



ICT IN THE EFL TEACHING IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BOYACÁ: AN OVERVIEW TO THE WORLD

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Abstract

This paper presents a critical and theoretical reflection about the importance of the use of ICT in the classrooms in which the foreign language (English) is taught at the public schools of the Department of Boyacá, how its use can contribute significantly to the improvement of students' language performance and to provide knowledge and innovation to the teaching in the teachers ; also, how the government of the department of Boyacá can contribute to the progress of the use of ICT in foreign language teaching, implementing some actions. Thus, the Department of Boyacá can be a reference in the implementation of ICT, in the English language teaching in public schools.

Key Words: Boyacá, Foreign languages teaching, government, ICT, National Bilingualism Programme, Secretary of Education, schools, teachers, technology.

Resumen

Este artículo hace una reflexión crítica y teórica, acerca de la importancia del uso de las TIC en los salones de clase donde se enseña las lenguas extranjeras (Inglés) en las instituciones educativas públicas del Departamento de Boyacá, la manera cómo su uso puede aportar significativamente al mejoramiento del nivel de lengua de los estudiantes y brindar conocimiento e innovación a la enseñanza del mismo a los docentes ; también, cómo el gobierno del Departamento de Boyacá puede aportar al progreso en el uso de las TIC en la enseñanza de las lenguas extranjeras, con la ejecución de acciones en tal sentido. Así, posicionar a Boyacá como un departamento modelo en la implementación de las TIC, en la enseñanza de la lengua inglesa en los colegios oficiales.

Palabras clave: Boyacá, enseñanza de las

lenguas extranjeras, escuelas, gobierno, profesores, programa nacional de bilingüismo, secretaria de educación, tecnología, TIC.

Introduction

During my teaching experience, I have been able to study different theories and methods for teaching English language in the classroom and their application to in the students; at the same time, I have seen how the use of technological tools has permitted teachers to help in the improvement of English language teaching.

Through my studies in the language teaching master program at UPTC, I have read some articles and books in relation to the use of ICT in English language teaching; really, I could find as the use of the technology offers new perspectives for language teaching, through games, internet , video-conferencing, etc. Also, I awakened the interest to know which have been the actions that Department of Boyacá to implement ICT in official schools.

Thus, this article explores a general profile where the importance of ICT in language teaching is explained: advantages and disadvantages taking as reference different authors; secondly, the perspective on the use of ICT in language teaching in Colombia that illustrates as our country has designed some policies to improve the language teaching in schools. Finally, the vision as the Department of Boyacá is working to improve the use of ICT in English Language teaching in public schools.

Besides, it is evident the action of different governing parties in Boyacá, especially, the secretary of education, gearing towards giving the chance of implementing ICT in schools, training teachers and installing broadband internet connections in towns. Also, it is important to mention the aims of the current government in the Department of Boyacá (2012 - 2015) in relation to the implementation of ICT in foreign language teaching. To finish, stating the conclusions and pedagogical implications.

Importance of ict in english language teaching

Nowadays, the world is living many changes in some aspects: the advance of technology is unavoidable and its influence in the different contexts of society: education, health care, politics, science, arts, etc. In fact, there is a term that has made the world evolve: ICT (information and communication technologies). ICT has been explored in different contexts: articles, books, research projects, etc. Blurton (2002) defines ICT as a: "diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information." These technologies include: computers, the Internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television), and telephony.

Actually, these tools permit the society to have easy access to the information and

knowledge and to make the life of different people in their jobs and daily activities more comfortable. The education is implementing the use of ICT for the teaching and learning of different subjects. As Otto (2005) argues, the access to the internet is constantly increasing in schools. Around the world, many governments have designed plans for giving the necessary resources to provide the schools with technological tools and training for teachers to improve teaching using ICT.

Obviously, foreign language teaching is not indifferent to the world evolution in terms of the use of ICT, and some research studies and academic articles have shown the advantages of the use of ICT for improving the teaching and learning of English around the planet. Although, there are some disadvantages that will be analyzed in the article.

The use of ICT offers many advantages for teachers that wish to have an innovation in foreign language teaching. Houcine (2011) states some positive effects on foreign language teaching and learning: a possibility to adapt the teaching materials easily according to circumstances, learner's needs and response. Also, ICT allows people to react upon and to enable the use of recent/daily news; it offers access to authentic materials on the web.

