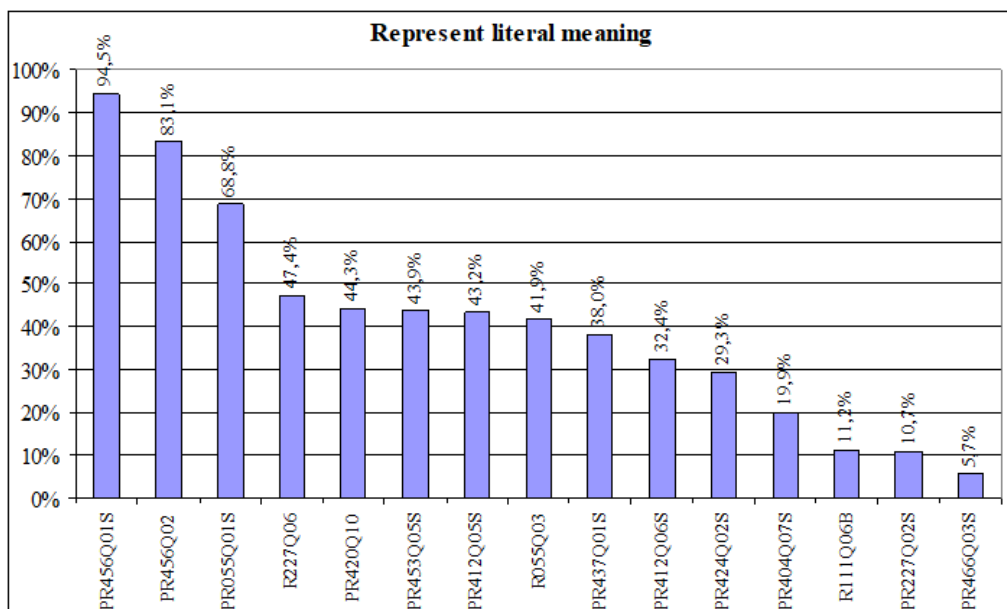


Fig. 1. The Romanian students' performance in "scan and locate" & "represent literal meaning" items

3.2 Represent literal information

This process refers to comprehending the literal meaning of sentences or short passages, typically matching a direct or close paraphrasing of information in the question with information in a passage.

This form of "reading for meaning" appears to be quite difficult for our students: Two items have a success rate of more than 75%, another item was well answered by more than half of the students, but all the rest present a less than half success rate.

The low scores in this category highlight the potential learning difficulties of our students since this process indicate how well the reader understands what it is about in a text.

In terms of text category, the most difficult items appear to be those applying to functional texts that are non-continuous. The multi-layered information that combine linguistic, numerical and visual codes are confusing for our students as previous research shows [8].

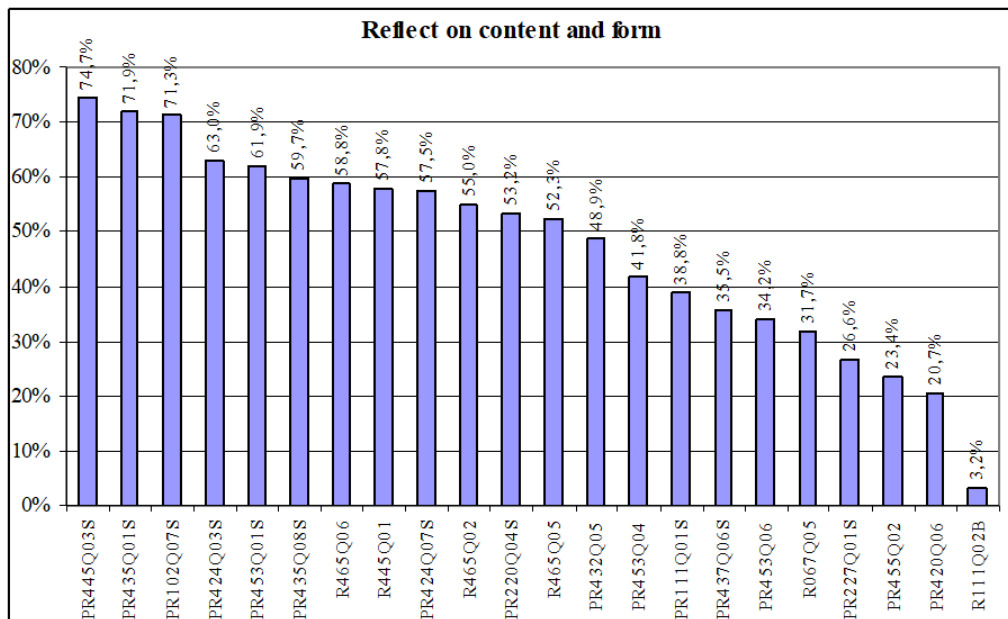
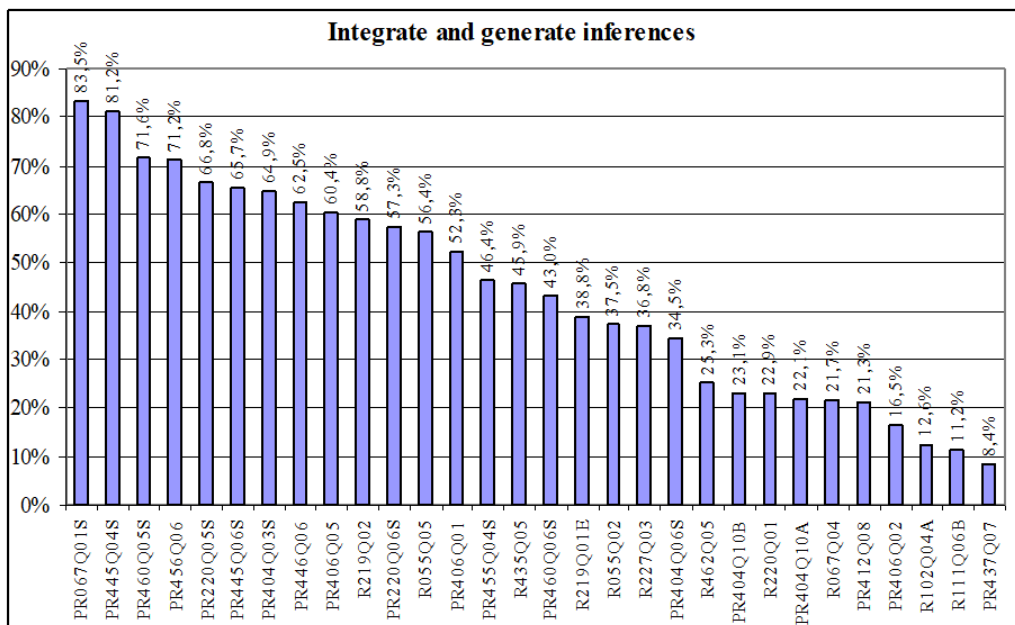


Fig. 2. The Romanian students' performance in inference and reflection related items

3.3 Integrate and generate inferences

This process refers to going beyond the literal meaning of information in a text by integrating information across sentences or even an entire passage.

Inferences are difficult with both the literary and functional texts. Nevertheless, the non-continuous texts are the most confusing for the students. The good news is: multiple

choice items support inferences and allow better reading.

3.4 Reflect on content and form

More than half of the items that ask the reader to evaluate the form of the writing to determine how the author is expressing their purpose/view are performed successfully by more than half of the students. Nevertheless, there is a highly problematic question that is solved by only 3% (lowest score of all items!). It refers to understanding how the style of an article could influence the reader. This shows the vulnerability of the students in front of the media manipulation.

4. Renovating and innovating practices

The analysis we very briefly presented above highlights the strengths and weaknesses of our students. We need to identify what favours a successful reading in order to capitalize for improving comprehension in areas where students encounter difficulties: PISA evidence shows that multiple choice tasks support students with making inferences and reflecting on content and form. This is very valuable for renovating practices: e.g., more multiple-choice tasks will help students better understand what it is about in the text.

The new curriculum (2017) clearly defines reading as the student's own comprehension, interpretation and engagement with the text [9]. There is also provision for a variety of texts: continuous, non-continuous and multimodal. Nevertheless, textbooks and, subsequently, practices are not yet tuned to the real-life reading challenges in the class. In the current context, technology-based reading tasks [5] might become the opportunity to innovate practices and motivate students in reading for meaning.

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Quality in Early Childhood Education: PETaL EMJMD

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Abstract

Early childhood education (ECE) stands as a priority for most international educative organizations and institutions that advocate for curriculums of excellence in the 21st century school (Delors, 1996 [1]; European Commission, 2019 [2]; UNESCO, n.d. [3]). It is an educational stage marked by two key peculiarities: teachers must have a high specialization in the area, and their training should include quality teaching practices. With this background, the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master's Degree (EMJMD) "Play, Education, Toys and Languages" (PETaL) was designed and approved by the EC in 2018. Its main aim is to strengthen the professional development of educators who can approach ECE from its basic precepts, while incorporating the most innovative trends into the curriculum of this Master of excellence. The main objective of this study is to analyse the academic and professional profile of the two cohorts of applicants to PETaL EMJMD. We carry out an exhaustive quantitative scrutiny of data according to the academic and professional profile of the candidates by using Jamovi, (v. 1.2.5.) [4]. These variables are correlated with gender, level of English and the educational background of PETaL EMJMD applicants, which allow us to reflect and draw conclusions on the impact that this Master of excellence has and presumably will continue having at international university level regarding the international seek for quality ECE teacher training.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education (ECE), Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree (EMJMD), Applicants, Quantitative Analysis, Quality Education

1. Theoretical Backdrop

The political agenda places Early Childhood Education (ECE) as a priority for international education institutions that advocate for quality curriculum in the 21st century school: (i) *The New Sustainable Development Agenda* (UN, 2015) [5] establishes as its goal number 4 to ensure quality education for all inhabitants of the planet. (i) The EC (2019) [2] report states that ECE is the foundation for lifelong learning and development.

