

Using technological devices in the Chilean classroom to motivate young adult learners to learn English in UST Santiago: A case study

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Abstract

Technological devices are part of our daily life: we use our cell phones and our computers every day in order to talk with our friends, check our emails, to read newspapers, to give our opinion or just to write an essay that the English teacher asked. The use of it in the English classroom is not the exception. But, what is happening inside the English classroom in the Chilean context? Is technology used as a learning tool? Are students in Chile motivated to learn a foreign language? Are teachers aware of the advantages of using technology? The purpose of this research is to demonstrate how the use of technology in an English classroom in Chile can motivate Chilean adult students that belong to a particular career such as Psychology, Engineering, Physical Therapy, among others that are studying Basic English at Universidad Santo Tomás in Santiago as a mandatory subject. To state this, two questionnaires were answered by the students and some classes were observed. The results showed that learners have different learning styles among them but they do share some preferences. For example, students like to learn English doing different activities during the class, they prefer to work in groups, learn new information listening to lectures and new words by writing them and searching for its meaning immediately. The conclusion of this research project is that students see technological devices as a complement, but not as the main tool for learning English, helping to improve students' participation.

Keywords: technology, motivation, adults, learners, Chile, education, devices.

Here in Chile, the use of Information and Communication Technologies are included in the English Curriculum where the Ministry of Education of Chile stated that they are a great support to teach and learn a foreign language. In addition, it is known that the typical old-fashioned English class is built around a book and basic grammar worksheets without a real life context. For instance, students tend to check their cell phones during the English class because the use of the book becomes monotonous and they do not pay attention to the teacher who is writing grammar in front of the class. The idea of this research project is to try to improve teachers' tools and students' motivation through technological devices in order to catch students' attention and to make learning in the classroom a meaningful process. Cennamo, Ertmer and Ross (2010) stated that technologies

have been part of teaching and learning for centuries. As the types of technologies have changed over the years, so, too, has their importance to the teaching and learning process (p. 4).

One of the first contribution in this research is mixing the board with the new technological devices such as projectors and computers during the different activities through the development of the class. Secondly, to train teachers, i.e. to improve the correct use of technology in the English classroom. Another contribution is to make a real-time change in the national curriculum of Chile adapting world's innovations.

Educational Technology

Mayer (2009) stated that for hundred years, the major format for presenting instructional messages has been words – including lectures and books (p.6). However, it is important to have a variety of material and resources to teach effectively and to make our classes more meaningful for us and for the students. Spratt, Pulverness & Williams (2005) stated that is very important to avoid doing the same activities in the same order in different lessons because the teacher can vary the pace, interaction pattern, skill, level of difficulty content, mood, and finally, exciting or calming activities (p.98). For this reason, it is important to know that the human being has a particular way of learning. “People learn better from words and pictures than from words alone” (Mayer, 2009, p.4).

Multimedia

“Our definition of multimedia is simple – multimedia presentations consist of coordinated verbal and pictorial images” (Mayer, 2009, p.273). Technology can provide us with all the elements that the human brain needs in order to learn. The cognitive theory of multimedia learning can help us to understand the way the human brain processes the information. First, we have the multimedia presentation that deals with the input that humans receive such as advertisement, dialogues, songs, etc. Secondly, the sensory memory refers to where the information or multimedia presentation can enter to our minds (ears and eyes) and then to the brain where the working memory try to organize and manipulate the information. Finally, the long-term memory is in charge of process and understands all the information previously learned and acquired through time connecting it with the information that was recently added. Knowing this, we can say that technology, by means of different technological devices, can give us a wide range of opportunities to learn certain topics in the English classroom, connecting ideas and processing the new and old information.

Role of the Teacher

In reality, to have technology in our institutions does not mean that the learning would be a hundred percent successful. Lewis (2010) stated four profiles of teachers: 1) Newcomer never uses technology or feels threatened by technology; 2) Casual user uses technology in his/her daily life for writing emails or lesson plans; 3) Old schooler uses technology in the same way he/she uses other traditional tools (worksheets – handouts); 4) Innovator uses technology not only to support the learning but also transform it. In this special case, we can say that some learners are *digital natives*, that is to say someone who has grown up with digital technology (computers, the internet, mobile phones, MP3 players, etc). On the other hand, most of the teachers are *digital immigrant*: someone who adopted it as an adult (Lewis, 2010, p.12).

Motivation

According to McKay & Tom (2013) motivation, for adult learners, must come from within them and be based on their perception that what they are learning is of interest and of value to them (p.4). For this reason it is very important to promote a safe learning environment, and of course to motivate our students in the English classroom in order to make them feel that this subject is worth it for their careers.

For all the reasons above the research question for this research project is how can technology influence Chilean adult learners' motivation in an English class from a private university in Chile? Furthermore, the general objective of this research project is to demonstrate how the use of technology in an English classroom in Chile can motivate Chilean adult students.

