



**Speak App!**

TOOLS FOR ORAL COMMUNICATION  
IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

# Desk research on effective oral communication in foreign languages

Erasmus+-Project

**Speak App!**

**Adult Education Tools for Oral Communication in Foreign Languages**

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## Introduction

### Project description

The project “Speak App! Adult Education Tools for Oral Communication in Foreign Languages” aims to improve oral communication skills of adults in foreign languages with the support of ICT (information and communications technology).

The EU has designated language learning as a prominent priority as part of its efforts to promote mobility and intercultural understanding. Multilingualism is a crucial element for Europe’s competitiveness and the EU language policy promotes foreign language competences as one of the basic skills that all EU citizens need to acquire in order to improve their educational and employment opportunities. The EU therefore claims the objective that every European citizen should master two additional languages on top of their mother tongue (European Parliament, Language policy Factsheet on the European Union).

The results of the EU-funded project “SpeakApps”, conducted 2011-2012, show that developing oral language competencies in a foreign language is demanding, particularly when opportunities for the learner to engage in informal communication situations are limited (Mhichil, Appel, Ó Ciardubháin, Jager&Prizel-Kania, 2015). Language learning methods supported by technology and the integration of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) significantly facilitate the development of language competencies.

In this regard, the project “Speak App! Adult Education Tools for Oral Communication in Foreign Languages” (Speak App!) focuses on oral skills for communicating in foreign languages and aims to provide open-access resources (e-learning course) for adult educators and learners. Based on a comprehensive research on needs and barriers of adult learners communicating in a foreign language, the project team will develop training material and resources for both learners and teachers of foreign languages (English, Spanish, German and Portuguese).

Special emphasis will be put on increasing verbal skills and motivations of learners to “speak up”. An online-tool that exclusively addresses oral communication issues will support learners to improve their oral communication competences. The project also aims to establish cooperation between learners through a web application that will act as a reference point for learning and interaction, and where users will be able to have face-to-face communication with native or high level speakers in order to improve their practical skills.

Furthermore, the project addresses language teachers and aims to develop educators’ competence on how to provide high quality training on oral communication techniques in foreign languages. Contents and resources of the project will be provided as an open-access online tool focusing on didactic approaches and framework conditions for educators.

### Rationale for desk research and research question

Language learning methods supported by technology and the integration of web applications significantly facilitate the development of language competencies. Over the last two decades, scientific research and evolution has accompanied technological innovations. In spite of the

increasing number of technologies supporting synchronous voice and video communication such as Skype, the range of online language learning environments are centred on three of the four language skills: writing, reading and listening, with very little engagement of oral skills. (Mhichil et al 2015) In contrast, the project “Speak App!” aims to provide an ICT-tool to improve oral skills of adults in foreign languages.

On a general level, the desk research serves to describe the state-of-the-art of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) in the context of oral communication so as be able to point to problems, needs and gaps within existing tools and approaches. The research reflects both, the learners’ and the teachers’ perspective, and aims to compile innovative approaches and practical tools on oral communication in a foreign language.

The research undertaken by all project members of Speak App is twofold, directed at the experience of language teachers and educators on the one hand and the current state of research on oral language learning with special emphasis on blended learning under a more general EU perspective on the other hand.

The present desk research focuses on the following questions:

- How can adult learners improve oral communication skills in a foreign language?
- How can language teachers support the verbal communication of their students?
- How do ICT-based online tools have to be constructed so that both language teachers as well as learners will benefit from the consolidation of ICT-tools?

The desk research addresses both learners’ and teachers’ perspectives and responds to the research questions in four chapters:

- Chapter I: Educators’/learners’ needs
- Chapter II: Motivation theories
- Chapter III: Didactic approaches
- Chapter IV: Assessment of verbal skills

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## 1. Educators'/Learners' needs

The teaching of foreign languages has considerably changed over time. For many years languages were taught through translation and the exhaustive study of grammar and exercises that included the successive repetition of certain words or structures (Harmer, 2013). Things started to change in the 1970s with the emergence of the Communicative Approach, and as Pinilla Gomez points out “the objective of the learning process is the use of the language by the students, in acts of communication with one or more interlocutors, in order to satisfy their concrete communicative needs in those contexts”<sup>1</sup>(Gomez, 2015, p. 889). This new conception of language teaching translates into a methodology focused on the development of Oral Expression through the accomplishment of a set of tasks and/or activities that encourage the student to think and interact in the Foreign Language.

In the European context, with the publication of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), the aim is to standardize foreign language teaching and orient it towards the actual use of the language, with an emphasis on communicative competence and, consequently, on Oral Expression and activities that stimulate it. However, in Portuguese schools for example, only little time is devoted to the exercise of this competence, compared to what is dedicated to the development of the others. In addition, there is some resistance from the students' side to use the Foreign Language as the language of communication, which, in turn, translates into the weak domain of the same (Aguiar cit. in Garrido, 2011).

### 1.1 The concept of oral expression

The main objective of a foreign language learner is to become proficient in the use of it, that is, to be able to speak it correctly (Baralo, 2000), which then leads to the remaining skills. Although, as Pinilla Gómez (2005) notes, it is also the skill that students find more difficult to master because it is a complex concept that involves much more than the correct use of vocabulary and grammar in oral discourse (Spratt, Pulverness & Williams, 2008; Thornbury, 2005; Kremers, 2000).

It is therefore necessary to grasp the complexity of this skill in order to understand the difficulties experienced by the students and to be able to propose more effective activities for their development (Baralo, 2000).

Spratt, Pulverness and Williams begin by classifying the Oral Expression as productive competence, that is, that implies the production of language, similar to the written expression (Spratt, Pulverness & Williams, 2008, p. 48). However, the Oral Expression makes a difference because of its immediate and ephemeral nature, with speakers having extremely limited time to prepare their speech (except when it comes to oral presentations prepared in advance) and the fact that after their completion, there are no remaining traces of such speech, except for when the speakers are recorded (Thornbury, 2015).

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<sup>1</sup> Gomez, 2005, p. 889: “el objetivo del proceso de aprendizaje es el uso de la lengua por parte de los alumnos, en actos de comunicación con uno o más interlocutores, a fin de satisfacer sus necesidades comunicativas concretas en esos contextos”

In an attempt to define Oral Expression, Pinilla Gómez (2005) refers to it as "one of the communication activities that can be developed during a communicative act and through which we process, transmit, exchange and negotiate information with one or several interlocutors" (p. 879). That means that expressing oneself orally implies not only transmitting a message, but also interacting appropriately according to the context and the recipient, even when dealing with an expository intervention. For this reason, Baralo (2000), Brown (2001) and Gómez (2005) add that the development of Oral Expression must be carried out in conjunction with oral comprehension. In short, Oral Expression is an interactive process of meaning making, which includes the production and reception of messages by two or more interlocutors immediately and spontaneously.

## 1.2 Learners' needs: Factors involved in language learning

### Aptitude and intelligence

Analog to a classroom that is not composed of homogenous students, there are adults who learn faster and perform better than others perform. Harmer (2007) states that between the 1950s and 1960s there was a strong belief that it was possible to predict whether or not a learner is successful based on his or her linguistic ability through testing. It is clear that this type of measurement assumes a discriminatory nature in teaching because different types of intelligence are not being taken into account.

Lightbown and Spada (2006) argue that successful learners may not present skills in all components of learning. Some are better at speaking, others at reading, etc. However, it is worth mentioning that performance also depends on other aspects such as motivation, and since the adult students are motivated to learn a specific language, they will naturally spend more time studying it. This certainly affects the learning process and its successful outcome. The same authors state that it is important to understand intelligence as a complex system and that people always present different types of skills, i.e. there is no way to elaborate a test that can account for measuring all the skills necessary to be able to affirm that a person is "smart" or not to learn languages.

Knowles (cit. in Blatya&Spada, 2006) identified some characteristics of adult learning in his theory: adult learners are autonomous and self-directed, accumulators of life experience and knowledge, goal motivated, guided by relevance, practical and feel a greater need to be respected. It is important to realize these adult skills and from them create a favourable learning environment specific to these learners.

### Motivation

The reasons that encourage adults to learn another language are manifold. The main ones are: a programmed trip to a country where they can use the language to communicate, professional growth, family encouragement, interest in the language, curiosity to read originals, identification with culture, better understanding of movies, conversation with other people, liking for the method used by the institution, etc. It is at this moment that the teacher/educator has the sensitivity to analyze the needs of his/her student learners and to become a collaborator

so that they are successful in their learning path.

Brown (2000) assumes that the success of any task is proportionally linked to the level of motivation in its accomplishment. The greatest doubt lies in what this term really means and how to provide it during learning.

Woolfolk (2000) defines motivation as an inner state that stimulates, directs, and maintains behavior. In this view, when the teacher/educator identifies the factors that motivate his student to study a Foreign Language and creates situations related to them, visualizing the success of the learning will be much greater.

In the behaviorist perspective, Brown (2000) comments that motivation is related to reward through positive reinforcement. If the student has already experienced this positive reinforcement, his next attitudes will always be motivated to acquire new rewards.

However, there are factors that can negatively influence learning such as lack of motivation from the student's side, beliefs about teaching and even the teacher's lack of sensitivity in understanding the needs of the students. So, it is important that the teacher has the right sensitivity that allows him/her to perceive the needs of the students and to interfere positively with their learning, always trying to stimulate those students who are unmotivated in this walk.

