



Volume XXI 2018

ISSUE no.1

MBNA Publishing House Constanta 2018



Scientific Bulletin of Naval Academy

SBNA PAPER • **OPEN ACCESS**

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To cite this article: [Maruntelu Liliana](#), *Scientific Bulletin of Naval Academy*, Vol. XXI 2018, pg. 136-139.

Available online at www.anmb.ro

ISSN: 2392-8956; ISSN-L: 1454-864X

doi: 10.21279/1454-864X-18-I1-021

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The importance of improving digital skills in modern language teaching

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***Abstract:** The general framework and general policies for e-learning are legitimated by the strategic objectives of the European Union aimed at increasing the competitiveness of the human resource. Thus, in 2001, the European Employment Guidelines showed the need for member states to adopt coherent strategies for lifelong learning. The European Social Agenda also highlighted the importance of access to lifelong learning for any person, especially in the field of information and communication technologies. This paper is intended to prove that modern languages are among the advantaged disciplines of using ICT, by demonstrating that specific language competencies can interact with ICT key competences, resulting in modern teaching-learning-evaluation activities.*

1. The Educational Context of ICT Integration in the Study of Modern Languages

ICT development is a defining element of society, and education is of particular importance in capitalizing on new technologies.

The trajectories drawn by the European Commission at the Lisbon, Copenhagen and Bologna meetings in the field of education and training culminate in the European Education and Training 2010 program. The reference framework promulgated by this program promotes the acquisition of 8 key competences, two of them being communication in foreign languages and digital competences.

The fundamental objective of studying modern languages is for the students to acquire and develop the communication skills necessary for a situationally / socially acceptable communication through acquiring specific knowledge, skills and attitudes in accordance with the Implementation of Education & Training 2010 program (2003) at levels equivalent to those laid down in the Common European Framework of Reference. The following objectives are set out in the European Language Portfolio (PEL):

- Recognition of language learning for communicative purposes;
- Stimulating a lifelong learning culture;
- promoting plurilingualism;
- encouraging reflection on the learning process and self-evaluation, supporting the individual study (autonomy);

The general competencies of communication in a foreign language, derived from the 8 key - competences for lifelong learning, are:

- the ability to understand, express and interpret thoughts, feelings and deeds, in writing or orally in a foreign language (listening, speaking, reading, writing), in a variety of socio-cultural contexts, according to the needs or wishes of the subject;
- Intercultural understanding, cultural expression and mediation skills.

The general competences of foreign language programs are:

- Receiving oral messages;

- Production of oral messages;
- Receiving written messages;
- Production of written messages;
- Values and attitudes.

Language teachers must build their teaching paths in strict accordance with the student's needs, motivations, peculiarities and resources. Thus, while respecting the students' interest in learning the language, the teacher of modern languages must adapt the content of learning to the student's practical and situational communication needs and knowledge. Also, the teacher should be familiar with the appropriate teaching methodology as well as the resources to give students access to: manuals, reference works (dictionaries, grammars, etc.), audiovisual and computer resources (hardware and software).

Teachers should start from analyzing students' learning needs in learning-teaching-assessment situation, setting real and realistic objectives and methods of communication skills in a foreign language with the utmost clarity and accuracy.

The development of digital competences and their use in foreign language teaching should not be seen and realized as a distinct activity added to the current programs, but should naturally integrate into the teaching-learning-evaluation process. Digital competences are designed to give language skills added value and quality so that both the student and the teacher can adapt more easily to the demands of the modern society they live in, a society that uses the resources offered by information technology very much.

2. The relationship between ICT and the formation of competences specific to modern languages

Using computers in teaching modern languages is not a novelty of our time. Technology was introduced as an instrument in the 1960s, a trend known as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL).

In the 1960s and early 1970s, the first CALL events were based on the behavioural model of learning. These consist of simple grammar, syntax and translation activities, and the computer evaluated drills systematically repeated by students. We can consider that these attempts were merely a virtual transfer of the content of traditional courses.

The communicative perspective emerged in the 1970s and early 1980s as a reaction to the behaviourist model. The main difference between the two visions is that, from a communicative point of view, relevant to learning a language, it is not the ability to use determined linguistic forms, but the way in which these forms are used in communication. Grammar must be taught implicitly and deductively, and students will have to produce their own oral and written messages instead of using prefabricated syntaxes. These proposals are based on cognitive theories that define learning as a creative process of discovery, expression and personal development. Technology has contributed to this vision change. The tools used provided more and more opportunities for individual work.

The final stage, called integrative, is based on the sociocognitive approach to learning a language, which considers the use of language to be of utmost importance in a real and meaningful communication context. The fundamental objective is to establish communication according to the student's needs, using authentic texts, for better and faster acquisition of the language. The acquired knowledge will be used in real situations, respecting the socio-cultural codes. Learning is no longer an individual activity, but rather a social one, in which interaction is important. The learner learns more effectively when doing it in collaborative form through projects. Also, the teaching process is individualized in the sense that it allows each student to work independently at their own pace.

