

TEACHERS' ICT PRACTICES AND PERSPECTIVES ON ELF AWARE ELT

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Abstract – Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) tools, highly representing out-of-school life, can motivate students to be more involved in the process of learning. As these tools can be used by students to communicate with their peers, create, disseminate, store, and manage information, they become integral to the teaching-learning interaction and process. The global society we currently live in requires that individuals develop both digital and cultural integration skills and competencies in order to become successful global citizens; teachers, as educators, not only as language teachers, are 'important actors' on this scene. This contribution discusses the responses to the Roma Tre University PRIN Teachers' survey investigating teachers' awareness and effective use of ICT in their daily English language teaching.

Keywords: ICT; digital skills; ELF; awareness; e-Twinning.

1. Language teaching practice: Current changes

English language teaching practice has in recent years changed both learning objectives and perspectives and for diverse reasons. In the last two decades Italian classrooms have gradually changed their composition: most of their students come from different cultural and linguistic environments, often coming from bilingual or trilingual migrant families recently moved into our country, while the language of schooling is Italian. This has affected not only teachers of different subject matters who had to adjust to the new condition by revisiting their use of Italian, but also English language teachers who had to reconsider their teaching approach. Their approach previously aimed at teaching English to monolingual Italians, while most recently they have been adapting their teaching of English to a plurilingual group of learners, whose English language competence varies according to the context they had learnt to use English and, most importantly, to the way they had been exposed to it, often out of school and through social media (Reinhardt 2019).

The English native speaker model in English language teaching (ELT) in multilingual classrooms has thus become unrealistic, not only because it has failed to reflect the lingua franca status of English, but also because the growing exposure to learners' out of school experiences, thanks to

international exchange projects or through the use of apps and social media, has challenged teachers' traditional ELT and has posed different types of communicative needs for learners.

A new conceptualization of communicative competence in English has thus become necessary, one which recognizes English as a world language spoken by a vast majority of L2 users, and encourages students to focus more on cultural and linguistic mediation rather than focusing mainly on accuracy. This new concept would take successful bilinguals with intercultural insights and knowledge as pedagogical models. Therefore, teachers should aim at the realization of intercultural communicative competence in ELT (Alptekin 2002). In this context the use of ICT is central as it allows teachers to take advantage of numerous tools that create opportunities for their students to use authentic material and real communications with their peers all over the world. When first introduced in the Italian educational context over twenty years ago (MIUR 1995), the use of ICT had initially been overlooked and considered disconnected to learning, both at school and at university level. Its central role for enhancing learning has only recently been acknowledged and a growing number of teachers of diverse subjects, gradually started using them, even though ICT are not fully integrated into daily teaching yet.

Several teacher education programs in ICT, meant to raise teachers' awareness of the relevance of technologies use in classroom teaching, particularly for language learning. These programs were developed and implemented by both national and European institutions. In the last 15 years training courses for the use of the Interactive White Board (IWB) or the National Plan for a Digital School, which supplied schools with infrastructures and expert coordinators (digital animators) in all schools have represented some of the most relevant attempts to integrate ICT in the language classrooms (Cannelli, Morbiducci 2019).

The field of ICT, as perceived, used and implemented by English language teachers in the classroom was among the areas investigated during the Roma Tre unit research study. The survey was administered to almost 200 EL teachers, and it explored EL teachers' knowledge, beliefs and their current teaching practices. Teachers' answers to the survey questions related to the use of ICT and of social media in ELT, highlighted the teachers' perception of the relevance the use of technology has in sustaining teachers in their job, and function and role ICT may have both in daily ELT and in teacher education within an ELF aware perspective.

2. ICT use in the language classroom: Findings from the teachers' survey

The teachers who answered the initial research survey, responded to some questions related to their ELT practice, among those questions, two were specifically related to their use and integration of digital technology and to the inclusion and use of social media in their ELT lessons. This aspect was specifically addressed in Q.17 where teachers were asked to identify those factors that would make a successful English teacher today; three were the factors explicitly mentioned: the integration of ICT in ELT, the use of social media and of authentic materials in the language classroom and the participation in European exchange programs inclusive of forms of telecollaboration. Q. 22 was meant to understand whether and how much EL teachers participate in transnational projects.