Besides, Houcine (2011) continues arguing that a quick feedback is possible as well as the possibility to combine alternately skills (text and images, audio and video clips. Also, lectures become more interesting and less ordinary which boosts learners' engagement; and lastly, ICT enables to

focus on one specific aspect of the lesson (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, etc.

All the mentioned aspects are fundamental to obtain excellent results at the moment of applying ICT in language teaching. It is a group of elements that allow the interaction of teachers and learners to improve foreign language proficiency; in the Internet, we can find a lot of websites about teaching and learning English in which teachers have access to materials for organizing lessons and for learners to practice the language, and to have an immediate a feedback about their communicative skills.

In addition, ICT presents alternative tools such as: videos, audios, podcasts, and blogs, to make more interactive lessons in the classrooms. Also, other benefits such as: the practice of vocabulary and pronunciation interacting with different web sites, preparing international language tests and searching for opportunities to study outside the country.

Thus, Mullama (2009) explains how the ICT solutions can be used as a support for different classroom activities, group work and pair-work assignments; but also for independent work; for enforcing student-centered learning and the principles of individualization (different interests/ levels/ needs), and how web-based solutions support the acquisition of vocabulary; forming one's personal opinion, and being able to express it on topical issues.

So, teachers can design activities that give the chance to arrange a model where students can have an independent work in the house with the use of a desktop or a

laptop computer in which they practice tasks for improving their communicative skills, moreover, the work in the lab, teachers plan group work, the support of partners can help to strengthen the learning of students in a foreign language. Consequently, the people in charge of organizing the syllabus for foreign language teaching have some options to vary the projects at schools.

However, the use of ICT presents some difficulties for classroom use, Gómez (2008) states some disadvantages about the use of ICT in language teaching: “teachers with no training on this technology have no access to ELT using information and communication technologies”. Besides, the author states that: “Another shortcoming is that not every teacher is capable to update his/her knowledge on ICT when teaching English”.

Because it is not possible for some teachers to update their knowledge on technologies that they are not able to use, updating knowledge becomes nearly impossible in cases in which there is no sponsorship or money to set up training courses on ICT. In addition, Brown (1999) argues that students’ lack of Internet knowledge can be a serious impediment to develop an activity related to it. Especially, if there are some schools in the different regions that do not have the infrastructure to work with communicative tools (computers) that permit students to learn the use of the Internet to access the virtual tasks to practice English.

Perspective about the use of ict in english language teaching in Colombia

In 1994, Colombia made reforms to the

education with the establishment of The General Law of Education (law 115 of 1994). It established the mandatory teaching of foreign languages in the classrooms in article 23. The objective is to achieve that in the twenty-first century, a high percentage of Colombian people have access to knowledge in foreign languages as a condition to improve the process of building a more cohesive society, providing for more equitable cultural identities with a model of sustainable customized development.

Our country has developed some policies about the upgrade of foreign language teaching in the classrooms; the Ministry of Education has created the Bilingualism National Programme: “Colombia Bilingüe”, it is a project of the Ministry of Education that seeks to promote the quality of English teaching programs. The proposal is that students “learn what they need to learn, can apply and use throughout life.” In 2019, Colombia could be a bilingual country; one of the most important aims of the National Bilingualism Program is that in six years teachers reach a B2 level of competence in English and students in eleventh grade, a B1 level.

In 2006, the Curricular Standards were designed to explain the aspects that are necessary for teaching foreign languages, following the established levels in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages that are stated in the Bilingual National Plan. Thus, The Minister of Education Cecilia María Vélez in the Estándares Curriculares (2006) argues that English standards are a fundamental guidance for English teachers, managers and parents to be clear about communication skills. Be-

sides, those are expected to be developed in children of basic and intermediate levels to help them achieve the target set in the *Visión Colombia Document 2019*.

Furthermore, another objective is to enable teachers to access permanent training in language teaching methods for teaching English and use of materials and resources (TV, radio, videos, books), to facilitate the learning of English. Mike (1996) points out that as: “the commercial sector begins to assume a more prominent role in the Internet’s infrastructure, rural and inner-city schools, already hard-pressed to provide Internet access, may find it less affordable”.

Therefore, the access to ICT is necessary within the National Bilingualism Plan as a form to interact with the world. Teachers can make the decision of using it in the classroom context; *Estándares Curriculares (2006)* recommend to explore all the possibilities offered by today’s world, using the media, music and the Internet, among others, that are so close to the younger population.

