The Integration of Apps for Communicative Competence in English Teaching

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Abstract : In the South African English school curriculum, one of the aims is to achieve communicative competence, the knowledge of using language competently and appropriately in a speech community. Communicatively competent speakers should not only produce grammatically correct sentences but also produce contextually appropriate sentences for various purposes and in different situations. As most speakers of English are non-native speakers, achieving communicative competence remains a complex challenge. Moreover, the changing needs of society necessitate not merely language proficiency, but also technological proficiency. One of the burning issues in the South African educational landscape is the replacement of the standardised literacy model by the pedagogy of multiliteracies that incorporate, by default, the exploration of technological text forms that are part of learners' everyday lives. It foresees learners as decoders, encoders, and manufacturers of their own futures by exploiting technological possibilities to constantly create and recreate meaning. As such, 21st century learners will feel comfortable working with multimodal texts that are intrinsically part of their lives and by doing so, become authors of their own learning experiences while teachers may become agents supporting learners to discover their capacity to acquire new digital skills for the century of multiliteracies. The aim is transformed practice where learners use their skills, ideas, and knowledge in new contexts. This paper reports on a research project on the integration of technology for language learning, based on the technological pedagogical content knowledge framework, conceptually founded in the theory of multiliteracies, and which aims to achieve communicative competence. The qualitative study uses the community of inquiry framework to answer the research question: How does the integration of technology transform language teaching of preservice teachers? Pre-service teachers in the Postgraduate Certificate of Education Programme with English as methodology were purposively selected to source and evaluate apps for teaching and learning English. The participants collaborated online in a dedicated Blackboard module, using discussion threads to sift through applicable apps and develop interactive lessons using the Apps. The selected apps were entered on to a predesigned Qualtrics form. Data from the online discussions, focus group interviews, and reflective journals were thematically and inductively analysed to determine the participants' perceptions and experiences when integrating technology in lesson design and the extent to which communicative competence was achieved when using these apps. Findings indicate transformed practice among participants and research team members alike with a better than average technology acceptance and integration. Participants found value in online collaboration to develop and improve their own teaching practice by experiencing directly the benefits of integrating e-learning into the teaching of languages. It could not, however, be clearly determined whether communicative competence was improved. The findings of the project may potentially inform future e-learning activities, thus supporting student learning and development in follow-up cycles of the project.

Keywords : apps, communicative competence, English teaching, technology integration, technological pedagogical content knowledge

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