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Can WhatsApp Enhance Students' Learning in CLIL?

¿Puede WhatsApp mejorar el aprendizaje de estudiantes en AICLE?

Lara Martínez
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5268-6433
IFDC Lenguas Vivas Bariloche, Argentina.
laraostanovit@gmail.com

Delicia Fernández Medina
IFDC Lenguas Vivas Bariloche, Argentina.

Cecilia Zabala
IFDC Lenguas Vivas Bariloche, Argentina.

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ABSTRACT. The aim of this paper is to show the impact of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) by using WhatsApp with activities based on collaborative work, real time communication, and feedback. The relevance of presenting authentic material such as topics of students' interest combined with collaborative work is central for developing motivation and success within the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach. The paper describes two activities: The first activity focuses on the creation of sentences using Google Photos, and the second one focuses on listening and speaking skills by using the shared space facilitated through WhatsApp as a mediation resource used by teachers in their classrooms, among other 21st-century digital tools. Also, the objective of achieving optimal learning outcomes promotes the increase of educational quality.

Keywords (Source: Unesco Thesaurus): Information and Communications Technology; ICT; CLIL; digital; collaborative work; educational quality.

RESUMEN. Este artículo muestra el impacto de las Tecnologías de la Información y de las Comunicaciones (TIC), por medio de actividades de trabajo colaborativo, comunicación en tiempo real y retroalimentación, a través de la aplicación de WhatsApp. La importancia de presentar material auténtico y temáticas que sean de interés para el estudiante, combinado con trabajo colaborativo, es un pilar para el desarrollo de motivación y éxito para la metodología del Aprendizaje Integrado de Contenidos y Lenguas Extranjeras (AICLE). Se muestran dos actividades: la primera, se enfoca en la creación de frases usando Google Photos; la segunda, se enfoca en las habilidades de escucha y habla usando espacios compartidos, facilitados por WhatsApp, como un recurso mediático usado por los profesores en sus aulas, entre otras herramientas del siglo XXI. De igual forma, se tuvo como objetivo el cumplimiento de un aprendizaje óptimo variado que promueva el incremento de la calidad de la educación.

Palabras clave (Fuente: tesauro de la Unesco): Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación; TIC; contenido y lenguaje integrados en el aprendizaje; digital; trabajo colaborativo; calidad educativa.

Introduction

Digital technologies have become an essential part of life, being used in different fields, including education. They help individuals not only to be well-organized, but also to overcome challenges (Kapur, 2019). For this reason, learners can benefit from using information and communication technology (ICT) in their personal life, as well as for school, which includes learning through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). In the context of education, WhatsApp groups can be used as a shared space in which students may use new phrases and vocabulary acquired within the classroom to discuss real life issues (Keogh, 2017).

As an attempt to help improve students' main language skills —e.g., writing, reading comprehension, and inferring meaning through interpretation, to name a few— Whatsapp is an alternative tool to enhance them, since it provides abundant benefits, such as giving access to a free system that facilitates cooperation, collaboration, and interaction. Furthermore, the use of groups in an instant messaging network enables learners to publish and share their knowledge with the class, assisting in their social presence.

The aim of this article is to describe a series of activities related to the development of writing skills of teenage students with a Pre-Intermediate (A2) level of English in a remote English as a foreign language (EFL) class, while encouraging and motivating their everyday work and development by using WhatsApp. For this purpose, we have included activities that embrace authentic material and content —the latter one based on a CLIL approach—, and different group arrangements.

Conceptual Framework

The CLIL approach offers two pedagogic advantages—namely, L2 competence and content development. It has also undergone transformations through online resources and technological devices that have

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been adjusted to the educational curriculum according to teachers' strategies and methodologies. Through digital resources such as mediation, students' language skills are also supported through remote education. Some teachers have been surprised to find out that students are not all understanding the content as they are teaching it but have been able to discover this fact through remote learning. By customizing their resources, teachers can notice the smallest detail when students do not understand a delivered piece of information. This allows them to reach out to all students who need further guidance and provide further instruction and even adjust their original presentation for effective comprehension. For this reason, WhatsApp has become an opportunity for students and teachers to connect with the content of English as a foreign language in schools.

