

Alfabetización Digital para la enseñanza de lenguas

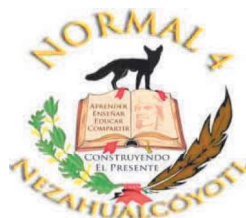


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“Fructificar la Razón: Trascender Nuestra Cultura”

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Teachers and students' perspectives on the use of ICT in TEFL

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Abstract

The impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) English Language Teaching (ELT) is undeniable. This paper addresses BA students' and teachers' perspectives of the use of ICT in their daily academic life. Using an on-line survey, a questionnaire and document analysis as data collection instruments, it was found that even though both teachers and students are keen on ICT use to improve language learning, there are still some constraints that impede full integration into ELT. These include insufficient computers, bandwidth, reliable wireless connectivity and lack of more focused training.

Key words:

ICT, ELT, teachers' perspectives, students' perspectives

Resumen

El impacto de las Tecnologías de Información y Comunicación (TICs) en la enseñanza del inglés es incuestionable. Este capítulo presenta las perspectivas de estudiantes y maestros de licenciatura respecto al uso de las TICs. Se empleó un enfoque mixto en el cual se utilizaron una encuesta, un cuestionario y análisis documental. Los hallazgos señalan que, aunque maestros y estudiantes favorecen el uso de las TIC's, aún existen restricciones que impiden su completa integración. Destaca la falta de computadoras, insuficiente capacidad de banda ancha, internet inalámbrico inestable y falta de capacitación en el uso de las TIC's.

Palabras clave:

TICs, Enseñanza del Inglés, Perspectivas de maestros, perspectivas de estudiantes

Introduction

The role of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and its impact in every aspect of our daily lives is indisputable. ICT has changed our everyday life and our relationships, causing people to react to new challenges and ways of communication. ICT is dramatically altering the way people communicate with each other. Recent technology has changed the world we live in and has provoked a paradigm shift in education (Noni, Jefri & Nasrullah, 2017).

The word ICT includes any communication device such as television, cameras, iPods, web 2.0 (social networking sites, blogs, wikis, video sharing sites, hosted services, Web applications, etc.), USBs, computers, laptops, tablets, CD players, applications, Internet, TV, projectors, smart phones, satellite system, etc. (Shalini Jayanthi & Vijay Kumar, 2016). To Rouse (2017) the most accepted definition of ICT is referred to as a combination of devices, apps, networking, components and systems that people use to immerse in the digital world. The influence of ICT in developing ways on how to better deliver instruction has been regarded as beneficial in education.

In educational environments, ICT can transform the process of teaching and learning considering that ICT serves as a tool to help and reinforce new patterns of interactions among teachers and students that may foster learning; new educational models (Deutschmann & Vu, 2015; Simon, 2016; Korkut, 2016) and instructional designs (Gunawardena et al., 2006) are emerging because of the influence of technology in and outside the classroom. The integration of ICT is necessary to satisfy the learning necessities

that the new generations of students require since today's learners think and process information differently, as natives to the digital world (Prensky, 2001, p. 1).

ICT in ELT

The integration of ICT in education is not recent. ICT have been around in English Language Teaching (ELT) for decades as tape recorders, language laboratories and videos have been used since the 1960s and 1970s, and are still being used in classrooms around the world. In the middle 1980s, educational technology included more basic electronic and non-digital tools (e.g., chalkboards, overhead projectors, video cassette recorders). However, in the early 1990s, digital technology use increased around the world along with ICT integration into language teaching and learning. Process that has steadily continued up to date. The use of ICT and media tools in ELT has been well-described in the literature (see Bax, 2003; Warschauer, 2005; Cimermanová, 2015). ELT has undergone significant changes due to the specific developments in ITC, and thus the learning environment, classroom practices, teaching resources and the role of teachers have changed dramatically in the last twenty years (Bax, 2003; Warschauer, 2005). The inclusion of multimedia and the arrival of the Internet led to a more integrated learning environment with enriched learning materials and better personal interactions, which promised a continuous process towards full ICT integration (Bax, 2003; Warschauer, 2005). With the increasing accessibility to the Internet, teachers and students are faced with endless ways of exploring, collecting and sharing knowledge; the hardware and software used in ELT can make many contributions both to teachers and students in terms of repeated use of materials, availability of materials everywhere and always, costless or low cost of materials, and effective learning in a short time (Gunuç & Babacan, 2017). ICT as a tool for teaching English is increasing

as educators have understood its ability to create both independent and collaborative learning environments in which students can learn English with much ease.