<i>Q17 Please indicate what you think would make a successful English teacher today:</i>	
17.4. To integrate the use of digital technology in English language teaching (ELT)	72,86%
17.5. To encourage learners to use social media and to bring samples of authentic English into the classroom	80%
17.7. To participate in European projects (e.g. e-Twinning, Erasmus, Tandem, etc.) using digital media & telecollaboration	68.37%
<i>Q22 Have you ever taken part in transnational projects, such as eTwinning or other European projects?</i>	Yes 34,29%

Table 1
ICT related questions in the teachers' survey.

The responses – 72,86% - to the survey highlighted English language teachers' awareness of the importance of integrating digital technologies in their teaching in order to become successful teachers. Over 80% agreed on the relevance of encouraging learners to use social media and of bringing samples of authentic English into the classroom. They considered essential for a teacher today to be able to select materials from the web and use authentic audio/video materials including texts in non-standard English as well as to be able to integrate the use of digital technology in ELT.

Over 68% also agreed that taking part in European projects and involving learners in forms of telecollaboration would represent a way to enhance teachers' success, even if the responses reveal that only 34,29 % of the survey respondents had themselves taken part in transnational projects.

These data highlight teachers' awareness of the important function of integrating ICT in ELT in order to offer learners the opportunity to use authentic materials, even if ICT, according to their responses, are not always

transferred into classroom practices. This still indicates that a transformation is taking place in the EL teachers' practice, and that they acknowledge the role played by ICT and the professional development implications of bringing international projects into the English language classroom (Cannelli, Morbiducci 2019).

3. Introducing ICT in an ELT training course within an ELF perspective

A course component on digital technologies, inclusive of the introduction to the eTwinning project for European class exchanges used in English Language Teaching, was included in the Post-graduate blended Teacher Education Course: *NEW ENGLISH/ES LANDSCAPES: revisiting English Language Teaching & Learning*, held at Roma Tre University as one of the main outcomes of the research project.

The aim of the ICT component in the training course for English language teachers was to encourage their use of digital technologies in a global perspective, in order to enhance intercultural communication in ELT within an ELF aware scenario.¹ The course participants were encouraged to develop lessons and activities in which digital tools had to be integrated and used to promote an active role of learners in a global perspective, thus opening the classroom to the outside world.

Another important goal of the ICT component was to have teachers acquire those competencies needed to set up collaborations with other European teachers through the *eTwinning* project² and the Erasmus+ projects in order to facilitate their implementation in the language classrooms, while sustaining the tailoring of the appropriate tools and methods proposed to their school and class contexts; all of this was part of the course practicum.

The ICT component supported teachers in identifying appropriate apps and ICT tools and in learning to use them according to their teaching context and their pedagogical and language objectives. Teachers were involved in planning learning activities collaboratively, using these tools to promote and enhance their learners' intercultural communication.

¹ Course ICT component program in ANNEX 1.

² *eTwinning* – the Community for schools in Europe and neighbouring partner countries – is an action for schools funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ programme. It involves teachers from 36 European countries and 8 neighbouring countries. *eTwinning* is a digital platform available in 31 languages. Browsing visitors can access a range of public information about how to become involved in *eTwinning*; explaining the benefits the action offers and providing information for collaborative project work. <https://www.etwinning.net/en/pub/about.htm>.

During the teachers' initial brainstorming and discussions about their practice and their use of ICT, it emerged that traditionally digital tools were considered as detached from usual lesson activities, to be used only with the aim of motivating students on language development. On the contrary, as it came out later in the course, during the lesson planning phase, course participants realized that ICT need to be integrated and strictly connected with pedagogical objectives, both in daily language lesson planning and in international collaboration partnerships.