Ensuring quality ECE for the potential 31 million children in Europe under 6 (who should have access to it) must therefore be an obligation for all Member States. The specialized training of ECE teachers must cover specific areas aimed at the integration of key issues in today's society, namely: (a) Intercultural education as an essential means of training against prejudice, social stereotypes and cultural conflicts. (b)

Multilingualism as a frame for communication among peoples (Gómez, 2016) [6]. (c)

The unquestionable importance of play and toys as fundamental constructs for physical and cognitive development, as well as for the construction of the emotional world of the human being. These three topics constitute the essential themes of the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree (EMJMD) *Play, Education, Toys and Languages*

(PETaL) in an integrated curriculum, developing these areas which up to date had not been offered in a cohesive way by an international program of excellence.

The aim of this work is to establish a comparative analysis of the academic profiles of the 433 applicants of the first and second cohorts of students (2019-2021 and 2021-2023 respectively). The main criteria to evaluate PETaL EMJMD candidates are: 1. Level of English (min. B2). 2. University Degree with a background on education. 3. Professional experience related to PETaL key themes.

Therefore, the following specific objectives were set:

- a. To analyse the academic profile of the applicants, considering if their university degree was specialized in education.
- b. To compare their level of English.
- c. To analyse the professional experience of candidates.
- d. To relate these data with the gender of applicants.

2. Methodology

The methodological procedure of this study was: (i) Opening of the EMJMD PETaL official platform (<https://www.uco.es/petal-emjmd/#/login>) for 3 months. (ii) Evaluation of the applications by PETaL Joint Academic Committee (JAC). (iii) Codification and quantitative analysis of the data obtained.

2.1 Description of the context and the participants

PETaL EMJMD has been specifically designed to facilitate learning among equals. It purposefully seeks for the best international students who, showing different cultures and languages, will interact positively in an academic context that is defined by being geographically, culturally and linguistically diverse: Spain, Portugal and Turkey.

The population of this research belongs to two groups of international candidates to PETaL EMJMD. Group 1 (cohort 19-21) was constituted by 220 applicants, ranged between 22 and 54 years old. In terms of gender, 80.45% were women (n=177) and 19.55% were men (n=43). Group 2 (cohort 21-23) was constituted by 213 applicants, whose age ranged between 21 and 51 years old. Regarding gender, 79.81% were women (n=170) and 20.19% were men (n=43).

2.2 Instrument

Our instrument obtained a Cronbach alpha of 0.911, showing thus high reliability (Oviedo and Campo-Arias, 2005) [7]:

Scale Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's α	
scale	0.911

Table 1. Cronbach's Alpha of the instrument (own elaboration)

2.3 Procedure

An exhaustive scrutiny of the following variables has been carried out through Jamovi (v. 1.2.5.) [4]: (a) Academic profile: including adequacy of the university degree (education related) and level of English; and (b) Professional profile: work experience in ECE (specially related to one of the areas of the Master). These variables are correlated with the gender of PETaL EMJMD applicants.

3. Results

Our analysis has been divided into two different sets: academic and professional profile.

3.1 Academic profile

Data show the following academic profile for the two groups of PETaL EMJMD candidates:

- Group 1 (cohort 19-21 = 220 candidates):
 - University Degree: 74 candidates (33.64%) have a University Degree related to education, while 146 candidates (66.36%) do not show Degrees related to this field.
 - Level of English: 18 are natives (8.19%), 11 have a C2 level of English (5%), 94 have a C1 (42.72%), 84 have a B2 (38.19%), 12 have a B1 (5.45%), and 1 candidate has an A2 (0.45%).
- Group 2 (cohort 21-23 = 213 candidates):
 - University Degree: 87 applicants (40.84%) show a University Degree related to education, whereas 126 (59.15%) do not have an education-related University Degree.
 - Level of English: 34 candidates are natives (15.96%), 86 have a C1 level of English (40.37%), and 93 have a B2 (43.66%).

3.2 Professional profile

Data also showing the following professional profile for the two groups of PETaL EMJMD candidates are as follows:

- Group 1 (cohort 19-21):
 - Work experience in ECE (specially related to at least one of the areas of the Master): 161 (73.18%) candidates did not show any experience (either national or international) related to PETaL EMJMD key areas, whereas 59 (26.81%) proved it.
- Group 2 (cohort 21-23):
 - Work experience in ECE (specially related to one of the areas of the Master): 125 (58.68%) candidates did not show any experience (either national or international) related to PETaL EMJMD key areas, whereas 88 (41.31%) proved it.

These data will be correlated with the gender of candidates:

- Group 1: 80.45% were women (n=177) and 19.55% were men (n=43).
- Group 2: 79.81% were women (n=170) and 20.19% were men (n=43).

Thus, the data for group 1 (cohort 19-21) are summarized in Table 2:

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Level of English</i>	<i>University Degree (education-related)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Working experience PETaL-related</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Female	B2	Yes	25	11.36%	Yes	20	9.09%
		No	47	21.36%	No	52	23.63%
Male	B2	Yes	4	1.81%	Yes	4	1.81%
		No	8	3.63%	No	8	3.63%
Female	C1	Yes	30	13.63%	Yes	29	13.18%
		No	46	20.9%	No	47	21.36%
Male	C1	Yes	5	2.72%	Yes	2	0.9%
		No	13	5.9%	No	16	7.27%
Female	C2	Yes	3	1.36%	Yes	3	1.36%
		No	19	8.63%	No	19	8.63%
Male	C2	Yes	2	0.9%	Yes	1	0.45%
		No	5	2.72%	No	6	2.72%
Total =			207	94.92%	Total =	207	94.03%

Table 2. Correlates for PETaL EMJDM cohort 19-21 (own elaboration)

Data for group 2 (cohort 21-23) are summarized in Table 3:

<i>Gender</i>	<i>Level of English</i>	<i>University Degree (education-related)</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Working experience PETaL-related</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Female	B2	Yes	36	16.9%	Yes	32	15.02%
		No	38	17.84%	No	42	19.71%
Male	B2	Yes	8	3.75%	Yes	5	2.34%
		No	12	5.63%	No	15	7.04%
Female	C1	Yes	31	14.55%	Yes	29	13.61%
		No	51	23.94%	No	53	24.88%
Male	C1	Yes	8	3.75%	Yes	7	3.28%
		No	6	2.81%	No	7	3.28%
Female	C2	Yes	2	0.93%	Yes	8	3.75%
		No	12	5.63%	No	6	2.81%
Male	C2	Yes	2	0.93%	Yes	7	3.28%
		No	7	3.28%	No	2	0.93%
Total =			213	99.94%	Total =	213	99.93%

Table 3. Correlates for PETaL EMJDM cohort 21-23 (own elaboration)

Moreover, we can also establish a general comparison regarding the nationality of applicants, which we gathered by continent.

- Group 1 (cohort 19-21): 50 Europeans; 105 Asians; 39 Americans ('The Americas' which includes Central, South and North America); and 26 Africans.
- Group 2 (cohort 21-23): 12 Europeans; 143 Asians; 28 Americans ('The Americas' which includes Central, South and North America); and 30 Africans.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

PETaL is an innovative Master of excellence in the area of ECE whose main foundations are based on complementarity in terms of research and experience of the universities that constitute this European consortium. The theoretical bases described here offer the opportunity of high-quality training in the area, as well as the best professional practice which, complemented by the intercultural and linguistic richness of the context that permeates the PETaL curriculum, will provide students with knowledge of the most diverse, current and innovative forms of Early Childhood Education. The data corresponding to the candidates of the two cohorts of PETaL show, in general terms, that there is a wide coincidence in the percentages of the parameters analysed for the two populations. Nevertheless, we will discuss further the main differences found.

Data from group 1 (cohort 19-21) do not show the total number of students (n=220) because the required level of English is B2, a minimum which was proved by 207 students. The first difference then is found herein: Group 2 candidates meet the B2 language requirement established by PETaL, and a higher percentage of natives applied in the second round (=15.96%). The level of English is a *sine qua non* requirement of the program because it is the language of communication among students, teachers and administrative staff. Additionally, 21st century societies have become multicultural and the increasing necessity to communicate with people from varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds has made English the *lingua franca*, following Crystal (2003) [8].

