

The Social Benefits of E-learning in the Study of Foreign Languages in Romanian Education

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Abstract: Starting from the general definition that globalization is the process of interactions increased at the global level, and of a higher interdependence at the economical, social, technological, cultural, political, ecological, etc. levels, and sharing the idea that globalization also refers to the diminishing of distances through technology, language and cultural differences, or to solving some global problems, this work tries to discuss the influence of globalization upon intercultural manifestations, upon national and ethnical identities. The evolution of society, namely the Romanian society imposed specific changes in the school curricula, and also the short and long term strategies.

The focus is moving from traditional learning to the creative, innovative and active learning. The curriculum requires a flexible inter, multi and trans-disciplinary approach. The traditional teaching paradigm is changing to keep pace with the increase in non-traditional students and the changing workforce. As a result school in Romania, education at superior levels, high-schools, colleges and universities continue to add more distance education courses, education focusing more and more on e-learning.

Keywords: E-Learning, Teaching, Learning, Foreign Languages, ITC

1. Introduction

The new trends in education have focused on the potential for changing the teaching-learning paradigm, in practice, the technology, namely ITC, are more and more used in education to support the existing teaching and learning practice with new tools. These new practices have an impact on student achievement which is a matter of debate. The introduction and use of ITC in education can help promote and enable a real educational reform and ITC can be a useful tool to motivate and support learning and to promote greater efficiencies in educational systems and practices. The use of computer technology in education has a very strong impact on and use in teaching, learning and creative expression within the environment of pre-college education [1].

The term “knowledge society” and its variant “knowledge societies”, has been adopted in the beginning by UNESCO within its institutional policies. There has been a great deal of reflection on the issue, which strives to incorporate a more integral conception that is not only related to the economic dimension.[2]

The European vision of knowledge-based society could be that in a transformation where social, economic and technical systems become simultaneously reorganized. The Future of ITC and Learning in the Knowledge Society report concludes that ITC can play the role of catalyst for change in education and training in Europe, providing ITC change goes hand to hand with institutional and social change. [3]

In the context of socio-cultural changes due to the political and economical changes in Europe, the study in of foreign languages became imperiously necessary. Multiculturality implies the knowledge of several languages. In the context of European Community policies foreign languages are passports for a better life, for higher standards of living. English itself, especially American English, as a language might be considered a multicultural, mixed language to some degree taking into account the many foreign influences upon it. Nevertheless it was never a truly mixed language in the strict linguistic sense of the word; mixed languages

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arise from the cohabitation of speakers of different languages, who develop a hybrid tongue for basic communication.

2. E-learning in Romanian Education

The development of new technologies in communications leads to new approaches to the educational process. E-learning is a new concept that designates a specific way of distance learning training. E-learning is a term that designates a learning process that relies on the use of computers as source of information and access to knowledge. The term e-learning is synonymous with the E-learning, online education, online education, web education, distance learning, etc.

Distance learning physics involves the distant between teacher and pupil / student communication between them achieved by exchanging messages or electronic documents.

In distance education, a particularly important role is held by the technological factors which should ensure that the pupils / students, and communication between them and their teachers.

A professor in the education system can address simultaneously a large number of pupils / students, but can have a dialogue with each of them individually. Those who study in this way can benefit from knowledge and experience of renowned teachers that could not address directly. We can say that within distance education, the role of the human factor is the guidance.

This type of training is available to anyone regardless of age, or level of education and access to information through modern technology. The following courses in distance learning systems are able to gain information as to his skills and abilities according to their own pace of study, choosing his own place and time they are willing to study. Meanwhile, students can express their creativity by making interdisciplinary connections between the concepts presented, revealing new interpretations of data. The lack of this fellow or teacher can stimulate the timid. Multimedia presentation of information stimulates attention, their understanding and interpretation of data, leads to active assimilation of knowledge.

Current information from all over the world can be found at any time using the Internet. Economic factors should not be overlooked, pupils / students significantly reducing transport costs or accommodation. The educational system can have a negative effect on relationships, the creation of emotional ties, or in terms of integration in society, lack of face to face contact between students and peers or their teachers. The efficiency of this system of education depends largely by the desire of those who follow such training courses.

We appreciate that distance learning is an opportunity for those who wish to study, but for various reasons, such as those of material nature or lack of time cannot attend the full time similar.

Over 20 universities in Romania have implemented this method.

The rapid technological changes and the spread of the Internet pose no threat to the education, on the contrary they make a flexible and attractive learning tool, one more adapted to the requirements of the modern lifestyle and more suitable for the computer addicted generation.

E-learning facilitates learning and knowledge sharing, develop creativity, prepare the young for the future and bring together people from different places, with the most diverse experiences.

Teaching foreign languages through e-learning is a challenge and also became a modern part of teaching. This paper aims to present the benefits of online teaching modern languages both for teachers and students.

Due to the Internet's flexibility people are offered many resources but they also use the Internet for communication and collaboration. This paper aims to present some methods of teaching English with the help of the computer, as a possibility of personal development, and also to offer the student better chances for the future.

3. M-learning - a new version of e-learning

M-learning is the way to learning the tools of communication involving mobile wireless, which creates the premises of an area spreading messages of global planetary scale. Mobile telephony has evolved so much that now allows connection to computer making consistent data transfers. M-learning is a new educational

paradigm that creates an environment in which pupils or students access to course materials, instructions and applications anytime and anywhere.

For an efficient use of m-learning by both teachers and pupils / students must understand the nature of interpersonal relationships in place, the quality and consistency of interactions, in realizing the importance of communicative exchanges of information, knowledge, experiences, values and attitudes.