The study

This study aimed to find out how English language learners and teachers use ICTs in an EFL context. A mixed-method approach, which involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study, was used. It combines statistical analysis of an on-line survey with in-depth analysis of an open-ended questionnaire and document analysis. 52 students answered The Beliefs About the Use of Technology in English as a Second Language questionnaire (BATESL; Becerra-Polanco, Collí-Novelo, Valdez-Hernández, and Hernández-Gonzalez, 2013). So as to obtain teachers' perspectives, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to 6 practising teachers. Document analysis consisted on reviewing the official research papers presentations record since March 2014 and the research papers addressing ICT use produced by students as a requirement to graduate, available in the institutional repository.

Research Context

The BA in English of the School of Languages (Universidad Veracruzana – UV), has a curriculum that includes the academic areas of English language, Spanish language, Linguistics, Culture, Literature, Research, Teaching and Translation. 220 students enrol each year (approximately 40% of the demand). The curriculum has two main objectives: to help students develop a good command of English equivalent to C1 of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and to provide students with the basic competencies to perform in teaching and/or translation professions. Students must earn 318 credits to graduate, completed in five or up to 10 continuous terms.

The courses related to Teaching that all BA students have to take are *English Teaching and Learning*, *Current Methods and Approaches in ELT*, and *Teaching Practice Planning*. They can also take three out of the four optional courses offered related to teaching: *Teaching Practice*, *ICT applied to ELT*, *English Teaching and Learning for Young Learners* and *English Teaching through Literature*. As can be seen, only one of them is directly related to the use of ICT to teach English.

All bachelor degrees at the UV have a course part of the Terminal Training Area called *Experiencia Recepcional*, for which students need to develop a research project that they must write up and present to earn the corresponding credits. In the BA in English, students write and present this paper in English, and some of their Research Papers are related to the use of ICT in the TEFL context.

Findings

Since March 2014, there have been 257 Research Papers presented by students to obtain their degree, within *Experiencia Recepcional*. Table 1 shows the total number of Research Papers (RP) presented, as well as the number of these RP that are related to ICT.

Table 1. Research Papers presented since March 2014

Date	Total of RP presented	RP related to ICT
March 2014	18	2
June/July 2014	22	0
September 2014	25	2
January 2015	19	2
March 2015	17	1
June 2015	12	0
September 2015	22	2
March 2016	14	3
January 2016	10	3
June 2016	16	2

Date	Total of RP presented	RP related to ICT
September 2016	26	8
January 2017	23	0
March 2017	6	1
June 2017	27	6
TOTALS	257	32

Own elaboration with information from the institutional repository

The following figure (Figure 1) shows the proportion of RP that are related to ICT. It can be appreciated that this proportion is low; however, from Table 1 we can observe that it has increased during the last two years.

