

THE DIGITAL TECHNIQUE – TOOL FOR LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Maria Mion Pop^{1*}
Mihaela Giurgiulescu²
Vanesa Magherusan³

ABSTRACT

The essence of efficient communication is perceived in 45 seconds. Beyond this, everything is just some filler that only outlines the main idea, namely it enriches communication. So we can say that every lesson should be well focused and concentrated into a sequence of no more than 45 seconds. It should be the goal of trainers of foreign languages by means of computers. Therefore, we would like to point out hereby the results of a research conducted on a sample of 1,055 participants, distributed as follows: 10-14 years old, 307 participants; 15 – 20 old years, 212 participants; 21-35 years old, 325 participants; 36-50 years old, 106 participants; 51 - 65 years old, 56 participants; over 66 years old, 49 participants. All participants in experimentation want / need to learn foreign languages, with preference: English, as language of trade and wide circulation and Italian because it is smooth, fine and delightful. Our research aims to improve the use of digital techniques both for trainers and subjects in teaching/learning foreign languages, from A1 to C2, in particular through e-learning. The study's results show the need to involve IT tools in the interactions with adults, young adults and children in learning foreign languages. We would like to emphasize the challenging psycho-didactics in achieving the goal of learning and independent learning.

KEYWORDS: *e-learning, challenge, psycho-didactics, computer science in psycho-didactics, independent learning*

CORPUS

At present in Europe there is an increased focus on learning foreign languages using computer techniques, tools and top-notch software designed for all ages, social backgrounds, specialized in different professional fields and training levels.

Our research should be considered from the following perspectives:

1. Andragogy: the relation between adults and the learning of foreign languages through digital techniques.

^{1*} corresponding author, Academician Prof. Dr., University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences and Center of Education Performance "Fibonacci", mariana.mionpop@libero.it

² Ph.D. Candidate, University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences; mgiurg@gmail.com

³ Teaching assistant, Romanian-American University; Ph.D. Candidate University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences; vanesamagherusan@yahoo.com

2. Tutorship: the relation between an individual (adult/young adult/child) and their training with the help of digital techniques.

3. Conscious use of digital techniques: the relation between user and the software available for different age and training levels.

ANDRAGOGY

Major difficulties are encountered in *the learning of foreign languages* by adults and the researchers in the field of andragogy highlight or deny it knowingly every time. The reasons are multiple: the most common are those of partial or total rejection of the use of digital tools and software or the lack of thorough training in the native language (grammar in particular). Researchers provide work methods in different areas of training: vertical and horizontal, in groups or individually, face to face teaching, through slides, handouts etc., but in terms of language acquisition, they do not provide a universally valid construct as such would not be possible. Context variables are manifold depending on interest, capability, application, available and accessible tools. Andragogy defined by Kapp, A., (1883) and continued by Knowles, M. (1940) M. Nyls (1980) may be based on computerized pedagogy so as to support programs for learning any language among adults. The appropriate training to define a well consolidated skill is manifested together with the need to create a wide mass of people involved in different communication forms: emigration, economic activities, specialization/training, exchange of information etc. In the article derived from a broad research, Mion Pop, M., Giurgiulescu, M., & Magheruşan, V., (2016) indicate that adults in urban areas are more receptive to using computer tools and software in general and prefer to train in a group of subjects under the supervision of a specialized teacher.

The factors supporting the learning and use of languages by adults often coincide with the financial benefits arising from their use. By definition, andragogy is a science parallel to pedagogy. The key elements that distinguish them are: the age of the subjects involved in training, compulsory/imposed teaching/learning, the consciousness that the subject develops in need of communication.

Computer science, through various routes of any communication, supports language acquisition by any subject eager to learn to them.

Computer Assisted Language Learning - CALL

Communication in a foreign language is a key competence for lifelong learning that sums up knowledge, skills and abilities (Key Competences for Lifelong Learning - A European Framework, 2006).

