

Distance teaching/learning of foreign languages mediated by information and communication technology tools

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Abstract

The inclusion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) tools in the teaching of foreign languages support cultivating independent learning, promotes the creation of oral comprehension skills and the development of listening habits. This study reflects the perception of the use of online platforms as a tool of communication, not only of information, revealing a multitude of opportunities for teaching foreign languages, but also challenges that require an argumentation of their positive role in structured educational environments. This argument makes this study necessary in the field of didactics, not only from the point of view of the resizing and enrichment of the pedagogical framework for teaching foreign languages but also from the perspective of teaching, which will, very probably, not be the same as before. This type of education, which encourages the development of the intercultural competence of the learners, contributes to the global formation of their personality as a social being through the creation of a context where language and culture merge into an inseparable unit, given that the real or virtual teaching environment is the meeting point of at least two cultures: that of the student and the language in question.

Key words: virtual classroom, oral comprehension, competence, ICT tools, challenge

Introduction

Each segment of society is increasingly linked to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), and in the present situation of 100 % online education, we use them by updating the context, the educational perspective of teaching, and the new roles of the actors in the teacher/learner relationship. The pursuit of my research in didactics also coincides with the current global situation, trying to improve the teaching/learning conditions for the more effective and authentic acquisition of FLE. As university professors, we have successfully identified the difficulties and obstacles encountered during the learning of French by students since the first steps of their studies. Thus, we have discovered the most effective tools to improve the language skills supported by the NICT whose implementation in the context of teaching/learning languages is a challenge due to a lack of training in terms of mastery of computer skills and equipment that are essential in this process.

This study reflects the perception of the continuous process of rapid change in the social circumstances of human relationships, of the nature of communication in virtual environments with multiple interactions between individuals or social groups with different social, cultural, and linguistic identities mediated by NICT. For these reasons, today's learners are closely and inevitably linked to the new realities created by the technologies by which they study, work, and communicate. Thus, in these new circumstances, it is essential for teachers to determine priorities and to orient the teaching/learning process of foreign languages precisely towards autonomous teaching of skills with the learner at the center.

At a time when we had to switch to 100% online education, two platforms were offered to support this situation by the institution: Google Classroom and Cisco Webex but other TICE tools such as Zoom, Duo, Kahoot, Nearpod, Pear Deck, O-Matic, Snagit, EdPuzzle etc. have been used by teachers, effective means to create

their virtual classroom essential in this new reality of teaching, around the world.

The use of these platforms as a tool of communication, not only of information, reveals a multitude of opportunities for teaching foreign languages, but also challenges which require a precise supported perception of the role of technologies in structured educational environments.

In the course of my research and professional experiences, various online platforms, and educational tools were considered to have well-defined value by their use in the service of concrete educational objectives in the curriculum. The use of this wide range of tools or platforms materialized in this study is placed in the model of the real classroom by adapting it to a whole new reality. This argument makes this study in the field of contemporary didactics, enriching the pedagogical framework for teaching foreign languages and necessary from the perspective of teaching in general.

At this point, we must reflect on the reality of the pedagogical practice of teaching skills creation in a foreign language and the possibility of integrating ICT tools in this process. Concretely, we aim to examine the role and measure the effectiveness of the virtual classroom, supported by the aforementioned platforms, in the creation and development of students' skills in distance education compared to face-to-face teaching where the aim is entirely educational and methodological in the service of improving the quality of teaching foreign languages.

Thanks to this pedagogical project of the French as a Foreign Language (FFL) teaching course with students and future teachers of French, and by observing several indicators, we are trying to ascertain whether teaching in the virtual classroom as an autonomous, interactive environment, centered on the learner promotes the creation and development of oral comprehension competence comparable to the traditional classroom. This type of teaching encourages the development of the intercultural competence of the learners, contributing to the global formation of their personality as a social being through the creation of a context where language and culture merge into an inseparable unit.

Models to guide the teaching of foreign languages

In order to properly determine whether a tool can really help the linguistic development of a learner, language teachers should be aware of models developed by various researches and theories on the learning of foreign languages, among which we can mention two which are not entirely independent of each other: psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics.

The literature and recent pedagogical practices of teaching in general, and foreign languages in particular, tend to support the interactive sociolinguistic model, which emphasizes, above all, the social aspect of language and the discovery of linguistic barriers in the communication process orienting the teaching of foreign languages towards competence teaching. "The basic principle of the interactive approach is that the foreign language is learned better through social interaction." (Claros, 2008: 147). However, it should be noted that interaction, which plays a major role in concentrating the attention of learners during activities, does not immediately "achieve" language learning, which in fact would occur gradually, over time and as a result of many interactions.