Regarding the academic background of applicants, the percentage of those candidates who showed an education-related Degree has increased for the second cohort (from 33.64% to 40.84%). This makes us think that applications by international students are becoming increasingly targeted to the candidates which PETaL EMJMD seeks. This idea is corroborated by the fact that the percentage of candidates who proved having a job related to PETaL key themes increased from 26.81% to 41.31% for the second cohort.

According to Szwed (2010) [9], most teaching positions are mostly occupied by women, a fact that is confirmed by our data. Most PETaL applicants are women (80.45% and 79.81% respectively for both cohorts), and the percentages on the level of English and working experience are higher for women than for men.

To conclude, PETaL EMJMD offers quality tertiary education to future professionals in ECE at the international level, thus fulfilling the objectives outlined by the highest international bodies (European Commission, UNESCO, UNICEF, UN, OECD) mentioned above, and reporting the professionalization of this education sector at the highest level. The analysis of the two cohorts of applicants proves that programmes such PETaL are necessary and sought by society at the international level, which understands that education must be at the most demanding levels in order to fulfil the expectations of a century that is defined by being in permanent change.

Acknowledgement

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Translation

Fan Translation: Potential Pedagogical Implications for Translation Trainees in the Digital Space

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Abstract

At a time when the digital space is taking primacy over the non-digital one in many scientific disciplines, Translation Studies is expressing both a strong tendency and a general need for interdisciplinary research within the digital space as well. The digital space presupposes that translation can take new directions – moving not only from the translator to the recipient, but the other way around as well, or as will be presented here, even from recipient to recipient. In this paper we shall present the trend of fan translation with the aim to draw attention to the necessity to investigate this form of translation further as it may be beneficial to all stakeholders in translation, i.e., researchers, practitioners and representatives in the translation industry at large, in particular to translation trainees. We shall present the results of the analysis of the applicability of fan translation in the domain of translation training based on which we shall provide a list of potential pedagogical implications of this trend for translation trainees in the digital space. The analysis and the subsequent conclusions will draw attention to the necessity of including fan translation in the curricula and/or syllabi of translation training programmes/courses which will enable the application of fan translation in a context beyond the entertainment industry where it currently occurs.

Keywords: Fan translation, digital space, pedagogical implications, translation training

1. Introduction

Substantial evidence can be found in the literature referring to the reasons why Translation Studies (TS) is an interdisciplinary field of research [1], [2]. Moreover, attention is drawn to the necessity that translation theorists and practicing translators, scholars and schools cooperate and engage in interdisciplinary approaches. New trends are appearing and novel directions are being discovered [3] so that is more and more common that translation is not moving only from the translator to the recipient, but the other way around as well [4]. The digital space is taking primacy over the non-digital one in almost every aspect of life and translation is no exception.

Nevertheless, it seems that the industry of translation and the study of translation do not always move in the same direction [5]. This research is aimed at drawing attention to fan translation [6], [7] and the necessity to investigate this form of translation further as it may be beneficial to all stakeholders in translation, i.e., researchers, practitioners and representatives in the translation industry at large, in particular to translation trainees. That is why we shall present the results of the analysis of the applicability of fan translation in the domain of translation training so as to provide a list of potential pedagogical implications of this trend for translation trainees in the digital space [8].

2. Fan translation

The World Wide Web enables a new level of connectivity which could not have been imagined in the not so remote past. People of similar ideas and inclinations can surpass the limitations of space by forming virtual communities in which they can connect, congregate and work together, create volunteer networks, initiate actions, perform tasks, raise awareness, mediate between and among users or, if necessary, build translation networks [9], [10]. In a situation where a network of individuals who are not professional translators, but are driven by their enthusiasm to help the dissemination of specific content (e.g., instructions for a video game, dialogues in an animated video, etc.), such network may be defined as a fan translation network [11]. An obvious characteristic of such network is that “potential consumers of translations double as translation producers” [6].

In most instances fan translation is related to the translation of video games, webtoons and similar multimedia content where players, viewers and users supply suggestions for the translation of the content [6]. It is obvious that members of the fan translation communities have to rely on open-source software because they are not affiliated to a translation agency so they do not get paid for their work. In addition, they have to coordinate their work without a project manager who would be dispatching the translation jobs to them. Therefore, it may be concluded that fan translators are extremely motivated individuals driven by an inherent wish to advocate the general spirit of free sharing and using online content.

A drawback of fan translation is that it is not reliable. Quite often justified concerns are being raised related to the quality of the final product, i.e. the translation because many people work on smaller segments of a larger text [7], [12]. Important text features, such as coherence and cohesion may be corrupted which means that additional work has to be put into the reviewing and editing of such translation [12]. Most often, there is no post-production, no post-editing nor is there a quality check. In addition, these types of translations are unofficial and they are almost all the time handled by amateurs who may lack important knowledge of translation techniques and strategies. Nevertheless, such translations are authentic and they are provided by members of the audience who the translation is directed at [6]. Thus, many elements specifically related to certain cultures and subcultures are translated accurately, a quality which may not be guaranteed by professional translators who are not part of the culture or subculture.

3. Fan translation in translation training

The starting point of the analysis of the applicability of fan translation in translation training is the question whether it will fit a translation training course devoted to non-literary texts. The specific content presented in non-literary texts as well as the fact that they are meant for very specific target groups, necessitates an adequate syllabus preparing translation trainees for such texts [4], [8]. Fan translation being specific in that sense fits the training of translators for non-literary texts as the course can be structured and designed in a way that will cater for all the varieties of texts a translator will face in the course of their professional life, including fan translation. Trainees would acquire practical skills primarily focusing on working with other translators in a community aiming at providing coherence and cohesion of an otherwise segmented target text.

The second step would be to determine whether fan translation may be incorporated into three main aspects of such a course syllabus: (a) objectives, (b) outcomes and (c) content.

The main objective of including fan translation in a non-literary translation course

would be to provide the students with the skills and competences to apply theoretical knowledge in practice. This would mean train the students on recognizing the type of text they need to translate, teach them which techniques, strategies and methods can be applied in the fan translation process, help them familiarize with problem-solving strategies; in one word, equip them with practical skills to handle texts usually included in fan translation.

The outcomes of such approach would be that students are able to apply theories and approaches during the translation of fan translation texts from language A to language B, make appropriate decisions while analysing a source text, explain the problems encountered during a translational act by using specialized terminology of translation theory, offer solutions for the problems encountered during a translational act and be open to criticism passed by reviewers and language professionals who will be assessing their translation products.

Finally, the content that would have to be included in a course including fan translation would have to be based on various texts from different fields and industries including the entertainment, film and animation industry, video games, webtoons as well as a wide range of multimedia content shared in the digital space.

4. The pedagogical implications of fan translation in the digital space

There is no doubt that the methodology of teaching translation in the age of digital primacy, fan translation being only a small segment, should include specific training regarding the translation of discourse in collaborative user-generated settings, i.e., the digital space in general. Already in 2005, Tennent suggested that TS needs “to keep abreast of technological changes, changes which affect the social fabric of the present generation and which will determine to a large measure the conditions under which the translator and interpreter work. New technologies, especially the Internet, offer unparalleled access to information, data banks and terminology that will facilitate the translator's work, provided he or she acquires the know-how to rapidly retrieve and assimilate them” [8]. This means that two directions should be pursued in the domain of translation training in the digital space:

- (a) Translation Studies should be involved in the development of curricula and/or syllabi focusing on modern approaches to the translation of content other than literary and non-literary texts in the traditional sense (e.g., web content in its broadest sense, video games, webtoons, cartoons, online commercials, banners, pop-ups, etc.).
- (b) Translation courses should be designed to focus on providing students with skills and competences related to working with other translators in a crowd or community. More importantly, translation students should be trained to analyse, understand and translate online and offline content from a wide range of products of modern culture.

5. Conclusion

At this moment, translation as a profession exists within a language market that is burdened by various economic indicators both at a macro and a micro level [13]. The list is long because numerous issues encumber the modern translation industry. To name a few, translation agencies have to accommodate to new market demands primarily existing in the digital space, amateur translators (bi/multilinguals without formal training) are slowly taking over given they provide services at lower prices, professional translators battle high productivity pressure, market demands are challenging due to the

competitiveness of the market itself, freelancers have to deal with their (quite often unsettled) status and technologization is extremely fast [13]. That is why it seems necessary to establish new directions in both research and practice which would enable a better synergy between scholars, trainees and the industry [5]. The digital space seems to be the perfect venue for such a synergy; therefore, it could be used to enhance the possibilities of specialized training provided to translation trainees. Fan translation should most certainly be included in such training.

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Quality in Human and Machine Translation

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Abstract

There have always been long-winded discussions on the role played by both human and MT in quality translation processes. Which one is better? Or, should they be used in combination to achieve a quality translation? The present paper provides an answer to these matters by means of the calculation of several evaluation metrics to study the quality offered by MT compared to human translation. Moreover, there is an implementation of a new tool based upon a reference model text with some indexes including Narrativity, Readability, Referential Cohesion, Deep Cohesion, and Concreteness, which is compared to the translated texts produced by humans. To calculate the evaluation metrics and indexes, chosen samples of scientific and literary texts were included. Mentioned texts were used in two final dissertations in the university course of Translation and Interpreting at the University of Murcia.