Finally, this research can help institutions to implement and to set a completely new manner to work with technology in the different classes, to teach the foreign language in a real context and explain to our students with real situations where they can use English. All the elements above will help our students to be more motivated within the English class. It is essential that teachers in Chile learn how to implement technologies in the Chilean classroom; but most important is that learners can feel that they can learn a foreign language. It is not an easy task, but with the help of everyone, technology can be the change that Chilean classrooms need, the change that Education needs.

Methods

Participants

The subjects of this research study were young adult learners that were studying English at Santo Tomás University in Santiago, Chile. Specifically, the subjects were from different programs such as Law, Nursing, Agronomy, among others. The class was called *English Basic 2* and the only material that they used was a book called *Touchstone 1* and sometimes, the teacher used the whiteboard to explain some grammar without a real communicational purpose. There was a low participation of the students during the different activities: they were using their mobile phones during the classes to listen to music, to chat with friends, to search for words they did not know, to take pictures of the whiteboard, etc. Also, the classroom had a computer and a projector.

Procedure

The instruments that were chosen were: observation and two questionnaires. The questionnaires were anonymous and were applied to those students that through observation seemed were not paying attention to the English class. In the observation, the researcher set certain criteria in order to collect data related with the object of study. The observation lasted approximately ten weeks without telling students about this investigation. In the questionnaires the main idea was to obtain real answers from the participants and categorized them. Those instruments were sent to the participants through web pages specialized in online questionnaires. We made contact with the participants and we explain them that they had to be honest and did not feel any pressure to answer politely. There were six open questions in both questionnaires, written in Spanish because was students' mother tongue and they could have a wide range of vocabulary to answer the questions. The second questionnaire was taken from McKay & Tom (2013), and it was related with the learning styles that the learners had. After gathering all the information, through these three different data collection techniques we triangulated the results, so as to make

connections between the results and to get a final conclusion. The idea was to have a holistic view of the phenomenon and to obtain real characteristics.

Results

As a result we can state that students see technological devices as a complement of the class, but not as the main tool for learning English. Regarding the objectives, we can state that learners like different media presentations such as videos but as a complement of the English class, not as its medium to learn English. According to the answers, it is important to establish that learners do not want presentations with grammar on it but with more activities where they can participate. For this reason the role of the teacher is to be an innovator.

Observation

We based our observation on three main points:

1. The type of material that they used during the observations: The English book was used every class; the whiteboard to explain grammar and Power Point Presentations to teach grammatical structures with some complex examples. In the same line, students used their books to solve the exercises and their notebooks to rarely write some vocabulary or some grammatical structures.
2. Types of activities: To start the lesson asking students to open the book in a certain page. There was no warm up or recalling of previous knowledge; To ask some students to read the answer out loud and ask some questions in Spanish and relate some English expressions to some similar in Spanish.
3. Students' reaction during the classes: Finally, students were using their cell phones to chat with some friends, or listening to music without paying attention and/or participating in the class.

Questionnaires

A) Learning Styles: The number of students that are in the list of the course were 29, but 24 attended regularly to the class. For this questionnaire, 15 students participated. This questionnaire was analyzed in a quantitative manner, using graphics to establish students' preferences regarding learning styles to state if they like to learn through images, videos or audio, working with others, among others. This questionnaire was divided in 4 sections:

1. Learning Mode: specific learning styles. In this question, we can see that: a) The majority of the students (73%) like to learn through diverse activities, which means that they like to do different types of tasks during the lesson; b) Some students (20%) that like to learn through the visual and/or auditory activities; c) A minority of our students (7%) like to learn when feelings are involved; d) None of them like to start the class with rules or concrete ideas.
2. Working alone or with others: a) The majority of learners (47%) establish that they like to work in groups, b) Followed by 5 students (33%) that prefer work in pairs and finally, c) 20% of them like to work alone.
3. Learning New Information: the way learners like to learn new information: a) Students (53%) like to learn new information listening to lectures; b) Others (47%) like to learn talking with others; c) None of them like to learn new information reading.

4. Learning New Words: a) Students answered that they learn new words writing them but also looking up for the words immediately, b) Others (13% each) remember some words easily and others create a mental image when learning a new word.