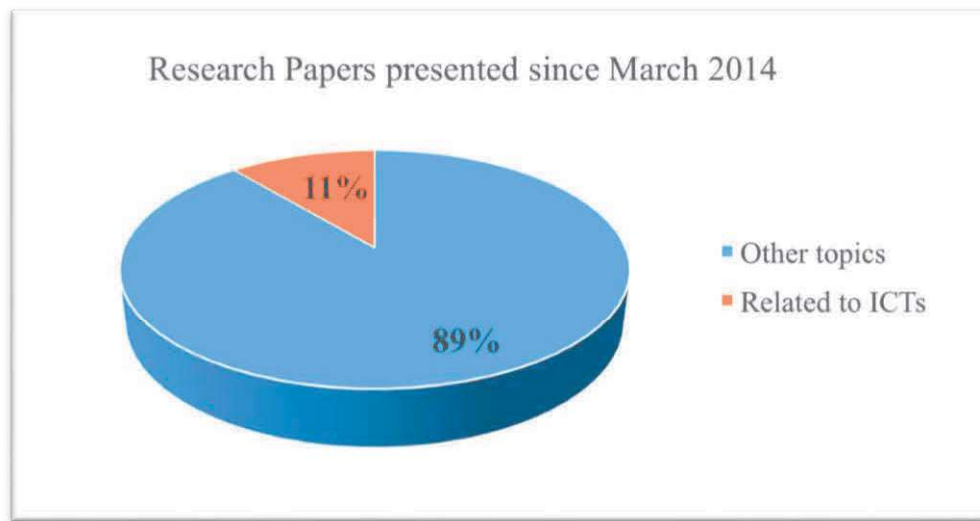


Figure 1. Proportion of RP presented since March 2014 related to ICTs.

Despite of the fact that ICT is relevant in the current academic life, it is clear that there is still some more research to do on this issue since it seems that neither students nor teachers are fully aware of its importance

BA research papers related to ICT

After revising the RP from the School of Languages available in the institutional repository, we found seven RP related to ICT. Table 2 below shows the title of these RP, along with

the date in which they were presented, and their main findings. The RP were organized according to the focus of the research. The first one focuses on ICT and autonomy, the following two on developing vocabulary with ICT, and the last four on students' and/or teachers' perceptions on the use of ICT in the EFL context. From the results reported in these RP, it appears that technology has started to permeate the educational process at the school where this investigation took place.

Table 2. Research Papers found in the institutional repository

Title	Main findings
The Use of Technology: Promoting Autonomy at The Early Level in The English B.A (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers use ICTs with autonomy purposes, even though they not always use them. • Students' experiences on technology is used to promote autonomy
Improving Students' Vocabulary Learning by Using Technology (2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' and teachers' awareness of the usefulness of technology to learn vocabulary. • Ubiquitous learning.
Learning English Vocabulary Through NGLISH Application (2015)	
Students' Perceptions Regarding EFL Learning by Using Technology (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students' Perceptions • Benefits • Drawbacks
Students' Perceptions Regarding the Use of Technology in the Classroom (2016)	
Analyzing Students and Teachers Responses Towards the Use of Technology in the BA in English at Universidad Veracruzana (2011)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important and motivating • Enhances the learning process • Regarded as effective, interesting, innovative and necessary
English Professors' Perceptions Towards the Use of ICTs at the Beginner Level (2014)	

In these RP, just as in previous studies addressing the use of ICT in ELT, where students have a positive attitude and view ICT as beneficial (Güven, 2016) and deem the role of ICT in language teaching *vital* (Korkut, 2016), there were positive aspects found in using technology to learn a language. The main findings in these RP referred to its effectiveness

in the language classroom, the chance to practice different skills, the improvement of grammar and/or vocabulary, timing and autonomy. Autonomy is a very important issue since, as digital natives, students usually find themselves self-efficacious in the use of ICT (Bozdoğan & Özen, 2014) as they constantly use Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Google, and Wikipedia (Darginavičienė & Navickienė, 2016).

Moreover, the results from these RP also showed that teachers were aware of and positive towards the use of these tools as important resources in the classroom, as several other studies seem to demonstrate that teachers are positive about ICT (Noni, Jefri & Nasrullah, 2017; Ziad, 2016a; Ziad, 2016b). However, the results from these RP also identified certain issues that appear to obstruct ICT use in classrooms at the School of Languages at Universidad Veracruzana such as the short duration of the courses, the infrastructure of the school, as well as their lack of availability and training on them.

Additionally, as in other studies considering teachers' perceptions, teachers might find it difficult to integrate technology into their instruction effectively due to the following challenges: time to prepare ICT-based materials (Gunuç & Babacan, 2017), technical problems, cost, lack of training and lack of support from their work environment, the need of an ICT technician, lack of ICT hardware and learning software, additional Internet bandwidth capacity (Noni, Jefri & Nasrullah, 2017), curricular, infrastructural and logistical barriers (Ziad, 2016a); more training to boost teachers' confidence (Mavroudi & Tsagari, 2016), and lack of integration of technology, pedagogy and content (Ziad, 2016b).