#### Beliefs

Every learner, whether consciously or unconsciously, has a belief system constructed from his or her learning experiences. For Barcelos (2000), beliefs are constructed socially, but also individually, being dynamic, contextual and paradoxical. On the one hand beliefs are considered dynamic and contextual because they change over a period of time or even within a situation and on the other hand they are seen as paradoxical because they are largely influential in the teaching-learning process, sometimes even functioning as obstacles and preventing learning from happening. Research indicates that learners' beliefs are factors that directly reflect on students' learning. The results obtained in Horwitz's studies (1988), one of the pioneers in belief research, showed that the beliefs of the students are reflected in the learning process. With adults this process is no different and it is somehow enhanced since they have a larger belief structure than a teenager thanks to their life experiences and learning.

Thinking about the student belief factor is essential for successful learning. In this sense it is up to the teacher to make a survey of the main beliefs of a student through a questionnaire (Horwitz, 1988) or an informal conversation.

#### Age

Alvarez and Bonfim (Alvarez&Bonfim, 2008) mention that there are many extrinsic and intrinsic developments happening in the process of growing up. The adult is demanded by the family, by society, by Western culture and by himself. At this moment he/she experiences two stressful phenomena: the feeling of failure, for not having corresponded to social expectations, family and self and the feeling of loss of physical power, by the appearance of the first feelings of old age. In addition, the adult confronts his already formed concepts with new neural structures. The new neural structures of the foreign language are not related to those already formed, thus making it difficult to associate them to what the individual has experience of.

Additional to the cognitive factor, the lack of time and the existence of other social roles and responsibilities that he/she has to cover, make learning difficult. Krashen (1982) mentions that the idea that adults do not learn as easily as younger individuals has become popular and further explains this idea by stating that the differential factor in the acquisition of knowledge is not age of the student, rather the level of the affective filter and the amount of effort they dedicate to learning.

### Affectivity

Affectivity is a very important factor in adult learning of a Foreign Language. Many adult learners did not have a good experience of affectivity with a language teacher before adulthood, which then often results in a failure to learn. The teacher should make sure students who are trying hard are rewarded. It is especially important that the adult learner, who already endures various pressures from the society, feels comfortable during the language classes.

Krashen introduces and describes the affective filter hypothesis as being primordial for the acquisition of a foreign language and confirms that "the level of affection is related to success in acquiring the second language." (Krashen, 1982, p. 31) The affective filter is part of the internal process in which the emotional states, attitudes, needs, motivation of the learner to learn a language are determined; the same process regulates and selects language models to be learned, the order of priority in acquisition and the speed of the acquisition. The author cites three affective variables that facilitate the acquisition of a Foreign Language: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. Motivated, confident and low-anxiety students are more likely to succeed in language acquisition compared to tense, anxious and low-esteem students who possess a very high affective filter that forms a mental block and decrease their chances of successful learning.

### 1.3 Educators' needs: The subjects of learning – teacher and student

Understanding the relations between teacher and learner is one of the ways to construct a conscious and reflexive process of teaching and learning. As previously mentioned affectivity and motivation are related to the way the learner and the educator interact.

For Spada (2004), language training is very important in the case of Foreign Language teachers. If their training is sufficiently comprehensive, teachers should be comfortable addressing formal, functional, pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of language. A teacher with a background in Linguistics not only understands the functioning of language, but is also able to understand how the student strives to learn. Thus, he/she will be able to better understand possible errors or other characteristics of the development of the learner. For the author, "... foreign language teachers should not only possess advanced knowledge and mastery of the language but also the ability to make this knowledge accessible and understandable to the student" (Spada, 2004, p. 3).

Thus in the teaching of Foreign Language for adults, the teacher/educator will have to assume diverse roles in relation to the formation of the students. According to Serragiotto and Luise

(2004), in order to meet these needs the teacher/educator will have to assume the role of facilitator, organizer, animator, linguistic consultant, experimenter and artist.

#### Facilitator

As a facilitator, the teacher/educator should make the student feel that they are being offered the best conditions possible to learn the language. It is not enough to simply meet the linguistic needs of the student, but it is also necessary to consider the cognitive aspects of the learning, the personality and interests of the student and to discover which methodology and techniques will best meet the his/her requirements. The teacher should create an environment that allows smooth teacher-student collaboration and between the students themselves, so as to favour the process of linguistic and cultural acquisition.

#### Organizer and animator

As an organizer and animator, the educator should organize the class and lead the various didactic activities effectively, taking into account the individual learning paths, the differences between the students and encouraging them to collaborate according to their individual characteristics. The teacher should also seek to animate the various activities, be stimulating and encouraging, and actively discuss during didactic interaction activities.

#### Language consultant

As a language consultant, the teacher/educator should put his/her own competence at the service of the adult learners whenever requested. It is important for the teacher/educator to let learners decide when and how they want to be helped in the language acquisition process, respecting their time and allowing them to look for answers to their linguistic learning, alone or in a group first, before intervening. Only after, the teacher / educator should collaborate or guide.

#### Experimenter or artist

As an experimenter or artist, the teacher should always be ready to experiment with new methodologies and techniques, seek new formulas to improve the results sought. In this way he will become an artist who puts his own skills and abilities into practice, using his own fantasy to create new materials that are increasingly interesting and adapted to the student's reality.

For adult students, the role of the educator becomes critical since the adult student has strong personal motivations and needs to learn. Therefore, understanding their needs and making them participate in the lessons becomes essential for successful outcomes, both in terms of motivation and effective language acquisition.

### 1.4 Challenges faced by educators and learners

Many teachers choose to teach more traditional, i.e. more teacher-centred and mostly individualized classes to avoid the agitation and noise generally associated with student-student interaction tasks (peer work, time work) and to be able to exercise, in their view, greater control over the class, avoiding problems of indiscipline. Nonetheless, the assignment of individual tasks, according to Martínez, precludes any kind of interaction, which is vital for the

development of Oral Expression since "interaction promotes the development of linguistic creativity as well as communicative spontaneity" (Martínez, 2016, p. 144).

Furthermore, conditioned by the pressure to comply with the program established by the Ministry of Education and burdened with bureaucratic tasks (Aguilar cit. in Garrido, 2011), most teachers don't have the time necessary to plan and organize Oral Expression activities and/or ends up neglecting Oral Expression activities.

Another conditioning factor is related to the teaching practice of many teachers who rely entirely on school textbooks. As Garrido (2011) observes, most school textbooks do not give Oral Expression as much prominence as the other skills and activities they suggest. Oral Expressions are sometimes taught in a way that is not satisfactory enough for the learners as they include themes that are not always of interest to students, or because they refer to situations that do not promote the actual use of the language.

The Common European Framework of Reference (222-223), highlights the importance of the learners' motivation for the success of the proposed activities and emphasizes the importance of proposing activities that take into account real communicative ends.

Another factor that hinders the development of Oral Expression in the classroom, which may also be what causes frustration and lack of motivation in students, is the scarcity of linguistic resources on the part of the student. This is either because he/she is in an initial level of learning (Baralo, 2000), or because he/she reveals some difficulties in terms of lexicon (he/she cannot remember the terms), pronunciation (he/she cannot pronounce the words correctly) and oral comprehension (he/she cannot understand what his interlocutor says). Regardless of the reason, the main consequence of such inadequacy is that the student will refrain from speaking and contributing to the learning with his oral participation (Giovanni, 1996).

When a student does not master the linguistic tools he needs, his "communicative self-esteem" (Martínez, 2016) diminishes because of the lack of an apparent positive image of himself, as referred to in the Common European Framework of Reference. This then translates into a low success rate in proposed Oral Expression activities (Kalan, 2016). Thus, alongside the decrease of communicative self-esteem, students experience feelings of insecurity, shame and fear when they have to express themselves orally in front of their peers (Alonso, 2012), as this generates anxiety, being the Oral Expression, according to the skill that causes them the most apprehension.

The so-called "foreign language classroom anxiety", referred to by Piasecka (2013) has, just like demotivation, negative consequences in the process of acquisition of the Foreign Language, harming the student's performance. According to the same author:

"Those who experience positive feelings (e.g., pleasure) have a tendency to concentrate on exploring and obtaining positive outcomes that they anticipate while those with negative emotional states (e.g., anxiety) process information with more effort, in a bit by bit manner (...)." (EwaPiechurska-Kuciel, ElzbietaSzymanska, 2013, p.224)

### 1.5 Favourable strategies for the development of Oral Expression

Not everyone can be expected to interpret the world and learn in the same way, as Harmer (2001) states, "... each student is an individual with different experiences both in and outside the classroom" (p. 37), especially in relation to how they learn and study. Through his theory of multiple intelligences, Gardner sought to sensitize teachers to this question, suggesting that "... we humans do not possess a single intelligence, but a range of intelligences" (Gardner, 1983, cit. in Harmer 2001, p. 46).

In developing his theory, Gardner proposed eight different types of intelligence that influence the way of learning and imply the kind of tasks through which students learn best:

- musical
- linguistic
- logical/mathematical
- spatial
- kinaesthetic
- interpersonal
- intrapersonal
- naturalist

We are all endowed with the eight intelligences mentioned above, presenting one or more as dominant over others, influencing how we best learn. Based on this perspective, teachers cannot expect a particular strategy, approach, method, technique or activity to work equally with all students or associate poor results from the students' side to a lack of interest. Teachers should instead take into consideration the fact that a given strategy may not be the most appropriate for a particular student's way of learning and, based on these reflections, they should opt for diversified strategies as a way of responding to heterogeneity, different learning styles and multiple intelligences.

Pinilla Gómez (2005) defines Oral Expression (OE) activity as a "didactic resource to develop that skill" that seeks to "reproduce the conditions in which oral communication takes place in real situations"(p. 889). Taking into account what has been stated so far in this report, we can legitimately affirm that the type of activities favourable to OE development is characterized by

- privileging the functional use of the language
- placing the student in the foreground in the learning process (being the teacher a facilitator)
- re-creating the most authentic communication situations possible
- and by promoting student-student interaction.