Chomsky's ideas were adopted by Stephen Krashen to explain the process of learning a foreign language in the form of a model known as Natural Learning (Krashen, 1985: 172)

Unlike the Natural Model, the interactive perspective is based on an explicit teaching model that is not isolated within the cognitive activity of the

individual. This innovation marks a significant change in attitude towards the Internet in general, and ICT in particular, as irreplaceable tools to promote and develop this type of education. The interactionist point of view finds its reflection in a certain number of models with different bases for the elaboration of which the socio-cultural theory of Lev Vygotsky served. According to this model "cognitive development, that is to say, learning foreign languages has its origins in social interaction". (Vygotsky, 1978: 27) The foundations of this theory, through their contextualization in language teaching/learning, deepen our perception of the inclusion of the Internet and ICT in the teaching of foreign languages, tools that promote social interaction. For Vygotsky, cognitive activity has a unique human character, an assertion that is based on the fact that it results from social learning, the internalization of social signs, culture and social connections. In essence, the creation of skills must, therefore, be considered as a social product realized through interaction.

This theoretical perspective can be concretized by tools of the application of differentiated forms of teaching, project work, collaborative learning, etc., where ICT is playing an important role. In fact, the socio-cultural theory of learning foreign languages has served as the basis for the development of many pedagogical models, including the idea of social constructivism, widely supported by didactics scholars. "Social constructivism" (Nawaz, 2012: 7) in scientific, educational literature is defined as a contemporary approach, "one of the most commented and accepted directions of constructivist theory" (Musai, 2013: 16), which sees the learner at the center of teaching/learning.

According to this model, learning derives from a social aspect, where the learner interacts and dialogues with the problem, the context, and their peers to discover the content and the values. The process of interaction and the knowledge used is considered very important since the social aspect serves as a basis for the processing and subsequent organization of cognitive information within the individual by drawing a parallel with the traditional classroom as a language learning environment because the new language brings with it fragments of culture that cannot be separated from the information.

The teacher, as leader and facilitator of the process, establishes with the learners an uninterrupted mutual connection, in which everyone participates by adding value and meaning to communication and evaluating and organizing information mentally. Obviously, we are dealing with a typical learner-centered teaching context, where the emphasis is on the communicative nature and social interaction for the creation of skills and knowledge.

Contemporary foreign language teaching and requirements for the learning environment

When we learn a foreign language, we go through several stages in the development of language learning that cannot be circumvented, a condition that is also accepted by the theories that we have just analyzed. We are rightly wondering about the teacher's role in guiding and speeding up this process. Of course, teachers cannot change the language development course for learners of a foreign language, but they do have the power to influence their pace and the level of learning. Thus, the teacher can help accelerate the learning process under the new conditions, but to make it possible, he must build a complete individual perception of the virtual classroom as a new learning environment – rich, unlimited in time and space – which must be updated in collaboration with the students.

Such an environment is characterized by several characteristics (Powell, Kalina, 2009: 243), among which first of all great importance is placed on the increase in possibilities for students to listen, read and write as well as to participate in discussions on oral and written documents in a foreign language, as an essential practice for the development of learning. The widening of possibilities for creating, presenting ideas, and analyzing texts of different types, promotes the development of an understanding of the concept of content and familiarity with a wide range of authentic documents. Teachers' practices during analytical reading through the modeling of clear strategic directions in context, as well as the sufficient time is given for students to process and create information, contribute to increasing the quality of the skills expected for the acquisition of foreign languages, the development of critical thinking, and responsibility for individual needs.

The construction of learning activities focusing on productive, continuous use of the language is a strategic element without which other characteristics would be devalued. Student participation in teaching is the key to success in learning a foreign language, as opposed to passive learning. Interaction facilitates and accelerates language learning because in the discussion, in the effort to give meaning, students make changes to be "more accessible", in other words, more understandable for their interlocutors by including corrective comments in order to improve their linguistic performance.

Careful planning of the teacher's program and daily activities must be carried out while preserving and promoting the principles of the new framework of the virtual classroom as a rich learning environment that transcends time and space. Considering the objectives, the roles of the actors in this process, and especially the ICT resources available to support learning, the program should be able not only to plan and analyze the process in detail but also to anticipate difficult situations.

For this reason, it is necessary to have sufficient time for each activity, in particular for learning projects, which must initially be designed at an introductory pace prior to increasing the scale. Online work must be scheduled with sufficient time to create a particular space for opportunities, but also for the improvement of the teachers' and learners' ability to apply the resources of these platforms.

