

# EXPERIENCES FROM USING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES (ICTs) IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

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Much has been written and said about the use of new information and communication technologies when it comes to learning and teaching a new language, it has always been a challenge and a dream to find innovative but effective ways to learn English but what have the real outcomes been from those people that have decided to use the internet, the cell-phones, the educational apps or any specialized software, in order to achieve better results?

We are currently on the verge of a huge educational revolution that is somehow going to make the process of learning and teaching a different and promising one, in developing countries such as Colombia the ICTs are being implemented, used and tested, not widely as everyone would like to but I can say there are a lot of teachers who are pretty much constantly updated and aware of cutting edge technologies for learning and teaching, thanks to precisely the internet, I wouldn't say ICTs are tools every Colombian English teacher uses every day, we're still afraid of implementing new strategies, activities or resources. It's also a time consuming activity to get the hang of them, sometimes it seems we're afraid of experiencing new things in our classroom, and it is in fact risky, taking into account we can't always rely on computers, internet connection, installed software, pc availability, etc, meaning we always need a plan b, c, d and so on, just in case things don't go as planned. It's all about daring to try and foresee what could go wrong and what the real purposes of using new technologies are.

Technology is a magnet to teenagers, it's a bridge that connects automatically teachers and pupils, it really takes us out of our comfort zone but allows us to do things differently.

## LMS

### Learning Management Systems

Some ways we can start approaching technology is by giving a try at using learning management systems for high schools or higher education institutions that allow users to create, manage and share content and resources, examples of them are schoology, chamillo, edmodo, these cloud based platforms provide tools needed to manage any classroom or blended learning environment, they offer a lot of resources such as forums, chat rooms, multimedia test makers, assignments and attendance tracking, etc.

I've used some of them for over one and a half year now and I've seen their advantages and disadvantages, especially because they've been used with blended learning classes (face to face and virtual ones). Some people don't really take full advantage of these LMS (learning management systems) they're only used passively for distributing materials or resources such as .pdf, .ppt or .doc files. You can actually do everything a teacher can think of, check and follow attendance, create quizzes or tests, upload and use resources (videos, audios, texts, links, pictures, charts, etc), communicate with students, give listening, reading, writing and even speaking assignments, grade stuff, etc. These Learning Management Systems are similar to major networking sites

such as facebook which provide ease of use and basically offer efficient tools and resources for teacher to optimize instruction.

One of the downsides or less positive aspects of using these platforms, is that students can navigate away from the main educational focus and get distracted easily.

But what if internet access is limited, or there are no enough Pcs available, which is a common scenario, can we still make good use of technology?, definitely there's more than Pcs, video beams or internet access when it comes to using technology for learning.



One of teachers' most time consuming tasks is assessing and grading, even though they're not the same, grading generally evaluate individual students learning and performance, and now it can literally be done in seconds, I recently tested a cell phone app (zipgrade) which scans with your cell-phone camera and grades your papers right away, so forget about the days you would spend long hours grading tests and quizzes, just make sure you have previously checked the answer key before letting the app do the rest. I had never graded so many tests in such a short time. The good thing is that it doesn't only give you a score but it takes a picture of the student's name and provides a way to give feedback based on the answers that were wrong, the ones they had I hard time with, and some other features that will surely make grading more

enjoyable. So you no longer have to have Pcs in your classroom in order for students to take a standardized test, you can print and perhaps laminate them, give the students the answering sheets and grade them in the blink of an eye.

Another trendy technology that is being used by some enthusiastic teachers is quick response codes (Qr codes) for educational purposes, they can be created and printed easily and then scanned off-line with a free qr reader or scanner app and then converted into text, a link to a video or web site, an audio file, or maybe take you along a scavenger hunt or treasure hunt activity, etc., all in all, there are multiple things you could do after scanning the codes with a mobile device, if the issue is that not everyone has a smart phone, they can simply work in pairs or groups and explore or develop a series of innovative and encouraging activities, so having a phone in class is not a problem anymore, they can be taken advantage of for learning and teaching.

These were just a few examples of some new inspiring technologies that can easily be adopted by teachers that will surely promote the exploration of new tools and activities in our sometimes conservative and monotonous classroom environments. It all depends on how much we'd like to make learning and teaching more enjoyable and different in a world that is increasingly more demanding and challenging.

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