Adults today live surrounded by technology and are familiar with its use in everyday life, as an element of normality. Their profile is radically changed at present, compared to previous generations, and they need a different type of learning motivations in line with current needs. Computer use in education is not a new idea. Since the 80s, the emergence of this equipment has proved to be of paramount importance, making the learning process more interesting, increasing the motivation of those who go through the training process with the use of digital technology. Thus, computer assisted language learning (CALL), the

personalized approach to learning foreign languages has become a more commonly used method. The most important features of this type of learning are individualized learning, self-paced, interactive learning with immediate, rapid and efficient feedback (Giurgiulescu M., Turculeț A., 2015 Konchady M., 2009). The use of the learning triad: audio, video and text in a lesson ensures optimal absorption of information, stimulating both the echoic and iconic memory. Learning vocabulary, for example, can be greatly facilitated by using digital games since early ages (Shahriarpoura, N., Kafib Z., 2014). It is much easier to learn correct pronunciation through the use of multimedia (the pronunciation of simple words can be listened to individually or in context, repetitions can be made whenever necessary, the pronunciation can be recorded and then compared with the correct sound). Along with vocabulary learning, educational software offers learning of foreign language grammar, spelling, writing assessment and everything that really means knowing that language. For a better reception of messages, the working environment can be adjusted within the computer-assisted learning so as to be more pleasant and closer to the learner, the sound can be easily adjusted, the look of the interface can also be chosen, and even the voice (male or female), etc.

Using digital techniques changes learning by memorization (rote learning) into learning through understanding (meaningful learning). Meaningful learning occurs when learners make connections between new knowledge (concepts or statements) and what they have already learned (D. P. Ausubel, 2000). The use of technology in language learning, of computer training facilitates understanding by means of the capabilities to structure information, gradual presentation focused on the individual and their level through the possibilities of active feedback and relationship between information (links, virtual reference).

Training tools

CALL is based on the organization of curriculum and its use. It is obvious that the offer in the field is wide and each author, free to think, comes forwards with a presentation according to what they think fit that the learner should acquire vertically so that they gain solid knowledge. If CALL is assisted, namely with the support of a specialized teacher, then the learner can find their way to success easily. If the subject learns by themselves, then they organize language acquisition based on the personal challenges encountered during training.

The organization of curriculum in CALL follows training rules *in crescendo*, which is very useful especially at propedeutic level. The fundamentals in the organization and use of curriculum consist of the presentation and impact of digital lessons on subjects. According to Mion Pop, M., (2013), Bont, J.I.C., Castilla, C.D.S., & Maranon, P.P., (2004), Landsheere, G., (1979), they should take into account the following:

1. Reference level (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2)
2. Level test: verification of skills (where required)
3. Age of learners
4. Interests of learners

5. Social background of learners
6. Topics
7. Involved parties
8. The environment where the topics are approached
9. Drawings/pictures/maps/tables/graphs relate to the age of learners and topics approached
10. Context chromatic and specific to lessons/topics
11. Literary text adjusted to the age and tasks of the learners
12. The text is clear and matches the drawings/pictures/maps/tables/graphs it refers to
13. The initial presentation/the first cover/the introduction is pleasant, attractive, challenging
14. The music accompanying the introduction is adjusted to the age and level of learners
15. The text is clearly written, with proper spacing between words, lines and drawings/pictures/maps/tables
16. The lesson includes examples and references to the next level
17. The lesson includes words/sentences translated in the context
18. The lesson includes vocabulary meant to support the learning of words and their meaning according to the lesson's topic
19. At the end of each lesson there are applications included
20. The review includes multiple choice exercises with closed or open answers
21. Level test: skills are tested according to the European standards (A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2)
22. The assessment of tasks and tests is based on scores/percentages/lit background according to results or virtual awards and/or coins, emoticons
23. Each lesson includes psycho-didactic stimuli
24. There are exercises that allow polysemantic use
25. There are translations and retroversion
26. There is the possibility to compare the translations and retroversion
27. There are models for the translation and retroversion of specialized texts
28. There are bilingual lessons
29. There are lessons that allow the adjustment of the voices of the presenter/character(s)
30. There are lessons that allow the vocal interaction of the learner with the characters
31. The end of each lesson/chapter includes vocal or written goodbyes/acknowledgments

32. The curriculum includes general topics, topics about the tourism, environment, non-discrimination, politeness, religion, economy or social-cultural topics of the speaking people

33. The emotions triggered by the topics on the learner

Transdisciplinarity (Ciolan, L., 2008) must find its place in the learning of foreign languages so that the learner could know more about the people speaking the language they learn precisely for the purpose of communicating with them (Cristea, S., 2005).

