The 3rd Online Conference on Research into Using Technology for Language Learning was held on 4 October 2018. This annual event, organised by the Laureate-Cambridge Online Language Learning Research Network (OLLReN) in association with the IATEFL LTSIG, gives both experienced and early-career researchers from around the world a place to share their work into the impact of technology to support language learning. The interactive format allows for both presentation and discussion of research and its implications. On the day, the conference was attended by presenters and delegates from over 30 countries, all around the world. This book contains short summaries of each of the sessions in the 2018 conference. Moving forward from last year’s efforts we have widened our scope to areas such as discourse analysis, translation studies and online teacher education. The varied nature of the talks were all underpinned by a shared interest in the effective exploitation of technology in a purposeful and meaningful way conducive with learning. We run this conference annually, so if some of these talks inspire you, think about submitting for next year’s conference.

The OLLReN management board would like to thank the IATEFL Learning Technologies SIG (LTSIG) for their valuable help in supporting and running the conference.

We would also like to thank all the presenters and attendees for their excellent contributions to this year’s event.

For more information about OLLReN, visit  http://ollren.org
For more information about the LTSIG, visit  https://ltsig.iatefl.org
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What research needs to tell us about online language teacher education (OLTE)
Dr. Denise Murray & Dr. MaryAnn Christison
Natural Language Processing Technologies (NLPTs) are making the headlines of newspapers and the timelines and feeds of Twitter and Facebook as their potential to manipulate and “understand” natural language is massive. Alexa, Siri, Bixby... are now part of our everyday conversations.

These so called personal or virtual assistants seek to fulfill the promise that human interaction with machines and systems can make use of natural language processing technologies smoothly.

Despite the fact that there exist some promising commercial solutions such as Cambridge Write & Improve, the use of NLPTs as Open Educational Resources (OERs) in the context of language education is in its infancy. The rationale behind our research is to promote the use of language learning approaches that combine automated processing of learner language, aka input, and the use of learners’ meta-learning skills. We are inspired by research in Data-driven learning, corpus linguistics (Pérez-Paredes, 2010; Boulton & Cobb, 2017) and corpus-driven language awareness (Aguado et al., 2012).

This research discusses the findings in Pérez-Paredes et al. (2018), where the authors examined the language teachers’ use of NLPTs and mobile assisted language learning (MALL) in the context of language learning in Europe. In particular, we consider here the results of an online survey completed by language teachers (n=230) both in Spain and the UK in 2015. The technologies included in the questionnaire were selected so as to cover as many available types of tools as possible, addressing a variety of skills, such as vocabulary acquisition (online dictionaries, Wordnet), vocabulary profiling tools, writing (spell checkers), reading (readability indexes) and general language awareness tools (Parts-of-Speech taggers). Most of the language teachers surveyed worked either in a Higher Education (HE) institution (37%) or in a secondary school (37%)

Our language teachers thought that their institutions were not actively promoting MALL (72%) and that teachers themselves very rarely used MALL either daily or weekly. Computer rooms or labs are still widely used, particularly in Spain, while web 2.0 and VLEs emerge as the main web services used by language teachers in both countries. Significant differences are found between UK and teachers in Spain in terms of the use of tablets but use of smartphones for language teaching remains very low.

These figures may contribute to explain why MALL in HE and secondary schools is not widespread yet. The survey results show that, other than online dictionaries, collocation dictionaries and spell checkers, most NLPT-related resources appear to be generally underused by the teachers surveyed. It is interesting that we couldn’t find a correlation between training or type of institution and the use of language processing technologies. However, we found that PhD and MA language teachers were, at least, more familiar with corpus-related tools. The findings of this research lend evidence to the need for further teacher training and awareness in this area of language education in combination with MALL. We believe that NLPTs could become powerful tools for language learning as they promote individual, personalized learning and awareness of language use and its lexicogrammatical nature. However, judging from these results, their potential remains unknown to language teachers.