Teaching based on group work requires adequate coordination by the teacher; the choice of partners in the implementation of projects and creative tasks, considered as a complex commitment which only succeeds when we take into account the differences between learners in terms of language, culture, objectives, and interests. Encouraging interaction between students requires the design of a welcoming environment and structure where the teacher must think about the deadlines of activities and provide continuous advice without neglecting the evaluation process.

The planning of this process is not limited to the traditional writing of the daily plan – the other, apparently secondary, aspects require special attention to lay the foundations for a healthy environment that promotes success in learning a foreign language online.

Principles and strategies for the introduction of ICT in language teaching

Based on theories of teaching/learning foreign languages, it would be necessary to synthesize and analyze the principles which should guide online learning activities. The successful integration of the Internet and ICT in education is both an opportunity and a challenge, given the dynamics of their changes. However, it is believed that this process is clarified and simplified by taking into account certain principles related to pedagogical rather than technical aspects and are mainly linked to teaching models, learning objectives, and planning. After all, whatever the pace of learning, before thinking about organizing the whole online course or planning it, one

should determine the direction of teaching that is linked to strategies and general objectives, which normally vary from class to class and even among groups of learners in a class.

The use of ICT in language teaching by "complementing linguistic and educational objectives". (Ruph, 2010: 6) should be accompanied by some teaching strategies.

These strategies see the learner as an individual who takes responsibility for the learning process and helps them develop "their vision of the world and freedom in discussions, characteristics which will lead them to independent learning", (Little, 2017: 173) that is to say to develop the independent learning strategies necessary to adapt to technological innovations and new situations in society, and to obtain results whose value exceeds the limits of time and space of face-to-face interaction.

Collaborative learning considered in the literature and contemporary pedagogical practices as a necessary strategy to guarantee success in language learning, creating an active learning environment, improves the understanding of the content, promotes decision-making skills, increases learners' trust and responsibility, focusing on each individual's success by assessing various learning styles. (Borich, 2003: 167).

Intercultural training depends on the ability to interpret information from different cultural contexts and effective communication between people of different cultures. Thus, the process of learning a foreign language aims at the same time to master the culture of the country where the language is spoken, and this objective should be integrated into the teaching environment thanks to NTICE, cultivating among our students at the same time habits of global education.

Critical learning is of even greater importance, given a large amount of information available on the Internet. More than ever, critical learning means reading between the lines, and while implementing virtual classroom tools, the teacher must help learners to think critically by revealing the angle of view and the objectives of each site, considering the irreversible impact that ICT has on reshaping social, political, and economic contexts.

The targeted skills are not acquired by chance, but through an interactive learning environment, where the student examines the information, integrates the knowledge acquired, and develops creative alternatives through action and interaction in active learning and which is a necessary complement to critical learning. Despite the widespread use of ICT, if teachers choose to reduce work with learners simply to searching for information online and neglecting knowledge creation through interaction, they disrupt the learning process and devalue the use of technology.

Nowadays, there is more and more talk of a symbiotic relationship between teaching/learning and action in socio-cultural contexts, evaluating learning not as an "individual psychological" process, but as a "social phenomenon". (Remi, Compennolle, Williams, 2009: 17)

Project-based teaching is one of the most important strategies that requires new ways of organization. More precisely, its realization begins with the simplest tasks to gradually expand and deepen through more complex activities, such as oral presentations, but also online publications. It is seen as a model of activity that moves from isolated, teacher-centered teaching to interdisciplinary, learner-centered teaching integrated into real-world problems. Project-based teaching can be further improved through the use of ICT, by giving students the opportunity to use a variety of online tools and access authentic material. The student, through an active online commitment, has the possibility of using real, authentic French, allowing him to be involved in the learning process, to plan, to examine, and to think about it at the same time.

Differentiated teaching in a foreign language is a basic educational strategy based on the principle that learners are different and have different needs with the goal of ensuring everyone's needs are met. This type of education provides different variations of what learners need to learn, how they will learn, and how they will assess what they have learned. Thus, the essence of differentiated teaching is "to adapt the contents, the processes, the methods, and the materials, with the learning rhythms of different learners, to achieve the same goals and objectives". (Muka, Karaj, Çela, 2006: 26) The need for differentiated instruction derives from the diversity of learners: "you cannot find two identical learners progressing at the same speed, ready to learn at the same time, using the same techniques to study the language, with the same profile interests or motivations and the same goals". (Muka, Karaj, Çela, 2006: 9)

Through differentiated instruction, students guided by the teacher have an equal opportunity to participate in the learning process by understanding, actively interpreting, creating knowledge, exploring, experiencing, and discovering the linguistic and cultural universe of the target language.

