

THE USE OF ICT AND CALL WITH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Abstract: *In the modern methodology of foreign language teaching, notions such as the internet, blogs, ICT, CALL are common and most teachers are familiar with techniques of using ICT in their classes. However, knowledge is mainly theoretical as in practice, very few teachers choose to teach with the help of ICT and CALL. Though many might blame the teachers for lack of interest and involvement in teaching or accuse them of reluctance, the truth is that there are Romanian schools with no access to the internet, the computers and the resources though there is internet are insufficient for the number of teachers and students in a school. Best case scenario is a lab with internet connection but it is mostly used by Informatics teachers. The paper presents some tools and activities that teachers can use when teaching with ICT and CALL and the results of a survey conducted on a number of 25 students. The survey referred to the amount of time spent using the computer, the types of activities students use computers for and the consequences of extensive use of computers.*

Keywords: *ICT, CALL, foreign language teaching;*

Introduction

ICT and CALL are constantly gaining territory in the field of foreign language teaching. More and more literature is available on this topic, teachers create activities to prove the usefulness of such approach to language teaching and students show more interest for language learning when teachers use materials that are appealing. Ames (1992) believes that "tasks that involve variety and diversity are more likely to facilitate an interest in learning." Davis et al. (1989) consider that students will only accept the use of ICT if they find it both useful and easy to use. Therefore, the software should not be too complicated and the activities should have an easy to use design. If all these prerequisites are fulfilled then ICT brings about: a greater interest and involvement in learning; greater self-esteem;

determination to achieve specific tasks; spending more time on the learning task;

Research by Story and Sullivan (1986) shows that pupils using ICT are more likely to be motivated to continue their work even when the tasks are too difficult. This should be taken into consideration in material design. Materials should enable pupils to achieve progression and keep them motivated.

Gardner, Dukes and Discenza (1993) believe that the use of ICT should must be pleasant, rewarding, important and without coercion.

Theoretical background

The truth is that English teachers can use a wide variety of resources in the teaching-learning process. It is very unfortunate that some of them still use the textbook and the CDs as the only resources. When textbooks have a teacher's book with extra worksheets and ready-made tests, then some teachers consider that nothing else should be brought into the classroom. ICT and CALL offer endless resources that can be accessed online or created by teachers. All of us have some basic computer knowledge and therefore we can create our own resources. Below, I have selected some useful ideas for teachers of English that they can use when teaching as they are a modern and challenging alternative to traditional worksheets and assessment techniques.

For instance, *blogs*. Teachers can create a blog in only a few steps by following the provider's instructions. Each blog can contain varied categories that can be accessed through a click. Posts have a title and reference to time of upload is also available. Thus, anyone can see when the post was uploaded and search for it in the archive. Editing is extremely easy as blogs use patterns that require no technical skills. Comments can be made by clicking on the "comment" section. Blogs contain many other information besides texts. They contain hyperlinks, charts, presentations, audio-video files which makes them attractive to language teachers. Readers can subscribe to blogs and receive notifications every time a new post is available. Blogs are useful in teaching a foreign language as they develop reading, writing and communication skills. English teachers can create a blog for their classes where they can upload different materials or use it to:

- Offer online texts
- Offer additional materials such as audio or video files, pictures, charts, etc.
- Organize internet resources by providing students useful links
- Give instructions;
- Assign tasks;
- Encourage students to write
- Give feedback;
- Stimulate debates with students

- Encourage peer assessment and support
- Find other purposes and reasons for using blogs

Sentence exercises

Exercises with sentences are similar to fill-in the blank exercises but words that are to be deleted are selected by the computer (e.g. every 4th or 5th word). Such activities can be created extremely easy with the “Hot Potatoes” software. The preparation of an activity requires no more than a few minutes.

Text, essay, exercise correction

Texts submitted by students electronically should not be printed and corrected traditionally, i.e. in red pen. Results are better when teachers insert suggestions in the text using word processors or specialized programmes. An appropriate software for error correction and comments to the text can be found at <http://www.cict.co.uk/software/markin/index.htm>; A plus of the programme is that it can be adapted to different languages.

Crosswords

Crosswords are very popular among teenagers and they are a very good teaching resource when developed around the vocabulary students are familiar with. They can be used as wind down activities, or as homework. Such activities can be easily created by teachers with the help of “Hot Potatoes” software. Students can also create such activities for one another using the same software.

Drills

Drills are also known as “Drill and Kill”. A computer can do nowadays what language labs used to do before, namely activities of the following type “She has got a pen”, “No, she has got two pens”. The users` insertions can be either text or conversation using the computer`s microphone.