WhatsApp enables teachers to be in touch with these students and even give them extra attention to boost their confidence and improve their learning outcomes. Educators may create a learning environment that promotes their long-term success. In EFL lessons, motivation may be achieved through stimulating tasks with a real communication purpose, including authentic contents and materials related to the students' interests, considering different group arrangements.

The huge potential of WhatsApp for creating more enriching and inclusive learning experiences includes real-time communication between teachers and students, and between teachers and parents.

A previous study at the intersection of CLIL and WhatsApp is that of Keogh (2017), who created a chat group to be used as a shared space in which learners could practice their use of new phrases or vocabulary learned in class in relation to real life issues in a supportive, reciprocal, and purposeful manner. The advantage offered by the WhatsApp group space was that activities and interactions were made outside the limited hours provided in the classroom and that the scaffolding was also available not only to those learners actively involved in the interaction, but also to those who were reading, giving evidence about the potential of such a virtual community of practice.

The relevant activities proposed in our paper are presented as individual and collaborative writing. Drawing on the notion of authenticity of content within CLIL (Pinner, 2021), students can create short stories told in seven series of images and write a caption for

them. Learners create a journal/daily dairy in which they would report everything about their week and what they wish to comment on. These entries would be reviewed by their peers. Such activities can be interesting for the students since they can create personal posts and include cultural identity in their own works.

Activities

Activity 1: "Create a Picture World"

Objective

Students will develop reading and writing skills by creating sentences and albums and by appreciating other people's works.

Target learners

Age: 13-14 years old

Level: Pre-intermediate (A2)

Language focus

Vocabulary related to countries and their culture, verb tenses, regular basis conversations, pretending, peer feedback, and interpretation of their own experiences.

Skills in focus

- Writing
- Reading

Materials

Mobile phone with WIFI access or data.

Duration

10 to 20 minutes per section.

Procedure:

1. Set up a Gmail account. Once you register and login, download Google photos.

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2. Go to the "Gallery" option on the right bottom of the Google photos app. Go to "Create your album." Once you have downloaded Google photos, and as you take some with your phone's camera, Google photos saves them automatically. After creating an album, give it a title and add as many pictures as you want.
3. Look up information about countries. Think about your favourite countries, countries you would like to visit, or the countries of your favourite football player or singer. You can also think about your family's country. Choose seven countries and look for information about their flags or food.
4. Go to Google and write the name of the country in the search bar. Go to images-gallery, select the picture you want and take a screenshot. You can take all the screenshots you want (countries, flags, etc.).
5. Now you can start your albums. Go to Google Photos. Go to Create Album. Select the photos to create the production. Give it a title. Once you create albums, they will be shared to the WhatsApp group.
6. Share the product and write sentences about that album of pictures. Example:
   "I live in Argentina. The colours of the flag are light blue and white."
   "Ariana Grande lives in the United States of America. People eat hamburgers and drink coke in the USA."
7. You can see the products of all your classmates. You can write some comments or say something about possible mistakes. You can edit them and rewrite them. You can also send an audio expressing something you want to share or question. Remember, first you type the corrections and then you send the message to the group.
8. Save your creations. Build a short story with a caption and share it as a final product.

The conceptual framework above has stressed the importance of digital resources as a mediation tool. Through WhatsApp, students can be confident and motivated as they revise content and vocabulary about countries by sharing with their classmates and the teacher

in real-time communication. The content is interesting for the students, as they can share about their origins, their favourite football players' positions, and so on. They create albums as they build and write sentences (language skills). The audience are their classmates and the teacher. Chatting and sharing content while reading sentences though a WhatsApp group creates a comfortable learning environment that provides feedback and peer correction being a source of self-confidence and authenticity, and students continue practising outside the traditional lessons in the classroom.