Project-based teaching and differentiated teaching go hand in hand with another approach, that of learner-centered teaching, which is imbued with the principle that the learner learns best by acting himself. This extends to group collaboration in research activities and during its critical and creative thinking development techniques, which means that the course program in general and the students' projects, in particular, will be shaped according to their own needs and interests. This capacity to adapt to the program corresponds to the needs of the new information society, where people must be able to find and create various types of knowledge tailored to their needs, rather than simply applying what they learn at school. Teaching centered on the learner does not mean that the teacher is absent, that he is passive or insignificant, but that his role is reshaped as a guide for necessary advice and support in organizing projects and using language appropriate for the activities. The more ICT are devoted to teaching, the more the center of activity moves away from the teacher and towards the learner. ICT in the virtual classroom offers new opportunities for learner-centered teaching and "autonomous learning to discovery". (Gjokutaj, 2005: 32) Collaboration in small groups would be effective in promoting these principles. A series of research studies have shown that "when teachers are able to effect this change, Internet-mediated language teaching undoubtedly produces positive results." (Warschauer, Shetzer, Meloni, 2000: 88)

Students must simultaneously "immerse themselves" in the learning of linguistic and technological skills in order to acquire effective communication skills and achieve their final objective of learning a foreign language. As part of this difficult endeavor, the teacher provides the work structure and support necessary for students who must learn to use the ICT tools in parallel with the foreign language, a skill that is essential for this new online teaching environment.

ICTs offer students the opportunity to find the right information and the ability to communicate with a real audience. In these projects, students in groups have innumerable choices for tackling various problems of a global nature, exploring and reflecting on historical events, intercultural relations, art, sport, the media, etc. When working on a subject closely related to the real world, students have the opportunity not only to browse the network but also to create and imprint their reactions.

The new teaching context in the current initiatives to foster collaborative communication between students consists essentially of promoting the linguistic skills of reading, listening, speaking, writing, and intercultural competence. Many studies see it as a reality quite possible thanks to the implementation of a new dimension of tools, like the world of the Internet. (Erben, Ban, Castaneda, 2009: 81)

For ICTs to be used systematically, it is important for the teacher to know

the level of technological competence of the learners by assessing them from the start of the project. It goes without saying that the teacher cannot expect students to learn language, technology and content at the same time since the dynamic process of learning and developing skills will follow a progressive rhythm.

The qualitative development of linguistic and cultural skills is facilitated by the provision of authentic materials to students and the creation of original resources. We consider the resources of the Internet to be of great value, but we must create tasks and choose materials according to the level of learning, the interests, and the computer skills of the learners.

The technical difficulties linked to the use of ICT can become potential obstacles for the teacher and the learner. The management of distance learning environments should be taken into account by the teacher, starting with the planning stage.

The teacher should encourage students so that they do not feel lost in this ICT-based teaching environment, involve them and guide them to avoid unreliable websites, and cultivate in all of them a critical attitude towards new information by guiding them through media education.

Characteristics of the virtual classroom

“The virtual classroom is defined as bringing together by a videoconference system a group of people, generally a trainer and learners, who can see each other, share documents and displays, discuss by audio or chat, perform, alone or together, interactive activities.”¹

The virtual classroom requires the teacher to be very precise in the use of techniques suitable for lesson planning, to encourage collaborative online work, and to be able to offer them autonomous, ergonomic, synchronous or asynchronous learning. Digital libraries are also an aid in these conditions to help design activities, provide different authentic documents, and share with learners. In this process, help is offered by ICT tools which “radically changes the way of learning and the way of teaching.” (Navamuel, 2020: 1)

Assessment of distance learning to successfully transition to a new online teaching environment.

In all forms of education, the role of evaluation is quite important, both for improving strategies and for projecting into the future. Generally, in teaching, two approaches are used: by skill or by objectives, which are not clearly separated from each other and do not influence the quality of the process.

However, it is necessary to consider the limits that distance education can impose, in particular on the evaluation of objectives or skills to transmit constructive, reliable, and valid feedback. Distance education creates a situation of increased control of the learner, which requires improvements in assessment strategies on the part of the teacher. “Through an appropriate learner-centered distance education assessment practice, it is possible to recognize the learner as a major partner in the teaching/learning environment – something that may be too easily overlooked in face-to-face learning situations.” (Levine, 2019: 37)

We use evaluation methods at different stages of learning that correspond to evaluation:

- diagnostic (assessment of prerequisites)
- formative (during learning)

¹ Source : www.elearning-news.fr

- summative (check the degree of achievement at the end of the process)

Formative assessment and self-assessment aim to inform the teacher and the learner of the degree of skill development to assist the teaching/learning process, improve the level of learners' knowledge, and to develop various strategies for part of the teacher.

In order to verify if the objectives have been achieved, it is the summative evaluation as in the face-to-face, which can be divided between the middle and the end of the learning session.