Keywords: Quality in Translation processes, Scientific-technical translation, Literary translation, English for Specific Purposes, Computer-based studies, Linguistics

1. Introduction

House (2015) starts most of her works with questions such as “What is a good translation?”. Quality translation should be mentioned here associated to the goals of MT and new ‘interactive’ and/or ‘adaptive’ interfaces have been proposed for post-editing (Green, 2015). Therefore, in this case, human and MT are inextricably linked. Some recent studies mention that MT is almost ‘human-like’ or that it ‘gets closer to that of average human translators’ (Wu *et al.*, 2016) and, also that MT quality is at human parity when compared to professional human translators”. Ahrenberg (2017:1) states that the aim of MT is ‘overcoming language barriers’, although human translation is aimed at producing ‘texts that satisfy the linguistic norms of a target culture and are adapted to the assumed knowledge of its readers’.

Nevertheless, there are authors who claim that it is almost impossible to overcome the perfection of human translation (Giammarresi and Lapalme (2016). MT Translation has gone through three stages ‘from early dictionary-matched machine translation to corpus-based statistical computer-aided translation, and then to neural machine translation with artificial intelligence as its core technology in recent years’ (Zhaorong, 2018). House (2018:2) defines translation as ‘the result of a linguistic-textual operation in which a text in one language is re-contextualized in another language’. House (2018:5) also insists on the cognitive aspects of translation, and specifically, the process of translation in the translator’s mind; a matter studied over the last 30 years.

Ahikary (2020) states that “the equivalence is one of the most important aspects or goals of translation; translator has to focus on searching for the best equivalent terms between two different languages or dialects”.

2. Methodology

2.1 Materials used in the experiment

To carry out this work, different types of materials were used. First, a collection of texts in English dealing with: Quantum Physics, Technology, Medicine, Environment and Geology, with an extension of 600 words for each one. Then, the second one is an extract from *Red Dirt* (2016), a literary text from the narrative genre. For the MT two different tools were used: Matecat for the scientific-technical texts and Wordfast Anywhere for the literary text. Apart from that, representative texts in Spanish were selected for comparison purposes: a selection of 5 scientific-technical texts from well-known international scientific publications. As far as the literary text, an extract was chosen from the book «Escritos de un viaje indecente» by Bukowski (2006), from the same genre and full of phraseological units, including insults.

2.2 Evaluation metrics for both MT

The first evaluation metrics we are introducing here are Precision and Recall. WER (Word Error Rate) is another metric we are implementing, but the most common metric used is BLEU (Bilingual Evaluation Understudy).

2.3 CAT tools: Matecat and WordFast Anywhere

According to Matecat's site: "Matecat is a free and open source online CAT tool. It is free for translation companies, translators and enterprise users." (Matecat, 2014). du Maine and the University of Edinburgh. In Matecat translation, assignments are organized into projects in which the user specifies the source language and the target language. One project comprises one or several texts to be translated, and each project has a translations memory. Wordfast Anywhere, which is a Translation memory of the company Word have the following procedure: the text is divided into segments that are being translated and stored, creating glossaries and translations, which will appear in future translations depending on the index of coincidence of the words.

2.4 Definition of the tool used to calculate easibility of the text

To analyse the appropriateness of the texts as regards reading, a code in Python language has been developed. The first operation carried out by this code is sequencing words of the text to recover the number of paragraphs, sentences, words and syllables in total, and later, it determines five metrics based on the studies in Coh-Metrix, but simplified.

This new technique is called CohLitheSP since it is based upon Coh-Metrix, and does not need large dictionaries nor corpuses formed by thousands of words to offer consistent results. Furthermore, on the other hand, specific formulae have been introduced for tests written in Spanish, when just a few changes have to be made to adapt it to any language without any extra cost.

To apply the aforementioned metrics, the following are needed:

A reference text conforming to a valid corpus,

A glossary of technical or specific terms which is helping to know which words are specific within a corpus. These terms will not include measurement units nor "words of stop" (prepositions, determiners, etc), and

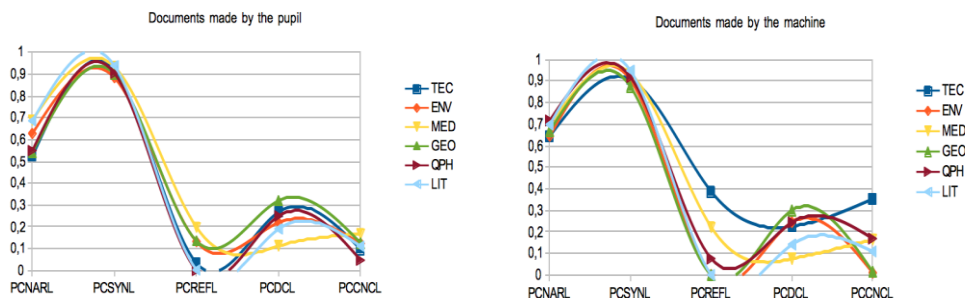
A set of connectors allowing to know when, in a sentence, something is being inferred from something previously said.

The selected metrics and their changes are:

- PCNARL. Narrativity. It is calculated determining which words of the text to be evaluated are already being recognized in the reference text.

- PCSYNL. Readability. It determines the simplicity of the text in its language. In the case of Spanish, the readability of Fernández (1959) has been chosen (based on Flesch), which is using a number of sentences, syllables and words. If someone wants to do it for the English language, it only needs to be changed with the Flesch-Kincaid, whose formula is also based on a similar calculation.
- PCREFL. Referential Cohesion. In this version, the same referential cohesion as in Coh-Metrix is calculated; but instead of considering all nouns, it is only applied in technical or specific terms recognized in the glossary.
- PCDCL. Deep Cohesion. It determines the incidence of the connector over the recognized sentences.
- PCCNCL. Concreteness. In this version, instead of calculating the concreteness over the whole corpus of the language, the incidence of the terms of the glossary is determined from the recognized words in the reference text within the text to be evaluated.

After applying this simplified version of Coh-Metrix over the produced texts in Spanish, it is possible to see how, after being evaluated separately with a mark from 0 to 10, they seem to describe a similar curve:



Tables 1 and 2. Students' and MT documents

As can be seen in the above figures, different types of written texts for different technical corpuses seem to be minor differences in marks, but with a pattern that seems to say that measurements are not random. Therefore, it seems that, in addition, the texts used as references, representing a corpus without errors, have a mark below 10 so students can never get that mark.

Therefore, not only must each Coh-Lit metric be weighted in such a way that favours the distinction among students' faculties, but, in addition, the results must be amplified so the reference texts have the same mark. For this reason, now there is an explanation on how to calculate the weighting of each metric and the constant used to amplify the mark.

2.5 Calculation of the amplification constant for each specific corpus

Below, the results of evaluating the reference texts can be seen.

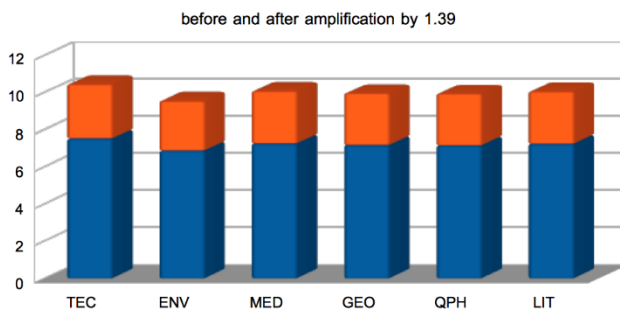


Table 3. Marks of reference texts

Due to the fact that reference texts have a mark below 10 (as it can be observed in Figure 3 in blue bars, after applying an amplification of 1.39, the results would be near 10. To be able to calculate a specific amplification to the text belonging to its corpus, the following formula could be applied:

$$K_{TEC} = \frac{10}{\frac{PCNARL_{TEC}^{REF}}{1000} \cdot 0.49 + \frac{PCSYNL_{TEC}^{REF}}{206.82} \cdot 0.2 + \frac{PCREFL_{TEC}^{REF}}{1000} \cdot 0.09 + \frac{PCDCL_{TEC}^{REF}}{1000} \cdot 0.17 + \frac{PCCNCL_{TEC}^{REF}}{1000} \cdot 0.05}$$

2.6 Calculation of marks of easibility of texts

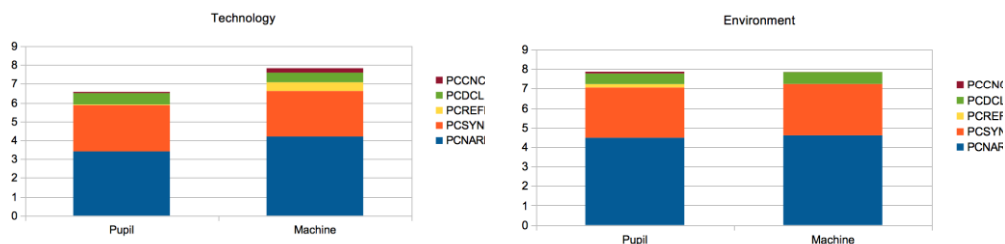
Regarding the calculation of the marks of the texts, the amplification constant must be applied by the addition of each metric divided by its maximum and multiplied by its weight. For example, the following formula can be observed over the technology texts:

$$Score_{TEC}^{PUPIL} = K_{TEC} \cdot \left(\frac{PCNARL_{TEC}^{PUPIL}}{1000} \cdot 0.49 + \frac{PCSYNL_{TEC}^{PUPIL}}{206.82} \cdot 0.20 + \frac{PCREFL_{TEC}^{PUPIL}}{1000} \cdot 0.09 + \frac{PCDCL_{TEC}^{PUPIL}}{1000} \cdot 0.17 + \frac{PCCNCL_{TEC}^{PUPIL}}{1000} \cdot 0.05 \right)$$