As Pinilla Gomez (2005) underlines "oral interaction - that is, conversation, communicative practice in pairs or groups - seems to be the most effective way of learning how to develop oral expression "(p.889). As a general principle, the activities that are most appropriate to the development of OE should be planned with a gradual difficulty (to increase the student's communicative self-esteem), taking into account real communicative purposes and meeting the interests of the students, so that they feel motivated.

Monreal and Peña (2006) propose a classroom model based on the study of real cases. In turn, Spratt, Pulverness and Williams (2008) emphasize the importance of scheduling EO activities in three steps, namely introducing new structures to be practiced, practicing them in a more or less controlled way through a set of tasks and finally, proposing activities in which students freely use the new language tools they have been provided with. Giovanni (1996) and Harmer (2013) also point out the importance of giving meaningful feedback at the end of a given activity, focusing on content rather than form, and including the positive aspects of a performance, not just its errors.

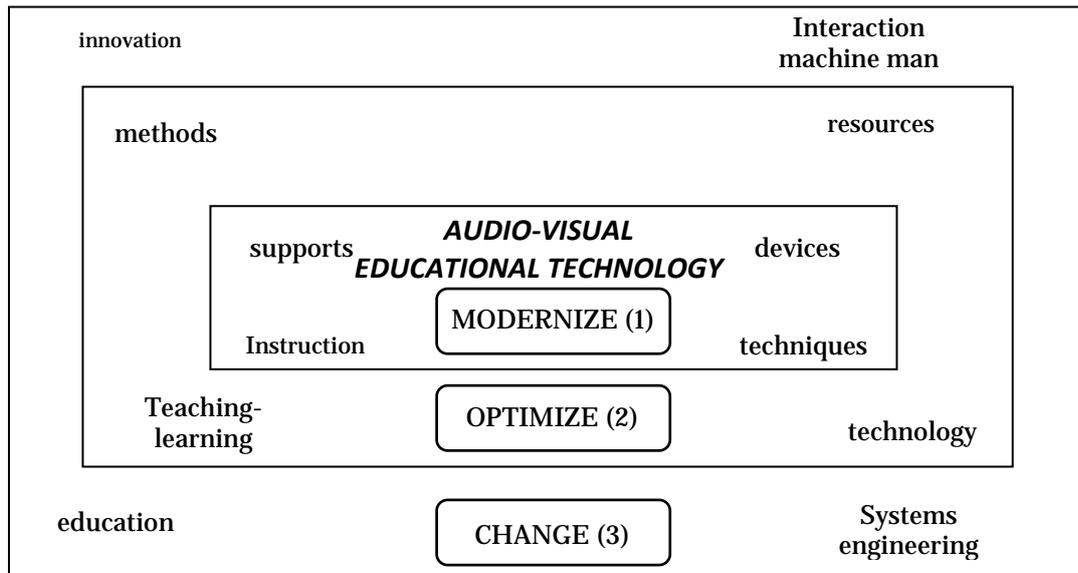
Finally, with regards to the type of activities favourable to the development of OE, we must take into account two aspects. On the one hand, according to Kremers (2000), the importance of giving the students an intrinsic or extrinsic motivation to speak, and on the other hand, as Martínez (2006) and García (2006) warn it is vital to propose activities as varied as possible.

### 1.6 The audio-visual: A touch for the motivation in teaching foreign languages

With the technological growth of the twentieth century, there has been a restructuring of the educational institutions, and technological theories have become part of contemporary theories of education. Educational technology (a concept in Blanco and Silva, 1993) emerged as a way to access to the increasing permeation of technology in our society. Furthermore, educational technology make the educational process more effective. The domain of study of educational technology consists, therefore, in the construction of teaching - learning systems capable of revolutionizing educational activity. Taking into account the study by Blanco and Silva (1993), "educational technology is sometimes defined as the application of scientific principles in solving educational problems" (p. 40).

Most of the authors who have dedicated their work to researching Educational Technology mention the existence of some stages in the evolution of this concept, which include: modernisation (aids for teaching) and optimization of the process (educational aids). The specific type of Educational technology referred to in this work is based on the implementation of audio-visual media in education, which is based on the ideas that the image is a carrier of the didactic value of concretisation in front of the predominance of abstraction. As Blanco and Silva (1993) refer:

"It is a Technology for Teaching in which audio-visual techniques credit their value for a massive presentation of iconic (fixed and mobile) information and the devices are considered an aid to teaching that facilitate and amplify the processes of instruction. With them they are only looking to modernize the classes." (p. 41)



**Figure 1** – Stages of the evolution of the concept of Educational Technology (Blanco & Silva, 1993)

Through investigations in the psychology of learning and communication, it has emerged that the audio-visual media and its communicative techniques are able to modify the teaching-learning process as well as the teacher-student relationship. Thus, one of the main goals of educational technology is to make teaching more student-centred than teacher-centred. In their study, Blanco and Silva (1993) reinforced this ideology: "No longer is teaching taught by the teacher, but learning by the student; the isolated techniques are grouped into a technology and the ultimate goal is to optimize the processes in the classroom" (p. 41)

At the time when audio-visual media entered heavily into teaching, the value attached to the image was such, and its codes were considered so close to the representation of reality that the above-mentioned postulates required no research to be substantiated. Stokes (2001) maintains this idea by stating "because pictures or illustrations are analogues of experience and are only one step removed from actual events, these visual representations may be able to capture and communicate the concrete experience in various ways" (p. 14).

Currently, the same postulates continue to be attributed to the audio-visual by several authors, with video being the dominant technology. Video technology has some advantages because of its flexibility and practical use such as: the fact that it allows an immediate feedback of the program; its capacity to allow stopping and advancing at different paces and the help it gives the teacher to configure the most appropriate pedagogical strategy. In this way, it opens up new opportunities and new forms of learning, which can be explored both in the classroom and remotely (Keene, 2006).

Regarding the use of podcasts, for example in English language teaching, the benefits of its use stand out since pronunciation, accentuation and inflection are essential for a correct learning in language teaching.

According to Cebeci and Tekdal (2006), the main advantages of using podcasts in education are portability and the convenience of being able to listen to educational resources anytime, anywhere.

A fundamental aspect of the use of podcasts in teaching is mentioned by Manning (2005) when he states that they can add an element of humanization to online learning thanks to the use of voice. Through diction, stress and inflection, one gains a richer understanding of the enthusiasm or passion of the interlocutor.

Finally, it should be noted that the educational value of an audio-visual resource is not always determined solely by its technical quality but rather by the way in which the different curricular elements are articulated, namely the learning objectives, the characteristics of the selected strategies as well as the learning context in question (Costa, Viana & Cruz, 2011). If the purpose of these resources is to get someone to learn something, all of these elements should be taken into account, otherwise it will not be possible to adequately stimulate learning.

### 1.7 Needs of teachers in the context of oral communication in an ICT-based learning environment

The main difficulties faced by teachers are the lack of resources and adequate teacher training. The lack of proficiency of the teachers, that is, lack of skills for the correct use of ICT, requires a change in the design of teaching. Teachers should be taught to go beyond the use of books in the classroom and adopt ICT tools instead. However, these changes in teaching practice are very limited because most teachers are not able or do not have the necessary resources to do so. This requires effort, endurance and dedication.

Teachers need to re-evaluate their knowledge of the technologies to master programs for editing images, videos and sounds through cell phones in the classroom. Instruments such as cell phones or tablets bring a multitude of educational possibilities and many students are very familiar with these technologies. Therefore, teachers have to speak the students' language in order to motivate learning by using these technologies and enabling them to be accessed both in and out of school. Teachers cannot discard the idea of building learning objects using audio, images and video or multimedia presentations and, for example, make audio books and video lessons (Santos, 2009).

### 1.8 Needs of students in the context of oral communication in an ICT-based learning environment

There is no meaningful learning if there is no organization and seriousness in the implementation of new technologies in education. On the one hand, the advantages for students in using technologies as a pedagogical tool are that they are stimulated, the content of what they will learn is boosted, and their autonomy and creativity will be enhanced. The disadvantages, on the other hand, are the lack of organization and training of the professionals involved and the lack of stimulation of the students for learning and developing critical thinking. As the

educational system increasingly uses technologies in the learning-teaching process, there is a decrease in digital exclusion and education progressively expands beyond the walls of classrooms. Despite technologies can make relevant contributions to the classroom, it is important to keep in mind that it all depends on how such technologies are used.

In this scenario, the teacher is more important than ever in the process of inclusion of ICT in education and his/her role should evolve from traditional teaching to a role of facilitator within the learning-teaching process. Therefore, he/she needs to be adequately trained to introduce ICTs into the classroom in their daily life. Surely, we will continue to teach and learn through words, gestures, emotions, affections, reading, written texts, television, but now we should include ICTs (computers, mobile phones, tablets) and real-time information in this list.

### 1.9 Conclusion

In a Europe with its great diversity of ethnic, cultural and linguistic origins, it is fundamental that all individuals acquire the skills that allow them to understand each other and communicate. In this context, the learning of a foreign language, which is often devalued, should instead be considered as essential and special attention should be given to it, trying to develop the best and most innovative strategies to promote its correct and effective learning.

In the society in which we live, the role of new technologies in formal or non-formal education is fundamental. We must develop communication, group work, personal relations and connections using new technologies so that learners will learn skills that are essential for their life. Hence, it is necessary to create and develop means and methods of work that promote the use of new technologies as knowledge production and construction. By promoting learning at differentiated rates, autonomy in the development of activities and by empowering self-learning, learners will be stimulated, making them co-responsible throughout their teaching and learning process and preparing them for a more active and interventionist personal and professional future.

