Chapter 5
Improving Teachers' Digital Competence to Bridge the Language Gap

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to examine the digital skills that foreign language teachers must have in our global interconnected society and the ways in which they can acquire them. Pedagogical and digital innovation has been traveling along the same lines for some time. In recent years, however, in all fields of education—and more specifically in the didactic of foreign languages—several methods and techniques that increase the use of digital technology have been developed. Consequently, all teachers must keep up with the times. In this light, the objective of this chapter is to reflect on the pedagogical scenario that the digital age has set up, as well as on the ideal portrait that teachers must have. Then, the authors will focus on the specific digital skills that teachers who want to "flip" their teaching process should have: What are the basic knowledge and skills that a teacher must master if they wish to rethink their practices and embark on a flipped classroom approach?

INTRODUCTION

A revolution occurred in the field of education when, as early as the 1970s, computers and then Internet appeared in our daily lives, and they both had a somewhat explosive impact in almost all areas. As education is no exception, teachers have been called upon to update themselves for more than 40 years with regard to the development of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). Since these instruments are constantly evolving, the rate at which this update must to be done is quite high. In this chapter, the authors want to emphasize that it is a question of developing technological skills with a didactic but also ethical (what effects the actions of teachers and students carried out in a digital environment do actually produce?) and epistemological (are users able to recognize the values of the tools or equipment used, and also to control their reliability?) reflection (Linard, 2003; Puren, 2004).

The current era sees an almost universal use of the Internet and an unprecedented global connectivity through tools such as computers, tablets and smartphones. In the world of teaching and learning, this has opened the door to enormous opportunities that, nevertheless, conceal some application difficulties: teachers must be able to adapt themselves to new developments related to ICT, and they must have access to the necessary tools to see the didactic assets hidden behind these developments. New technologies have the potential to support education throughout the curriculum and provide both teachers and students with opportunities for effective communication in a way that has never been possible before.

Therefore, the digital issue cannot be ignored and is always a priority. Considering this, the authors frame the discussion along three axes: 1) Promotion of digital technology: how innovation in Information and Communication Technologies are spreading and how teachers relate to new technologies; 2) Digital Didactics of Foreign Languages: what skills should foreign language teachers have?; are they sufficiently aware of online resources so that they can be integrated effectively into foreign language teaching?; what place do technologies occupy in the field of foreign language didactics?; 3) New approaches: the Flipped Classroom. Finally, the authors will propose an idea of training accessible to foreign language teachers who want to follow pedagogical and didactic developments, and integrate ICT into their practices.

Background

The digital tsunami is irreversible in our daily lives and it is on this basis that education policies of recent years is based. In 2006, the European Commission issued a Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, in which ICT are associated with a broader competence, namely "digital competence". This competence is defined as "the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet" (European Union, 2006, p. L 394/15). In this light, it should be recalled that the fourth key competence (Digital competence: the safe and critical use of information and communication technologies at work, in leisure and in communication) is an integral part of lifelong learning strategies and is constantly redefined in response to rapid technological developments (European Union, 2006).

Education connected to ICT literacy has become since then into a key focus of attention at the European level. More than ten years later, and considering that technologies are no longer 'new', their use is being integrated in pedagogy and education – slowly but firmly. Beyond the general skills detailed above, the authors will focus their attention on the specific skills of teachers, which must therefore be

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