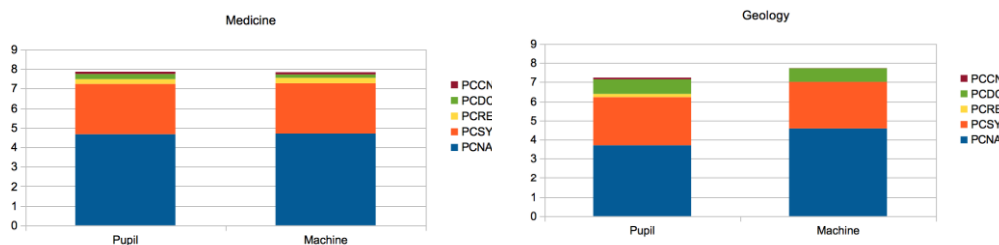
3. Results

3.1 Calculation of marks of easibility of texts

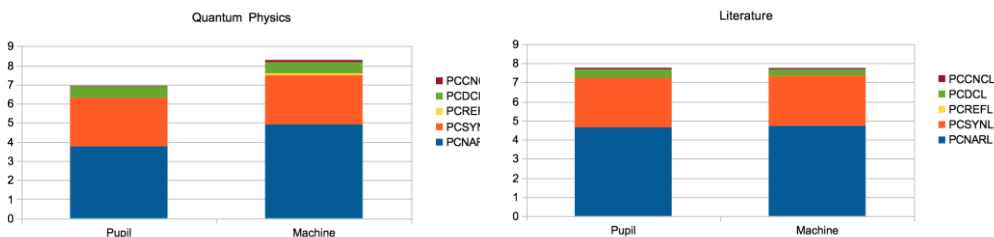
After applying the corresponding formulas already described above, the following results are achieved:



Tables 4 and 5. Evaluation amplified by its reference (Technology and Environment)



Tables 6 and 7. Evaluation amplified by its reference (Medicine and Geology)



Tables 7 and 8. Evaluation amplified by its reference (Quantum Physics and Literature)

4. Conclusions

In this work, a new and different tool has been shown which adds a supplementary challenge for students: the possibility of improving the readability of their own translations from English into Spanish.

Given the facts, the technique explained before is working properly mainly due to two results: on the one hand, it is proved that different texts coming from different typologies, including MT texts, get good or bad marks in the same metrics. On the other hand, the tests also show that, after refining the final mark, the result is approximate to a student's evaluation.

Moreover, it is important to stress the easy programming, which does not require large corpuses, despite the fact it comes from systems needing an enormous extra charge in the development of programming. This last feature is complemented by the fact that it is easily transformed to be working in any language.

5. Software

The programme written in Python used to calculate the statistics with commentaries in English can be found in the following address: <https://archive.org/details/coh-lithe-sp-012>

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Scientific Communication and Translation as a Space of Pragmatic, Cognitive and Communicative Overlap

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Abstract

In the context of mediated scientific communication the connection between information and knowledge and usage thereof in speech production is considered through the prism of cognitive-discursive approach in linguistics as a special cognitive process in which adequacy of linguistic representation of scientific thinking throughout scientific communication acquires special relevance for increasing efficacy of the latter, for it enables maximum cognitive effect to be ensured and achieved from processing of information encoded by linguistic means and transmitted by scientific text. Pragmatic, cognitive and communicative overlap within translation is a space where responses can be found to the challenges and issues regarding study and analysis of specificities intrinsic to the relation or connection between language and scientific cognition, scientific text comprehension, communicativeness of scientific text, knowledge augment as the aim of scientific communication, verbalization of new knowledge in scientific discourse and its reflection in worldviews of the source and target languages, etc. This article aims to analyse complex multilevel information forming part of deep sense structure of scientific text in the triad “communication act – text – word” where overlapping individual cognitive spaces of communicants shape communicative and pragmatic potential of scientific discourse within translation. Methods and materials. The methods of semantic and comparative analyses, the questionnaire method, the method of interpretational experiment, along with the translation method were used in the research. The experiment involved RUDN university Ph.D. students in Medicine (with different mother-tongue backgrounds from different countries) that have certain level of English language proficiency and are learning academic writing, including those taking the programme “Translator in the field of professional activities” (n. 82). Conclusion. In translation the potential of interpretation of thesaurus networks in the source and target languages, through the lens of dissimilarities between languages in what regards organization of their thesauri, is viewed as determined by efficacy of processing of cognitive information represented in scientific text in the source and target languages by a certain linguistic form, and can influence understanding and conclusions that are achieved depending on the degree of different communicants’ comprehension of the same texts, the number and quality of implications that they are able to derive, the amount of information, which is implicitly represented in a given communication act and which implies the need for dynamic interaction of conceptual systems and representations of the language users, i.e., the primary sender in the source language, translator as the secondary sender in the target language, and respective addresses in search of fruitful and efficient scientific communication. The practical value of this study can be relevant for discourse researches, translation studies, and language teaching.

Keywords: translation; presuppositions of scientific communication; thesaurus; intertextuality; scientific text

1. Introduction and discussion

Cognitively based approach to the theory of translation considers cognitive processes within mediated scientific communication as a phenomenon within the space of pragmatic, cognitive and communicative overlap.

Scientific text encapsulates space of comprehension in which bases are generated for communicants' cognitive activity related to searching for new knowledge or processing it, incorporating it into the system of stable representations and evaluating the scientific object which is being apprehended mentally through the lens of the position that is widely accepted in corresponding scientific community.

Interactivity of the communicative space of translation, in the light of comprehension within scientific cognition, is conditioned by communicants' (the sender's in the source language (SL), translator's and addressee's in the target language (TL)) linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge, including related to special areas of expertise, their interaction within cognitive models, fixed by stable linguistic signs, usage and recognition of which accords with the objectives of scientific communication and allows to detect scientific text's characteristic features as to the cognitive dimension in a given field of scientific research.

This article aims to analyse complex multilevel information forming part of deep sense structure of scientific text in the triad "communication act – text – word" where overlapping individual cognitive spaces of the communicants shape communicative and pragmatic potential of scientific discourse within translation.

For the purposes of this research, human cognitive activity in terms of organization of mental and linguistic space through categorization in the mental lexicon of the perceived scientific information and its verbalization within translation is of special relevance.

At this point, it is also relevant in terms of the potential of effectuating thesaurus nets interpretation in the SL and TL (in the light of organizing thesaurus in a given language) within translation, having processed cognitive information represented by a certain linguistic form in the scientific text in the SL and TL with the aim of approximation of contexts of interpretation on the basis of conceptual representations of the language user (*i.e.*, the primary sender, translator as the secondary sender and addressee in scientific communication in the SL and TL correspondingly).

Space of scientific comprehension (which represents *per se* a cognitive procedure) constitutes within translation process an act of cognition of an object or situation, *etc.*, of the reality, as a space of formal and semantic overlap, in which coordination of cognitive structures of the sender and addressee in the SL takes place and to which the addressee in the TL can connect.

In the context of potential asymmetry of terminology and notions matching the latter, space of comprehension in scientific translation may be conceived as an operative model that reflects experience of specific thinking, in terms of translation, and comprehension based upon the laws of language functioning and obtained, *inter alia*, on the basis of communicants' special background knowledge in respective areas of scientific research manifested by means of the SL and TL and verbalized in scientific text/discourse.

Moreover, this model predetermines pragmatic and communicative effectiveness of scientific communication and ensures designed pragmatic effect thereof.

2. Methods and materials

The methods of semantic and comparative analyses, the questionnaire method, the method of interpretational experiment, along with the translation method were used in

the research. The experiment involved RUDN university Ph.D. students in Medicine (with different mother-tongue backgrounds from different countries) that have certain level of English language proficiency and are learning academic writing, including those taking the programme “Translator in the field of professional activities” (n. 82).

When it comes to sources in foreign languages, Ph.D. students encounter significant difficulties and issues as to apprehension of scientific knowledge formed within the frames of settled or stable scientific representations in the SL (the English language, in this research) of special fields of knowledge, e.g., medicine, and linguistic realization in the target text (TT) as to shaping adequate reflection of this new knowledge within scientific representation and linguistic embodiment in scientific discourse by means of the TL (the Russian language).

One of the key problems here, its gnoseological value regards sense conveyance in scientific translation and consists in overcoming pitfalls of formal correspondence in the SL text when achieving adequate linguistic embodiment of the SL text's content in the TT.

