Editors' Note: Reconceptualising ICTs in foreign language teaching and learning

Nota de las editoras: Reconceptualizando las TIC en la enseñanza y aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras

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Abstract

This special issue intends to highlight the relevant role of ICTs in language education. In that regard, this monograph brings together contributions that take a closer look at the use of technology in the foreign language classroom in the higher education context. The articles included, written by an invited author and four fresh post-doctoral researchers, may bring some light to scholars interested in current trends taking place in educational settings. The monograph closes with one review and an interview with the Interuniversity Institute of Modern Applied Languages (IULMA-UJI) director.

Keywords: ICTS; Foreign language teaching; Skills; Translanguaging; Feedback

Resumen

Este número especial pretende destacar la relevancia de las TIC en la enseñanza de idiomas. En ese sentido, este volumen monográfico reúne contribuciones que profundizan en el uso de la tecnología en el aula de lengua extranjera en el contexto de la educación superior. Los artículos incluidos, escritos por una autora invitada y cuatro nuevos investigadores postdoctorales, pueden aportar algo de luz a los académicos interesados en las tendencias actuales que tienen lugar en los entornos educativos. El monográfico cierra con una reseña y una entrevista a la directora del Instituto Interuniversitario de Lenguas Modernas Aplicadas (IULMA-UJI).

Palabras clave: TIC; Enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras; Habilidades; Translingüismo; Retroacción

INTRODUCTION

It is undeniable that ICTs have become a key instrument in our everyday lives, both in public and private spheres. By the same token, technology has become fundamental in the educational realm (Soria, 2003). Moreover, it has paved the way for designing and implementing pedagogical methodologies (Palomino, 2017) based on learner-centred approaches (Bellés-Fortuño & Bellés-Calvera, 2017; Mayes & de Freitas, 2004). Some authors have referred to ICTs as a "trend" (Bellés-Calvera & Bellés-Fortuño, 2018, p. 58) and others as a "driving force of transformation" (Player-Koro, 2012, p. 93) in regards to the field of education. Nevertheless, they can no longer be considered an add-on to the language classroom because they have become inherent to language acquisition and use (Kern, 2006; Warschauer, 2002). While it is true that ICTs can boost learners' motivation due to the attractiveness of the presentation of materials, the learning objectives should not be overlooked (Hernández Mercedes, 2012). In this sense, technologies are a means to an end, i.e. learning (Hernández et al., 2018; Kern, 2006; Palomino, 2017).

Additionally, the integration of ICTs in the classroom has proven advantageous (Bellés-Calvera & Bellés-Fortuño, 2021; Kern, 2006), not least in the language teaching and learning context (Kohnke, 2021). On the one hand, not only can they be used to practise all skills (Bărbuleţ, 2013; Bellés-Calvera & Bellés-Fortuño, 2018, 2021; Bellés-Calvera & Martínez-Hernández, 2022) but also to acquaint learners with the culture of the target language (Pun, 2014) and other social aspects and competences intertwined with language-learning (Marín Díaz & Romero López, 2009). On the other hand, ICTs offer teachers the opportunity to personalise learning and content (Alobaid, 2020) given that multiple forms of representation can be offered to the students, thus catering for all students' needs and providing attention to diversity (Ballesta Pagán & Céspedes Ventura, 2015; Bellés-Calvera & Martínez-Hernández, 2022).

Despite their aforementioned value and widespread use, some teachers still feel reluctant to include ICTs in their lessons (Kohnke, 2021). Such unwillingness might be on account of the mental strain or technostress (Penado Abilleira et al., 2021; Salanova Soria, 2003; Yusri et al., 2014) derived from teachers' insufficient knowledge and confidence in this area. Furthermore, studies reveal that teachers have reported feeling isolated (Marín Díaz & Romero López, 2009; Palomino, 2017) due to the little support provided by the institutions in this matter. Therefore, in order to combat teachers' opposition to ICTs, training in their application and integration in language courses is of paramount importance (Ballesta Pagán &

Céspedes Ventura, 2015; Brun & Hinostroza, 2014; Palomino, 2017; Penado Abilleira et al., 2021).