The new guidelines require rethinking of components or pedagogical principles, to give a particular approach to content, new ways of training the trainers, new educational policies designed at a time in society.

When speaking about on-line learning we need to take into account the advantages and the disadvantages of e-learning in the study of a foreign language.

Advantages:

- Student can study anywhere as long as there is access to a computer with internet connection;
- They can work at own pace;
- User can accommodate different learning styles through different activities;
- Flexibility to join discussions any hour of the day;
- E-learning is cost effective.

E-learning also offers individualized instruction, which print media, cannot provide, and instructor-led courses allow clumsily and at great cost. In conjunction with assessing needs, e-learning can target specific needs. And by using learning style tests, e-learning can locate and target individual learning preferences. (convenience, cost, time) and the disadvantages (fixed courses, personal contact, reliability) of it.

Disadvantages:

- Lack of personal community and connection (not for blended learning);
- Its a banking model of education (which is partially inevitable);
- Not necessary based on the best science regarding How People Learn;
- Tech, toys, and teaching over learning;
- Focus on memorization over learning core competencies;
- Better aligning of incentives of teachers and learners;
- Downtime plus mobile as well as “play” are issues to consider as well;
- Underutilized talents and facilities;
- No way to ground social networking and web 2.0 tools;

4. Foreign languages and ITC

Taking as motto Heraclitus’s adage “The only constant force in the universe is change”[4], people should use their utmost ability, adaptation, to cope with this change. If some years ago computers were the concomitant of science-fiction movies like Star Trek, in reality, computers were rather primitive and scarce. They were used only for basic operations, and there were few people who could use them. Regarding the Internet, it was a means of communication mainly for scientists, who wanted to exchange and share information with one another. We can say that this situation has known a “boom”, an incredible development and expansion in the last twenty years. Today, this technology has become available to a lot of people, and there is almost no school that doesn’t have computers and Internet connection. One can easily find on the Internet whatever reading material he/she needs, being able to access, read, buy or download all this knowledge. Younger generations, that have grown up together with this technology, find it more easily to use it than their parents, for whom, at least at first, using a computer was rather, if not very difficult to use a computer.

The educational system has traditionally been conservative, the introduction of computers signifies a great deal of work for teachers and produces a brusque change in relations between pupils and teachers and perhaps for this reason many teachers are doubtful about the introduction of computers in the classroom. Many teachers feel threatened by the change in their role and the need to develop a new mind set in which the teacher is not the main source of information so that treatment of teachers’ attitudes becomes a key factor

in in-service training. With many of the innovative projects proposed teachers have begun with great enthusiasm only to become disillusioned once the project is in motion.

Teachers give positive responses to those items which are socially acceptable such as the advantages of ICT over traditional methods their motivating effect or the non complexity of use even though their answers are at variance with their personal beliefs about teaching which are reflected in questions apparently not related to the use of computers. For example, many of them believe “the use of computers presents advantages compared to traditional methods” (this has to be the socially acceptable answer since we have seen that the majority of teachers have no experience of using computers in the classroom, definitely a reaction based on hearsay rather than evidence). [5]

In secondary education, many teachers believe that the use of computers motivates students only as an initial novelty, and as they become used to them, motivation diminishes. They claim that ICT helps them control the problems of discipline in the classroom, due to the fact that students feel more motivated to work with a new instrument, and are therefore more settled; but at the same time it is more difficult to get them to concentrate on the language tasks, since they tend to open applications dedicated to games and leisure such as playing computer games, checking their emails or chatting. The overall feeling is that the use of ICT has not improved the performance of the students in learning English.

Normalization has been achieved at an administrative level, but the main problem is that the use of ICT has not been normalized in the teaching of foreign languages, above all because the teachers do not have the training necessary to be able to integrate it into their classes.

The literature on attitudes is abundant in sociolinguistics but scarcer in the specific area of teachers' attitudes towards learning and teaching. In recent years, however, there have been an ever increasing number of studies into the possible reasons for the lack of impact of ICT in improving educational results [6], the different aspects which could be influential such as self efficiency of teacher's own computer skills [7] or the part emotions play in accepting computers [8] as well as numerous studies on the problems facing the introduction and use of computers in the classroom especially from the point of view of differing expectations and attitudes between students and teachers [9] Finally several studies have emerged which establish teachers attitudes as the probable basic cause of the wide distance between expectations and results.[10][11]

Attitudes are notoriously difficult to define and pin down. As [12] claimed attitudes are characterized by an embarrassing degree of ambiguity and confusion which are difficult to pinpoint as they cannot be directly observed but rather need to be inferred through beliefs conduct and feelings expressed. In other words “attitudes are hypothetical constructs. Their existence cannot be seen or measured directly, we are only aware of people's attitudes through their behavior” [13]

In foreign language learning there are many specific features to which experts that develop educational content and e-learning modalities must adhere. E-learning is facilitated by the use of digital tools and content. Typically, it involves some form of interactivity, which may include online interaction between the learners and their teacher or peers. The selection of proper multimedia technologies in foreign language learning is very important issue. It should be possible to achieve the necessary quality of teaching materials for mastering reading skills, listening comprehension, writing and communication skills.

5. Conclusion

Nowadays the Internet and the ITC technologies have become every-day tools for everyone who has a computer at home and a subscription with an Internet provider. Things that would have been impossible some twenty years ago are commonalities today. While the average user exploits the advantages of the new trends in education, however they see fit, in a formal environment, that is school, the teacher will teach the students to benefit as much as possible from the using of the Internet, improve education by offering the students the opportunity of e-learning. The teacher becomes a guide that will show the children the correct way of extracting, selecting and using the information available on the Internet.

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