The findings reported in the analysed RP make evident that the relationship between technology and the learning process is very important to the extent of investigating its

implementation. It appears that there are more positive aspects than negative ones reported in the RP of this BA.

BATESL questionnaire

52 Students answered the Beliefs About the Use of Technology in English as a Second Language (BATESL) questionnaire online in Google forms, which main purpose was to know whether and how they use ICT at school and home. The main findings showed that most of the students (92.3%) have access to a home internet connection and that they use it 4 hours, at least, daily. This suggests that most of the students use technology not only at school but also at home, which may indicate that they have the chance to practice English, as they reported, somehow at any time during those 4 hours or so. The results also indicated that 57.7% of the students love using the computer to help their learning.

However, 42.3% of the population indicated that they preferred not to use computers unless they had to. This may happen because students might use other technological devices apart from PCs or laptops; on the other hand, it could also indicate that they are not completely skilled in using the computer specifically for language learning purposes. Students also mentioned (63.5%) that they sometimes used ICT to learn or practice English at school, but also a 23% of them stated that they hardly ever or never use them. Thus, it can be said that many of these students do not use ICT for educational purposes. This might be related with their confidence when using technological tools since 51.9 % of them affirmed they felt a little bit confident when using them to learn English.

Students were also asked about the abilities and kinds of tasks they performed using technology. They reported that the most important skills and sub-skills they practiced with ICT were: 1) Reading, 2) Speaking and Vocabulary, and 3) Writing. Therefore, it is

suggested that students use technology for both productive and receptive skills. Regarding which tool or webtools they use to improve English as well as how they use ICT at school, the participants mentioned that they make the most use of computers (94.2%), translators (88.5%), and online dictionaries (87.7%); mentioning that they use this technology for creating power point presentations (82.7%), reading online (73.1%) and e-mailing (63.5%). The common activities students do to practice English with ICT were reported as follows: 67.3% exercises, 61.5% videos, 57.7% movies and 9.6% podcast. They also reported to make use of Duolingo and apps only in a 1.9% each. Hence, it can be said that even though participants use technology daily at home or school, they use it in its more basic forms. Table 3 shows the results of the second part of the questionnaire, consisting of 15 statements in which students had to indicate how much they agreed or disagreed with the beliefs expressed.

Table 3. Students' beliefs of ICT in the ELT (questions 11 to 25 from the BATESL questionnaire)

Students' beliefs of ICT in ELT	Strongly agree		Strongly disagree		
	1	2	3	4	5
I think learning vocabulary could be much easier with ICT and internet	23.1%	35.5%	34.6%	5.8%	0.0%
I believe learning grammar is more interesting with web tools instead of face-to-face class	11.5%	17.3%	44.2%	21.2%	5.8%
I prefer memorizing words using web sites and not using a word list from chalkboard	17.3%	21.2%	30.8%	25.0%	5.8%
I like practicing my writing with foreigners using chat, emails, Facebook, or twitter	32.7%	26.9%	23.1%	11.5%	5.8%
I think Google translator really helps me with my homework	7.7%	17.3%	23.1%	28.8%	23.1%
I prefer watching videos online to learn English	34.6%	21.2%	21.2%	23.1%	0.0%
I like recording my voice in order to improve my pronunciation	11.5%	21.2%	25.0%	32.7%	9.6%
I think English classes online are more effective than face-to-face classes	0.0%	7.7%	25.0%	26.9%	40.4%
I believe that English classes with ICT are more motivating	7.7%	40.4%	36.5%	11.5%	3.8%
I believe English teachers must assign homework with ICT	17.3%	23.1%	50.0%	7.7%	1.9%
I think my English teachers need digital literacy	15.4%	28.8%	38.5%	17.3%	0.0%
I prefer using dictionaries online	38.5%	34.6%	19.2%	5.8%	1.9%
I think podcasting and music are good resources to practice my listening	46.2%	34.6%	17.3%	0.0%	1.9%
I don't feel shy practicing English with ICT.	44.2%	30.8%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
I have a better academic relationship with my teachers, through ICT, and not in face-to-face class.	9.6%	13.5%	30.8%	25%	21.2%