3.1. Digital tools in the ELT classroom

The digital tools, proposed to the course participants to sustain their ELT practice within an ELF-aware pedagogical perspective, were introduced in the course according to their features and functions and their relevance for exposing learners to authentic input. Diverse were the tools introduced and then implemented in the participants' lesson planning and classroom implementation.

The most commonly used tools teachers use in the ELT classrooms are videos; they often come together with the coursebooks or are provided by publishers since they are the most effective instruments to enhance students' autonomous learning: they can be viewed, stopped, reviewed, and listened to again. And they provide teachers with authentic or semi-authentic materials that would cover a variety of topics and offer an opportunity to explore spoken language.

Videos can be used in the ELT classroom for teaching vocabulary, accents and pronunciation. They offer authentic examples of everyday English as used by people with diverse lingua-cultural background; they can be used by teachers, but also by students who can create their own videos. By creating a context for these short videos, students can be helped to explore a world of online English learning possibilities. There are several websites that offer teachers opportunities to download useful videos as well as supporting teaching guidelines for classroom use.

TED website,³ for example, offers a playlist of videos completely dedicated to issues related to language and communication, bilingualism, multilingualism and intercultural communication in all parts of the world, as well as many regarding migrants and refugees who speak about their experiences; they are freely available on *TED* website. *TED* has recently developed special materials and lesson plans to be used together with the videos.⁴ The course participants were offered the opportunity to try out *TED*

³ <https://www.ted.com/>.

⁴ TES-ED. The TED-Ed project – TED's education initiative – makes short video lessons worth sharing, aimed at educators and students. Within TED-Ed's growing library of lessons, you will find carefully

materials and they did so in order to find voices and experiences in English from all over the world and they started resorting to the *TED ED* website.

Extremely interesting videos and podcasts can be found on the website of the *Centre for Intercultural Dialogue (CID)*, where people from all over the world share their experience and offer useful materials. The *Center for Intercultural Dialogue* serves as a clearinghouse in multiple ways; one is to provide links to sites that publish podcasts or videos on topics related to intercultural and transcultural communication. The CID is closely connected to the UNESCO Crossings Institute for Conflict-Sensitive Reporting and Intercultural Dialogue, University of Oregon, brings together 2 different pursuits: intercultural and inter-religious dialogue on the one hand and conflict-sensitive journalism on the other.⁵

Course participants were presented with diverse platforms and apps to exploit or develop videos, and they learnt how to create games and quizzes on videos, thus stimulating their language creativity. They also involved their students to create their own videos; some of them used, for example, *Playposit*,⁶ a tool that allows teachers to upload any video and ask simple questions, through *Playposit Interactive video*, three times as effective as a standard video, where learners explore and learn how to apply new material at their own pace in a digital setting, thus stimulating their language creativity.

Another popular and useful tool that was frequently used by the course participants was the *YouTube* channel, always a source of videos, songs and interviews; it even offers teachers support to involve learners in the creation of a video of their own and upload it on *YouTube* using the *Studio.Youtube tool*.⁷

The first interactive social tool and scenario that was suggested to the course participants was *Flipgrid*,⁸ a social learning tool for “PreK to PhD”, as it is advertised. *Flipgrid* is a social learning platform where educators can ask learners a question, and the students can respond to the teachers and to each other using a video, creating a “web” of discussion. A list of video capsules appears in a line and any student can add his/her response just entering with a code - either with a computer or a tablet or a mobile - by clicking on a button and recording.

The following link <https://flipgrid.com/etwinners> represents an example of how *Flipgrid* was used to have a web discussion among teachers,

curated educational videos, many of which are collaborations between educators and animators nominated through the TED-Ed platform. <https://www.ted.com/watch/ted-ed>.

⁵ <https://centerforinterculturaldialogue.org/databases/podcasts/>.

⁶ <https://go.playposit.com>.

⁷ <https://studio.youtube.com/channel/UCm7V1hI2COFqYVajim6k89A>.

⁸ <https://info.flipgrid.com>.

coming from different parts of the world, all non-native speakers. We can see some teachers introducing themselves and discussing the validity of this tool in an intercultural context meant to enhance students' awareness of the wide diversity of Englishes spoken all over the world.