3. Results

Multilevel comprehension of the space of translation unveils the essence of the communicative space and, throughout objectivization and exteriorization of the interiorized conceptual structures, reflects the conceptual structure of the scientific text in its verbal form in accordance with certain requirements of formal nature and with the ones that apply to the content (translation norm, criteria of adequacy and equivalence, etc.).

Multilevel complex information of the deep structure of scientific text, which is activated in the course of its linguistic processing within approximation of the contexts of comprehension in the SL and TL, often shows that there is no well-defined dividing line between linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge.

The Yu. N. Karaulov's hypothesis that the world picture is unmatchable in different languages [1] may also be applied to scientific picture in the SL (language 1) and scientific picture in the TL (language 2). Turning to dimensions of mediated scientific communication which are of special interest for the purposes of this research, we should note that, in many cases, in translation certain specificity of the asymmetricalness of the scientific pictures just referred to may begin manifesting itself. In particular, as accouples within translation, they are in dynamic equilibrium, which influences linguistic manifestation of scientific thinking within mediated communication, as well as creation of sense invariants and verbalization of the latter in translation from the SL into the TL.

It may, as a result, have an effect either on augment of scientific information or on the loss of the latter, predetermining the necessity for corresponding translation methods (Newmark [2]) to be applied.

Designed to facilitate the forming of an *ad hoc* analytical and search strategy of translation, multi-vector translation analysis of scientific text shows that the perceiving, interpreting and realizing, to which the variant of translation opted for in the TL is subjected, comes determined by the linear character of its perception in a given space of scientific discourse and depends largely on specificities of translator's linguistic and scientific (professional) competence (Ph.D. student's, in this research). In this respect, it is in accordance with the addressee's linguistic and scientific world pictures in the TL that the issues of appropriateness of remodelling and reflecting the cognitive space of scientific text discourse are to be viewed by the translator.

In most cases, it is even at the stage of perception that this type of approach eliminates multiple interpreting, mismatches concerning perception of the source text

(ST) at its verbal level pursuant to the scientific tradition in the SL and TL, and contributes greatly to adequacy in intertextual references (especially in what regards other scientific texts, their segments, cliché, stereotype expressions). Example:

*“In a case series involving patients with severe Covid-19 who received remdesivir through a **compassionate-use program**, the majority of patients had a decrease in the need for oxygen support, but there was no comparison group”.*

(Mild or Moderate Covid-19//N Engl J Med 2020; DOI:10.1056/NEJMcp2009249)

Translation into the Russian language: *“В ряде случаев с участием пациентов с тяжелой формой COVID-19, которые получали ремдесивир по благотворительной программе, у большинства из них снизилась потребность в кислородной терапии, но группа сравнения отсутствовала”.*

(For the essence of this programme, see Mussa Rahbari & Nuh N Rahbari,

“Compassionate use of medicinal products in Europe: current status and perspectives”, Bulletin of the World Health Organization, 2011; 89: 163-163// available at: <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/89/3/10-085712/en>: “... allow seriously-ill patients to obtain the medicines through a “compassionate-use” programme”; “patients ... who cannot be treated satisfactorily by an authorized medicinal product. The medicinal product concerned must either be the subject of an application for a marketing authorization in accordance with Article 6 of this Regulation or must be undergoing clinical trials”). Our questionnaire demonstrated that, Ph.D. students’ translation of the ST word combination “compassionate-use program” into the Russian language, in most cases (85%), fails to produce similar parallel knowledge structure in the TL due to lack of involvement of extralinguistic knowledge in the sense perception and its verbalization in the TL within scientific picture of the Russian language. It also fails to ensure cognitive transparency and reproduce pragmatic markedness and of the English word-combination, and to facilitate appropriate sense interplay and adequate processing of conceptual information and communication efficacy oriented towards restoration of scientific communication presuppositions in the Russian language. Moreover, it fails to embody pragmatically intended cognitive context of the scientific medical discourse in the Russian language.

4. Conclusion

In translation the potential of interpretation of thesaurus networks in the source and target languages, through the lens of dissimilarities between languages in what regards organization of their thesauri, is viewed as determined by efficacy of processing cognitive information represented in scientific text in the source and target languages by a certain linguistic form, and can influence understanding and conclusions that are achieved depending on the degree of different communicants’ comprehension of the same texts, the number and quality of implications that they are able to derive, the amount of information, which is implicitly represented in a given communication act and which implies the need for dynamic interaction of conceptual systems and representations of the language users, i.e., the primary sender in the source language, translator as the secondary sender in the target language, and respective addresses in search of fruitful and efficient scientific communication.

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Teaching Translation of Italian Lyric Texts to Opera Singers: Analysis of Tools

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Abstract

The process of teaching translation of Italian lyric texts to opera singers is influenced both by linguistic factors – quality of the scores and orthographical varieties, specific vocabulary, obsolete grammar, poetic word order, unknown context – and by the accessibility and the range of translation tools. The aim of this paper is to analyse the tools used for translation of operatic language. The results are based on research conducted at the Conservatory of Pilsen, Czech Republic, and it includes analysis of a student questionnaire and comparison of the data with previous research. Samples of Italian texts and translations in other languages used for pedagogical translation are included. The paper also discusses limitations of the online dictionaries commonly used by the students which should be taken into account in the teaching process.

Keywords: pedagogical translation, online dictionaries, Italian, operatic language, lyric texts

1. Introduction

This paper presents the research conducted at the Conservatory of Pilsen which is one of thirteen conservatories in the Czech Republic where future opera singers are being prepared. The conservatories are secondary schools located in towns with theatres where graduates search for their first employment. Students usually enter at the age of 15 with A1-A2 knowledge of English and no knowledge of Italian.

The paper provides an initial overview of the specific language of Italian lyric texts.

The research in its first stage evaluates the students' questionnaire, in the second stage the most used translation tools indicated by students are analysed. These results are compared to the situation investigated at the same institution in 2014. In this paper always the pedagogical translation, also called study translation, is considered [1].

The research questions to be answered are: Is there any tool more suitable for such a specific translation? What are its limitations?

2. Operatic language

The language of lyric texts differs significantly from the language commonly taught in modern language classes. Orthographically, words vary in connection to the historical period of the source text, e.g., *cor(e)/cuor(e)* (heart) and elisions are frequent [2]. As only a limited number of Italian words are oxytones, librettists often use apocopes, e.g., *son(o)* (I'm) [3]. Morphologically, historical verbal forms or other parts of speech are encountered, e.g., *dovea* (I had to). A considerable part of the lexicon is not only poetic but even obsolete, e.g., *alma* (soul), and historical denotations differ if compared to the modern meaning. Atypical word order such as hyperbaton is frequent. These specifics are of eminent difficulty even for students of B1 or B2 levels [4] while students of opera

normally don't reach any CEFR level [5].

3. Research on the translation process

The research was conducted at the Conservatory of Pilsen in 2014 and again in 2019, aimed to understand which tools opera singers use while studying a new part, and what are the limitations of these tools.

3.1 Methodology

The research was based on the questionnaire distributed among the students of lyric singing from the second to the sixth year of study. The total number of participants was 20, between the ages of 16 and 35. They were all native Czech speakers. In the first part, the questionnaire focused on the use of translation tools and research into the context. In the second part, the participants were given 10 options with concrete examples of difficulties related to translation and were asked to scale them.

3.2 Results of the research

All the participants sing in Italian and they usually search the plot of the piece they interpret.

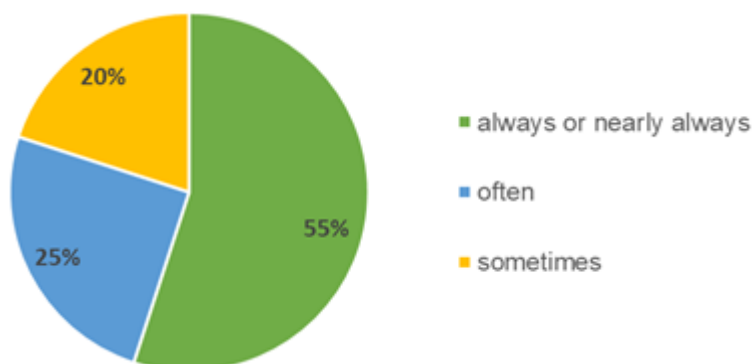


Chart 1. The percentage of participants searching the plot

The participants prefer searching the plot in their mother tongue rather than in any foreign language.