TELL-OP website: www.tellop.eu
ENHANCING STORY TELLING AND READING SKILLS AMONG STUDENTS USING TECHNOLOGY

Dr. Vanita Chopra

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Storytelling is indeed an age-old tradition, the benefits of which are well known since time immemorial. Yet, there is a need for advances in digital and print technologies to find reverberations in the art of storytelling to save the teacher from the sheer drain of time and grind and ensure efficiency. Meaningful technology integration is defined as curricula utilizing authentic tasks that intentionally and actively help learners to construct their own meanings from thinking about experiences (Jonassen et al. 1999). Technology Integration is defined not by the amount or type of technology used, but by how and why it is used (Earle, 2002). Meaningful integration of technology is achieved when students can select technology tools to help them obtain information in a timely manner, analyse and synthesize the information and present it professionally (Harris 2005). However, harnessing the power of the integration of technology requires not only a new or advanced technology, but also a systematic way of utilizing the technology to improve student learning (Schofield, 1995).

This exploratory research aims to explore the following questions: Which applications seem to facilitate meaningful technology integration in storytelling? To what extent can use of technology help in enhancing storytelling and story reading skills among students? How can we investigate this?

The sample size consisted of 50 students of grades V and VI of a government school in Delhi, India for a period of 6 months. The students were immersed in digital and print media which included the use of innovative software like graphic organizers, Wordle and applications like Story Maker. Reading corners and word walls made use of print technologies including environmental Print that worked as effective interventions to encourage the students towards reading. The study made use of purposive sampling and tools of observation, informal interaction with the students and maintaining student portfolios.

The findings showed a remarkable improvement in the students’ perceptions and interests regarding stories. Students who initially felt inhibited and apprehensive by the name of ‘stories’ engaged in what Neuman (1999) calls a ‘Chain Reaction’ wherein they wanted to tell, retell and recommend stories to one another and became efficient readers. Digital narrations and creation of stories not only helped students gain confidence in storytelling, it gave them a sense of ownership when they mentioned their name as author. It broadened the scope of collaborative learning when 2 or more students developed a story together. Their digital portfolios helped both the teacher and them to track their progress.

The study is delimited to storytelling and a rather minuscule yet consequential sample, yet it aims to kindle further research that opens avenues to incorporate technology in all domains of language.

REFERENCES


The TOPDI pilot

The British Council's Teacher's Online Professional Development Project India (TOPDI) was a pilot to offer its 'myEnglish' online English language course (a six-week course blending self-access activities with live online classes) to 571 state school teachers pan-India. The pilot tracked on-course engagement and course outcomes, using pass rates, participants' self-ratings and feedback. The aim was to identify success factors and barriers to learning outcomes and participation in online courses, and whether this model was a viable, scalable solution for similar training courses in a low-resource context.

Pilot Outcomes

Access and completion rates were notably high for an online course. Course participation rates were consistent throughout and correlated with pass rates, suggesting that those who embarked on the course also successfully completed it. Self-ratings of language ability rose significantly from pre-course to post course. Interestingly, the increase in self-rating of participants' confidence, IT and broad professional skills was as significant as the reported impact on their English communication skills.

Success Factors

The course design maximises communicative opportunities in-class and via forum tasks. As Anderson (2004) notes, “interaction has long been a defining and critical component of the educational process and context”. Communicative activities promoted language personalisation and feedback from teachers and peers and these opportunities for personal interaction on the course were widely regarded by learners as motivators for course completion.

Teachers and advisors sent weekly reminders and progress updates and were available for help via email and a 'help forum'. The teachers' role was reported as a crucial dimension of the course. Their performance was highly rated and had a reported positive impact in the participants' understanding and execution of their own teaching work, including setting up communication practice and giving feedback.

Barriers to Completion

The main obstacles to this BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) model were access to devices and to reliable Internet connection. Participants were often not equipped with the hardware or skills needed. Feedback showed that successful course participants found workarounds to resolve challenges, often seeking advice from each other; thus individual's confidence in using IT was positively impacted by the end of the course. Course timing was also a barrier, with participants having to attend to other work commitments.