E-dictionaries

E-dictionaries are very useful for learners of less commonly taught languages. Via internet, learners can access such dictionaries which use either the shareware system or are free. Good dictionaries can be found at <http://www.dictionaries.com> or simply by searching a dictionary in google.

E-portfolios

An e-portfolio, also referred to as e-folio or digital portfolio can be a collection of papers and worksheets or for more skilled teachers and students even a web page where students display parts of their work. For educational purposes, portfolios are a personal collection of information describing a student`s achievements and progress. Portfolios have different aims like progress of learning, continuous development, proof of competences. The strong point of portfolios is that students become aware of their own learning

style and therefore select proper activities that would help them in the learning process. Portfolios are also a good assessment method.

Fill-in the blanks

Users work with a text, where words have been deleted based on certain criteria (new vocabulary, verb forms, prepositions, phrasal verbs, etc.). The user has to find the proper word to solve the exercise. Hot Potatoes is also a software that enables teachers to prepare such activities.

Find the answers

Students get a question or some tasks and they have to find the answers in documents, videos, audio files, on the internet or on CD-ROM, DVD etc. Answers can be handed in to teachers or presented to the whole class. A more elaborated version of this activity is the Webquest.

Jumbled sentences/paragraphs

This activity is more common with texts and learners have to arrange the story or the text in the correct order. Beginners receive only isolated sentences as it is easier for them to solve the task. Teachers can create the activity by using the "Hot Potatoes" software.

Grammar

Grammar exercises are available online on different webpages. However, I would suggest the use of VISL: <http://visl.hum.sdu.dk/visl/> VISL i.e. "Visual Interactive Syntax Learning" where students can solve grammar analysis exercises, games and questions and research on texts.

Apps and games

Many apps and games are available for learners. They are appreciated by students as they can be accessed on their mobile phones or tabs and have an attractive visual design. I will mention here only some of them like Duolingo (vocabulary and spelling, suitable as wind-down activity), EduBlogs (used for assessment and sharing students' knowledge), LearnZillion (suitable for introducing, reinforcing and advancing students' learning), Stack the States (revision activities), Wordle (for reading activities), Weebly (for building webpages as it is extremely easy to use), Subtext (reading and critical thinking), etc.

Research Methodology

The idea that ICT and computer-assisted lessons would suit students better than traditional classrooms seems true at least theoretically. But we wanted to see the students' opinion regarding computers and internet and their use in a foreign language classroom. Therefore, we designed a survey and applied it to a class of 25 students, aged between 16 and 17 from Adam Muller Guttenbrunn High School of Arad. All students answered all the questions included in the survey.

Certain significant conclusions can be drawn from the interpretation of the results of the survey.

First of all, 100% of the students enjoy watching TV and using their computer. The answer YES can be found on all questionnaires.

What draws particular attention is the number of hours that the students spend using their computers and watching TV. 50% of the respondents answered that they spend more than 5 hours per day, while 25% stated that they used their computers between 3 and 5 hours per day. The other 25% of the respondents chose other options which represent shorter time intervals; 2 thirds of these respondents were girls.

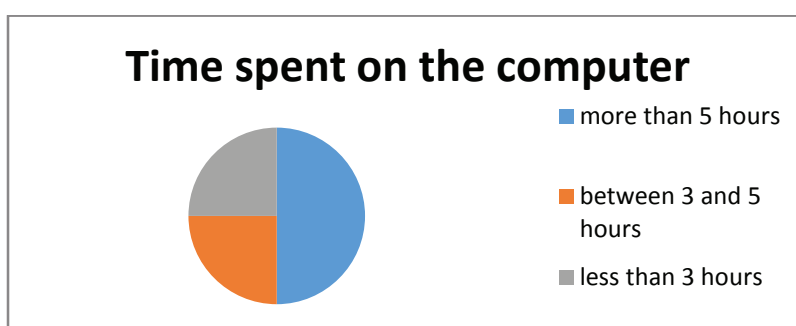


Chart no 1 Results of the survey on time spend using the computer

78% of the questionnaires revealed that the students' reasons for using computers and watching TV are to avoid getting bored and having fun. 15% of them said that they use them to research information, while 7% chose the relaxation option or others.

Moreover, when asked to state the reasons why they do not use their computers, 34% of the students mentioned their homework, 28% spending time with family or friends and 38% mentioned practicing other activities or being prevented from using them by their families (being grounded).

In terms of consequences of using ICT, students have mentioned the following: 5% insomnia, 10% isolation, 29% boredom, 22% addiction, 25% not being able to focus and 10% violence. These numbers lead us to understand that almost 40% of our young users do not know how to properly use their computers so as not to get bored or feel isolated. Being introduced to new web sites and games during the English class will give them new challenging preoccupations with positive consequences upon their behaviour and mental activity.