Digital storytelling can also represent a way of collaborating on a common narration among international partners; the most interesting tool that fosters both spoken and written skills is *Storyjumper*.⁹ This tool allows the creation and sharing of storybooks with voice narration by the author or partner.

Another interesting area of ICT tools in English language learning and teaching, that was introduced to the course participants, is *Gamebased-learning* that includes both traditional games that allow communication in English among players and games created specifically for language acquisition in telecollaboration. In the first group there are games such as *Minecraft* or *Fortnite* that are very challenging and motivating for students, amplifying their need for communication. In the second group there are simple tools such as *Quizlet* or *Kahoot*, that are created by teachers or students to provide a gamelike feedback, or more complex environments like “escape rooms” or virtual reality worlds. Today, gamification and game-based learning have become buzzwords in education; gamification at school, is the idea of applying some game elements to a non-game situation, using a scoring game mechanic to reward users for certain behaviors, for example, if a student helps a classmate, or if he completes an assigned task within a certain time.¹⁰

3.2. eTwinning: A special place for ELF communication

Participating in international projects, such as *eTwinning* or ERASMUS+, EL Teachers encounter NNS teachers and learners from other countries, they use ICT and adjust to diverse cultural and linguistic environments, they use English in intercultural communication very seldom included in their initial teacher education.

eTwinning partnerships represent a great source of innovative practices for English language learning, and English is used as a Lingua Franca in social media interactions as it gives teachers the opportunity to exchange experiences with the support of international experts. An example of this type of experience took place during the course with the participation of Tübingen University, when a webinar on virtual reality environments in ELT in an ELF aware perspective was held on the European eTwinning platform by Professor Kurt Kohn, supported by the author (Kohn 2016).

⁹ <https://www.storyjumper.com>.

¹⁰ <https://www.game-learn.com/what-is-game-based-learning/>.

The Erasmus+ project *Tecola*, created among the others by Professor Kurt Kohn, from Tubingen University, gives special attention to:

- Authentic communication practice in the foreign language;
- Intercultural experience, awareness raising and competence development;
- Collaborative knowledge discovery in contexts of content and language integrated learning;
- Learning diversity and differentiated pedagogical practices.

Tecola virtual world harnesses gamified telecollaboration technologies to enhance foreign language teaching and learning. Virtual world interaction, video communication and gamification are deployed to support virtual pedagogical exchanges between secondary school students throughout Europe.

Professor Kohn presented the course participants his Erasmus+ project *Tecola*, involving European Universities and schools in virtual environments with the aim of helping foreign language students develop their intercultural communicative competence.

During the webinar Professor Kohn explained how ICT can foster autonomy in foreign language students in a global perspective with the use of synchronous and asynchronous tools such as *Tecola* virtual world, videoconferencing and co-construction of written communication through dedicated tools, offering scaffolding, differentiation and increased communicative production (www.tecola.eu).

In *Tecola* virtual world, Chatterdale English village offers the environment where students from different countries, using their avatars can interact, following their teachers' instructions. The link to the *Tecola* project website¹¹ offers all materials, tools and are available for consultation, while the link in the note refers to the Webinar held in the course.¹²

eTwinning – The community for schools in Europe – is an online community working on a safe internet platform that provides a range of activities including joint projects for schools at national and international level, collaborative spaces and professional development opportunities for teachers.

eTwinning has had a particularly positive impact on project-based teaching skills and foreign language skills, as well as other teaching practices such as multi-disciplinary teaching, students' competence development, student-centred discussions, and the development of learning to learn skills. Development in these areas can be said to be mainly supplied within

¹¹ <https://sites.google.com/site/tecolaproject/>.

¹² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jcBBTVNc6y0>.

eTwinning, as they are skills and practices which teachers otherwise may have less opportunity to develop.

As far as English language learning and teaching in an ELF perspective is concerned, in the latest EU publication “*eTwinning in an era of change*” (2020), teachers who are taking part in the European community of schools perceive that *eTwinning* has had a strong positive result both for them and their students particularly in their abilities to deal with multi-cultural situations, as the table below shows.