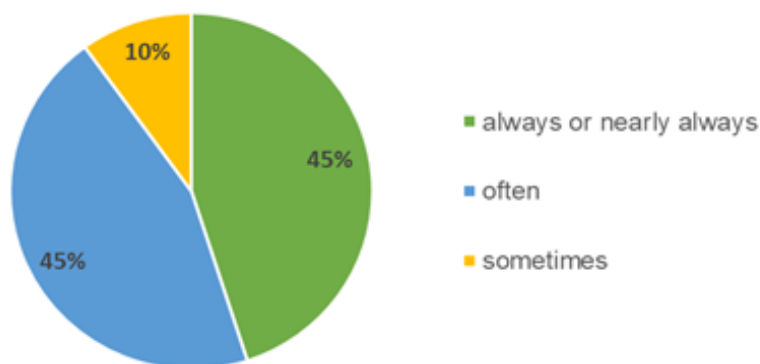


Chart 2. The percentage of participants searching the plot in the mother tongue

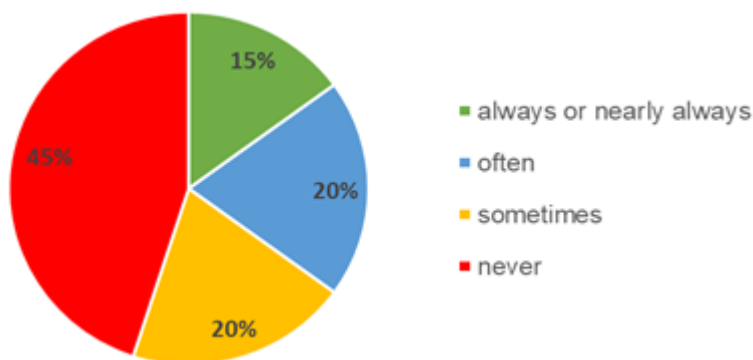


Chart 3. The percentage of participants searching the plot in a foreign language

Almost all the participants use Google Translator and more than half of them also use the online dictionary (Lingea) recommended by the teacher. Other online dictionaries are used only sporadically, as well as paper dictionaries or glossaries included in a textbook. Some participants also mentioned the teacher as a translation tool.

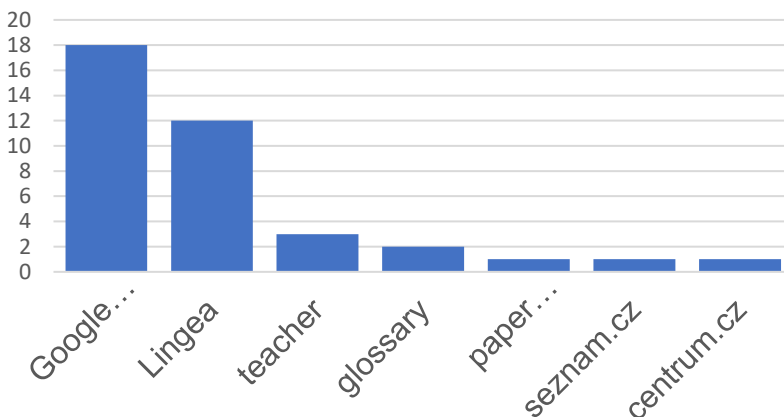


Chart 4. The quantity and type of tools used for translation

The difficulties of translation can be subsequently listed from the most to least frequent as follows:

1. The translation of isolated words is comprehensible but the whole sentence/verse isn't (e.g., *dove il diavolo ha la coda*).
2. The searched word is not present in a dictionary (e.g., *sempiterno*).
3. The meaning of the translated word is not related to the text (e.g., *albergo*).
4. The word can't be translated because it's contracted (e.g., *m'*).
5. The text can't be translated properly due to the unknown context.
6. The word can't be translated because it's not in its elementary form (e.g., *vado*).
7. In the source text there are spelling mistakes (e.g., *tute* instead of *tutte*).
8. The word can't be translated because the part of speech can't be determined (e.g., *legge*).
9. The correct meaning of a translated word can't be selected from present options (e.g., *casa*).
10. The translation is complicated due to missing interpunctuations (e.g., commas).

3.3 Comparison to the previous research

If compared to the results obtained five years before [6], in 2014 for 84% of participants the most used translation tool was Google Translator, in 2019 still 90% of them use it. But the Italian-Czech online dictionary (seznam.cz) used at the time by 53% of the participants was replaced by the Lingea online dictionary recommended by the teacher and used in 60% of cases. No one uses an electronic dictionary which must be installed on a pc. While in 2014 50% of the participants combined the use of online and traditional paper dictionaries, in 2019 paper dictionaries were completely abandoned.

Also, the teacher as a translation tool is mentioned only in 15% while he/she was mentioned in 90% of cases in 2014.

Among the major difficulties of translation, three questions were added in 2019 (unknown context, spelling mistakes, and missing interpunctuations), based on the criteria of assessment of the source text [7]. At the top of both versions of the questionnaire, the whole sentence or verse comprehension is mentioned. A dictionary not able to give any result was in the second position of 2019's version, while in 2014's version this item was in the 6th position. The next position is occupied in both versions by the problem of a meaning that doesn't suit the text as a whole. The problematic contracted words came in the 4th position in both cases. In the new version, the question of unknown context is scaled as the fifth major difficulty.

4. Analysis of tools

While in 2014 the difference between traditional paper textbooks and dictionaries and the multimedia tools for the Italian language was described, in 2019 there are new resources in the field of Italian operatic language and its translation.

4.1 Textbooks for opera singers

The new textbooks, *L'italiano nell'aria 1* and 2 [8], [9], published in 2015, offer specific courses of Italian for the opera that covers the A1-B2 levels. The two volumes introduce nearly 200 arias and recitatives for pedagogical translation but most of them are fragments and context or generic guidelines for translation are only given in the teacher's guide that can be downloaded separately. As a part of the textbooks, *Glossary of Opera and Music Terms* brings typical operatic expressions that are translated into English, Russian, German, and Chinese (a Czech version is not planned for now).

4.2 Online dictionary

At the Conservatory of Pilsen, the online Italian-Czech dictionary Lingea of 2017 is recommended by the teacher for several reasons. It offers pronunciation and it is also possible to search for declined or conjugated entries. In Italian, this dictionary presents 41.000 entries; 72.000-word meanings; 25.000 examples, phrases, and idioms; and 161.000 translations.

4.3 Glossary, translator, and dictionary

In the *Glossary of Opera and Music Terms*, there are 199 expressions consisting of 78 verbal forms, 66 substantives, 26 adjectives, 24 adverbs and 12 of these expressions are phrases. When these expressions are searched, almost 77% of them can be found in Google Translator and about 52% in the Italian-Czech online dictionary Lingea.

Tool	N	Event	Sample p
Google Translator	199	153	0,768844
Lingea	199	103	0,517588

Table 1. The proportion of translations found
(N = total number of searched expressions, Event = found translations)

But when the two-proportion test is applied to the found expressions, almost 53% of them are translated incorrectly in Google Translator while the incorrect translation occurs in the Lingea dictionary only in approximately 13% of cases.

Tool	N	Event	Sample p
Google Translator	153	81	0,529412
Lingea	103	13	0,126214

Table 2. The proportion of incorrect translations within found expressions
(N = found expressions, Event = incorrect translations)

Thanks to its multilingual database, Google Translator finds expressions like *onnipotente* (omnipotent) or *sacrificio* (sacrifice). Also, 5 of 12 phrases like *v'ho* (there is) are correctly translated. But there's a high percentage of incorrect translations when the searched expression corresponds to a proper name like *brando* (Brando instead of sword) or *rio* (Rio instead of rivulet), and because the translation into Czech is based on English expressions like *diè* (to die instead of day), *empire* (empire instead of to fill) or *face* (face instead of torch). It often changes parts of speech and in some cases, it gives completely unsuitable results like *alfine* (all right instead of finally) or *piagare* (plague instead of to wound) which occurs very rarely in the Lingea dictionary. The Lingea dictionary indicates parts of speech correctly but doesn't recognize phrases.

Conclusions

While comparing the research conducted at the same institution five years before, it comes out that the context is the fifth important factor in the translation process, even if future opera singers prefer searching the plot of a new piece in their mother tongue instead of dealing with foreign languages. In 2019 participants indicated the fact that the searched word is not present in a dictionary as the second major translation difficulty, while in 2014 when participants combined online and paper dictionaries, this item was scaled at 6th place. In 2019 paper dictionaries were not used anymore but Google Translator is still the most used translation tool, accompanied recently by the Italian-Czech online dictionary Lingea.

Based on the analysis of typical Italian operatic expressions searches, it can be stated that Google Translator provides more responses (almost 77%) and is especially suitable for searching phrases but its error rate is very high (almost 53%) when used for searching single expressions, also because the translation from Italian to Czech is made through English. The Lingea dictionary gives fewer responses (less than 52%) but its error rate is relatively low (less than 13%).

No one of the analysed online tools can be considered more suitable for pedagogical translation of Italian lyric texts due to their evident limitations. As there is not any Italian-Czech dictionary for opera, for now, students of conservatories have to rely on glossaries. The presented research was limited by the number of participants, but it raises an interesting question of the pedagogical translation of opera and appropriate translation tools in other languages outside English.

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Communicative Space of Translation through the Prism of Translator's Linguo-Mental Personality

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Abstract

Prevailing in modern linguistics, communicative, anthropocentric approach tends to increase interest in living language considered as open and functional knowledge system that operates in real communication, tends to shape growing interest in contacts with other languages and linguistic worldviews thereof, conception of linguistic personality, whether in linguistics or in adjacent or neighboring disciplines, e.g. translation theory, cross-disciplinary studies of speech production phenomenon inter alia, in terms of cross-cultural communication per se and professional scientific communication in particular. The aim of this article is to analyze some specificities of translator's linguo-mental personality viewed through individual's linguistic capacity, embodying systemic representation of language with its functioning in processes of perception of scientific text in the source language and its generation in the target language basing on communicative and pragmatic parameters of mediated communication, such as complex system of the sender's communicative intention, his pragmatic and cognitive orientation towards the addressee; presuppositions and implications, the translation norm, etc. The article forms part of our research study of the conception of translator's linguo-mental personality as a separate conception of translator (mediator) within the general theory of translation.