Implications for scalability

A course offering varied opportunities for interaction and support motivated good attendance and completion. The Internet Society notes “the rapid pace of change in technology...means that past experience is not always a good indicator for the future” - it is hoped that progress in IT skills and infrastructure will remove obstacles of accessibility over time. An online course that can achieve such positive learning outcomes and regular participation is a workable, scalable model for developing participants' skills in a low-resource context.

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Translators training that is part of higher education programmes still depends heavily on the traditional, teacher-centred methods despite the fact that translation is intrinsically a collaborative activity (Cordingley & Frigan Manning, 2017). Due to different curricula requirements as well as assessment methods, students' final work is marked individually, which affects their willingness to collaborate. Formal educational context puts more emphasis on the development of specific language skills and translator competences, than on upgrading personal and team working skills that will prepare the student to meet the requirements of the job market, which demands entrepreneurial competences (Vandepitte, 2009; Arnó Macià et al. 2014) and intercultural awareness and knowledge (Cleary et al. 2018).

The aims of the study were:

• to create a student virtual team collaboration project in order to observe the collaborative process of translation and determine the factors that have an impact on collaboration within the teams, particularly in the domain of decision-making and problem solving tasks;

• to explore the quality of the online interaction between the participants of the study in order to evaluate the quality of this learning experience;

Following Garrison and Kanuka (2004) and Garrison and Vaughan (2008), a blended course in translation was created that integrated practical classes in the classroom and online collaboration. The aim was to use a problem-based approach to develop students' translation and editing skills as well as to enhance their team work skills by integrating online and face-to-face interaction. The study included 60 second-year undergraduates who took the course in the academic year 2017/2018. We used interactive whiteboard with Smart Technology and Edmodo for lectures/posting specific tasks/presentations and the wiki website EditMe and Google Docs for sharing feedback and documents. The students had to establish a shared virtual workspace with their colleagues in order to collaborate and provide peer feedback.

The data was obtained using observation, interviews, product analysis (that the translations students did) and questionnaires (Likert-type scale). The results were calculated using descriptive statistics. Overall, they were satisfied with the quantity and quality of their virtual collaboration (63% enjoyed it), and agreed that it had a positive effect on their motivation (52%) as opposed to 13% who did not have any opinion about that statement and 35% who disagreed. Most students opted for using mobile phones instead of PCs for practical reasons and easier access.

The quality of the feedback and comments changed in time as the tasks became more demanding. At the beginning, some of the students reported that their team members were rather slow and reluctant to offer suggestions and comments, but they sped up and managed to get the information they needed as the deadline was approaching, in line with Coughlan (2004), López-Pérez et al. (2011) and Cleary et al. (2018). The challenges were related to knowledge sharing, credibility, group vs. individual goals, unequal contribution.

In order to modify and adjust the existing curricula and syllabi at the institutions of higher education, it is obvious that more blended courses should be offered, in particular if we want to encourage millennials to collaborate and increase their attention span and focus devoted to some time-consuming processes, such as translation or proof-reading.
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RAISING, AND EXPLOITING AWARENESS: USING THE INTERNET AS A SOURCE OF COLLOCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

Elen Le Foll

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English language learners of all proficiency levels often struggle to make idiomatic collocational choices in their writing (e.g., Laufer & Waldman, 2011; Lu, 2016; Nesselhauf, 2005). Although many more reliable and specialised resources exist, language learners nowadays rely heavily on freely accessible online resources to solve such collocational problems.

To investigate the use of online resources as sources of collocational information, 44 advanced learners of English completed a collocation cloze test with 34 gaps and unrestricted access to the Internet. Participants’ use of online resources was documented by recording their computer screens in real-time. The data extracted from the videos was coded directly onto the participants’ collocational choices, thus allowing for a detailed comparison of resources consulted, strategies employed, and idiomaticity of the collocations produced (Le Foll, 2016).

The video analysis revealed that most strategic issues were due to both the choice of resources and the way the participants queried the resources. Linguee (http://linguee.com), search engines and bilingual dictionaries were by far the most popular resources. Limited awareness of the context was a recurrent problem and this was frequently observable in combination with the use of Linguee and Google. Other issues included poor reliability of the resources consulted, lack of validation and inattention to articles and prepositions. Furthermore, some participants conducted searches on Linguee as if the web interface were a standard dictionary, whilst others expected online dictionaries to respond to queries like a search engine (Le Foll, 2016).

