Utilizing ICT within Transnational Cooperation among Language and Content Teachers in Europe

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Absract

Teaching and learning systems have implemented ICT features to a certain extent onto all levels of education the last 20 years. Blended learning, online learning, mobile education applications are some of common approches used even for earning a degree in various branches around the world these days. ICT is often used for developing both students´ and teachers´ competences within a life-long education process too. Are teachers and students prepared for effective and wise using of ICT? Is ICT something that should be deployed into learning-teaching process to assist students and/or teachers to improve their competences and skills? Do not we miss more human touch in education? How can teachers cope with ICT implementation into education?

This contribution aims at mapping and describing ICT tools used within an ERASMUS+ project focusing on exchange of good CLIL practice among European language and content teachers on Primary and Secondary level of education. At first, the e-modular training course for developing CLIL teacher competences is presented. Then experience with building the project web platform and using cloud environment for partners´ cooperation are outlined. Next, some pitfalls of ICT learning environment are disccussed. Finally, some recommendations and ideas are proposed how to utilize ICT in teaching-learning environment on different levels of education.

1. ICT tools used in education

Development of the Internet and the WEB platform and raise of their accessibility and consistent affordability make almost all the world get linked. Age is not a real obstacle in terms of utilizing ICT tools. All these mentioned facts have a great impact on education sector and the style of supervising new generations and their preparation process for future life. Old practices are being altered, and new practices, spaces and possibilities created. [1]

ICT production includes creation of hardware, software and other components of the ICT infrastructure, and not just helping large hardware and software firms in developing countries. Production encompasses consultants, trainers, Internet service providers, data services providers, application providers, web designers etc. [2]

ICT tools seem to be very important not only for passive utilizing in education sector but ICT sector is very important sector for jobs building, product and service innovation field that reasonably contributes and will remain in contributing to states' GDPs. We think, there is no question if to implement ICT tools into education or not. The question is which ICT tools, at which level/amount and which purpose. We cannot imagine learning-teaching process on tertiary level of education without ICT application. As Bauer & Kenton stated in their study that although teachers were having sufficient skills, were innovative and easily overcome obstacles, they did not integrate technology consistently both as a teaching and learning tool. [3]

1.1 ICT student competence

Considering students on Tertiary level of education, they are supposed to command and are well oriented in e-environment, as they face it from very beginning. They are asked to apply for a university through academic information system. The communication is based almost in all cases via e-mails or information uploaded on the web of the university. The enrollment process is conducted partially through the university academic system and ICT is used in many other cases. One can say, the students are experienced in using ICT, on the other hands, their competente in e-learning si quite low. The priority of STU MTF teachers is to make the students acquainted with the e-learning possibilities and introduce them to e-learning techniques as the majority of STU study materials are mostly in electronic versions which can be easily updated and upgraded. [4]

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1.2 ICT teacher competence

Hardly ever there is a university teacher who has not had any contact with ICT and never used an ICT tool. ICT is a "natural" element of our personal and professional lives. In terms of ICT utilizing didactically we can state, that the teacher competence in ICT utilizing can varies. Firstly teachers should be aware of modern ICT tools that can be used to ease their preparation for lectures, to find the right communication channel with their students also with their colleagues, to share their ideas, research findings etc. Deploying ICT tools can be motivating factor for students' development and it can have entertaining effect too.

Considering Foreign Language teaching ICT tools are admirable elements of the process. Most FL teachers are not native teachers, so they use ICT tools not only for supervising their students but also for their own development of FL competences. The methodology called CALL (computer aided language learning) caused "a boom" in computer utilizing, however there were some disadvantages of such approach to learn foreign language. The main one was that social interaction disappeared in cases when students used only computers to solve the tasks that should have helped them to develop their FL competences. [5]