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## 2. ICT as a motivation tool

The expression *motivation theories* applies to various models that aim to understand what drives individuals towards the achievement of a specific goal. Such theories are formulated taking into account various factors that influence human behaviour and are used not only to understand people's actions and conducts, but also to create programmes that harness people's motivation to reach enhanced results. Some example of this are the application of motivation theories in workplaces in order to increase productivity or their use in schools to obtain better performances and results from students.

Motivation is one of the main factors that determines the success or failure of the students' learning in the teaching of foreign languages. However, keeping students motivated while teaching is not always an easy task and often demotivation lurks in. In this context, one of the greatest challenges facing teachers is the promotion of teaching practices that will awaken and maintain the students' interest and lead to effective language learning. The teacher is responsible for creating a motivating environment by selecting good activities, choosing appropriate materials and adopting functional strategies.

This chapter will focus on how motivation theories can be used to incite learners to communicate in a foreign language actively, with a special emphasis on language learning supported by technology. The work will be divided in three main sections focusing respectively on motivation theories in general; motivation theories in language learning; and motivation in technology supported learning.

### 2.1 Motivation theories in general

There are multiple definitions of motivation. For example, Melendy has defined it as a process starting with a need, and evolving to a behaviour that moves an individual towards achieving a goal (Melendy, 2008). Hall defines it as a key factor necessary to accomplish a particular activity by stating that "it is difficult to imagine anyone learning a language without some degree of motivation" (Hall, 2011 p. 134). In terms that are more general motivation could be understood as "an internal drive which pushes someone to achieve something" (Harmer, 1988). However, the origins of this drive are to be found in various elements. One major division adopted by many authors is the separation between internal and external factors that shape motivation. Both, elements that are internal to the learner such as needs, enjoyment, interests and ones that are external like social life, teaching methodology, learning environment and societal norms influence the motivation behind the learning process. However, just taking into consideration these two aspects is limiting, hence the necessity to go deeper in understanding where motivation originates from.

Despite that fact that different authors have theorised the starting point of motivation in different ways, there are five mainstream theories that have been leading the scene for a long time. These include the expectancy-value theory; the attribution theory; the social cognitive theory; the goal-orientation theory and the self-determination theory. In order to understand motivation

theories in language learning, it is first necessary to understand these general motivations theories.

- Expectancy-value theories – Motivation is understood as the result of the combination of two factors which are the expectation of success (will I succeed in completing this task?) and the value that is attributed to the specific tasks (interest, personal importance, etc.) (Cook & Artino, 2016). According to this theory, both these factors are influenced by events and elements that are external to the individual but ultimately are the result of the interpretation that individuals attribute to them;
- Attribution theories – Individuals react in different ways to different events or inputs. As a result “Success or failure in mastering a new skill, for example, might be attributed to personal effort, innate ability, other people (e.g. the teacher) or luck” (Cook & Artino, 2016, p. 1004). Of course, these perceptions impact the motivation behind peoples’ learning efforts.
- Social-cognitive theory – Interaction with others and the environment around an individual are what prompt learning motivation. According to Bandura, performance is the product of a three-way interaction between personal factors, behavioural factors and environmental factors (Bandura, 1986).
- Goal orientation theory – the term *goals* is to be intended not as ‘specific learning objectives’, rather as “broad orientations or purposes in learning” on a predominantly subconscious level (Cook, Artino: 1006). The set of goals taken into consideration in this theory can be divided in mastery goals about becoming expert in a specific topic (focus on the value of learning) and performance-approach goals which instead are concerned with doing better than others or failure avoidance. This is also proved in a study by Dunkel (1948) that showed how having something to win at the end of the learning process encourages the learners to obtain better results.
- Self-determination theory – Motivation is best when there is an internal (intrinsic) motivation behind it. When people are driven by the simple desire to satisfy their curiosity or master a task, then they are more likely to successfully complete a specific task. It comes without saying that external factors can be internalised thus become self-determining factors.

All these theories have some aspect in common as underlined by Cook and Artino. More in detail, the characteristics underling both theories are that they are all related to the existence of some form of competence and that they are all ‘*cognitive*’. In addition to these characteristic it is also possible to underline the fact that in these theories the element of the ‘*self*’ is constant. These aspects are all very relevant when it comes to motivation theories in language learning, especially when these are related to various forms of ICT.

## 2.2 Motivation theories in language learning.

Moving more specifically to language learning, Gardner and MacIntyre (1993: 2) describes motivation as a complex structure with 3 components, “desire to achieve a goal, effort extended in this direction, and satisfaction with the task” (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993, p.2).

The previously mentioned distinction between internal and external motivation is also present when focusing on language related motivation. In this case internal and external motivation, or what Gardner and Lambert called “integrated motivation” and “instrumental motivation”, are separated on the basis of narrowed elements.

## 2.3 Internal motivation

Internal or ‘integrated motivation’ refers to the language learning process with the aim of personal development and cultural enrichment. The learner’s target is to be accepted from people coming from another culture and different factors impact motivation such as personal interests, behaviour and desire to learn a new language. These factors are also often linked with travels and friendships.

To create this kind of integrated motivation in a scholar environment, the teacher needs to orient his activities on communication and implement activities neither too easy nor too hard, but realistic.

## 2.4 External motivation

External or ‘instrumental’ motivation refers to the fact that the learner decides to learn for reasons such as professional purposes, social status or to reach a certain level of education that the society is expecting from him in order to reach specific positions.

Spolsky proposed an effective scheme to illustrate this intrinsic-extrinsic dichotomy.

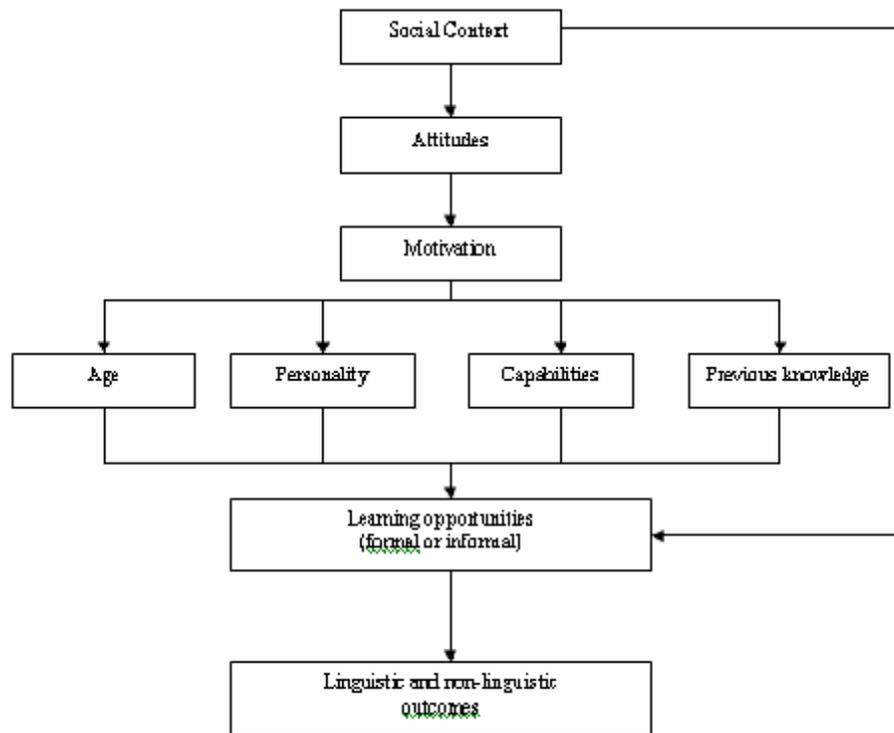


Figure 2: Spolsky's Model of Second Language Learning

More in detail, many reasons can be taken into account when analysing the motivation behind language learning. These are at the base of language learning theories and are applied in combination with general motivation theories. They include:

- Expatriation/migration: if an individual decides to or is forced to leave their country for another, knowing the language of the welcoming country is obviously a plus which will help them adapt in the country, communicate with people, find a job, etc. From another perspective, showing an interest for the language, as for the culture will prove their desire to integrate in the society and will most probably be appreciated from the local people.
- Familial dialogue: if a person did not migrate, it is possible than his or her ancestors did. Learning the mother tongue of their parents or grandparents is a good way to communicate with them and it can also be a way to reconnect with someone's roots and culture. For some people, it is a way to get ready to transmit this language to the future generations, not to lose the familial history on the one side and to enlarge the cultural horizons for another on the other side.
- In the case of mixed marriage, learning a language can be motivated by the need or the desire to communicate with the family in law or simply not to feel excluded from conversations.
- Professional opportunities: this point is particularly true for people who work in big and multinational companies. Being able to speak additional languages apart from the local

one will enhance one's chances of career progress and is often considered an asset in the job market which is connected to increased salary.

- Travelling abroad: people may travel in some non-touristic places. It's always easier to use the local language or a lingua franca. It's particularly important to read the security advices and the basic rules in culturally different countries.
- Sharing passions: learning a language allows to discover new passions or leisure activities and to learn more about how this passion is practiced around the world. If we take the example of dance, someone can transmit a local dance and learn about another in another country.
- Developing cognitive competencies: learning languages is considered to positively improve brain skills. Studies showed that multilingual people have keen minds, they are more reactive, their global intelligence is more developed, and their reading capacity is better. Apart from this, learning languages has also been linked to slower rise and progress of diseases such as Alzheimer disease. This is because language learning is generally considered as a good way to nurture your memory.
- Developing analytical skills and better adaptation to changes: a multilingual person is able to manage few tasks at the same time, and to quickly switch between these tasks.
- Optimal concentration: learning a language helps people to develop their concentration, focusing on their objectives.