This paper focuses on the pedagogical implications of the results of the study. The study demonstrated that even advanced learners are frequently unaware of the existence, or of the advantages of particular online resources. It is therefore argued that the range of resources available and their respective strengths and weaknesses ought to be explicitly taught in class. In particular, it seems crucial to demonstrate the potential pitfalls of user-contributed dictionaries (e.g., https://dict.leo.org and https://dict.cc), search engines, automatic translation tools, and other popular, yet seemingly poorly understood, translational aids such as Linguee. The findings also make clear that students could benefit from being taught advanced search engine queries, as well as efficient ways to find and draw from reliable parallel texts. Students should be taught how to verify their collocational choice. Moreover, advanced students can be introduced to online concordancers.

Such sessions should ideally be taught in a computer room, so that students may immediately compare resources and strategies and apply newly learnt strategies in exercises especially dedicated to improving the strategic component of collocational competence. Alternatively, students can be asked to use their own mobile devices. As participants in this study demonstrated widely varied levels of competence using different resources, a further approach would be to encourage students to collaborate on English production tasks (or the preparation thereof), so that they may learn from their peers’ strategic processes (cf. House, 2000).

In sum, students need to be taught which resources to use, how to successfully retrieve information from these resources and, crucially, how to evaluate the information they encounter (cf. Sinclair, 2004, p. 2). This paper therefore argues for the necessity to explicitly dedicate class time to focus on the strategic component of learners’ collocational competence. Given increasing reliance on online resources, and in spite of young learners’ supposed digital nativeness, it seems urgent for such activities to be integrated in the modern EFL classroom.
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This short summary presents two case studies which focus on the use of digital technology to provide support to teachers who may have had limited, if any, opportunities in their lives to access any kind of teacher training or development. These teachers are likely to live in places that are at some distance from urban areas, working mainly in rural schools that are under-resourced, or they may be teachers who are displaced from their normal working contexts because they have been uprooted by war or natural disasters. The two cases that are focused on are primary teachers in Pakistan and Syrian teachers who are living in refugee camps in Jordan. These are contexts where we have worked looking for digital solutions to support various kinds of teacher development.

While neither of these cases studies relied exclusively on the use of mobile technologies, access to such devices is certainly very common even in the most remote contexts and are very important for refugees (see recent UNESCO reports). In the work we have been doing we have been trying to follow a principled approach and build on the work of others rather than trying to reinvent the wheel. Zembylas (Vrasidas, Zembylas, & Glass, 2009, p18) argues ICTs can “… open[...] up prospects and opportunities for promoting democracy and prosperity in poor parts of the planet …” and can support the provision of materials to teachers who do not have access to any other resources. We follow Trucano’s 10 principles for planning to introduce ICTs into remote, low-income educational environments, the first one of which is: “The best technology is the one you already have, know how to use, and can afford” (Trucano, 2013).

Case Study 1 focused on Pakistan and worked trying to reach 400,000 teachers. It did this through teacher trainers who are based in local resource centres. It was the local resource centres that we connected to and worked with groups of teachers linked via Skype. A teacher trainer working in the British Council in Lahore would run sessions with three groups of teachers at the same time, presenting ideas, but also encouraging interaction via Skype and feedback via mobile phones. The project successfully managed to develop a set of materials and working practices that could be rolled out across the region.

Case Study 2 focused on teachers working in refugee camps in Jordan. It aimed to work collaboratively with these teachers to design and develop mobile based materials that could be used to support teacher development sessions. We conducted a needs analysis using a questionnaire and discussions that took place on WhatsApp. An exemplar set of materials was produced that could run offline in the mobile app Ustad Mobile.

In both case studies we showed that it was possible to both reach out and include teachers working in usually hard to reach contexts using available digital systems and we are continuing to build on what we started.

