



# New Technologies in Foreign Language Classroom: the Role of Attitudes

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## Abstract

*Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) are nowadays the substantial part of the basic knowledge in our society, as they affect every area of our life, communication and learning. It is thus important that the students learn how to make use of the technologies in the classroom, in order to develop their digital skills and abilities, and how to learn through them. Attitudes towards the use of ICT in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classroom may affect students' learning process, as attitudes, with their 'behavioural implications' are considered an influential factor by many scholars in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The present study focuses on the analysis of learners' attitudes towards the use of new technologies, such as the Internet, as a basis for a foreign language (FL) classroom learning activities. The methodology of the study is based on the ICT and attitudes questionnaire and it involves the sample of 27 public post compulsory secondary students from Vitoria, Spain, engaged in an experimental project of ICT use in EFL classes. The tentative analysis of the data show students' general positive attitude towards technologies, as they consider them useful in the language learning process; however, scarce opportunities to learn through technologies in EFL classroom were revealed.*

## 1. Introduction

The internationalization of the European Union and of the world in general urges the new generations to reach greater levels of foreign language proficiency. It is crucial that young people develop "specific and appropriate inter-cultural and linguistic skills and strategies in order to function as autonomous mobile European citizens" [1]. In the recent decades, the European Parliament has been focussing on "lifelong learning" of languages [2] and implementation of programmes based on authentic and functional input within school curriculum.

Another important aspect in the school curriculum is the development of learners' digital competence, since Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have changed almost every aspect of the 'traditional' way people live, interact with each other, search for information, and learn. As new technologies have become part of the substantial knowledge in our society, it is of paramount importance to help learners acquire and develop their digital skills and abilities, in order to prepare them properly for the future challenges. Combining English classes with the interaction with technologies, such as the use of the Internet, is, without any doubt, is a great way to support language learning, since the use of technologies in the classroom engages students in their learning process and motivates them, "adding value to the process of learning (...)" [3]. In spite of the fact that integrating the technologies in education is nowadays a primary objective [4], it is not common in a foreign language (FL) classroom to let the students learn with and through the technologies.

One of the main factors that may play a role in students' language acquisition process, as well as in their interaction with the technologies in the classroom is the attitudinal one. Language attitudes are considered "evaluative reactions to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent" with "behavioural implications" [5], constituting one of the factors that certainly influence Second Language Acquisition (SLA). As such, they can largely condition students' affective and cognitive responses towards different languages, and motivate them for certain behaviour as far as the learning of a language is concerned. It seems thus interesting to investigate students' attitudes towards new technologies, bearing in mind their possible effect on SLA.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The Spanish government, as well as Basque local educational authorities, has been supporting the implementation of projects which incorporate new technologies in the classroom, mostly in primary education. In this way learners are given the proper tools to command the use of the information technologies, in particular, to improve their ability to probe, select, manage and process valuable information. This is nowadays of the utmost importance, since those who are not able to master ICT



will never catch up with the development of the society [6]. However, such ICT programmes are still scarce in the secondary schools. That is why the present study has been conducted particularly in this educational setting with the aim of drawing the attention to ICT's benefits also for older learners.

Technologies are rapidly gaining the attention and interest of teachers and learners in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms world-wide. So are the studies that focus on exploring the use of technology in language learning and teaching [7], yet few of them focuses on learners' attitudes towards the integration of new technologies into EFL classes. Numerous research studies suggest that positive attitudes are essential for successful language learning processes and for meaningful use of technologies [8].