ICT in english language teaching in the department of Boyacá

Particularly, in the Department of Boyacá, there are 347 schools, of which 266 are public schools and 81 private schools in 120 towns. It is necessary to clarify that Tunja, Duitama and Sogamoso have an independent administration in education; for this reason, the statistics could not be included. According to the Secretary of Education in the Department of Boyacá (2010), the students at schools were 214290.

Following the national policies, the Secretary of Education in Boyacá has designed some strategies to train the teachers in foreign language teaching and to improve their communicative skills; they have attended immersion activities in which they can practice the foreign language (English) full time, besides, several publishing companies are offering books in which English and ICT are integrated; although, some of them prepare conferences and workshops for training teachers in the use of these books.

The immersion plans are useful to improve the communicative skills in foreign language, its practice enriches teachers’ own experiences but I consider that it is necessary to strengthen the training in ICT, not only TV, videos, movies provide a variety for students’ learning, the use of new ways such as blogs, wiki, podcasts and Internet web sites offer other possibilities for teachers and students to improve the foreign language performance.

On January 24th, 2009, the governor of Boyacá proposed a “bilingual village” for the Department of Boyacá, during the foreign language teachers’ meeting in Paipa. The secretary of Education at the time stated that many people should travel to Boyacá to learning English; although, the English performance in Colombia is poor, the practice must be continuous and generate experiences since primary school to continue with the permanent improvement, as well. Also, the Minister of Education, Cecilia María Vélez, has stated that: “El fortalecimiento del inglés como lengua extranjera es esencial en los estudiantes colombianos, si podemos completar este procesos, podrán hablar dos lenguas, con la ayuda de la tecnología”.

Different activities have been developed to promote the use of ICT in education in the Department of Boyacá. On October 2011, Duitama organized the first educational blogs meeting, the conference showed progress on the next topics: the use of technological information as a methodology to develop students' knowledge in various areas, and information and knowledge innovation of Web 2.0 topics in schools. At the time, the Department of Boyacá has designed 68 educational blogs in the educational institutions run by the towns, making Boyacá one of the regions of the country with the greatest promotion of technologies, within and outside the institutions, as an educational tool¹.

Every four years, there are changes in the Colombian department governments, thus, the innovation in the policies for education is clear; the new governor of Boyacá, Juan Carlos Granados Becerra has proposed in his plan "Boyacá para el mundo", policies about the education and foreign language teaching in the educational context at the schools in the Department.

Granados (2011) argues that: "A través de los desarrollos tecnológicos actuales, se brindará la oportunidad a los estudiantes y educadores de complementar su formación académica mediante el acceso a redes de información global, en tiempo real y actual. La aprehensión de conocimientos específicos de acuerdo con las necesidades de la región optimiza los procesos educativos y enriquece a la comunidad, potenciando las capacidades individuales

de nuestros estudiantes. La enseñanza de una segunda lengua, se hace fundamental para afianzar los procesos de integración de las comunidades con el mundo, por ello se fortalecerán los centros de bilingüismo a partir de la primera infancia".

This new plan shows the chance for the different actors of the educational community to access the communication technologies as an important tool to improve education; each student must take advantage of these advances to open communication and new horizons for their personal and professional life. The governor Granados has been insistent on the fact that foreign language teaching is essential to opening-up the world.

So, it is necessary that each town in Boyacá has an optimum broadband network to achieve compliance with the proposed objectives, in addition, the Secretary of Education in the Department should be given not only the training of teachers in the use of ICT. Also, the schools must adequately furnish with needed technological resources to further develop an absolute innovation in the foreign languages teaching.

In January, 2012, the Minister of TIC in Colombia, Diego Molano, proposed the creation of an of ICT board in the Department of Boyacá and the connectivity among towns for promoting the improvement of virtual services. There were discussions on the quality of computers in the schools in the Department and the

¹ Las TIC sobresalieron en encuentro de blogs educativos, en Boyacá. Centro Virtual de Noticias de la Educación (2011), retrieved from: <http://www.mineducacion.gov.co/cvn/1665/w3-article-275458.html>

strengthening of the optical fiber and the broadband in the rural zones, as well².

However, there is apathy in some teachers to be trained in the use of ICT. Some of them show lack of interest in attending the training; first, there are some teachers that are about to retire from the educative labor and they are thinking of the retirement pension; also, others feel that the training is mandatory; if they do not attend the seminars, they can suffer serious consequences and punishments from control entities. Other teachers argue that it is difficult to use the computer and technological tools, they are uncomfortable with the use of technology in the classroom and they prefer to continue with the traditional methods for teaching foreign languages.