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More and more language classes are being given online in ‘digital’ classrooms, rather than in-person in a ‘face-to-face’ environment. Wall Street English students follow a blended course, first completing multimedia lessons, and then practising the language in teacher-led classes called ‘Encounters’, traditionally held in our centres. Since 2017, Chinese students have had the option to attend Encounters online as well as in-person, and approximately 35% of all Encounters in China are now held online.

We set out to investigate the effects on language learning when students attend their Encounter online, rather than in-person. In September 2018 we surveyed a sample of our Chinese students and their teachers (both online face-to-face)* and investigated three questions.

1. What are the differences in opportunities for language practice and communication?

We can see from Figures 1 and 2 that while 41.2% of students felt that both online and face-to-face classes gave them an equal opportunity to practice the target language, only 23.3% felt that both types of classes gave them the same opportunities for freer communication with other students.

 Students largely chose to take classes online as it was more convenient, indicating that the availability of online classes does increase the number of classes students can attend (thereby increasing the intensity of language practice). Some students noted the benefits of practising communication in a medium used for virtual meetings in the workplace.

Figure 1

Figure 2

2. How does the quality of teacher feedback and assessment compare?

All students are given feedback and a numerical grade after each Encounter, which identifies areas for improvement and remediation. Online Encounter scores from June to August 2018 were on average 2% higher than in-person scores, although only 34% of students perceived that it was easier to get a higher score online as compared to face-to-face. Given that students may have fewer opportunities to demonstrate the use of the target language online, it is important to further examine the quality of both immediate and delayed feedback that our students receive.

3. How does teacher-student communication compare?

Although our hypothesis was that online teachers would find it more challenging to assess whether students could understand what they were saying, a similar number of online and face-to-face teachers (83.0% as compared to 88.0% respectively) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement ‘It is easy for me to know whether students understand me during the class.’ However, 60.8% of students reported finding it easier to understand their teacher face-to-face, highlighting a key area for further research and training (see Meskill and Antony 2014 for the challenges of the polyfocality of online
interaction for learners, and Guo and Mollering 2016 for the need to research the effects of multimodal interaction). Some students noted the benefits of being exposed to a range of teacher accents in the online classroom (see Jung 2013 for the benefits of intercultural communication in the online classroom).

In summary, while students perceive they have more opportunities for language practice and communication in the face-to-face classroom, online classes can make a positive contribution to a student’s learning journey by offering opportunities both in terms of the frequency and type of communication.

*53 Online teachers, 34 in-person teachers, and 293 students responded to our survey

REFERENCES


THE EFFECTS OF INFORMAL COMMUNICATION
THROUGH TECHNOLOGIES ON LEARNERS’ USE
OF DISCOURSE MARKERS

Christina Lyrigkou is a second-year PhD student in Languages and Applied Linguistics at the Open University (UK), in the department of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies, and she has also completed a MSc in Applied Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition at the University of Oxford. Her research focuses on L2 pragmatics and informal language contact through mobile assisted language use. Recently, she was one of the organisers of the first conference on “(In)Formal Second Language Learning (ISLL): Integrating Informal Practices into Formal Contexts” which was part of the 2017-2018 British Association of Applied Linguistics and Cambridge University Press seminar series.

The study of the contact with a foreign or second language (L2) outside formal learning settings (e.g. the classroom) is not a recent trend in the field of second language acquisition (Hyland, 2004; Krashen, 1976; Pickard, 1995). However, there has recently been renewed interest in the field of “informal learning”, attracting a number of scholars (Benson & Reinders 2011; Cole & Vanderplank, 2016; Lai & Zheng, 2017; Lee & Dressman, 2018; Scockett, 2014; Sundqvist & Sylvén, 2016). This appears to be because of the affordances of the Internet and technological advances, such as smartphone applications, given that mobile technology and the Internet allow unlimited and individualised access to the L2 on an anywhere-anytime basis (Jarvis & Achilleos, 2013; Kukulska-Hulme, 2009).