The most powerful type of motivation is the intrinsic one as it does not depend on external conditions, but on the student's determination to achieve goals that he/she set him/herself, even when adverse situations emerge. (Deci & Flaste, 1996) In fact, this type of motivation is very subjective, varying from person to person, and the teacher does not have direct control over it. It is true though that internal motivation is difficult to achieve if not accompanied by favourable extrinsic factors, or, in other words, external factors often tend to trigger internal motivation. If the environment in which the teaching of the foreign language occurs provides interesting activities for the students, the extrinsic motivation will be high. Conversely, if the environment in which the student is inserted is uninteresting, if activities are not clearly defined by a straightforward didactic plan (determined at the beginning of the academic year) and if the students' interest are not met, it becomes difficult for the foreign language to impose itself on the mother tongue, leading to disinterest and demotivation.

Currently, several factors can be demotivating during the teaching and learning of a foreign language, such as:

- Classrooms with too many students
- Unmotivated teachers
- Assessment exams with exaggeratedly difficult questions
- Intensive oral repetitions, for example using the audiolingual method.

Among the extrinsic factors, the teacher is one the main element for the motivation of the students. The personality, posture, attitude, and even the students feelings towards the teacher

are very important factors in determining students attitude and motivation to learn the foreign language (Moon, 2000). Another relevant external factor influencing motivation, regardless of who teaches, is the peer group. Peers can be a great source of motivation, either positive or negative, as students envisage learning a foreign language.

In both general teaching and language teaching, these theories and motivational factors are decisive for the way in which teachers act in the classroom to provide effective learning, regardless of the methodology used in each situation. Generally, the teacher should always use the best strategies possible to provide the students what is necessary to acquire a new language and guide them through the learning process, so that they remain motivated for successful learning, knowing in advance that there is no one infallible method.

## 2.5 Language learning motivation and technology

Before focusing on language learning and technology, it is necessary to pose some caveats. Namely, the fact that integration of technology in classes is a relatively recent phenomenon and the fact that it does not apply to all schools and all realities yet because of its relevant costs. For these reasons, the amount of research available on the topic is somewhat limited, there are not many studies on the matter and the available studies mostly concern developed countries.

New technologies are now spreading in many different fields of human activities. Internet allows students to have unlimited access to information in a very short time, however, from a pedagogical perspective, this does not mean that students will not need teachers anymore because of the plenty of available sources. Rather, students will need to be oriented to develop skills to an even larger extent than earlier by including technology related elements in their curricula. In other words, a broader access to information does not necessarily associate with a higher learning capacity, neither a higher motivation to learn.

Many researchers argue that technology should follow pedagogical rules and that the teachers should use it as a tool and adapt it to their intended purposes. Covington (1984) talked about the existence of a functional link between skill, effort, performance, and self-confidence. In other words, students are fully aware of the importance of technology in their life, when it comes to learning and other multiple aspects. This understanding of technology is not learnt only through schools and educational bodies as technologies are invading all the fields of the planet. Becoming familiar with technology in all its forms is the translation of the idea they will access easily to their dreams as well as their professional and personal success.

Technology should stimulate and feed into the motivation of the learner to gain a second language (L2) regardless of their motivation. Even better, technologies should offer the possibility for students to learn, keeping in mind their motivations and by tailoring and shaping the learning experience according to the person's motivation for learning.

Another implication of the usage of technology for language learning lies in what Maehr has defined as the motivation to work on a task in a context which is different than the one in which task was learnt (Maehr, 1984). The implication of this is that language learning has certainly

moved from one context to another, but it is still up to the personal effort and interests of the pupil to determine possible successful outcomes, regardless of the class time or in class activities.

When teaching languages through the use of technology, it is important to keep in mind that the more things a student can achieve language-wise through technology, the more prone they will be to use these tools to learn languages. In other words the more people know how to reach a goal through a specific means, the more confident they will feel using it and the more they will be prone to use such tools.

Finally, the use of technology in language learning affects the autonomy of the students. Generally, the teacher gives information to pupils, in an order he/she chooses and with a rhythm, he/she defines. Technology changes this structure by guiding the relation between the pupil and knowledge along different timescales and different lines. The pupils can identify alone their sources of information without any order, and organize them in a personal way, the one that makes the most sense for them. What is different and new when it comes to language learning through technology is the interactivity of the materials. The pupils are not passive anymore, but active in their learning process. For once they are the pilots and not the passengers of the learning “machine”. Ultimately this is to be considered at the base of motivation in language learning (and learning in general) through technology.

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### 3. Technology enhanced language learning: New didactic approaches

The development of communicative competencies is an overarching objective and an essential element of successful foreign language learning and teaching. Learning strategies and technological innovations are increasingly affecting each other. Innovations in the field of information and communication technologies (ICT) offer far-reaching benefits for fostering oral proficiency in a foreign language and enable the use of new methods in order to make learning more efficient and attractive to learners (McCarthy, 2016).

The educational applications of new technologies have been discussed using a multitude of terms, e.g. computer-assisted learning/teaching (CAL/CAT), technology-enhanced learning (TEL) or e-learning, and, with reference to language learning, computer-assisted language learning (CALL), ICT-based language learning, or mobile assisted language learning (MALL), to mention just some of the combinations of terms used (Ioiță & Asan, 2013).

Technology-enhanced learning encompasses all the processes of teaching and learning, as well as all activities in which electronic devices and applications are used. Digital learning has the benefit of enabling the leap from passive reception of the content to active participation. Since the advent of new technology for language learning, innovative language teachers have been constantly seeking new didactic approaches to match the potential of technology-enhanced learning (Ioiță & Asan, 2013).

#### 3.1 E-learning as a support system: Blended Learning and Flipped Classroom

Today, the two types of foreign language learning within a formal framework – the classic one based on traditional classroom learning with physical attendance, and the digital one relying on technology – are increasingly interlaced. E-learning as a support system for traditional learning in the classroom makes the learning process more flexible and student-centred (Mullamaa, 2010). ICT solutions not only support different classroom activities such as group work and pair work, but also provide the opportunity for independent follow-up work on classroom activities for students with different learning styles. It aims to better take into consideration the needs of different students for the purpose of the principles of individualisation (different interests/levels/needs).

Two didactic approaches that combine the traditional and the digital approaches are known in the literature as Blended Learning (BL) and Flipped Classroom (FC).

**Blended learning** (McCarthy, 2016; Ioiță & Asan, 2013) refers to didactic approaches that combine online digital media with traditional classroom methods and combine learning sequences taking place face-to-face and online. Face-to-face sequences can correlate with multimedia ones synchronously and asynchronously.

**Learning in a flipped classroom** (Wu, Chen Hsieh & Yang, 2017) is an alternative approach that integrates technology into (language) learning. As an educational technique, flipped classroom consists of two important components: the use of computer technologies such as

video lectures and the involvement of interactive learning activities in face-to-face units. Via mobile apps or e-learning platforms, information is introduced to students prior to classroom lectures. This allows more advanced learning in-class, giving students more opportunities to participate in engaging activities. The core idea of flipped learning is to provide a learning community where students develop knowledge through constructive learning experiences, peer interaction, and collaboration.

The purpose of both learning strategies in language learning (Ioiță & Asan, 2013) is to find the optimal combination of attendance and distance learning in order to fulfil teaching and learning objectives and efficiency criteria as well as possible. The use of new technologies aims at creating surplus value and new technology must be implemented alongside purposive tools and exercises. Therefore, the educational purpose must remain the first and foremost criterion in the decision to use digital technology in the learning process.

### 3.2 Didactic principles for ICT-based language learning

Didactics can be defined as “the theoretic substantiation of pedagogic activities, of the science about the way of conveying knowledge, in order to create competencies, i.e. the teaching methods.” (Ioiță & Asan, 2013, p. 244)

With the development of web-based learning environments, students become more engaged, and communication and learning processes are less teacher-centred. These developments continuously change the role of teachers, students and learning itself. (Mullamaa, 2010)

In technology-enhanced learning, all pedagogical principles that apply to the traditional classroom are valid, but need to accommodate technological progress. Successful integration of technology into the language learning process requires different parameters that impact the success of online language learning (Trepule, Tereseviciene & Rutkiene, 2015):

- course design
- increasing requirements for IT skills of teachers and students
- the availability of technical support for users
- learner motivation
- a perceived sense of community
- an open mind set of teachers
- time management.

Based on these requirements, Trepule et al. (2015) suggest the following didactic principles to support the learners’ success in increasing their oral proficiency in a foreign language:

- **Learner centredness:** technology-enhanced language learning should be learner centred to achieve positive learning results.
- **Meta-cognitive activities:** fostering and supporting learners’ meta-cognitive activities of reflection, self-assessment and self-efficacy for autonomous learning.

- **Social interaction:** building social presence in terms of discussion channels or other ways of connection with the teacher and other learners.
- **Time management:** offering tools for time management for achieving milestones and goals in a set time.

In addition to these principles, the Community of Inquiry (CoI)<sup>2</sup> framework encompasses three interdependent elements that facilitate meaningful online learning (Wu et al., 2017):

- **Teaching presence:** refers to how teachers sequence the learning activities and facilitate learning; encompasses the design, direction and support of student activities.
- **Social presence:** refers to the social and interpersonal communication required for online learning; ideally includes open communication with others and cohesive communicative responses.
- **Cognitive presence:** refers to the development of critical thinking skills, the ability to create meaning out of ideas.

