Using ICT in the foreign language classroom

**Author:** Salvador Bonilla, Marina (Maestra.Especialidad en Lengua Extranjera: Inglés, Maestra de Inglés).
**Public:** Maestros y profesores de lenguas extranjeras. **Materia:** Lengua extranjera, Inglés. **Idioma:** Inglés.

**Title:** Using ICT in the foreign language classroom.

**Abstract**
This document analyses how education has changed in the last few years thanks to the evolution of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). It starts by defining the term ICT, examining the advantages of introducing technological resources in the foreign language classroom and finally, this document mentions some of the most important and valuable digital tools that teachers can bring and introduce into their lessons as well as their benefits for second language acquisition.

**Keywords:** Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

**Titulo:** El uso de las TIC en la clase de lengua extranjera.

**Resumen**
EL presente documento analiza cómo ha cambiado la educación en los últimos años gracias a la evolución de las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TIC). Empieza haciendo una definición del término TIC, examinando las ventajas de introducir los recursos tecnológicos en la clase de lengua extranjera.Y por último, este documento menciona algunas de las herramientas digitales más importantes y valiosas que los profesores pueden introducir en sus lecciones así como sus beneficios para la adquisición de una segunda lengua.

**Palabras clave:** Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TIC), Inglés como Lengua Extranjera, la Enseñanza Asistida por Ordeador (EAO).

Before starting, it will be convenient to define and clarify what the term Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) means. There is a great number of definitions of ICT but the most comprehensive one is given by the British Computer Society as follows:

‘The scientific, technological and engineering disciplines and the management techniques used in information handling, processing and disseminating; their applications; computers, networking and communication and their integration with men and machines; and associated social, economic and cultural matter’.

It is widely known that ICT plays an important role in education in general but also in foreign language teaching and learning foreign languages in particular. They are considered to be powerful tools to improve the teaching-learning process of second language acquisition.

It is also recognised that communication has changed in the current information age, prompted by the appearance of new ICT. The technological changes have caused a permanent socialization and acculturation processes, in which ICT is a key factor.

Moreover, students’ access to new technologies in the educational field has increased enormously over the last decade. Children are being exposed to a range of technologies from a very early age in the home and by the time they reach nursery age, many have developed some of the digital skills that enable them to participate in technology-driven activities as soon as they start school (Battro, 2004; Facer et al., 2003).

As a consequence, pupils and teachers are expected to be using ICT in their classrooms on a regular basis since it has become an essential part of any teaching–learning context and language teaching is no exception. Thus, there is evidence that practitioners can provide scaffolding in the overall language-teaching objective.

The activities pupils and teachers engage in using ICTs in EFL classrooms reflect a pedagogical orientation or direction. By using three main theories of learning as theoretical lampposts, it is possible to illuminate some of the embedded pedagogical traits in EFL teachers’ ICT use (Dede, 2008). In this sense, many studies consider that the introduction of ICT improves the three major theoretical approaches to learning: behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism.
• **Behaviourism.** Within the field of educational ICT, behaviourist learning theories are mainly associated with drill-and-practice applications (web-based or subject specific Software), with their focus on developing isolated, discrete competences.

• **Cognitivism.** Within the field of educational ICT, cognitivist learning theories are mainly associated with applications used to organise, sequence, and structure pupils’ work and that help them assess their own progress. Learning Management System (LMS) and digital portfolios can be said to share properties of a cognitive nature.

• **Constructivism.** ICTs are by many seen as particularly conducive for constructivist learning activities, due to the accessibility of authentic material and applications suited for pupils’ own exploratory uses in problem solving activities (Lund, 2004), (Salomon, 2000). “The computer is seen in the literature as a cognitive tool that has great potential to support a constructivist form of teaching and learning” (Mueller et al., 2008): 1533. It is primarily the use of general tools and exploratory uses of internet that can be said to have clear links to constructivist ideas about learning and teaching.

WHAT ARE THE ADVANTAGES OF USING ICT IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING?