Materials and methods. For our research purposes, comparison was undertaken in what regards linguistic personalities of RUDN university Ph.D. students from different countries with the same specialty in Medicine taking the programme "Translator in the field of professional activities" and RUDN university Ph.D. students with different mother-tongue backgrounds that have certain level of English language proficiency (n. 84). The questionnaire method, the method of interpretational experiment, analysis of oral and written translation of scientific texts, along with the translation method were applied in the study.

Conclusion. The undertaken research broadens the understanding of translator's linguo-mental personality as a concept that has its essential features characterized by multilayered nature preconditioned by the phenomenon of multidimensionality of the process of translation, dynamics of the latter, and specific conditions and determinants of cross-cultural crosslinguistic communication. It amplifies potential of analysis of different types of translator's activities within a wide spectrum of real situations and contributes to approximation, to a certain extent, of the training of specialists in interpreting and translation to the practical requirements as to professional communication. The practical value of this study can be relevant for translation studies, intercultural communication and discourse researches, language teaching.

Keywords: translation; translators linguo-mental personality; cross-linguistic cross-cultural communication; scientific discourse; interdisciplinarity

1. Introduction

Growing need for analysis and scientific generalization of results of cross-disciplinary researches at the next abstraction level, along with reconceptualization and re-examination of the existing notions of the theory of translation from the modern cognitive communicative paradigm perspective, shape significant interest in further study of the process of translation, its conceptual base, developing separate theoretical concept of translator as essential part thereof, in particular, as well as practical aspects of translation activity, in general, including training of translators.

2. Discussion

In practice, increasing and broadening exercise of translation activity, in the broadest sense, by nonprofessional translators (first of all, experts, specialists, scientists, students, Ph.D. students) in most cases gestures toward the necessity to emphasize the focus on framing the problem of translation, first of all, in terms of the idea that adequate understanding of the essence of translation, its guiding principles, and its norms is indispensable for effectiveness of mediated cross-cultural cross-linguistic communication, international cooperation per se, and scientific collaboration.

In the light of studies of humanistic status of the process of translation, E. Notina's concept of translator's linguo-mental personality (TLMP) [1], characterized, inter alia, by complex multilayer structure and dynamism, has formed fruitful base for our research.

Within translation, translator's or mediator's personality may be viewed as linguistic personality in the paradigm of real communication which acquires certain specificity within a given communicative space. Moreover, the latter determines, to a great extent, both translation requirements and criteria for evaluation of its quality.

Cognitive-communicative perspective on the study of the phenomenon of translator's personality, translator's linguo-mental characteristics and qualities may throw further light on potential responses to the challenges internal to the long-standing problem of a more complete description of translation per se, its key concepts (equivalence, adequacy, translatability, etc.), and, through the practical aspect lens, including, to efficient training of Ph.D. students in what concerns using translation (on the basis of their skills and abilities) as a source of new scientific information that may be subject to further cognitive processing and reshaping oriented mainly towards obtaining new knowledge and implementing it in scientific cooperation within corresponding area of expertise.

"The process of translation can scarcely be adequately described disregarding that it is carried out not by an idealized construct, but by a person whose orientation as to values and psychological orientation inevitably influences the final result" [2: 2012, 8].

In the process of translation, it is the translator who has the key role or position, for, being a subject of specific textual translation activity, which comes formed by translator's perceiving and interpreting the source text (ST) and generating the target text (TT), the translator coordinates textual activities of the translation act participants, the latter belonging to different linguo-cultural communities.

In the context of translation, complex structure of translator's linguo-mental personality comes preconditioned by the requirements that apply to knowledge, skills and abilities of the translator [3, 4, 5].

3. Materials and methods

For our research purposes, comparison was undertaken in what regards linguistic

personalities of RUDN university Ph.D. students from different countries with the same specialty in Medicine taking the programme “Translator in the field of professional activities” and RUDN university Ph.D. students with different mother-tongue backgrounds who have certain level of English language proficiency (n. 84) and are taking the “Academic writing” course.

Analyzing specificities of engagement of linguistic consciousness into the cognitive processes within mediated scientific communication, we focus on semantic, pragmatic or conceptual mismatches between the source language (SL) and target language (TL) with regard to the transfer of cognitive information in translation of scientific texts and discourse, paying special attention to the way in which cognitive and linguistic structures of the source and the target languages intercorrelate in translation, underlying strategy of Ph.D. decision making as to their verbalization in a given context.

It is particularly important to note that effectiveness and yet particular complexity of translation analysis is preconditioned by the fact that the scope of such a complex comparative analysis embraces contact of two non-cognate languages (the Russian language and the English language).

The scope of the analysis just referred to above comprises explication of the semantic structure of a lexical unit of the SL determining linguistic and extralinguistic features thereof at denotative, significative and connotative levels, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, finding in the TT those common concepts, which are considered by the translator as matching the linguistic sign as a marker of a given cognitive structure and chosen as a translation variant.

The scope of the analysis also embraces complex comparison of situations in which the sign mentioned above is used, defining specificities of interpretation of the sign in a given discourse, inter alia, on the basis of conceptual representations of the communicants in a particular field of knowledge.

4. Results

At the very beginning of their first year of study, Ph.D. students taking the “Academic writing” course, as our study has shown, have literal translation as inherent and necessary stage of their translation process, when tight time limits are to be observed (93% of cases, including students with mother-tongue languages other than the Russian language).

In practice, offering false comfort of mechanical substitution, literal translation, as our survey made by use of questionnaire has shown, excludes or eliminates comprehension as essential component at the stage when the translator processes the ST, generating and structuralizing the TT's sense. In many cases, literal translation does not depend on the level of professional competence in respective field of knowledge and expresses the strive to reflect in the TT the original text's specificities as to the form, rather than the contents, the strive to get the form of the original text precisely and faithfully reflected in the TL.

What's most interesting for our purposes is that, in most cases, central to students' struggles with the challenge of translating scientific texts in a limited time period is failure to invoke corresponding norms of translation, to resort to respective instruments and tools comprised by the concept of translation strategy.

The questionnaire has shown that in translation Ph.D. students (98% of cases) tend to focus on formal correspondence and mere external form of the SL text's message, what excludes immediate link to the referential situation implicitly present in the text as a relevant integral part of its sense continuum, and translator's special knowledge in this area of expertise.

Example: «Because AUCs are not routinely determined in clinical practice, the 2009 consensus guidelines recommended trough ***monitoring and maintaining trough concentrations*** between 15 and 20 mg/L as a surrogate marker of the AUC: MIC (target 400 mg*hr/L) for ease of *managing therapy* and simplifying dose adjustments and monitoring.

(*Pharmacotherapy*. 2020; 40(4): pp. 363-367)

Translation variant: «Поскольку АИС обычно не обнаруживаются в клинической практике, консенсусные рекомендации от 2009 года рекомендовали **минимальный мониторинг и поддержание минимальных концентраций** между значениям 15 и 20 мг/л в качестве суррогатного маркера (АИС: МИС) (целевое значение 400 мг/л) для обеспечения *управления проведения* терапии и упрощения коррекции дозы, а также сделать мониторинг более простым и доступным».

As regards this example, literal translation impedes dynamic cumulative analysis of the message evolving throughout scientific medical article's text, burdens its comprehension in the TL, for the translation does not take account of corresponding subject knowledge, does not refer to already existing scientific special texts, i.e. it fails to establish intertextual links in the TT.

In this example, word-for-word translation is the cause of breach of the sense structure of the sentence and the text as a whole that leads to ST's blurred sense: «минимальный мониторинг» instead of «мониторинг минимальных значений, точек» (***trough*** – “minimum point, the low point in the concentrations”; “*monitoring and maintaining trough concentrations*”).

The overall effect is lack of comprehension of the referential situation throughout the process of translation and breach of the sense structure of the scientific text and intertextuality manifestation failure in the TL, i.e., in the Russian language.

Furthermore, the literal translation just referred to is out of accordance with the usage in the TL. Translator's focus here is on finding immediate correspondence with respect to each lexical unit of the original in translation from the English language into the Russian language disregarding the norm and the usage in the TL: “*управления проведения* терапии”, “управление лечением” (Rus.) vs. “managing therapy” (Engl.).

Hence, issues of turning aside from the SL text and misapplying the method of addition, as well as issues of literal reproduction come up, the latter being inconsistent with both the norm and usage in what regards medical discourse.

5. Conclusion

The undertaken research broadens the understanding of translator's linguo-mental personality as a concept that has its essential features characterized by multilayered nature preconditioned by the phenomenon of multidimensionality of the process of translation, dynamics of the latter, and specific conditions and determinants of cross-cultural crosslinguistic scientific communication. It amplifies potential of analysis of different types of translator's activities within a wide spectrum of real situations and contributes to approximation, to a certain extent, of the training of specialists in interpreting and translation to the practical requirements regarding professional communication.

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