Tutorship

Tutoring in this context should be understood as the relationship between individuals (adults/young adults/children) and their training using computer. It suggests here a tutorial of the virtual teacher-evaluator that will help the learner in their training on their digital way for a vertical acquisition of language. Obviously, the learner can receive the consent of the virtual teacher to pass to the next level only based on the results obtained after each lesson.

Conscious use of digital techniques

The conscious use of digital tools must be understood as the relationship between user and foreign language software distributed by age groups and level of skill. Often, the information transmitted through software is chaotic, inadequate, incomprehensible for the subjects or incomplete. If for some subjects, the information can be reviewed, the things are not the same in terms of foreign languages, in particular for a beginner. The acquisition of a polysemic word makes the learner to use it inappropriately in contexts which might jeopardize their mood. We find it helpful to point out that the information received by the learner and how it is transmitted or suggested can put the learner in more or less pleasant situations. Therefore, we believe that information that promotes violence is inappropriate, although in language acquisition the topics approached should be diverse. The topic is important to be approached and presented so as not to cause negative emotional states on the learner (Mion Pop, M., Giurgiulescu, M., 2015).

With strong impact on the learners of foreign languages, regardless of their age, is the presentation of concepts that should be learned as easy as possible. Special attention should be paid to translations and retroversion because it is the field where we can easily notice the learner's knowledge and its absence (Pop - Mion, M., & Tacea, F.-A., (2015), Vrăsmaș, E. (1999), Zlate, M. (2004). The connection between the learner and high quality software enhance the possibility to learn and accept them at an early age. If the presentation is approachable, the digital tool will be easily accepted.

RESEARCH

Under the umbrella of language acquisition, our research enables us to contribute to the improvement of the digital path in this field. Taking into account the elaboration and assessment techniques of school textbooks, course books and scientific presentations, we would like to point out the psycho-pedagogical importance of software in the field of

foreign languages. Our research has covered 1,055 subjects. They were asked to indicate the preferred tool by which they would feel challenged/ encouraged to learn English and/or Italian. Young participants prefer to have handy access to internet programs using tools such as laptop, telephone and the computer, between 65% and 100%. Respondents over 66 years old prefer assisted training or are willing to give up if learning is not compulsory or not an urgent necessity. The differences between urban and rural areas are significant, as are those between girls and boys.