Apart from documenting how learners use informal sources, several studies have explored whether and to what extent informal L2 (mainly English) contact affects L2 development. Research has found positive associations between informal L2 contact and vocabulary acquisition (Kusyk & Scockett, 2012; Sundqvist & Wikström, 2015), listening and reading (Lindgren & Muñoz, 2013), writing (lexicogrammatical knowledge, Cole & Vanderplank, 2016; written complexity, accuracy and fluency, Kusyk, 2017) and speaking (fluency, Sundqvist, 2009; overall speaking scores, Lee & Dressman, 2017). However, since many learners have access to naturalistic L2 input through their use of informal sources, the question remains as to how unlimited contact with authentic language can be associated with learners’ pragmatic choices in their spoken production, such as the use of discourse markers (DMs).

A pilot study was conducted, as part of a longitudinal PhD project, to examine the spoken DM use of seven Greek adolescent learners of B21 level English, and whether and how learners’ DM use was associated with their informal L2 practices. Even though all participants achieved high scores in two oral production tasks, they markedly differed in terms of the frequency, range and functions of the DMs they employed. Further analysis of the pilot data suggested that differences in DM use might be associated with the type, rather than the mere frequency, of learners’ favourite informal activities. Although all participants reported daily contact with English through a variety of online and traditional informal sources, those who showed frequent and diverse use of mainly colloquial DMs (e.g. “like”, “and stuff”, “you know”), stood out because they also engaged in regular oral communication with other L2 speakers through WhatsApp and Skype.

The main PhD project aims to draw a more informed picture by recruiting more participants and by following a dynamic approach: learners’ DM use will be tracked longitudinally and examined in relation to their ever-changing informal L2 practices. Moreover, it will be studied how informal L2 contact and other relevant individual and contextual factors interact over time shaping a learning trajectory. Understanding if informal L2 contact, among other factors, affects the development of oral communication, has the potential to influence the practices of language learners and teachers, the evaluation of existing course books, and the design of new, multimedia instructional materials for second language learning.
REFERENCES


EXPLORING LANGUAGE LEARNING VIA SOCIAL MEDIA BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: A CASE FOR WeChat

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Social media like Facebook, Twitter and WeChat offer many chances for learners’ engagement, interaction and collaboration in learning tasks, which benefit learning processes and the overall learning experience (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014). As language learning is not only an individual process but also a cognitive and collaborative procedure (Mondahl & Razmerita, 2014), under the theoretical guidance of sociocultural theory and social constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978), social media could assist learners to learn language in an active way and to interact with the target language (Borau, Ullrich, Feng & Shen, 2009). Thus, language learning is no longer confined to the classroom settings, but can occur in social networking routines.

This paper shares affordances and limitations of social media, by taking WeChat as an example. In terms of affordances, firstly, social media can enhance interaction, communication and collaboration, which not only contribute to the creation of active and communicative learning environments (Blattner & Fiori, 2009; Aydin, 2014b), but also foster learner’s language development (Borau et al., 2009; Zourou, 2012); On WeChat, students could learn language and share opinions, and their English language ability could be developed. Secondly, social media have advantages in motivating students’ language learning (Clark & Gruba, 2010), which plays a vital role in completing learners’ long-term goals and helping them make up for any gaps in aptitude or learning conditions (Dörnyei, 2012). Regarding WeChat, teachers can encourage their students, and students can also inspire their classmates by sending voice or text messages. Also, the “Red Pocket” on WeChat could be implemented, in which teachers could put small amount of lucky money for encouraging the excellent students.

However, privacy is one of the main concerns about social media (Moran, Seaman & Tinti-Kane, 2011). The popularity of Online Social Networks (OSN) has increased the possibility of leaking users’ personal information (Krishnamurthy & Wills, 2009). Concerning WeChat, learners may use their mobile number to log in, and the third party access enables them to use their WeChat account to log into other applications. Thus, their alias, photos and other information may be shared. Furthermore, EFL learners can be easily distracted from their academic tasks (James, 2012; Rosen, Carrier & Cheever, 2013). On WeChat, students are easily distracted by the chat notifications. As social media are normally regarded as communication tools rather than academic platforms (Kabilan, Ahmad & Abidin, 2010), it is difficult to accept it as a learning tool and integrate it into language teaching and learning. Moreover, passive participation is also a common phenomenon (Aydin, 2014a). On WeChat, learners prefer to send asynchronous messages when they have questions. When they are asked to reply, they just type the answers without extra comments or questions.