Sample ICT Tools that support the virtual classroom

ICT Tools are easy to use and enriching through support to create video lessons to explain a concept, tutorials, recorded presentations etc.

a. *Aha Slides* is a platform that allows the creation of interactive multiple-choice questions (MCQ), offering the possibility of inserting a good dose of interactivity into presentations and online courses. It is simple to understand and implement and aims to arouse the interest of learners by complementing the slides with questions that the teacher wishes to ask during the lessons in the form of graphs or other formats ideal for validating understanding or learning.

b. *Bored or confused* offers students a simple and discreet way to comment or ask questions during a lesson. The students, once connected, will give insight into their state of mind-bored or confused tries to improve things by testing student follow-up and understanding.

c. *Snagit* offers a simple way to create and edit screenshots or record videos to show a complex process or provide detailed feedback. This software provides many export formats. For video, you can create files in MP4 format optimized for use on the Internet.

d. *EdPuzzle* allows online creation of tailor-made educational videos integrating video media into online courses. The platform enables you to retrieve any video presented on YouTube to create an interactive video, offer it to learners to survey, and measure their level of understanding. Above all, we can insert interactive quizzes at certain moments of the image presentation to involve the learners.





Video created by a student from the University of Tirana

e.Screencast-O-Matic is a tool that lets you edit videos once you've recorded them, add transitions to them, and keep them in different formats.

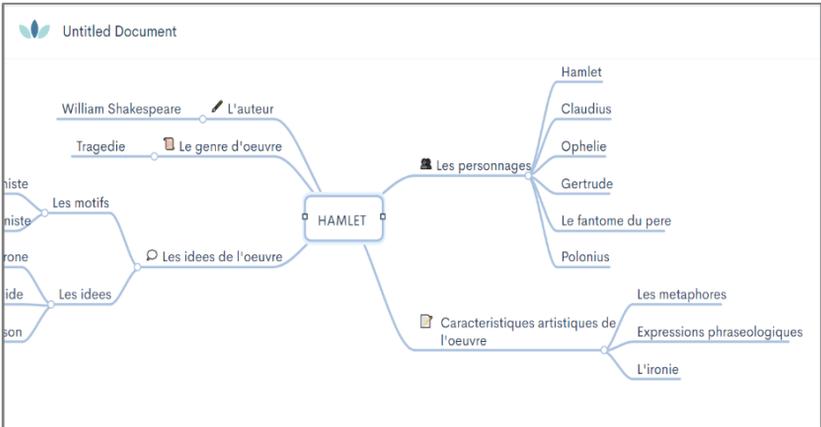


Figure 1: Mind map created by a student from the University of Tirana

Listening skills in teaching/learning foreign languages in the virtual classroom

Studies show that around “50% of communication time is spent listening.” (Gilman, Moody, 1984: 333) In fact, listening is one of the most important habits we acquire in life because it precedes the other skills.

Through listening, we are able to understand each other, enrich our lives, and receive important information about our experience. Listening is described as "a mental act that activates our being by allowing thought processes to handle

information". (Pearson, 2012: 16)

The foreign language teacher must sketch motivational documents as listening supports, according to the linguistic level of the learners, and "keep pace with technological development as a necessity for learning today". (Richards, 1993: 10)

Students need to be exposed to a variety of tasks and to different listening contexts to increase listening efficiency and interest in learning a foreign language. It is important that the task sets expectations based on the language skills of the learners.

The authenticity of the material is considered essential because authentic language and real-world tasks allow students to understand the links between learning activities and real-life communication goals. It is obvious that students delve deeper into the activity when the document they are dealing with is authentic, neither artificial nor specially designed for teaching use. "Systematic knowledge and the use of listening strategies are an important element in cultivating the habits of successful listening in a foreign language." (Brown, Lee, 2007: 397) ICTs create an ideal environment to promote communicative skills and the development of listening skills in a foreign language. They provide opportunities to explore creative forms, "to create an environment favorable to the real use of languages by motivating learners, promoting their interaction, promoting personal values, facilitating enriched learning experiences in collaboration". (Pennington, 1995: 716)

The inclusion of ICT tools in the teaching of foreign languages is a significant argument for their undeniable reforming role, cultivating the competence of oral comprehension, and assessing the level of development of the listening habit through autonomous learning.

Description of the experiment

ICT tools are an opportunity available to avoid the interruption of teaching by raising it to a new dimension, which exceeds the constraints of space and time and qualitatively developing the habit of listening in a foreign language. We will assess its development through the achievement of learning objectives for a period of three months based mainly on listening activities via online platforms.