From the results of this part of the questionnaire, students seem to feel more comfortable using ICT to learn English when it comes to learning vocabulary, practicing writing in social media, watching videos, using dictionaries and using podcasting and music for listening. They also strongly agreed that ICT helps them not to feel shy while practicing English. On the other hand, they very clearly disagree with the usefulness of Google translator for doing homework, and they feel more comfortable with face-to-face classes and interaction with teachers.

Teachers' questionnaire

An open-ended questionnaire was administered to a group of six English teachers from the Department of Foreign Languages at the School of Languages, UV. They were administered this questionnaire before participating in a workshop related to the use of digital tools in the English classroom. The aim of such questionnaire was to know teachers' familiarity with technological tools.

Regarding which tools teachers know and how frequently they use them, most of the participants claimed they know some digital tools such as Prezi, Duolingo, Power point, Quizlet, websites and social media. This suggests that the participant teachers are familiar with certain tools that might help them in their daily teaching practice. Nonetheless, teachers commented that they use these tools only *once a week*. This might have to do with the number of tools teachers know or with the amount of knowledge they possess of such tools. It has to be said that teachers did not mention anything about how they incorporate such technology. Some teachers wrote:

'I use WORD, PREZI, QUIZLET, DUOLINGO. I use them, at least, once a week'. (T2)

'All the ones mentioned before (Prezi, Power point), at least, once a week'. (T5)

Concerning the benefits of using technological tools in the English classroom, the teacher participants agreed that by using digital tools they may make the classes more dynamic, they fulfil the students' needs and are appropriate for the context, they make easier the designing of the materials, and that, in general, they may enhance learning, even though they did not mention how they do this. What is more, the materials can be shared easily making the process much more interactive. Teachers stated: 'it is beneficial because they respond to the students' needs and to the context' (T2); 'they make the design of the

materials easier, which can be shared in different websites with different people; apart from making the process more interactive' (T3); '[ICT] favours the design of the materials because they allow us to have access to images and content which would make the learning process easier for students, making it more effective' (T6).

However, the teacher participants also mentioned some drawbacks, for example, students not using their imagination and creativity, teachers not having access to some tools at school, and students making wrong use of these tools. Some of them stated: 'it is an obstacle when the digital tools are not appropriate or when there is a wrong use of them' (T2); 'if some materials are designed using one app, sometimes the institutions do not have the correct necessary material to use such app' (T3). Thus, it can be inferred that the use of these tools should be implemented consciously and according to the context to make the most of them. More importantly, it is vital that, to integrate the use of ICT successfully in ELT, teachers should be trained to use technology appropriately in the classroom. ICT literacy is important for both teachers and students.

To sum up, all the participants agreed on the fact that using as many digital tools as possible is beneficial for their classes. They mentioned they would like to know more about tools to design interactive materials, videos and statistical software. It seems teachers are interested in applying them in their daily teaching practice, which might make their classes more meaningful for students; that is, these participant teachers are concerned about improving as language educators and being up to date in integrating ICT for teaching purposes. It can be inferred that the use of ICT in the English classroom is a need that cannot be evaded.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that at the BA in English of the UV both teachers and students are aware of the importance of ICT in English language learning and teaching; nonetheless, they are

also aware that, despite the many advantages that ICT offers, there are still many challenges to overcome. If schools are to introduce ICT successfully, several issues need to be resolved in advance: increase training in application of social websites for learning and teaching English, overcome any barriers so identified by educational participants (sufficient computers, bandwidth, reliable wireless connectivity) and carefully crafted use of web-based materials as complement to book-based materials.

The results found in this study are very similar to those found on other latitudes. It can be said that the use of technology in the English classroom is an issue that still needs further investigation. Both the training in the use of technological tools and the awareness of their use in this context are of paramount importance so as to provide teachers and students with a more ICT academic environment.

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