2. ICT tools and international project work

One of the basic ICT activities in FL education is online intercultural exchange (OIE) or tele-collaboration. This refers to the application of online communication tools to bring together classes of language learners in geographically distant locations with the aim to develop their FL skills and intercultural competence through collaborative tasks and project work. Research has demonstrated the potential of this activity for supporting collaborative FL learning and developing intercultural awareness and online projects Furthermore, online portals, such as e-tandem, Intercultural E-mail Classroom Connections (IECC), eTwinning (www.etwinning.net) and ePals (www.epals.com), have enabled a significant number of online FL exchange projects to be set up by teachers around the globe. Today, tele-collaboration allows educators to engage their learners in regular communication with members of other cultures in distant locations and gives learners the opportunity to reflect on and learn from the outcomes of this intercultural exchange within the supportive and informed context of their FL classroom. [6]

In MTF STU in Bratislava we are running the project that is based on ICT tools utilizing called *Student online conferences of STU MTF (Slovakia) and University of Niš, FEE (Serbia) for the purposes of specific English language and other skills development* connects STU MTF PhD. students, young researchers and English teachers of the project partner institutions using English for Science and Technology (EST) as means of communication. Although the project is based primary on ICT tools utilizing to meet project objectives, both project teams met themselves face to face in Niš , Serbia last year and the second personal meeting is being prepared these days in Trnava in Slovakia. Both virtual and personal meetings and discussion have already conducted we find useful. We think, that personal meeting held in Niš, in Serbia was an added value to the virtual meetings conducted later via SKYPE, as we got to now each other personally.

2.1 ICT tools utilized in a ERASMUS+ project

Utilizing ICT tools within a project no matter what kind of it is a bare necessity for all participated in. MTF STU in Bratislava is involved in an ERASMUS+ project called *Transnational exchange of good CLIL practice among European Educational Institutions*. It is a partnership of 6 educational institutions from different level of education from Primary to Tertiary level. In terms of ICT tools, they were used at very beginning- in the preparation phase to search for partners. E-mail communication and Facebook messages were used to get the final version of the project proposal. Main project goals to build an open CLIL database with accessible CLIL resources and e-modular training with a completion certificate for CLIL teachers around Europe, to train teachers from partner countries on CLIL, to collect data from observation for father research and analysis and to organize an international conference on CLIL issues require skilled participants who commands sufficient level of ICT competence. We have already managed to build a web platform educlil.eu using Joomla environment where also a modular e-course on CLIL is running. Within the web platform there is also the partners' cloud room where the photos, video, lesson plans can be uploaded to be available for the project partners to disseminate project activities, findings, outcomes. This zone is available only for the project partners using the access data. Still synchronous and asynchronous communication is used to solve any tasks, requests on time. However, we should mention that again personal meetings supported our cooperation and assisted very well to put the project issues forwards.

2.2 Pitfalls of ICT tools usage

Experience from other national and international projects showed us that Google tools are easy to use for sharing, presenting and storing data, documents etc. The problem can appear in the case when you are involved in several projects and you are supposed to manage several different Google accounts with their passwords as well. To avoid overloading of ICT tools utilizing is good to unify those tools for several different projects if it is possible and to use those ones the most of project partners are familiar with.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

Integration of ICT may be more effective when these tools support meta- cognition and the cooperative learning approach using collaborative learning devices. When used properly, ICT integration shows positive effects on motivation, student interest and instigates complex cognitive processes. [7] The results of a study showed that in general, both the pre-service teachers and instructors are in favor of using technology in and out-of-class activities. This positive attitude is an important indicator of willingness and first step in effective integration. Almost all of the academic staff was willing and ready to participate in any course, seminar, and workshop about technology usage, which reveals the need for professional development. [8]

Finally, we can declare, that we cannot be able to provide current knowledge without deploying teachers, students' ICT competence and ICT tools into education. However, we should manage which ICT tools, at which amount and for which purpose. We should not forget that education is a complex process where human touch is necessary to keep also in the future. No problem to use for example robot teachers in the future but not as a replacement of real teachers. Perhaps, learning foreign languages will be based on utilizing computer chips or nanotechnology in the future, however to understand people, intercultural differences, historical, social context and being able to express our own ideas we should maintain humankind in education.

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