Using technology from this perspective, known under the Technology Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) logo, makes possible the integration of both language skills (oral and written comprehension) and technological competence into the learning process, from a global point of view and not as a punctual instrument.[1]

The emergence in the mid-1990s of computers capable of managing not only textual information, but also sound and visual information leads to notable progress in the teaching of modern languages.

With the advent of the Internet, the new technical means will not only be a tool for information processing but also a communication tool. The Internet and electronic communication introduce two determinant concepts in the process of teaching and learning a modern language: interaction (action pursuing a communicative purpose) and interactivity (electronic simulation of the interaction process). They also lead to a redefinition of the tools used, the way of communicating knowledge and how to understand the educational process.

The incorporation of ICT in teaching-learning-evaluation of modern languages produces notable progress, facilitating openness and communication between different countries and cultures, contributing to the formation of a more tolerant and participative multicultural society by overcoming geographical, linguistic and cultural barriers.

3. Opportunities, advantages and limitations of ICT use in teaching-learning-evaluation of modern languages

Traditionally, in the teaching-learning-assessment of modern languages, technology (audio and video cassettes, radio and TV cassettes) has always been used which, without being digital, facilitates communication and information exchange, but with the incorporation of new technologies, modern media have a wide variety of multimedia resources both online and offline.

It is a fact that the use of ICT in the classroom does not automatically involve the enrichment of students' knowledge and skills.[2] In teaching modern computer-assisted languages, two terms are often confused: use and integration. It is not the same thing to take advantage of a few minutes by doing an Internet activity at the end of the day, conceived as a play activity or to propose a perfectly integrated activity in the didactic approach. ICT tools need to be introduced only when they help students in real life, not because they are in fashion or because other teachers use them. In many cases, for some of the lesson's objectives, it may be more appropriate to resort to traditional means (books, magazines, TV, video, etc.).

The use of ICT in the teaching of modern languages is appropriate in two areas: learning materials and the learning process itself. [3] Through new technologies, teachers and students are given the opportunity to freely explore language and choose the right materials for teaching-learning-assessment. This can be done by accessing existing information on the Internet in real contexts (literary texts, newspapers, magazines, blogs, etc.), which facilitates the significant use of the modern language studied.

In terms of learning, the incorporation of ICT in modern language course fosters two types of learning: on the one hand, constructive and meaningful learning of language, on the other hand, cooperative learning. Learning becomes a creative, personal process in which the student, the protagonist of this process, builds his cognitive representation of modern language, starting from his native language, using learning strategies such as generalization, simplification or analogy. The learning process is controlled by students and directed by the teacher to search for information, critical reading and document creation, and the results vary from individual to individual. Thus, learning not only facilitates the transmission of information and communication, but also emphasizes student's autonomy and responsibility.

On the other hand, ICT tools favour social interaction and collaboration, i.e. cooperative learning. It also allows teamwork and leads to the cultivation of social attitudes, the exchange of ideas, cooperation and personality development. It emphasizes those processes that students use to create a message, and the learning process is approached from the perspective of finalizing themes. Teamwork stimulates all members of the group and causes them to find the best solution, assess critically and communicate.

Classical editing of a letter or e-mail is complemented by other activities involving the use of social networks, virtual groups, networking games where participants express themselves through oral or written messages and learn with others, reaching out to develop common contents. This strengthens the fundamental advantage of using ICT: collaborative work. Through networks and forums, students

and teachers from different parts of the planet share their teaching-learning-evaluation projects with digital tools.

The incorporation of ICT also allows for an intercultural approach, a compulsory dimension of the teaching-learning-evaluation process of a modern language. Students use modern language and come into contact with another culture in real time. The range of activities the student and teacher have at their disposal is unlimited: from the virtual visit of a city or museum to the elaboration of projects on cultural themes.

The limits of ICT use in the process of teaching-learning-evaluation of the modern language are:

- insufficient technological and digital knowledge of both students and teachers, which, for some, makes it impossible to carry out work tasks and, for others, produces stress and an inappropriate approach to work strategies;
- the difficulty of selecting the right information;
- incomplete and superficial learning: students do not sufficiently dedicate enough time to learning and confuse knowledge with data accumulation;
- lack of high quality educational software;
- very high costs of equipment and software;
- lack of specialized staff, appropriate equipment, and complementary bibliographic material (guides, manuals, etc.)
- resistance to change of teachers, pupils.

The teaching-learning-evaluation process demonstrates that the introduction of ICT does not lead to the elimination of the role of the teacher. Technology provides it with the tools to optimize the instructional process at certain stages. However sophisticated, educational software cannot answer unpredictable student questions, the teacher will always have the most important role in education.

Table 1 lists the paragraph styles defined in this template.

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