### 3.3 Key elements of successful ICT-based language learning

A well-balanced digital environment for language learning in combination with a corresponding didactic approach enables a student-centred approach of language learning, adaptability and collaborative learning, and helps to increase students' learning quality and feeling of belonging to a community. Recent studies (Ioiță & Asan, 2013; Wu et al. 2017) point out the following key elements of a successful e-learning environment:

#### Social interaction – building social presence

Learning is not happening in isolation, but in cooperation in the process of discussion and sharing. Social interaction has an enormous positive impact on learners' motivation and achievements. Social interaction contains space for giving and receiving direct feedback, exchange of ideas and reflection. It is recommended to provide social interaction (e.g. via online discussion) in a virtual classroom to build a sense of community. Encouraging student-to-student interactions may increase their performance, their learning outcome and their motivation (Trepule et al., 2015).

Documenting different (group) activities can help develop a group spirit. Creating a sense of belonging enables students to open up and to interact in the learning process. In this sense, ICT-based language courses can also help build bridges between study periods, different study years and student groups, helping to shape a feeling of "us" (Mullamaa, 2010).

#### Interactivity and cooperation

In a virtual language-learning environment, exercises must be designed to be dynamic, often integrating playful components. Sequences of individual learning alternate with tutor-guided

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<sup>2</sup> The Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework is a widely used model for examining and evaluating a learning community. The community of inquiry model is an instructional design model for e-learning developed by Randy Garrison, Terry Anderson et al. (University of Calgary).

ones and with situations in which students interact in pairs or in groups in order to achieve a suitable learning environment (Ioiță & Asan, 2013). In order to facilitate oral proficiency in the foreign language, activities should be designed to be student-centred and encourage students to actively engage in interactive activities. The learning tasks provide activities in which the students acquire knowledge in collaboration with their partners in the online learning community (Wu et al. 2017).

#### Individualisation

At the same time, the individual design of e-learning is one of the fundamental advantages of digital language learning. Personalised components of online learning effectively complete the often undifferentiated approach in the classroom (Ioiță & Asan, 2013).

#### Student autonomy

Language learning in a virtual environment cultivates student autonomy and raises student awareness by allowing students to proceed their own pace, it also provides autonomous supportive learning contexts that support students' self-regulation. Personalisation aims to make learning more effective by adapting to the learners' needs and preferences (Mullamaa, 2010; Wu et al., 2017).

Since students are encouraged to take responsibility for their learning outside the classroom and to participate actively in the online activities, students gradually become responsible for their own learning, thus leading to improvements in autonomous learning.

#### Authentic language learning

Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is able to enhance oral proficiency (Wu et al., 2017) because of ample opportunities for conversational applications in authentic, supportive, interactive, engaging and collaborative learning contexts. Online learning communities provide learning opportunities to use foreign languages in a more authentic way. Experience shows that web-based language learning offers students the possibility to communicate in a “natural” environment. This encourages students to participate and open up (Mullamaa, 2010).

#### The role of teachers

Research (Comas-Quinn, 2016; Trepule et al., 2015) shows that the role of teachers changes considerably in online learning. The teacher is a central figure in the process of technology-based curriculum integration, and the success of technology-enhanced learning depends heavily on the attributes, skills and decisions of the teacher. Therefore it is important for language trainers to have adequate technological skills to use and construct technology-enhanced learning (TEL), but it is no less important to employ adequate didactic approaches and methods to use TEL effectively. Particularly with regard to online learning environments, support and guidance for learners during the learning process leads to a more effective approach to learning. Trepule et al. (2015) divide teachers' support into meta-cognitive, procedural, contextual and technical support.

Wu et al. (2017) agree that teachers in TEL need to possess good instructional skills, strategies and attitudes and have to consider the proper combination of structure, dialogue and learner

autonomy, providing engaging and effective learning activities. In a virtual classroom, teachers serve more as a guide than an authority, guiding students through their learning paths. The teacher acts as an advisor, an expert in the field whose task is to support the students' development. Mullamaa (2010) emphasise that a web-based learning environment strengthens cooperative action between teachers and students.

### 3.4 Benefits and disadvantages of web-based language learning solutions

Digital language learning strategies are used for various reasons. Promoted by most recent studies (Ioiță & Asan, 2013; Mulamaa, 2010; Wu et al., 2017), features such as interactivity and cooperation, individualisation and personalisation, broad access to information, as well as reachability and mobility are the main benefits of technology enhanced learning.

At the same time, the major disadvantages (Trepule et al., 2015) are lack of social interaction and, related to this, feelings of isolation in terms of lack of support, guidance and community feeling. Additionally, online learners have to manage their own learning pace and task performance. It is very important to offer either teacher or system support in time management for learners in virtual learning environments. Didactic approaches have to consider support systems to mitigate these drawbacks.

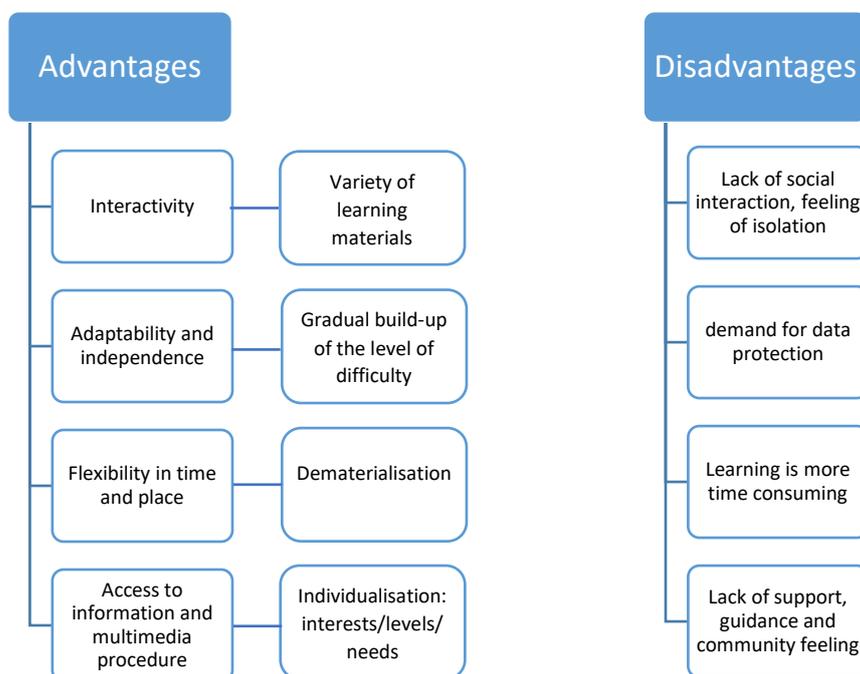


Fig. 1: Advantages and disadvantages of ICT-based language learning.

### 3.5 Hands-on ideas for implementation

The recent shift in language learning towards the application of digital environments has provided students with new learning strategies to develop their communicative competences. Various studies (Hubackova & Ruzickova, 2011; Mullamaa, 2010; Sarfraz, Mansoor & Tariq, 2015) present numerous best practice examples on how to implement tasks and applications.

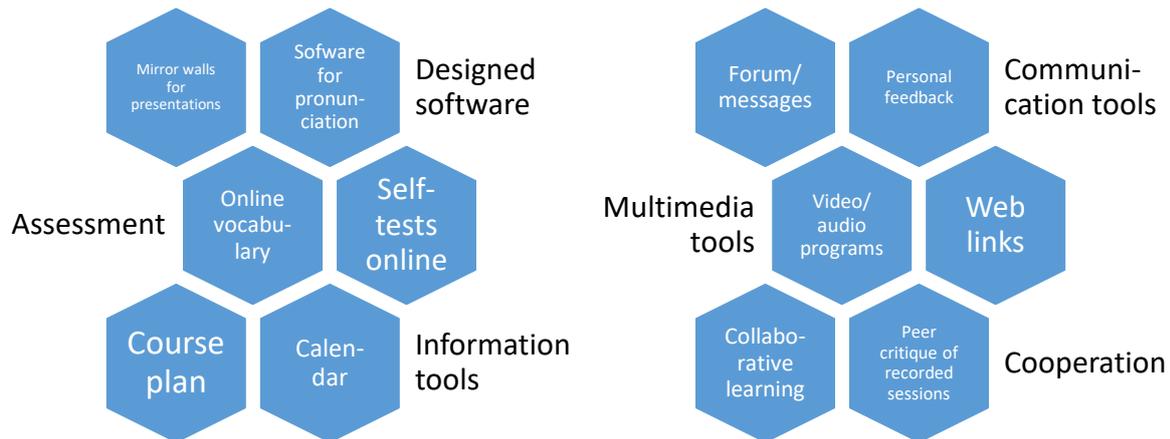


Fig. 2: Best practice examples for implementation.

#### Recommendations for practice

Comprehensive recommendations, do's and don'ts can be found in the current literature on implementing e-learning tools in language learning. Some recommendations are listed below:

- In order to promote collaborative learning among students, the virtual learning platform should provide enabling technology for interaction and co-working. (Wu et al., 2017)
- A technology-assisted online learning community should provide an authentic setting for genuine interaction among students. (Wu et al., 2017)
- Recent studies point out that synchronous interactions are a key motivator for engaging students in tasks. Students reported that languages are best learned through interaction with native speakers. Thus, the development of a community of practitioners is recommended (Mhichil, Appel, Ó Ciardubháin, Jager & Prizel-Kania, 2015).
- Students' responsibility for performing the online learning activities is essential. To support the students' learning progress, teachers must have tools for monitoring their progress throughout the whole process. (Wu et al., 2017)
- Reduce redundant data on the platform: incomplete tasks should be deleted after an agreed period of time.