With respect to course design, the difficulty of the course should be suitable for learners’ learning goals and their current ability (Miller & Miller, 1999; Tess, 2013). Additionally, some pedagogical recommendations for teachers wanting to use social media should be highlighted (Aydin, 2014a). Teachers’ role should be revised from that of a knowledge distributor to that of a supporter. They should spend more time interacting with their students to build a strong relationship. Furthermore, teachers should take more actions via social media, such as designing attractive learning activities and giving learners incentives, to stimulate learners’ potentials in language learning.
EXPLORING LANGUAGE LEARNING VIA SOCIAL MEDIA BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: A CASE FOR WeChat

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FOSTERING CULTURAL AWARENESS THROUGH VIRTUAL REALITY IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

In numerous fields, scholars and researchers have recognized the potential of virtual reality (VR) defined as a computer-generated simulation of a three-dimensional and seemingly real environment by using special electronic equipment (Freina & Ott, 2015). Various studies have investigated how VR can be used to address questions related to science, medicine, and architecture. In the field of language learning and pedagogy, only a few research studies have looked at how immersive VR environments can be used for educational purposes. An analysis of studies, published in four CALL journals from 2004 to 2013, revealed that only 29 of the published articles concerned VR (Lin & Lan, 2015). Among those articles, only 3 studies examined the use of VR in the development of cultural awareness, a crucial aspect of language learning.

While educators understand the importance of culture in their pedagogical practices (Schulz, 2007), current language textbooks frequently present the target culture in a static manner without allowing students to engage with and explore the many dimensions of that culture (McConachy & Hata, 2013). VR offers a solution to this issue by providing students with engaging and immersive experiences otherwise inaccessible due to geographical constraints. Drawing on the Experiential Learning Theory framework (Kolb, 1984), this small-scale research aimed at addressing the lack of studies concerning VR and cultural awareness by investigating how VR technology might foster cultural learning as well as students’ attitudes towards the use VR in the educational context. The participants were 14 undergraduate students enrolled in beginner and intermediate Italian courses who had not previously used VR for educational purposes and had been taught the target culture through the use of tools as readings, images, videos and teachers’ explanations. First, a pre-survey was administered to assess participants’ attitudes towards the use of technology for language learning and their interest in the target culture. Following, participants explored four 360-degree VR videos with the use of Google Cardboard, their smartphones and head-phones.

Prior to each video participants were told about the environment they were going to see (i.e., a street in Florence, an opera theater in Modena, a bakery in Bergamo, and a plaza in Milan) and they were asked to write a pre-reflection about what they expected to experience. Each video was followed by a post written reflection, where participants wrote about the virtual experience, and a teacher-led discussion. Overall, participants expressed positive attitudes towards the potential use of VR in the language classroom.

In comparison to the traditional textbook they found that immersive experiences brought culture to life and they were impressed by the opportunity to move around in 360 degrees and choose where to focus their attention. Regarding cultural awareness, participants noticed cultural facets (e.g., how people interact in Italian environments, the dimensions of buildings and streets, etc.) that they might not notice in traditional pedagogical resources. Lastly, more research is needed to further understand practical applications, affordances and constraints of VR in language education.

