The Use of the ICTs to Improve University Students’ Oral Presentations

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Abstract
New technologies are part of our daily lives, regardless of what we are ready to deal with them or not. The introduction of the Information and Communication Technologies in education has set a new paradigm in knowledge acquisition. The Internet, overhead projectors and interactive boards, presentation and animation software, online databases are only some resources that teachers use in order to present information in a more dynamic, immediate and stunning way, transforming and revitalizing the teaching-learning process. The ICTs have been established in the University classroom and nowadays, they have become an essential part in this teaching/learning process. Lecturers make use of them in the same proportion as they make of traditional materials. At the same time, students have to be acquainted with these new technologies and they also have to be able to deal with them.

The objective of this paper is twofold: on the one hand, we study and show how our students make use of the technologies when they have to face their oral presentations in the subject ‘Advanced English: Professional Settings’ (English Studies Degree at Universitat Jaume I in Castellón, Spain). It is acknowledged that visual aids can be helpful to support a speech but we want to analyze if the visual aids are successfully applied, how and to which extent. On the other hand, we want to make out the opinions of their classmates about the use of these graphical resources (students fill in a questionnaire about the effectiveness of the visual aids in their classmates’ presentations and how they would improve them).

Results demonstrate that not only teachers make advantage of the new technological resources, we show, based on the students’ oral presentations and their peer-reviews, that also our university students are increasingly aware of the advantage and importance of the ICTs in the classroom.

1. Introduction
New technologies are part of our daily life, regardless of whether we are ready to deal with them or not. Their impact on our lives is so overwhelming that we see ourselves forced to keep up with them. And so should our educational system. [1] The fact that teachers face a digital generation is no news for anyone. This process not only affects teachers; students must also come to terms with the fact that they are no longer expected to be mere collectors of information, but to become intelligent information users. It is essential for the student to be able to efficiently search for information, process it and communicate it, transforming it into knowledge. This process involves a good use of one’s intellectual and emotional capacities and triggers a more and more efficient and autonomous learning process, according to individual objectives and needs. New technologies provide us with an endless range of possibilities; thanks to them, we can share resources with other educational centres and we can practically find information about anything, anytime. The Internet offers us online dictionaries, electronic libraries and encyclopaedia, reviews, newspapers, data bases, guided virtual visits to almost any museum or city around the world. More and more companies have understood the impact of new technologies and are redirecting their efforts into creating educational computer games and resources, transforming the craving for information into an extremely profitable business. [2]

Considering this scenario, we cannot afford to forget that, as the development of new technologies affects the way we communicate and interact, we learn and live; the educational system must be able to come up with ideas and schemes that will allow it to adapt itself to these new requirements.

1.1 The new teacher’s role in the digital era
The traditional teacher-centred paradigm progressively opened the way to a new paradigm, learner-oriented, in which ICTs play an important role. [3] As ICTs made their way in the language classroom, the traditional role of the teacher has seen itself broadened and diversified; the traditional holder and transmitter of information (reflected in methods such as grammar translation or direct method) slowly evolved towards that of a counsellor through the learning process, a friendly guide aware of the
individual differences among learners in point of needs, learning styles and paces, aiming at enhancing the learners’ autonomy by training them into taking responsibility of their own learning process.

Nevertheless, the relentless progress of technological devices represents a continuous challenge for the language teacher, redefining the language learning-teaching process. Basic computer expertise (i.e. managing and manipulating data, the use of software etc.) compounded with an open, responsible, critical and reflective attitude towards ICTs and a continuous pedagogical and technological training in the use and implementation of ICTs in the classroom are key requirements if we want to meet the challenges and endless opportunities provided by the technological advancements and thus improve the language teaching-learning process.

