Teachers' Perception of the Students' Foreign Language Learning and the Potential Role of ICT

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the learning problems that arise in the teaching of second languages. Nowadays, the introduction of new technologies in this field has had a relevant effect by offering new possibilities that did not exist in the analogue era. However, many of the learning problems persist, and one of the causes identified is the change in learning styles. The use of new technologies has fostered an experimental learning style among students. This style is incompatible with traditional classes of theory and practice, in which an intellectual effort is required to understand the theory and then put into practice what has been learned. The present work starts from this reality and tries to provide possible improvements. For this, an analysis of the main problems encountered by the learners in the various linguistic acquisition components (lexicon, grammar and processes of comprehension and production, both oral and written) has been carried out. The method used was a questionnaire answered by 113 active language teachers. After the analysis of the answers received, a series of specific problems of the teaching-learning process was enumerated and different IT applications and ICT resources were searched that could solve or at least minimize them.

KEYWORDS

Communication Competences, ICT, Language Learning, Language Training, Teaching Second Languages

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most important objectives in the teaching of second languages is to ensure that students acquire the skills to face various communicative activities of production and comprehension, both orally and in writing (De Europa, 2012), of the language under study. To achieve this goal, the teacher uses different resources that will provide the student with a set of comprehension strategies (identification of keys and inferences) and production (planning, compensation, control and correction) useful to acquire different communication skills in the language of study (Larsen-Freeman, 2014). In the case of listening comprehension, you need to listen to sound learning resources in the language of study such as public statements, media, songs, lectures, private conversations, etc. In the case of reading comprehension, you need to read different types of text documents written in the language

of study such as instructions, newspapers, magazines, opinion articles, literary texts.... In the field of audiovisual understanding, it is necessary to access multimedia resources such as television programs, fiction films, reports, etc. And finally, for the activities of expression, interaction or mediation, it is necessary to be able to try different production models (public presentations, oral monologues, written essays, etc.) (McLaughlin, 1989).

The teacher will have to use and adapt these resources to the different learning styles presented by the students (Fernández, 2007). The mentioned learning resources can be analog or digital according to the nature of the technology used to create them. The analogical case is characterized by the fact that production requires a physical manufacturing process and access to resources is limited (Godwin-Jones, 2010) since to use it requires the resource to be physically available (for example, if a reading book is needed then it will have to be bought or borrowed from a library). Some examples of analogue resources are (Palma, 2016): books with grammatical contents and exercises to exercise vocabulary and grammatical constructions, reading books in the study language adapted to different levels of skill, bilingual paper dictionaries, tapes or discs with sound recordings used for listening comprehension, videos to work on audiovisual comprehension (verbal and non-verbal language), vocabulary cards, etc. Digital resources are an equivalent electronic reproduction (Golonka, 2014) of resources and analog learning strategies (for example, physical dictionaries have given rise to online dictionaries). Its introduction in teaching has been varied (Chun, 2016). In some cases, digital resources have replaced analogue equivalents (Blake, 2009), and in other cases analogue resources have been maintained and used as a complementary tool (Blake, 2013). The impact of digitalization is materialized, among other aspects, in the possibility of accessing features that were not possible with physical means (Nomass, 2013) such as the availability of simple, rapid and universal access to resources or access to digital repositories with learning resources in different formats prepared specifically for the teaching of second languages (Levy, 2009).

The nature of the resources influences how they can be used by students and teachers (Richards, 2015). In this sense, analog resources are generally designed to be used with the presence of a teacher who will guide and evaluate learning (Cook, 2013). Classes are based on the presentation of theoretical concepts that are illustrated later with the realization of exercises that put into practice what is seen in the theory. On the other hand, the evaluation with analogical resources is characterized by being manual (Crusan, 2016) with a direct intervention of the teacher (James, 2013). In this sense, the evaluation is generally based (Walker, 2016) on the realization of a written examination with questions of various types (true or false, questions to complete, group, writing, etc.), a test of oral expression through a conversation with the teacher, a listening comprehension test consisting of asking questions about the content of an audio that has been reproduced and a written comprehension test by asking questions about a text read by the students. In the digital world, some of the characteristics of use of the analog world are maintained, however new ones are introduced. Thus, the possibility of adapting the contents dynamically to the learning style of a student arises (Van Essen, 2014), it has the availability of technological tools to evaluate in a semi-automatic way linguistic skills such as pronunciation and oral expression (Jones, 2016) or the skill in writing and using the grammar and vocabulary of a language, or it is possible to receive almost immediate feedback about the activities carried out by a student (Chiu, 2013).

Despite the diversity and possibilities offered by learning resources (especially digital resources), second language students continue to have learning problems in the various linguistic competences. For example, the European Study of Linguistic Competence (ESLC), proposed by the European Commission in 2005 and supported by the European Parliament in 2006, shows widespread problems of oral and written comprehension in students of second languages such as English, French or German (EECL, 2012: 91). Other studies (Sparks et al., 1993) agree on the difficulties that students present in aspects such as the acquisition of vocabulary, good use of grammar, or non-verbal comprehension (Erhman, 1996).

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