- In case of a flipped classroom, keep the online courses open for participants for at least half a year after the course ends, thus offering possibilities for a longitudinal learning process. (Mullamaa, 2010)
- The main technical issues that have to be solved are usability of tools, storage of files, concerns related to data protection and learners' privacy. (Michil et al., 2015)
- Every online learning environment should provide particular tasks for moderation to address potential mal-use. (Michil et al., 2015)

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## 4. Assessing verbal skills

### 4.1. Definition and types of assessment

Assessment is the process of identifying, gathering and interpreting information about students learning. This process involves a wide variety of methods and tools to monitor performance and document the students' progress. Assessment is also important to evaluate the teachers' performances and it can point measures to improve the whole process, the goal is to make improvements, not just simply judge learners. (Hanna & Dettmer, 2004)

The terms assessment refers to the whole process of documenting knowledge, skills, attitudes and beliefs, usually in measurable terms. In the educational context, assessment is the process of describing, collecting, recording, scoring and interpreting information about what a student can do.

In the context of language teaching and learning assessment refers to:

- The act of gathering information on a daily basis in order to understand individual student's learning and needs.
- It also refers to the act of collecting information and making judgements about a learner's knowledge of the language and ability to use it. (Hanna & Dettmer, 2004)

Types of assessment:

Assessment can be done through many methods and it is possible to classify them based on the purpose for which they are designed. (Angelo, T. A., 1993)

- **Formative assessment:** provides feedback and information during the teaching process. It serves to document the progress of the student and to adjust the training experience to the real needs of students while the teaching process is ongoing.
- **Summative assessment:** takes place after the learning experience and provides feedback that sums up the teaching and learning process.
- **Performance assessment:** requires students to prove that they master the skills they have been training during the learning process. It's usually done by producing or performing something, like building things or performing oral presentations.
- **Diagnostic assessment:** identifies students strengths and weaknesses and it can be used to adapt the teaching to the student's needs. It provides exhaustive information, but if the student is not properly informed, he can perceive his weaknesses as a diagnosis of medical issues and demotivate himself. It requires preparation of the teacher and students to understand this method.
- **Authentic assessment:** this type of assessment reflects student's learning achievements, motivations and attitudes. It emphasizes what student knows rather than what they do not know. If done correctly, the student participates actively in the assessment and, being able to participate in the progress and achieving goals, can be highly motivating.

#### 4.2 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages:

As many authors have already pointed, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment (henceforth, the CEFR), has been one of the most influential development in the domains of language teaching and testing in the last decades.

Weir (2005), points that CEFR has not been designed specifically for language testing, even if it can be used to determine the objectives for teaching and assessments. Although there have been problems while implementing the CEFR in language testing, using the CEFR scales for reporting what a learner can do is very useful. But, likewise, this can lead to an inappropriate use of it by not clearly establishing how the evaluations are to be carried out since the CEFR is only a theoretical framework on which to develop training materials. The CEFR enables language testers to generate tests with common principles that are in accordance with the values of the Council and the idea of European citizenship. Apart from the theoretical considerations, several criticisms have been made regarding the practical issue in utilising the CEFR for test development and alignment issues. For instance, choices related with content selection are left to the test developers.

This year, 2018, the council of Europe made some changes to 2001 descriptors of competences, these changes must be taken into account while developing assessment grids.

The biggest changes in this field are the disappearance of the term “native” in the descriptors, as learners are expected to communicate with any speaker, not just natives. These changes are important for choosing the right materials when preparing tests or other assessment materials and teachers must notice descriptors changes.

To overcome these shortcomings, a test development model might help and guide teachers in defining the constructs, generating tests, administrating and evaluating them by taking our context into consideration. Such a model would have clear and practical implications on practical teaching and learning.

Assessment is an integral part of language teaching and learning languages, not just a final step in the process, nor just a judgment. Following the CEFR, the term assessment is used to refer specifically to evaluation related to proficiency and learning among language students. The term evaluation, in contrast to assessment, has a broader meaning, and it goes beyond language proficiency to include aspects such as analyses of the effectiveness of teaching methods, materials or teacher satisfaction. The CEFR uses the term assessment only to analyse the level of proficiency learners have, and uses the term evaluation with a broader meaning.

#### 4.3 How to assess oral skills: rubrics, tests and gamification

Assessment is “an ongoing process that involves the student and teacher in making judgements about the student’s progress in language using by non-conventional strategies” (Heurta-Macias, 1995, cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002, p. 337). Indeed, it serves to improve instruction, enhance students’ performance and develop their autonomy (Bostwick & Gakuen, 1995; Cohen & Hill, 2000).

#### Rubrics:

The rubric is defined as an instrument that can be easily adapted to assess the oral competence of a student in a foreign language. It is an instrument that accurately assesses the learning and the products made by the students.

According to Arter & McTighe (2001), rubrics measure learners' performance in a way that goes beyond the information gathered by the traditional standardized testing and they help maintain consistency in the assessment process.

It breaks down performance levels into specific aspects and provides information on performance levels and specific performance criteria.

The creation of meaningful opportunities for oral language assessment during English sessions encourages both teachers and students to take on active roles in the assessment process. Despite the existence of some problems related to the affective/psychological, knowledge, performance and technical reasons, teachers strive to implement both types of evaluation in the classroom, which revolve around the use of formative and summative use of speaking assessment.

#### **Tips to create rubrics to assess oral skills:**

- Choose a task to assess.
- Summarize the critical elements that are going to be evaluated (elements must be measurable).
- For each element create also an evaluative range of the performance in each element (for example, "Excellent", "Good" and "Unsatisfactory").
- Also use scale of development in the rubric, such as "Beginning", "Emerging" and "Exemplary".
- Add descriptors for each level of performance.
- Avoid subjective or imprecise criteria such as "interesting" or "creative". Use objective indicators as much as possible.
- Criteria must clearly differentiate one level from another.
- Assign a numerical scale to each level.
- If possible, ask your colleagues for their opinion and feedback on the design.
- Explain students on how to use the rubrics and request feedback to them. This will show you if the rubric is clear to them and will help you to identify any weakness.
- Rework the rubric based on all comments and suggestions received.

#### Tests:

The most usual tests to measure the oral and communicative competences of a student are interviews, either individual or group. The teacher can either conduct the interviews personally or rely on ICT tools. An example of a test using ICT tools, would be the case of a student equipped with a computer, headphones and microphone, who listens to the questions and has a closed time to answer that question, the system records the responses that will later be evaluated by the teacher.

Recording the students' answers allows a revision of the answers, a comparison of the answers and solves the problems of objectivity since they could undergo an evaluation by a third person if necessary.

Tests are the most extended form of assessment, but they are not the only mean, and in the case of assessing oral skills they have a very limited scope. Assessing can be also done through informal checking or verification. There are three main concepts linked to the concept of tests that are fundamental: validity, reliability and feasibility. (Morrow, C. K. 2018).

- **Validity** is the degree to which the test measures what is assumed and expected to measure. Frequently, tests applied measure very partial aspects of the students' competences and have a very relative validity when it comes to making global judgements about communicative competences.
- **Reliability** refers to the consistency of the tests. A test is reliable when participants get the same results (or very similar) if they perform the same test several times on different days.
- **Feasibility** refers to how authentic the tasks are. The items or questions the students must solve in the test must be related to activities and tasks of real life, somehow they must be similar to problems that are usually presented in real life.

Assessing also involves several factors related to contexts, culture and assessment tradition, and all of them must be considered while assessing.

#### **Tips for developing tests:**

- Physical circumstances under the language testing takes place.
- Time of the task.
- Keep a balance on task types.
- Balance the topics and genre.
- Include a range of voices and accents in the listening
- Keep in mind the cultural perspectives of students.

#### Gamification:

A group of Spanish investigators designed an APP named *GuessIt!* that helped learners to get involved in their own learning process and assessing their foreign language knowledge. The APP was initially launched for the A1 level of German. They designed a game based on the pedagogical framework of mobile learning which many researchers have described as a process in which learning is gained through multiple contexts, in which people and technology interact.

In this experiment students played on the APP for four weeks, focusing on different levels of vocabulary. Results from the pre and post tests have shown a significant improvement in vocabulary acquisition and the results have also shown that the students had spent more time using the APP than the estimated time they would usually spend learning beyond the classroom. A clear correlation between the indicators of independent results obtained in the APP and the results obtained in the course is yet to be found.

#### 4.4 Digital assessment tools

Technology plays a vital role in the effective and efficient assessment of oral skills and offers teachers a variety of new tools that can be used in any kind of classroom. The use of ICT in assessment involves the use of digital devices to assist in the construction, delivery, storage and reporting of assessment tasks, answers, grades or students' comments.

ICT-based assessment can be done through many devices like laptops or through other portable devices such as smart phones, tablets, iPads, or even through the use of electronic gaming devices. Likewise, ICT-based assessment supports the use of multiple formats like text documents and multimedia formats, and it can also involve simulations of complex games. Students can perform the assessment tasks individually or by groups and such assessment can occur with a large number of students in a synchronous or asynchronous manner.

For example, teachers can use computers to create assessment assignments, deliver them to students, collect results, and finally provide grades and comments to students. This method also allows to analyse the responses collected and to differentiate students with different abilities, the teacher can adapt materials and didactic methods to the student's characteristics.

Example of asynchronous assessment tasks:

- Video recording
- Audio recording

Example of synchronous assessment through ICT:

- Video conference (Skype, Hangouts etc.)

According to the time availability of the teacher and students, each teacher will choose the most convenient way to perform the assessment tasks.