Feedback

Feedback on students' contributions can be made through peer correction. Students make comments about mistakes. They can write on the chat. They can also send an audio too in order to offer clarifications. The teacher makes a final comment and writes it down.

Anticipated problems

Some students may not participate. This can be due to lack of internet connectivity or a feeling of dispersity about the activity. For instance, sometimes students are too involved in Instagram (e.g., reels, chats, etc.) and unable to concentrate on school activities. If the teacher uses Instagram, a message can be sent to a student and motivate them by sending a gift or short video/reel to promote their involvement with the activity. Once they do it, tell them to go back to the Google photos activity.

Alternatives

Students are encouraged to create reels, if they prefer, as it is fun to share them. In that case, they can create an Instagram account for school and be followed by their classmates and teachers, who they can follow in return.

As another alternative, students are invited to send pictures by Telegram. In that case, they can create a Telegram account and send time-limited pictures.

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Activity 2: "Daily food routine"

Objective

Students will develop listening and speaking skills by paying attention, creating, producing dialogues about food habits and nationalities.

Target learners

Age: 13-14 years old

Level: Pre-intermediate level (A2)

Language focus

Verb tenses (Present Simple), describing types of food, requesting new information about daily food habits in the rest of the world, and social interactions resulting in peer feedback.

Skills in focus

- Speaking
- Listening

Materials

Mobile phone with WIFI access or data.

Duration

10 to 20 minutes per section.

Procedure

Send the students a model recording of their food habits and names of nationalities/countries with its traditional food. Focus the recording on being an authentic material (provided by the teacher). The following picture (Figure 1) shows a sample dialogue. The teacher, student 1, and student 2 produce a dialogue (Figure 1). At the end, the teacher records themselves and sends an audio to the WhatsApp group.

Figure 1. Illustrative sample of the activity

Source: Own elaboration.

- Ask students to think about dinner and teatime in relation to food and nationalities. You may send pictures (e.g., pizza, coffee, hamburger; Chinese, Italian, American) to guide students to a similar task. You remind them to take into account food time in their daily routine.
- Any student may start the dialogue; if nobody wants to be first, the teacher names one by writing just the name. Example: Sara. Sara sends an audio and then a student responds. All students participate.
- Listen to ideas about food time and countries. Pay attention to the speech.

The activity shows how encouraging WhatsApp is. This is an opportunity to work collaboratively. There is a focus on content language and language focus as they revise intercultural expressions about mealtimes. Furthermore, they focus on oral skills by producing speech. The use of that digital resource is suitable for students to be confident and extremely motivated; digital resources such as social media are part of daily routine. Additionally, the use of WhatsApp is

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available for extra work outside the classroom. The more input by a variety of resources with the guidance of the teacher, the better the teaching-learning environment.

The task helps learners to improve their speaking skills outside of the class. It is an additional opportunity for an authentic speaking and listening experience.

Feedback

Observations to students' contributions can be made by peer correction. When there is a mistake, one student can write it correctly and add an audio with a brief explanation. The teacher can monitor and repeat what the student expresses in order to make students realize what is wrong.

Positive feedback can be made by means of emoticons (positive ones), or they can use the option to react to the messages directly with emojis (e.g., "thumbs up").

Anticipated problems

Students may be too embarrassed to send audios. The best solution to that problem is to send a private message to the student, ask him or her to produce a short audio and send it only to the teacher. This is a good way of encouraging them to feel more confident when sharing with the whole group. The students may also record an audio in groups or pairs to avoid this issue.

Alternatives

The students can use the app Quizlet, where they can upload a short audio with translations, and their classmates can review their work online.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to describe two activities to help students to develop writing skills, self-confidence, and motivation by using WhatsApp. Based on the proposed activities, the use of WhatsApp

should be considered an effective tool to raise educational quality, by encouraging students to research, create and share their own knowledge.

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