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INTRODUCING AQUEDUTO:
THE ASSOCIATION FOR QUALITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING ONLINE

Gavin Dudeney

Thom Kiddle

AQUEDUTO (the Association for Quality Education and Training Online - http://aqueduto.com) was born out of a pressing need for a quality assurance programme for online teacher development and education. Initially conceived by Gavin Dudeney, Director of Technology at The Consultants-E (https://www.theconsultants-e.com) and Thom Kiddle, Director at NILE (Norwich Institute for Language Education - https://www.nile-elt.com/), AQUEDUTO has a variety of aims: helping online training course providers evaluate, and validate, their own courses; helping teachers find the right, quality training course for their own developmental needs; contributing to developing research into effective online training; and sharing best practice among partner institutions. Members currently include: Laureate International Universities, International House London, NILE, The Consultants-E, Macmillan Education, International House World Organisation and the British Council, and AQUEDUTO also has reciprocal partnerships with organisations such as Eaquals, Trinity College London and others. The organisation is currently seeking like-minded members and partners worldwide who share the desire to push the boundaries of online training and development.
WHAT RESEARCH NEEDS TO TELL US ABOUT ONLINE LANGUAGE TEACHER EDUCATION (OLTE)

Dr. Denise Murray

Dr. Denise E. Murray is Professor Emeritus at Macquarie University in Sydney and at San José State University in California. For seven years, she served on the Board of Directors of TESOL International, including a term as President in 1996-1997. She has a long history as a language teacher educator. Dr. Murray’s own research interests include computer-assisted language learning, cross-cultural literacy, the use of the learners’ L1 in the second language classroom, the intersection of language, society, and technology, settlement of adult immigrants, OLTE, language education policy, and leadership in language education. She has published her work in seventeen books and more than 100 articles. She has had a lifelong interest in distance education, focused on how to make education accessible to those whose physical place, available time, and other life circumstances make it impossible to attend a brick-and-mortar institution.

The estimated number of English language learners worldwide is about 1.5 billion (Noack & Gamlo, 2015). With the substantial increase in English learners in recent years has come the ever increasing pressure for qualified English language teachers who need access to high quality courses and programs to develop their knowledge and skills. To meet this demand, there is considerable incentive for programs and institutions to provide courses for teachers who have varied educational and work experiences, different backgrounds and degrees of knowledge, different experiences in teaching, and also reside in different contexts that encompasses both large urban centers and remote rural areas. The fact that we live in a globalized world that is connected through digital technologies provides a platform for how we meet the demand for high quality English teaching and teachers. As a result of both the increase in English worldwide and the advances in the use of digital technologies, we have seen, in recent years, a substantial increase in the number of online language teacher education (OLTE) courses and programs. In fact, “[O]nline and distance education is very likely the fastest growing area of education in the world today, in both the developed and developing worlds” (Simpson, 2012, p. 1). This rapid proliferation of online courses and programs (Murray, 2013; Murray & Christison, 2017; Shin & Kang, 2017) has also led to concerns about quality in OLTE.

To determine what quality is and how to measure it in OLTE, we need to understand what the existing research says, as well as what instructors and students of current OLTE courses think about what constitutes quality in OLTE. We began with a brief overview of the research on OLTE. To date, there is still very little extant research on OLTE. Most of it is small scale, and details of the contexts, particularly details about the learning management systems (LMSs), are missing. These missing details include information about the configuration and design of the course, in other words, whether it is synchronous or asynchronous, totally online or blended and whether specific tasks that lead to interaction are included and implemented (Arnold & Ducate, 2006). The absence of these details makes it difficult to generalize and draw useful conclusions across contexts. We also reviewed the research on teachers’ beliefs and perceptions of OLTE (Murray & Christison, 2017), providing information on the reasons that teachers choose OLTE courses and programs, what the issues are in designing and implementing courses and programs, and what teachers see as indicators of quality. We highlighted several important findings from the perceptual research, namely, that instructors of OLTE courses and teacher learners (i.e., participants in OLTE who are taking the courses) do not share the same perceptions of OLTE, that flexibility (in both learning and accessibility) is the primary reason teacher learners choose to take OLTE. We also discussed some of the issues in designing and implementing OLTE, such as readiness of teacher learners, the preparation of teacher educators for teaching online, and the difficulty of transferring learning online to face-to-face (f2f) contexts.

Because there is a dearth of research on OLTE, we also suggested research questions that are critical to advancing OLTE and proposed two theoretical frameworks for guiding research and practice in OLTE in the future. These frameworks were the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework proposed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) proposed by Freeman and Johnson (1998) and updated by Freeman (2018).

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REFERENCES


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