The contributions included in this volume rely on the role of technological resources in developing learners' written and oral skills, as well as in boosting students' motivation in foreign language contexts. These include tools like tandem virtual exchanges and grammar checkers, among others.

As regards tandem exchanges, research on the use of Skype has revealed that this tool can be useful for non-native speakers of a given language (Elia, 2006; Pomino & Gil-Salom, 2016). This was the case of Italian and English language learners who had the opportunity to improve their communicative competence in the target language by means of Skype (Elia, 2006). Synchronous and asynchronous collaboration in virtual higher education environments is also possible with this software, fostering oral and autonomous learning skills (Pomino & Gil-Salom, 2016). There is no doubt that these practices may also prompt intercultural and interpersonal skills (Scherer Bassani & Buchem, 2019; Pomino & Gil-Salom, 2016), but affective factors may have a negative impact on oral production (Fondo, 2021). Another area that deserves special attention is pronunciation. Even though it has been neglected in foreign language instruction for a long time, the integration of technological devices in education such as Praat, Voki and Twitter (Bellés-Calvera & Bellés-Fortuño, 2018; Delalez & d'Alessandro, 2017; Mompean & Fouz-González, 2016; Yoshida, 2018) has contributed to improving learners' performance by raising awareness of phonetics and speech rhythm, to name but a few.

Turning to written communication, grammar checkers have been introduced in the foreign language classroom to provide students with corrective feedback and, thus, with more opportunities to improve their writing skills (Wu, 2014). In fact, recent research has shown that secondary school students benefited from the use of Writing Pal to a certain extent as they could notice and correct organisational, grammar and word choice errors, thereby improving the quality of their essays (McCarthy et al., 2019). Other studies have explored the use of Instagram as a mobile-assisted learning tool, leading to positive results in vocabulary acquisition (Aloraini, 2018; Gonulal, 2019). In addition, students seem to welcome this type of initiatives for language learning purposes (Erarslan, 2019) despite the fact that no superiority is perceived with regard to traditional approaches (Andujar & Çakmak, 2020).

In light of the above, this monographic issue seeks to report current empirical research revolving around the effectiveness of ICTs in foreign-language

contexts. It deals with the most innovative approaches to language teaching from a digital perspective, covering the impact of ICTs in spoken and written communication through individual and collaborative practices.

This special issue opens with our invited author, **Laia Canals,** an expert in the application of ICTs in language teaching. In her paper, she explores the role of translanguaging practices in tandem virtual exchanges focused on the negotiation of meaning between Spanish and Canadian undergraduate students.

Technological resources may also be useful when providing feedback to language learners. This can be observed in **Robert Martínez-Carrasco** and **Alicia Chabert Ull**'s article, which examines the use of grammar checkers as a valuable tool that allows scaffolding students' writing skills in higher education contexts. In line with tertiary education, **Roser Sánchez-Castañy** investigates the extent to which translation technologies are implemented into tertiary education Translation modules through the analysis of different translation programmes.

It goes without saying that digital competences have become a fundamental skill, not least in the teaching sphere. In her article, **Maria Llanes** explores and analyses the role of technologies in teacher-training programmes and how effective these are in instructing teachers-to-be in the implementation of ICTs in their lessons and lesson plans.

Bearing in mind the topic of this monographic issue, **Eugenia Rama Iglesias** reviews the volume *Online teaching and learning in higher education during COVID-19. International perspectives and experiences,* by Chan, Bista, and Allen, which provides an in-depth analysis of the educational practices that have been conducted in tertiary education throughout the pandemic. Last but not least, this issue comes to an end with an interview to **Dr Begoña Bellés-Fortuño,** the current director of the Interuniversity Institute of Modern Applied Languages at Universitat Jaume I, who reflects upon the lecturers' need to develop their technological skills in order to boost and adapt their lessons to learners' current demands.

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