Research focuses on the level of motivation, freedom, and diversity of choice of media for listening, learning autonomy, the authenticity of documents in different speech contexts. This is essential to learning progress by evaluating the attitude of the students and the tendency of their progress towards the achievement of tasks.

A range of methods proposed by the social sciences have been widely used: questionnaires, interviews, notes collected on the opinions of students, a vast contemporary educational literature for the construction of the pedagogical environment of the virtual classroom, as well as the use of methods and statistics to confirm the validity and veracity of the conclusions drawn.

Students are technically oriented in advance on how to participate and communicate via the offered online platforms. For each hour of online listening, activities appropriate to the level of the learners have been programmed, and each task performed has been continuously evaluated. From the analysis of learners' responses to subjective indicators such as confidence in the new teaching medium, the level of comfort, satisfaction, motivation, and the level of autonomy perceived during work, we have drawn important conclusions about the benefits of the virtual classroom. Students express their thoughts on the disadvantages or obstacles to online learning such as poor electronic skills, language difficulties, technical obstacles, lack of Internet signal, differences in style and pace of learning, noise, anxiety etc.

The material consists of a multitude of authentic documents from reliable websites, as well as numerous listening documents from a number of educational websites, which form a diverse framework of documents and subjects, starting from

real interviews, analyses, and syntheses, recent news from around the world, bringing a mosaic of interesting, complex and often unknown experiences.

The wide range of material offered for study: audio, video, sometimes accompanied by partial transcription, listening material dedicated to teaching/learning opens the way to self-assessment. More concretely, some of the most common types of activities are those of the MCQ type, to alternatives, by filling in the missing sentences through the supporting description, by defining terms and concepts according to the data in the document, by giving motivated answers to the questions asked, "true / false" choices, vocabulary exercises, creative work, literal reproduction of a certain segment of text, a summary of the material, comparison of points of view on two similar supports, etc. The completion of the tasks is followed by reflection activities and comments in the forum.

Each selected material is then developed and analyzed according to a more effective educational concept. Specific activities have been created for each listening material, with methodological guides to listening strategies designed in three stages: pre-listening, listening and post-listening activities.

In the first stage, the students receive the preliminary information necessary to plan what they will hear, asking them to observe in advance the title or the visual images of the video, to read carefully the orientation summary of the listening material given alongside, to study the questions on the activity file, the directions given by mail or on the Google Classroom platform. In the pre-listening stage, students are given introductory information on the subject that will be listened to. While listening to the material, learners are invited to take notes and answer various questions. For the post-listening phase, students are generally invited to express themselves and to give their thoughts on the subject in the group forum.

The nature of the design of the material created for the online platforms and the realization of the work in continuous cooperation with the students is based on the principles that guide listening towards a successful activity by overcoming the initial uncertainty in a complex virtual environment, towards self-confidence, which is then necessary to perform work as efficiently as possible in a familiar, stimulating and comfortable environment. For 39 hours, students from three groups worked mainly on online platforms: Cisco Webex and Google Classroom, supported by authentic documents and activities created specifically for learning activities.

The experiment is carried out in full coherence with educational standards for the evaluation of a certain number of measurable indicators such as: the progressive results of the students during the development of the habit of listening in the virtual environment, measured from several perspectives; the trend of student progression session by session in this environment, the evaluation of productions at the reflection stage, as well as an evaluation of two subjective factors of great pedagogical values: motivation and satisfaction felt by students in the online environment compared to a traditional class.

With regard to the ability of the virtual classroom to promote intercultural competence in foreign languages, research is based on the standards set by the two basic documents: the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and the Portfolio European of Languages (PEL). Thus, to analyze the performance of this dimension, the attitudes of students towards the development of different elements of the intercultural dimension are taken into account during the listening program focused on the aspects and characteristics of the characters' speech in authentic documents as well as the discussions of the participating students in the forum.

Research methodology and project structure

As part of the realization of this study, various qualitative and quantitative methods were used, the nature and scope of which was conditioned by the interdisciplinary profile of this study. On the one hand, the use of new tools to support the virtual classroom requires knowledge in the field of NICTs, while on the other hand, the creation of real teaching aids, with a view to studying the design and development of skills, requires rigorous didactic knowledge, deep mastery of academic skills, lexico-grammatical aspects of the French language, and interculturality.

This study focuses on the comparative methods of different indicators, objective and subjective, at various stages of the project in this new environment of online education, the results of which are based on data processing and statistical analysis in accordance with the context of research, ensuring reliability.