The analytical survey Information and Communication Technologies in the Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages: State-of-the-Art, Needs and Perspectives published by UNESCO [4], define the new literacies required of language teachers as follows:

- scientific literacy: the ability to think scientifically in a world governed by technology and science
- digital literacy: the ability to use and apply ICTs adequately in language research, activities and tests
- critical literacy: the ability to evaluate any given sources of information
- linguistic literacy: the ability to keep in line with changes in language use and usage and adapt materials to these changes
- cultural literacy: the ability to observe and record changes in the society of the target language and its direct implications for language teaching

According to the same publication, the new teachers’ roles are:

- **facilitator and guide**: teachers must guide the students through the selection and independent use of materials, as well as responding to their personal needs.
- **mediator**: teachers must be able to act as intermediaries between students and the target society and language
- **researcher**: teachers must keep up with developments in the field of modern languages and applied linguistics
- **designer of learning scenarios**: the diversity of the available learning scenarios represents a challenge to teachers
- **collaborator (with other teachers)**: keeping up with development of learning environments implies collaboration with other teachers for a more fruitful coordination
- **orchestrator (technology, learners, curriculum)**: the new teacher needs to develop management skills and be able to find the balance between his student’s learning styles
- **evaluator and self-evaluator**: the new teacher must not only be able to evaluate materials, tools and methods, but also be able to evaluate the learning process in itself and the final product, revising the model of evaluation if needed and making it suit his particular situation

To conclude, these roles involve developing and putting into practice a new set of skills and competencies derived from the need of adapting ourselves to new demands.

### 1.2 The new learner’s role in the digital era

Learning in the digital era implies the assumption of new roles from teachers’ part. But, just like teachers, learners must also assume their new roles. The shifting towards learner-centeredness in the language learning process involves a growing awareness of their own learning process and taking on new responsibilities. The learner, as an active agent in his own learning process, must be willing to reflect upon the learning process and evaluate it, make choices regarding learning strategies and styles, adapting them to his own needs.

The new learner must not only be aware of all the pedagogical aspects influencing his learning process, but must also be able to use to his own benefit all the tools and opportunities provided by technological advancements. New technologies allow the learner to communicate with other learners
or native speakers of the target language in collaborative environments (e.g. chat rooms, e-mail etc.) and grants them access to authentic materials (e.g. videos, articles etc.). Under this scenario, we could conclude that the learning process can become much more enriching and rewarding as long as both teachers and learners assume their new roles and have a positive attitude towards change.

2. Method

We study and show how our students make use of the technologies when they have to face their oral presentations in the subject ‘Advanced English: Professional Settings’ (English Studies Degree at Universitat Jaume I in Castellón, Spain). It is acknowledged that visual aids can be helpful to support a speech but we want to analyze if the visual aids are successfully applied, how and to which extent. On the other hand, we want to make out the opinions of their classmates about the use of these graphical resources (students fill in a questionnaire about the effectiveness of the visual aids in their classmates’ presentations and how they would improve them).

Because of the importance of English in professional contexts earlier this millennium, and preponderance of this language in the field of cultural, economic and social, we consider essential to develop the acquisition of knowledge of the English language level (C1 according to the Framework of Reference for Languages) and its application to professional contexts, in its speech genres and writings, with particular emphasis on the pragmatic aspects of language.

The teaching of this subject is eminently practical. Thus, students of this subject should combine theory undoubtedly necessary, provided under the parameters of tutored practice, both in the classroom and in the activities which develop externally. They also emphasize the practical sessions provided (both problem solving and exercises such as laboratory practice) and work sequentially to develop in the various seminars to make.

To prepare and implement this subject and these oral presentations, we have taken into account firstly, the P3s in Pedagogy [5], Personalization, Participation, and Productivity; secondly, when working in groups, establishing a model for the students to be able to review their peers’ works [5]; and finally, paying special attention to the following generic and specific competences: Autonomous learning, capacity for analysis and synthesis, capacity to manage information, capacity for organising and planning, capacity to communicate acquired knowledge, capacity to identify problems and research topics as well as assessment of their relevance, capacity to identify and synthesize bibliographic information, capacity to link philological knowledge to other disciplines, and team work.

About the subject specific competences, we highlight the global development of communicative discursive competence in English by means of oral and conversational strategies as well as reading and writing strategies according to the different oral or written genres, development of perlocutionary and argumentative capacity in English.