But, there are some of them that show real will to learn the use of ICT in the foreign language classrooms, they look for the advantages for its daily use and the benefits for their students, for example, to use the ICT to improve communicative skills in the students and to let them explore new cultures and worlds through the use of foreign language and technology.

Conclusions and pedagogical implications

Analyzing the general situation in the department of Boyacá, it must continue with the training and implementation of new technologies for promoting an innovation in

foreign language teaching, each day, the training can focus on the correct use of ICT in the classroom, however, some teachers need to be trained and motivated, Even if there is some apathy to work the lessons on foreign language with the technology.

Nevertheless, teachers have the opportunity to explore the ICT without the need to be obliged to attend the conferences and immersions; the use of ICT can enhance the EFL teaching. It is not only to watch some movies during lessons or to listen to music; it is having the real rapprochement to the use in class. Students can be comfortable with the different ways to teach English in class. Consequently, it could be beneficial to obtain results in the SABER 11 and other international tests. It takes into account all the possible resources to use them in the classrooms.

In Boyacá, the immersion plans for teachers have been carried out several times in the year, these can include the use of ICT and design within a short and long term, the total implementation of virtual lessons at the schools in the Department of Boyacá, creating websites, blogs, wikis, podcasts, video casts, etc. with the professional training directed by experts in the use of ICT in foreign language classrooms. In Colombia, there are PH.D that can offer the teachers and the Secretariat of Education in Boyacá, appropriate orientation for obtaining the goals to turn the Department into a model in the virtual teaching of foreign language.

² Creación de Consejo TIC para Boyacá, propone ministro Diego Molano Vega durante sesión de comisión sexta del senado. Ministerio de Tecnologías de la Información y las Comunicaciones de Colombia.(2012) retrieved from : <http://archivo.mintic.gov.co/mincom/faces/index.jsp?id=21225>

It will be interesting to motivate the teachers in the different schools in the department of Boyacá to do research about the use of ICT in foreign language lessons, a motivation for them is having the occasion to show their own production, and inform the progress to other colleagues in the national and international education events.

Taking as a reference the government period (2012-2015), the progress in the use of ICT in the teaching of English language will be definite; Boyacá has the great opportunity to be a model in the implementation of the new technologies in the improvement of English proficiency in the students and the upgrade of foreign language teaching. Teachers and university students of foreign languages have the occasion to follow the training in the use of ICT in the classroom, because the task is not only of governments or universities.

If the goal is to make Boyacá a potential place for foreign language teaching and learning, it is essential that teachers create the culture of technology in schools, especially, those who teach foreign languages, implementing the use of technology for designing materials in the daily activities, looking for the improvement of communicative skills, homework, workshops, projects, etc. Interacting with their students providing feedback on homework, chatting in a foreign language, solving questions about the use of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, or suggesting the use of web pages where they can practice the communicative skills in English language.

Also, school principals have the responsibility to generate the motivation in teachers and students to use ICT, however, they must search for the way to strengthen the technology in their schools, providing tools such as computers, video projectors, TVs, DVDs; although interacting with the town governments in the implementation of broadband and optical fiber that allow the real connection with the world and the cultures.

The government of Boyacá has the task to strengthen the programs that can take the ICT to the different towns, the way is not only to place computers in the schools, the optical fiber and broadband need to accomplish with international standards, so that people can enjoy the services and technologies. Thus, schools can plan the virtual activities and teachers have the tools for designing the lessons.

Consequently, the government of Boyacá needs to establish the agreements that give origin to the permanent update of broadband internet connections in the towns. If the secretary of ICT is created in the department, it must join the Secretary of Education in the responsibility to provide the sufficient tools for establishing the definitive teaching of foreign languages using ICT in public schools. But, it is not only words, speeches, or political promises. There needs to be concrete actions that must be carried out in reality.

In 2019, when Boyacá celebrates the 200th anniversary of the “Batalla de Boyacá”, the use of ICT must be a real support in the EFL teaching at the schools in the country. I

think that foreign language teachers in Boyacá can contribute to the implementation of technology by the creation of websites and other technological tools, the scientific production to show around the world and the devote effort of the governments in Boyacá to strengthen the foreign language teaching as a benefit for young people to offer them a passport to the world.

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