Roles and potential of online platforms to promote linguistic and intercultural skills:

In face-to-face or hybrid courses, we communicated using limited digital tools (email, forum, etc.). In the context of 100% online teaching, however, the interaction is fully publicized, hence the need to plan how and when the teacher will communicate in a "synchronous or active" and "asynchronous or proactive" manner with the learners, directly by videoconference or deferred in time by sending teaching materials through the platforms. "Communication problems do not lie in the means used, but rather in the way of using them in a particular context." (Papi, 2020: 1)

The methodological approach, the instruments, the participants, the procedures, the structure of the course on online platforms, the presentation of the objectives at the strategic stages of the session, and the data collected have demonstrated the level of effectiveness of the use of online platforms compared to traditional face-to-face environment and tools.

Reliable online resources have played multiple roles, providing not only a necessary framework, but above all a precious source of authentic and educational documents: online dictionaries of various types, magazines, and newspapers, as well as a range of audiovisual programs, used to build a listening program that would be developed in virtual environments.

Questionnaires and surveys carried out at the various stages of the project enabled the collection of quantitative and qualitative concrete data. The linguistic product by the students during the teaching activities: the grades, the homework, the comments on the activity files, and in the online forum, as well as their performance on the tests, at different stages, completed the framework of the study through which the experimentation became possible. In addition, a range of statistical calculations served as the basis necessary to demonstrate the effectiveness of the application of this study.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of the experiment is to adapt the courses and create online learning activities to promote the competence of oral comprehension. Thus, through the various pedagogical models, online teaching is prepared by communicating synchronously and asynchronously. The teacher should suggest activities and resources using educational files to consolidate the lexicon on subjects of interest to the learners with a view to developing linguistic and intercultural skills in parallel.

During the online courses, the teacher supervises the social interaction of the learners with the aim to orient them on the structures of asking and answering questions in French, as well as how to react to new information. Finally, distance

learning must be assessed after defining tools for online assessment in order to make effective correction online.

Resources/tools for the virtual classroom

ICT tools: online platforms; equipment: computers, tablets, smartphones connected to the Internet; activity file.

Reflection

Reflection is the last step to provide feedback through student feedback. During this stage, students are encouraged to promote oral and written skills on the subject treated in the materials and exercises.

Analysis of the results of the experiment on virtual teaching

This study, like other current research in didactics, attempts to analyze the trend of progress in the competence of oral comprehension and the level of satisfaction of the learners while learning a foreign language online using various ICT tools. In order to promote the competence of oral comprehension of FFL students in an autonomous online learning environment, we have developed up-to-date, authentic teaching materials appropriate to their level, needs and interests. Students' comments and observations demonstrate that the online environment offers them the freedom to express their thematic preferences and interests.

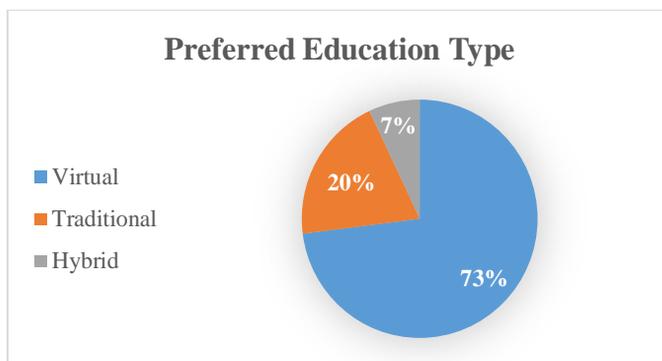


Figure 2: Results of a poll conducted with the students on their preferred education type

The design of the educational material included mechanisms, activities, and practices, was geared to facilitate the establishment of links between prior knowledge and the new information to be received, and is based on a set of principles necessary for the creation of a listening program in a virtual environment whose essential principle is interaction. The statistically processed data demonstrate the undeniable advantage of online education compared to traditional ones thanks to the continuous interaction of their actors.

The results were subjected to a detailed educational analysis in order to identify the tendency of the contribution of online platforms to achieve predetermined objectives related to the competence of oral comprehension. Students' assessments of the potential of online platforms for promoting oral comprehension skills and the integration and parallel development of other skills demonstrate the benefits of ICT

tools, as well as the positive spirit and great confidence in the new environment for learning a foreign language online.

Autonomy is one of the essential characteristics of the online environment, as students can practice listening to authentic documents at any time during their available time. Individual listening online helped them organize their learning before, during, and after the live listening activity by listening to them again if necessary, often using transcripts to confirm certain linguistic segments. All these elements have contributed to the creation of a stimulating and autonomous learning environment, increasing the responsibility of the students and truly transforming them into seekers of information and knowledge.

In order to measure the level of motivation and satisfaction of the students during the listening practice and to highlight certain concrete aspects of pleasure during learning using the ICT tools, they were polled in relation to various detailed indicators at the beginning and at the end of the experiment. Motivation and satisfaction were assessed at significantly high levels during the experience in online platforms, which further confirms the positive impact of ICT tools on the learning process.