Learning managing systems (LMS) like Moodle allow the creation of assessment tasks, that can be easily shared through internet with the students and give the possibility to analyse the results at a glance. They even allow the creation of self-assessment questionnaires through which the students receive the result immediately, without the need to wait for the corrections

Examples of available tools:

- **Rogo:** customisable e-Assessment & online course delivery system.
- **Hot Potatoes:** enables you to create interactive multiple-choice, short-answer, jumbled-sentence, crossword, matching/ordering and gap-fill exercises for the World Wide Web.
- **Concerto:** web based platform for creating rich and dynamic tests.
- **Myexambox:** enables teachers to create exams and share them publicly.
- **Animoto:** Gives students the ability to make a short, 30-second share video of what they learned in a given lesson.
- **AudioNote:** A combination of a voice recorder and notepad that captures both audio and notes for student collaboration.
- **ForAllRubrics:** This software is free for all teachers and allows you to import, create, and score rubrics on your iPad, tablet, or smartphone. You can collect data offline with

no internet access, compute scores automatically and print or save the rubrics as a PDF or spreadsheet.

- **Kaizena:** An online tool for providing students with real-time feedback on their digitally-uploaded work. Teachers can highlight or speak to give verbal feedback and attach teacher-created, reusable resources to student work.
- **Peergrade:** A platform that allows teachers to create assignments and upload rubrics. Students upload work and are anonymously assigned peer work to review according to the rubric.
- **Voxer:** Consider using this voice recording tool as a way to let students listen and self-assess their ideas and assignments. You can send recordings to parents so they can hear how their students are doing, let students chat about their work, or provide feedback to students.

Digital tools allow students' and teachers' mobility, they can perform the evaluations at any time and, depending on the type of course, they can be synchronous or asynchronous. Assessment tools based on speech recognition systems to perform self-assessments are the only ones that need to be improved since they may not recognize the student's accent or give the correct answers. It is recommended to avoid them since, due to the state of the technology, they do not always work correctly and can be highly demotivating for students.

#### 4.5 Best practices in assessing through ICT-tools

All good practices related to the assessment of oral competences through ICT tools require the human factor. As we have seen previously, technologies that would allow automatic evaluation, such as speech recognition, are not sufficiently developed to offer a reliable evaluation of a skill as complex as oral competence in a foreign language. Therefore, all the good practices that are collected are examples of how to design assessments of oral competence in foreign languages, using ICT tools to support them, but the assessing process is always performed by a person.

##### Good practice 1:

In his book *Deep Learning for a Digital Age*, which discusses the correct use of technology in higher education, Weigel (2002) designed and specific assessment method using a Moodle platform as support and rubrics.

1. For each oral task to be assessed (for example an oral presentation of 1 minute in a given topic), the teacher creates a guideline with the rubrics and an explanation on how the task is going to be assessed.
2. Each student records him/herself performing the task and uploads the video to the Moodle platform.
3. Once the trainer reviews the videos, he issues his assessment of them based on the rubrics of the evaluation guide available to the students.

4. The author recommends giving feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of the student including fluency, language, pronunciation and content. He also recommends setting a time limit, as this helps students to better plan the structure of oral assignments.
5. Having the recordings on the platform consents them to be viewed more than once, and it also allows students to conduct self-assessments or peer-to-peer assessments.
6. The tools that can be used to record the videos are Voicethread or Movenote.

This assessment task can be used in both synchronous and asynchronous training.

#### Good practice 2:

In 2010, at the International Association for Educational Assessment Conference, the authors Lendem-Hitchcock and Syed Mohamed, presented a study that stated as conclusion that the mode of delivery (paper or computer) has no significant impact on student performance in the Reading Aloud task. So when the teacher designs the task to be evaluated, in face-to-face training, it does not make any difference if he decides to put the text on screen for his students or on paper. When it comes to training through a Moodle platform, the text must necessarily be displayed on the screen and use a voice recorded tool.

The Spoken Interaction component assesses students on their ability to give their personal responses and to express themselves clearly with appropriate vocabulary and structures; and to interact effectively with the examiners.

To develop this task, trainers must take into account the following items:

- Select video clips with subjects of interest for the students. This should be done by taking into account the age of the students who are going to take the test, hence choosing videos that are appropriate for their age. Trainers must avoid content with a cultural bias and potentially sensitive or controversial themes especially involving religion, race, or ethnicity.
- Each video should be less than a minute long with a brief synopsis to make the context clear, and also with minimal text or speech. Students are explicitly told that they are not going to be asked questions on what they hear on the video clip.
- Students are asked to give personal response and comments on what they have seen on the video.
- Students have 10 minutes of preparation before the test to study the passage and watch the video clip.
- The examiners work in pairs and include an experienced school teachers and an English Language examiner. It is important that all of them know the assessment procedures before each test.

In this study, 80% of young people say that the video clip has helped them feel more comfortable and better understand the task of Spoken Interaction. So instead of showing pictures or give props to students, in the Spoken Interaction tests, it is recommended to use video clips.

This test works correctly in face-to-face training or through e-learning platforms when it is a synchronous training. In the case of asynchronous training, it is more complicated to use this type of test since it is difficult to determine how much time has passed since the student has seen the video clip and has been preparing to give his opinion, or if he/she has counted on the help of another person to prepare his/her speech. This evaluation task can be used in both synchronous and asynchronous training, provided that a tool is integrated to monitor the entire process and leave a record.

#### Good practice 3:

This Good practice is from the paper “New and not so new methods for assessing oral communication”, by Gary J. Ockey and Zhi Li (2015).

On this paper authors discuss five popular types of task used to assess oral communication. The task types are oral proficiency interviews, paired/group oral discussion tasks, simulated tasks, integrated oral communication tasks, and elicited imitation tasks. The first three task types are variants of scored interviews while the last two are variants of the highly structured samples.

The only task that allows automatic assessment using an ICT tool is the elicited imitation task, as can be done through an automated speech recognition system (ARS). Some popular apps as Duolingo use this kind of tasks to assess the oral communication skills of its users. There is great consensus that even this tasks can provide estimations of a student fluency and pronunciation, however ARS technologies do not have the potential to assess boarded communication competences as interactional aspects. Also, it could be possible that a student can only imitate the phrases without actually understanding the meaning of what he/she is saying. This might lead to students wasting time on repeating phrases instead of interacting with other language users.

To evaluate the other tasks, the authors recommend that the trainers carry out the assessment through rubrics and that they score, at least, the following key communication aspects:

- Interactional competence;
- Fluency;
- Grammar and vocabulary;
- Phonology.

The oral proficiency interviews and the paired or group oral discussions can be done through ICT tools such as Skype, but the assessment always must be done by a person. In addition, these two tasks require synchronicity between the evaluator and those who are evaluated, which is why they are tasks typical of synchronous language training.

Simulated tasks are commonly used to assess oral competences in the context of a specific purpose of a language. An example of this are the role-play tasks, which require students to play a role in a simulated tasks context, like a business meeting. One example is an oral communication test in aviation English for air traffic controllers developed by Park (2015). The test simulates a control tower as a virtual assessment environment in Second Life, an online 3D

virtual world. In the role-play task, test takers act as air traffic controllers and give oral directives based on incoming aural information. Park's tasks rely on input that has been recorded, that is, the task is asynchronous.

Integrated tasks are used to measure more than one communication subskill. An example of this task is the TOEFL iBT that uses this type of test tasks to assess speaking ability. Students are required to listen to a short audio clip and then they have to summarize that input for a hypothetical audience that has no access to that input. The students' production is then recorded and assessed by a pair of examiners. Since this task does not require interlocutors, it can be computerized. In the context of a TOEFL test, when performed in a specific place, and under supervision, although there are no synchronous elements, it is easy to verify that the student follows the rules of the exam. In asynchronous training, the tools to be used would have to allow the entire process of carrying out the task to be recorded to determine that the rules of the task have not been violated. It would be necessary to integrate in the training platform a tool that allows to follow the complete accomplishment of the task.

#### 4.6 Conclusions

The evaluation of oral skills has received much consideration at all levels, as its implementation serves to improve the learning process of students and to improve their speaking potential. It is necessary to develop more complete and exhaustive assessment mechanisms that are able to relate specific competences with other broader evaluation means, actively involving the student; both in the learning and in the assessing process.

Objectivity is the major issue a person has to face while assessing. As a response to this, the CEFR provides concepts and resources to facilitate objective judgment of language competences. Within the learning process, formative assessment involves the collection of information and feedback for students and teachers alike. In order to take advantage of assessments, people need to develop a metalanguage about evaluation. Therefore, specific training and the development of awareness, may be necessary.

Teachers should choose the assessment method in relation to the type of information they want to collect, tracking the teaching methods, the students' performances, etc. The use of ICTs represents a great advance, especially in the management of evaluations. Teachers can easily classify students, if he/she has all the information organised and stored and, when unifying methods are used, the information are easily comparable. By following simple tips, teachers can create meaningful assessment tasks and involve the students in the process who, as a consequence, will be more motivated.

Having examined and investigated the most frequent methods of assessment, it is determined that rubrics are the best recommended tool for the assessment of oral competences in foreign languages. This is because rubrics are a method that requires students to demonstrate their oral skills in a practical way, and, when they are used properly, they motivate students to advance in their studies, as they can notice their own advances.

Regarding the use of ICT tools to assess the oral competences of students, all good practices refer to tools that must be used just as a support to the evaluation that ultimately has to be done by a trainer and not an ICT tool. The reason for this is that technology is not yet sufficiently advanced to correctly assess a complex competence such as oral skills in foreign languages.

When examining good practices, it has been taken into account whether the tasks can be applied in synchronous or asynchronous training. The main outcome is that evaluating oral competences in asynchronous training through e-learning platforms has the added difficulty that certain tasks cannot be programmed, depending on the synchrony between the evaluator and the evaluated or between participants (when it comes to group tasks).

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