Liu [9] examined students' attitudes towards ICT in EFL setting and the factors that account for such attitudes towards ICT integration in English learning. The study revealed that participants were generally positive towards ICT and the use of ICT for learning English, as they acknowledged the advantages of the use of technologies in the EFL learning. The data of a study by Kennedy et al. [10] show that students are more positive than teachers about how useful ICT could be in supporting learning and teaching at the university. Hernández et al. [11] also focussed on students' attitudes towards ICT. The participants of the study showed positive attitudes towards new technologies and regarded them an important and useful tool for information search and broadening the knowledge. Another study, by Siragusa and Dixon [12], analysed the attitudes towards the interaction with ICT in learning environment. Regardless of an initial anxiety of the participants, as far as the introduction of a new methodology is concerned, the interaction with ICT experience was assessed positively. In the same line, Ipiña [13] conducted a study concerning learners' attitudes towards ICT, in which she found students' overall favourable feelings regarding the ICT and a positive change in students' attitudes towards English after the use of ICT in the classroom. The purpose of the present research is to examine secondary students' attitudes towards new technologies in English learning, since, as suggested by previous investigations done in the field, they may influence learners' attitudes towards English, and thus, the learning process itself as well.

### **3. The study**

The present research aims at exploring the role of learners' attitudes towards the use of ICT, such as the Internet, as basic source of information and the facilitator of the interaction with the world-wide knowledge community in EFL classroom activities, by analysing the attitudes towards the integration of ICT in EFL classroom and students' attitudes towards English as foreign language.

The current work is a preliminary study and a part of a larger investigation with a longitudinal design, which is being conducted with the support of a grant from the Basque Government (ZABALDUZ).

#### **3.1 Participants**

The sample of the study consists of a total of 27 students of a public post compulsory secondary school in Vitoria-Gasteiz, Basque Country, in Spain, engaged in an experimental project of ICT use in EFL classes. During one three-month period they participated in a set of up to two weekly sessions of technology use for English language learning during which they used the Web for information search, in pairs, dedicating their time to agree on a specific topic, explore the Internet in search for information, brainstorm their ideas and, finally, draft a scheme for their compositions. Then, they were asked to write a composition on previously agreed topic, and additionally, to perform an oral presentation.

#### **3.2 Methodology**

A three-part questionnaire of a total of 150 items has been employed in the study. The first part consists of some background questions; the second part, which regards the attitudes towards English, is based on a study conducted by Dörnyei [14] and Lasagabaster [15], while the third part, regarding attitudes towards ICT is adapted from Ipiña [16] and Kennedy et al. [17].

In the present report we analyse the responses to 80 items of the original questionnaire. 56 items of five-point Likert-type scale has been used in order to gather information about participants' attitudes towards English and their Ideal and Ought-to L2 Self. Another 24 items have been used with the aim of investigating students' attitudes towards the use of technologies in learning environment.

### **4. Results**

The tentative analysis of the results reveals students' overall positive attitudes towards ICT (the mean scores over 3—neutral attitude, and approaching 4—positive attitude). ICT may serve the students as



means to improving the matters they learn and to learn more English, while they make the classes more interesting. It seems that the students do not approach many difficulties in using ICT and regard them interesting (mean scores around 4-rather positive attitude).

Technologies are considered useful in the language learning process, although, according to the participants, they have not been given enough opportunity to make use of ICT in their EFL classroom and they assess rather negatively the quality and quantity of school's digital equipment and resources. As far as the attitudes towards learning English are concerned, the mean scores are over 3.5 (with 5 being the score for very positive attitudes). English is regarded important, above all, for surfing on the internet, as well as for information search.

## 5. Discussion and conclusion

The preliminary results of the present study are in line with the previous researches on the field, since students were in general positive towards ICT, yet they did not comment on the anxiety issues regarding the adoption of ICT in the classroom activities.

As suggested in other investigations, favourable attitudes are crucial for successful language learning and developing meaningful use of ICT. Despite the fact that the present study's data showed positive attitudes towards the use of ICT in EFL learning setting, technology-based teaching and learning projects are still unusual in secondary education in Spain.

The present investigation aims at emphasising the advantages of letting the technologies into the secondary classroom. Positive attitudes towards the use of ICT in the EFL course may favourably affect learners' attitudes towards English, by making the classes more interesting and motivating. This in turn, may influence the very process of learning.

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