Linguistic difficulties in online listening materials create barriers for a number of students. 47 % of the students affirmed the presence of the barriers, connecting them to problems of pronunciation, speed, but also to the frequency of unknown words and the length of authentic documents.

Statistical analysis of the survey results showed a significant improvement in the skills of oral comprehension, confirming the value of this study on the various opportunities to teach through online platforms in a 100% virtual environment. Students have adapted to a new environment with different individual tendencies.

To assess student performance during listening activities, we analyzed:

- the tendency of students to progress from task to task
- the nature or character of the students' responses during the reflection phase by measuring two indicators:
 - a) the level of student participation
 - b) the length of written responses

In this new environment, a considerable influence would have been exerted by the time of exposure of students to the material of the listening activity on online platforms. In addition to the exposure time, the nature of the virtual environment and the variety of materials it offers have influenced the improvement of their results.

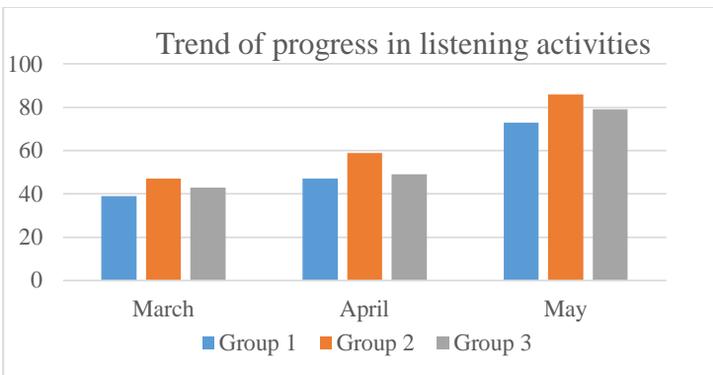


Figure 3: Results of students' performance in listening activities measure over time

The types of materials, both in form and in content, was much richer: the various real themes of current events engaged the sensitivity of the students, but also the format of their presentation in the form of videos, which provided them a complex context and in addition to the visual encounter with the speaker, better-oriented students towards listening, by offering them models that remain closer to real listening in everyday life.

Finally, students are invited to reflect and provide solutions to the problems encountered in the documents offered. The brainstorming activity consisted mainly of asking a summary question on the material heard and was primarily facilitated in the forum. This step takes on a new dimension, as discussions, debates, and suggestions are published in the forum so that they become accessible to all the students of the group where they interact in an asynchronous manner by leaving comments.

Through the comparison of various survey indicators, we notice active participation of the students, which means that this listening program aroused a lot of interest. The elements of cohesion, lexicon consistency, and grammatical domain of written productions, suggest improved efficacy of the ICT tools in this new teaching/learning environment online, as compared to the traditional environment.

Conclusions

The environment for teaching / learning foreign languages online through ICT tools like differentiated, learner-centered teaching has been shown to ensure a progressively positive process. Clearly, this new environment increases the level of responsibility and commitment of learners to present themselves as best as possible in the performance of tasks, very evident in writing and commenting posted in the group forum. The gradual improvement of the skills needed for this environment over time overcomes various difficulties when listening to documents in French, such as poor computer skills, linguistic difficulties of the text to listen to, technical obstacles, inconsistent style of learning, lack of internet signal, emotional insecurities during work etc.

Motivation and satisfaction during the listening sessions increased significantly in the presence of ICT tools. Students describe the given task as motivating, interesting, stimulating, and very useful for their training as well as affirming the pleasure of listening to interesting materials in authentic French. The use of additional links plays an essential role in improving the level of oral comprehension and promoting the expression skills of students. The students had very positive assessments of the way in which the sessions are organized through asynchronous virtual communication suitable for autonomous learning.

The qualitative work is done online, by providing reflective and varied written productions respects the guidelines for writing an essay. They are more qualitative online, thanks to the presence of virtual dictionaries and the use of additional links to find precise, authentic, and in-depth information in order to improve the students' written comprehension. The students' responses are consistent with a dynamic style, where the role of different sites is again reaffirmed in promoting students' listening skills and in promoting other linguistic and intercultural skills. It is valuable to underline that certain students, normally quiet in the traditional classroom, seemed almost "awakened" online – becoming consistently active, working hard, and displaying convincing progress.

In conclusion, the analysis of a series of objective and subjective elements, the results and the positive evaluation of the students on the effectiveness of this new environment, thanks to the various online platforms designed in accordance with the

teaching program, support an undeniable fact. that this type of education should be seen as an effective alternative for the future of education in general and foreign languages in particular.

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