B) Personal Opinions: The number of students that were in the list of the course were 29, but only 24 attended regularly to the class. For this questionnaire, 12 students participated. The questions were analyzed in a qualitative manner, i.e. grouping them taking into consideration all the similar answers given by the students. The categories were:

Category	Subcategory
<i>Do you like the English classes? Why? Whynot? (¿Te gustan las clases de Inglés? ¿Por qué te gustan? ¿Por qué no?)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive attitude towards the English class. • Negative attitude towards the English class.
<i>Do you like that the teacher explains the contents using only the whiteboard? (¿Te gusta que el profesor/a explique la materia utilizando sólo la pizarra?)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Negative attitude towards the use of the whiteboard adding new elements. • Positive attitude adding more elements to the use of the whiteboard.
<i>What do you think of the English book that you use? (¿Qué piensas del libro de inglés que ocupas en clases?)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive response of the use of the English book. • Positive response adding new elements.
<i>What would you like to add to the English class to make it more interesting for you? (¿Qué te gustaría agregar a la clase de inglés para hacerla más interesante para ti?)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addition of new elements to the English classroom. • No additional elements. • Addition of the Spanish language.
<i>How could computers and presentations help you in the English class? (¿Cómo podrían ayudarte el usar computadores y presentaciones en la clase de inglés?)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preference on lectures. • Communication and pronunciation. • Rules and exercises.
<i>What do you think about the use of visual presentations such as Power Point, videos and audios in the English class? (¿Qué piensas del uso de presentaciones visuales como Power Point, videos y audios en la clase de inglés?)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive response towards the use of technological devices. • Negative response towards the use of technological devices.

Then, the main concepts were grouped in order to have a clear vision of them.

Subcategories Theoretical Information

- Technology as a need in education in nowadays' world

- Benefits of multimedia learning
- Fulfilling different learning styles
- Characteristics of adult students
- Importance of connections among useful tasks for real life and tasks in the English classroom
- Teachers' role and teaching strategies
- Characteristics of a University
- Importance of motivation within the English classroom

Finally, both categories were crossed in order to have some final conclusions that could help us to arrive to the final conclusions.

Crossing Information: New Categories

- Motivated students with positive attitude towards the importance of the English class
- Motivated students unsatisfied with some aspects of the English class
- The importance of more devices to complement the use of the whiteboard
- Students' positive attitude towards the book but adding complements to it
- Adding different activities to motivate students to learn English
- Positive response towards the use of technological devices to improve the development of the English class
- Importance of the use of presentations and computers in the English class to complement it in general terms.

We can say that Mayer's theory of multimedia learning (2009) was confirmed because students knew that they learn better from words and pictures than from words alone (p.4). On the other hand, students established that technological devices were not essential elements to improve their motivation but they can complement their classes because they knew that if they participate more during the different activities using the book, they can improve their English. Moreover, the way teachers do their classes had a direct influence on learners' motivation, because as they stated, they like to participate. In consequence, the use of technology can help to the different learning styles during the English class because through the different images, videos, texts, can be more engaging and more meaningful for learners.

The principal limitation that we faced was the low participation of the subjects even though they were told in class about this project; they received a lot of information class by class and the instruments were sent to their personal e-mail accounts. In this specific context, adult learners do not see English as an important subject because they care much more about the subjects that are directly related with their programs. Also, they are used to have similar English instructions during their entire school life; they just want to learn what they have to learn for the test. Furthermore, the contents of the entire semester were already established, letting no space for the teacher to improve or to create new material, so it was difficult to arrange a specific date to do the interview out of the class because of the low commitment of the participants.

This study can be improved by doing some classes with the use of the technology and some classes without it in order to compare how the implementation of these tools can influence students' motivation and if they improved or not. Furthermore, this research would work better with high school students when they actually are looking for new experiences. Also, the questionnaires could have more specific questions addressing directly the opinions of the participants, asking for some

past experiences using some technological tools. Finally, this study could be more specific if the focus is on one device and see how it influences students' motivation or participation in the English classroom.

Conclusions

According to the research questions, we could state that students had different learning styles and technology could fit those, but also they said they like to learn through lectures and they liked the book. Chilean English teachers maybe know that technology is an important aspect, but they are not prepared for it. In this case, we can see that the teacher was an old schooler in Lewis's terms because the use of technology was in the same way as the whiteboard: to explain grammatical structures. If teachers have to use some technological resources, they need to have some training before doing it in order to use it in the correct way for learning. Technology could work to support the class, but what they need are more activities where they can use the language with a communicative purpose.

In consequence, how can technology influence Chilean adult learners' motivation in an English class from a private university in Chile? We can say that technology does not have a real influence in Chilean adult learners' motivation because they are used to a certain model of class, where presentations are used to teach grammar and to help them study for the test. Also, they liked the English book and how the different tasks were presented. They would only change the use that the teacher gives to the presentations adding more videos and audios to complement what they are doing.

Hence, the general objective of this research project was to demonstrate that the use of technology in an English classroom in Chile is needed to motivate Chilean adult students; we can say it was not achieved. With the collected data we cannot establish that technology is needed in this specific context because in none of our results we could demonstrate that students needed it. Learners' motivation can be influenced of the real intention in learning a foreign language, i.e. to learn English with a communicational purpose. We could see that learners wanted a different English classroom where they could actually use and practice the language. At this point, we can say that we need more information to state the real influence that technology can have in learners' motivation because teacher and students are not ready to change the rhythm and structure of the class. In this case would be important to collect more data to know students' reaction or improvement using different teaching methods with technology.

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