3. Results and Discussion

Students present their academic work orally at the end of the academic year. In this subject we have 26 students enrolled. The teacher provided appropriate instructions to the subject during the first weeks of class. They may also develop a presentation of their work through poster sessions or any other visual tool, which will be presented and defended publicly.

All students (in this subject we have 26 students enrolled) defended their work using either PowerPoint by Microsoft or Prezi including audio, videos and pictures in their Presentations.

As a student was defending the work, their partners were observing as they had to fulfil a questionnaire about the presentation. All our students participated in the questionnaires (in total, each student had to fulfil 25 questionnaires).

Students took into account many different items to include in their answers such as the Presentation was too long, or bored, or the attitude of the speaker in front of an audience (body movement, nervousness, eye contact, etc.); but we only paid attention to the answers related exclusively to the use of visual aids in the Presentation; for this paper, we have analysed the answers to the question: “how do you suggest this presentation could be improved?”

The result can be divided in Positive and Negative reviews. The positive opinions were closely related to the whole structure, design and organisation of the whole oral presentation. In general, students prepared good works and their classmates so noted on the questionnaire.
We have classified the negative opinions as follows:
- About the text
- About the design (video and audio)
- About the user

3.1. About the text
The main negative reviews were about (i) grammatical issues: students were critical in this aspect and they pointed the grammatical mistakes in their classmates’ presentations, (ii) too many words in the slides: students indicated the excessive use of words in one slide, (iii) too much theory: students complaint about the excessive time devoted to theory as presentations were intended to show the practical part of the topics and (iv) the form of the text: some students complained about the impossibility of reading the text as the colour of the text.

About the first item of review (text), we can conclude that the presenters should pay more attention with the grammatical and typological mistakes on their slides. The fact of using visual aids means that the audience will be just as aware of your words as the visual resources; therefore, presenters should care more this important issue and review the text before submission. On the other hand, it should be also noted, that, sometimes, the presenters forget that visual resources are used to assist the presentation, in any case, can replace any aspect. The act of writing too many words on a slide makes visually unattractive and otherwise, is not intended to replace our words by the printed text. And finally, regarding the reviews about the use of specific type of text on the slides, we have to point out that according to Wax [7], we have to pay attention to design, focusing on avoiding the temptation to dress up our pages with cheesy effects and focus instead on simple design basics such as the use a sans serif font for body text. The use of decorative fonts only for slide headers, and then only if they’re easy to read. We have to put dark text on a light background and align text left or right and finally we must avoid clutter. As Wax says, ‘your slides are the illustrations for your presentation, not the presentation itself. They should underline and reinforce what you’re saying as you give your presentation’. Downey [8], from The Learning Centre at the University of New South Wales also reinforces these points in an oral presentation using PWP:
- help you cover more ground in less time
- link the sections of your presentation
- illustrate factors which are difficult to explain or time-consuming to describe
- show reality in ways that words alone cannot (photographs, plans, maps)
- help the audience visualise abstract concepts (charts/ diagrams/ conceptual visuals)
- summarise information (keywords, graphs, tables)
- make a dry subject interesting

3.2. About the design
Concerning design, what students complained mostly about were in three clear aspects: (i) the organization of the visuals, (ii) too many videos: if we take into account that a presentation lasted 30 minutes, there was a student who included five videos which lasted 2/3 minutes each, and (iii) the quality of the visual resources.

After having seen the results, we conclude that students’ main complaint was about the excessive and many times unnecessary use of videos and the quality of them. We have to be aware and so our students that including visual aids in the presentations can be many times useful in order to better organize the presentation, better explain our points and illustrate our text and words but, sometimes we risk of abusing visual aids. We should choose the most appropriate ones and make sure we are not going to have glitches in the presentation. The selection

3.3. About the user
Students also realized about (i) problems using the resources. Students noted some kind of inexperience in some of their classmates when using the visual resources and complained about this fact. This lack of technical skills can turn our presentation into a disaster. As we have commented in our introduction section, new technologies are invading our personal and academic lives and both teachers and students have to accept it and work in the same direction.

About the user, and after the students’ opinions, we can conclude that although few students showed some difficulties when using the technical support, most of them were well prepared in this issue.
References