83% Promoting intercultural dialogue through collaborative work between colleagues and learners and with various stakeholders.
82% Ensuring I acquire social, civic and intercultural competence.
80% Ensuring my students acquire social, civic and intercultural competence.
79% Developing my competences to design and use a wide range of teaching strategies to meet the specific learning needs of learners of all abilities with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

Table 2

The top 5 priorities that teachers report in relation to their own development and the development of their students (Gillera 2020, p. 11).

As it emerges from the *eTwinning 2020 Report*, multiculturalism is a fact of modern day society and teachers are faced with this challenge in their classrooms on a daily basis. The respondents to this survey place the promotion of intercultural dialogue at such a high level as well as the wish to develop further their competence in designing and using a wide range of teaching strategies to meet all such challenges.

The Teaching and Learning International Survey (*TALIS 2018*) of the OECD asked teachers and school leaders about working conditions and learning environments at their schools to help countries face diverse challenges. *TALIS 2018* pays particular attention to multicultural diversity, where the integration of world economies and large-scale migration contributed to forming more ethnically, culturally and linguistically diverse and rich learning environments, creating the need for high-quality learning experiences for diverse student bodies.

The results of the 2018 Monitoring Survey show that *eTwinning* teachers use the *eTwinning* Community to (Kearney, Gras-Velázquez 2018, p. 25):

- ensure that they acquire social, civic and/or intercultural competences;
- promote intercultural dialogue through collaborative work among and between colleagues and learners at different levels;
- develop their competence to design and use a wide range of teaching strategies to meet the specific learning needs of learners of all abilities

with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socio-economic backgrounds;

- provide students with opportunities to learn about and practice democratic values, social inclusion and/or active citizenship.

4. Conclusions

The responses to the Teachers' survey showed a clear understanding of the relevance of ICT in language learning and in teaching materials, and the growing role of international exchange programs, as well as of projects like *eTwinning*, because the use of ICT helps learners become more familiar with a range of non-native accents and raises students' awareness of how features of their own accent could cause difficulty for someone who is not so familiar with it.

Projects such as *eTwinning* enhance the awareness of the multicultural dimension and of the European integration process in students and teachers, and foster students' understanding of globalization while consolidating mutual value of different identities. While working with peers all over Europe, teachers experience pedagogical innovation in an international environment, being supported by a continuous and progressive feedback on the work done.

In the teacher education course *NEW ENGLISH/ES LANDSCAPES* participants expressed their deep interest on the innovative ELF aware approach through ICT and international projects, even if they showed difficulty in detaching from a native speakerist perspective, probably because they are still undergoing a process of change that needs more time to be realized. Awareness needs to be implemented with a sound pedagogical background integrated with the use of technology. ICT tools allow this process to accelerate as they allow out of school real life and different cultures come into their classroom daily practice.

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Annex 1

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CORSO DI AGGIORNAMENTO

New English/es Landscapes: Revisiting English Language Teaching & Learning

A.A. 2018/2019

Prof.ssa Alessandra Cannelli

The use of digital technologies in a global perspective: how to develop intercultural communication in ELT

Aims and Objectives: After examining the results of the PRIN survey about the use of ICT in an ELF aware attitude, the teachers will be guided to have a more reflective approach to tech, with a pedagogical and global perspective.

Skills: The teachers will be able to:

- select tools according to context, pedagogical objectives and skills to be enhanced;
- plan activities by the use of tools that may develop Ss' ELF awareness and intercultural communication;
- interact with other teachers all over Europe in order to start partnerships among schools and improve their own professional development.

Activities: The teachers will be asked to plan class activities/lessons in which digital tools are integrated and specifically used to promote an active role of Ss in a global perspective.

Activities on-line: Teachers will be asked to take part in forum discussions and they will be assigned tasks.

Evaluation: Before final evaluation, peer evaluation of tasks will be object of forum discussion in order to share practices

Practicum: Teachers will be asked to try out what planned and observe results in their classrooms.