Focusing on second language acquisition, ICT are considered to act as one of the best supporters by providing enormous additional opportunities for practising and serving as a platform for interaction and task based learning activities. In fact, the incorporation of ICT at schools has positively changed the educational system a lot, considering ICT as a useful tool for the teaching of the curriculum.

In second language classroomms, there is a general aspiration for exposing learners to the target language in a natural way using authentic texts and real spoken models. In this case the role of technology provides a significant addition to more conventional tools (blackboards, books, cassette players...).

The current National Curriculum for Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) has a number of elements which can be addressed by the use of ICT. Pupils are expected to:

- Communicate with people in target language countries.
- Develop in all four language skills.
- Enhance their language learning skills.
- Have access to a range of resources in the target language.
- Have their special educational needs met to give them access to modern language learning.
- Make effective use of ICT in the development of the four skills.

According to Herington (2002) the use of technology is advantageous in several ways:

1. It facilitates exposure to authentic language.
2. It provides access to wider sources of information and varieties of language.
3. It gives people the opportunity to communicate with the world outside.
4. It allows learners-centered approach.
5. It develops learners’ autonomy.

WHAT TYPES OF TECHNOLOGICAL RESOURCES CAN WE USE?

In this early part of the 21st century, the range of technologies available for use in language learning and teaching has become very diverse and it is essential to language practice. It has never been easier to find such a wide range of digital material for teaching and this is especially useful for foreign language teaching. Moreover, these digital tools are central to the so-called field of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL).

Among the most common digital tools we can use in the language classroom it bears mentioning the following ones:
• **Software.** There are hundreds of software dedicated to modern foreign languages that can be very successful. Among others, teachers can use simple computer programmes like word processors, dictionaries or games in order to enhance teaching and learning.

• **Internet/webpages.** The Web offers enormous potential in language teaching and learning. Internet can provide access to large quantities of authentic input material and, at the same time, it can provide opportunities for language practice. We cannot forget mentioning the so-called Web 2.0 which is a technological online tool based on Internet users’ collaboration and sharing of contents in an interactive way (wikis, fóruns, blogs, podcasts, social networking, social bookmarking, multiplayer games...). *Web 2.0 represents the most current state of CALL* (Walker, Hewer, & Davies, 2008).

• **Films and videos.** Watching videos or films can bring variety and entertaining to the class, helping students improve their four language skills. These provide a source of authentic and varied language with examples of real-life conversation and thanks to the visual support, students will be able to understand better the communication process. They can be used to do listening and writing activities or to practise speaking.

There are plenty of DVDs explicitly made for language learning but we can also find a wide range of websites which provide short stories, TV programmes, videoclips and films. Some of these webs are: www.filta.org.uk; www.filmclub.org/; www.youtube.com; http://www.filmeducation.org/; https://vimeo.com; www.lessonstream.org; etc.

• **Digital documents.** They are used to present visual and audiovisual material (word, graphic and/or pictures) in a dynamic and interesting way. Some examples are: Slideshare, Prezi, Scribd, Power Point Presentations, Glogster...

• **The Interactive Whiteboard (IWB).** It is one of the major technological development in the last few years. Teaching with the IWB promotes creative teaching and allows teachers to accommodate many different learning styles (visual, auditory, kinesthetic, tactile...). Evidence suggests that the interactive whiteboard ‘increases enjoyment of lessons for both students and teachers through more varied and dynamic use of resources, with associated gains in motivation’ (Levy 2002).

Obviously, these are not the only digital tools we can use for language teaching but they’re considered the most useful ones. Other technological resources can include podcasts (www.fluentu.com), video conferences (www.skype.com), e-mails, educational apps, laptops, tablets, digital cameras, smartphones, etc.

As we have seen, ICT can offer an ample range of stimulating, motivating ways of developing and practising language skills but with so much technology available, it is sometimes difficult for educators to know how to make the best choices.

There is a temptation to think that all teaching and learning problems can be resolved by means of a technological tool. For this reason, when using technology for learning contexts they should try to think rationally and constructively taking into consideration how to make the best use of it.
Bibliografía