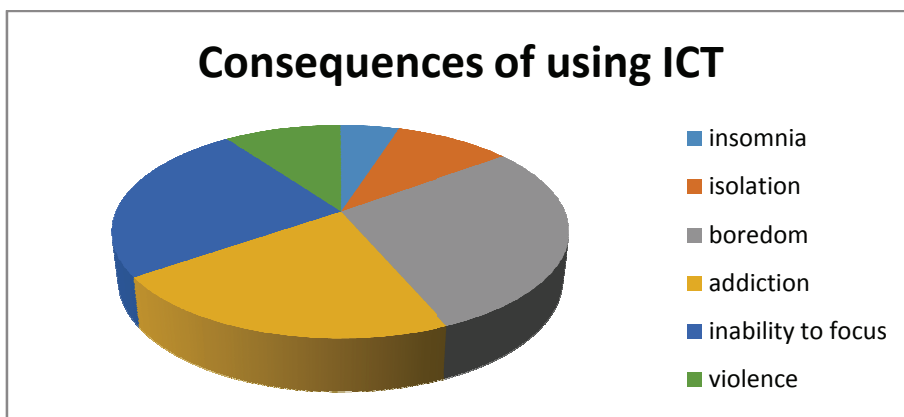


Chart no 2 Results of the survey on the consequences of using ICT

When students do not use their computers, they have very diverse other activities: 10% of them read, 22% listen to music, 20% ride their bikes or walk, 28% go out with their friends, 8% paint or draw and only 12% of them rest or do extra school work. This shows us that during their spare time, students prefer to get as far away as possible from any school related activities and enjoy themselves with their hobbies or with the sports they like. In terms of activities offered by the computer, students ranked the following activities as the most popular among their age group: chatting with friends 40%, 23% playing video games, 17% exploring web pages and searching for information, 12% downloading films or music and 8% doing school work.

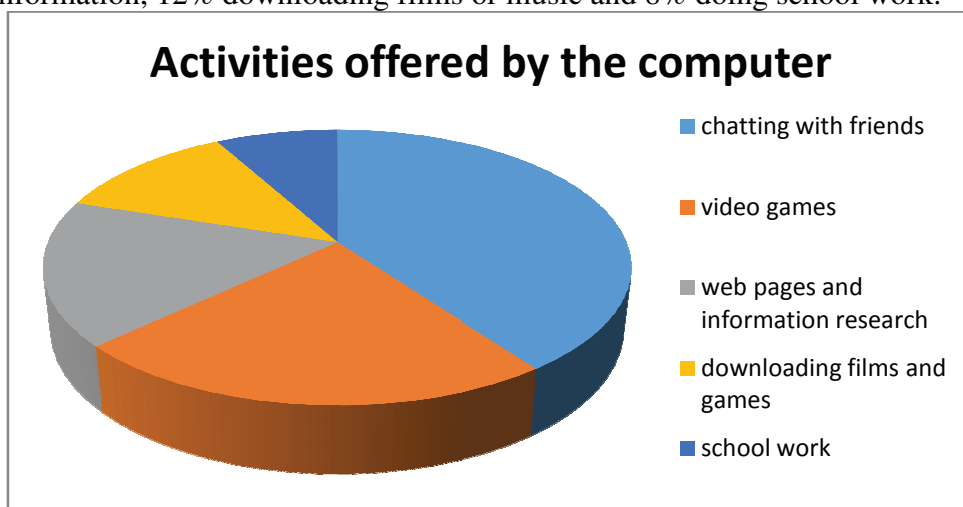


Chart no 3 Results of the survey on activities offered by the computer

As for the use of computers/TVs in doing homework, 27% of the students consider them to be very helpful, 37% normal, while 36% consider them of little or very little use. This convinces us yet again that 16 year-old students

do not yet know how to use computers to their benefit and which web sites to access in order to improve their school work.

In conclusion, this survey highlights the need of using ICT during English classes with the purpose of expanding the students` horizons and general knowledge of the world. Educative games, web sites and programs would give them more challenging activities which will prevent them from getting bored of feeling isolated.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, the results of the survey show us that teenagers are close to addiction when it comes to using computers and the internet but they do not know how to use them to their own benefit. Computers, ICT and CALL can be very attractive and can enhance learning when used properly. Thus, it is the teachers` responsibility to teach them when, how and how much time they should spend using the computer. The activities designed by skilled teachers should show them the benefits and the pleasure of learning a foreign language in a modern and technologized manner.

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online resources

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