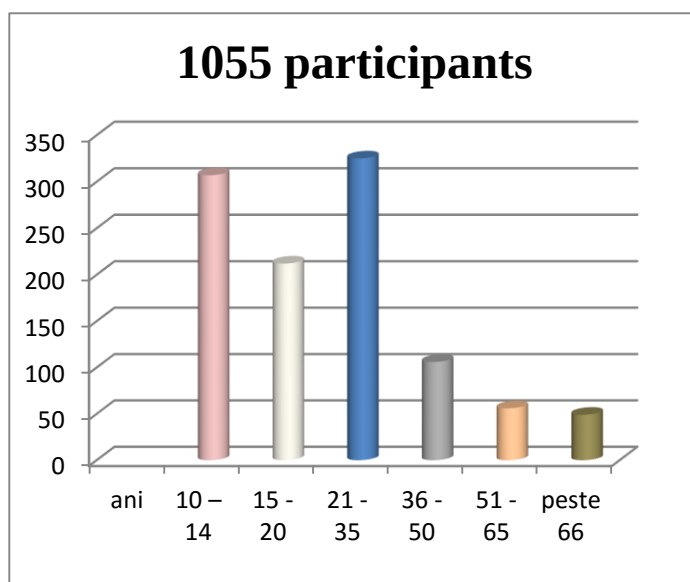


Figure 1. Distribution per age of subjects

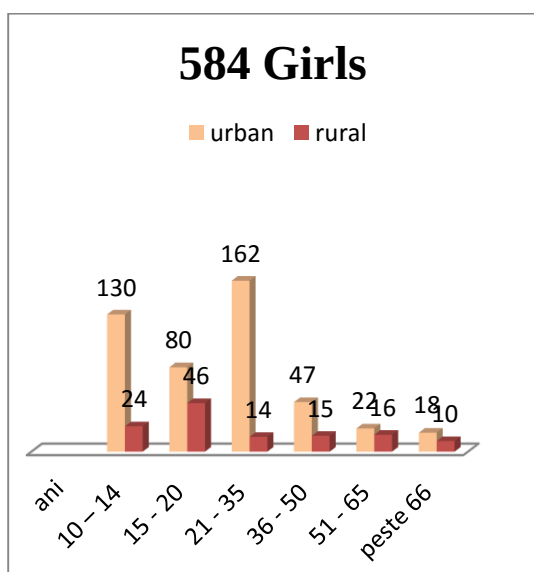


Figure 2. Distribution per age of girls

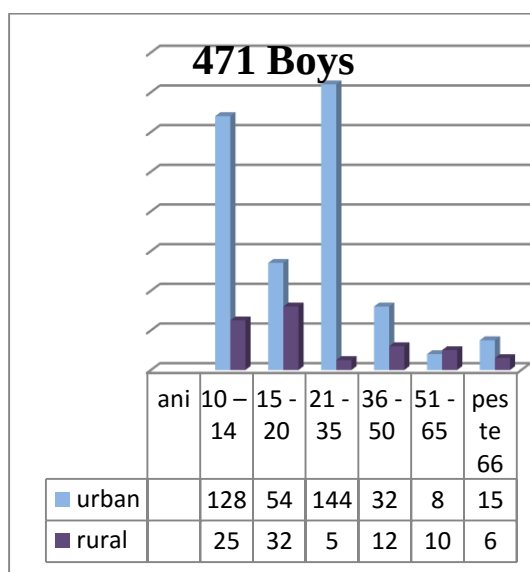


Figure 3. Distribution per age of boys

When asked *when is the adult willing to learn a foreign language*, the reply shows that the adult must be forced/encouraged/challenged to do so. The answers of urban respondents indicate that a person with a high level of culture and education would follow a medium term course to acquire a foreign language; this response is not found among respondents from rural areas even if they have a high level of training.

Children are often forced to participate, during their school years, in courses of foreign languages and they are excited to communicate and demonstrate their competence in the applied modern language. Young people (15-35 years old) are mostly dedicated to learning English rather than Italian.

Which is/are the method/methods by which the concerned subject learns a foreign language easier? The answers come from our respondents and at first glance it can be concluded that young people (10-14 years old) prefer topics focused on action involving attractive characters (speakers of the respective foreign language) with whom they can identify and enjoy engaging in dialogue with; young people between 15-20 years old are challenged by games and songs and like engaging in joint actions and interacting with other friends (speakers of the respective foreign language) and also like organizing group discussions. Quotas remain high at groups of adults (between 36-65 years old) who may be offered with a wide range of software that includes music, movies, attractive characters, and games.

As shown in the table below, we can notice that subjects older than 66 years old are interested in constructive conversations so that the sent message finds a purpose in communication; at a small difference of about 4%, subjects over 50 years old do not have a purpose different than the previous group. Between 10-35 years old subjects like engaging in dialogue even if the sent/received message does not have substance; for them it is very important to talk about anything. This is the age and market segment of the training market that creates moments of comfort or even discomfort/tension on the subject. The psycho-pedagogical impact through which the sent information reaches the subject by means of digital messages (games, movies etc) should be evaluated and controlled. That is why it is comfortable for the learning of foreign languages to be assisted by a specialist in education and training that is responsible and competent.

Table 1. The importance of factors for the learning of the linguistic competence

year	Character(s)/singer	Type and topic of game/lesson/song	Sent message
10 – 14	100%	96%	30%
15 - 20	75%	100%	10%
21 - 35	61%	77%	28%
36 - 50	80%	100%	40%
51 - 65	86%	100%	66%
Over 66	20%	60%	70%

Our proposal:

A solid acquisition and in a relatively optimum period of time can be conducted only through assisted training, focused on the subject, irrespective of their age, but integrated in a group of speakers of higher level, who could challenge the subject every day. Concentrating the material to be learnt in a relatively short period of time forces the subject to practice daily. If we distribute the period of time per levels of language acquisition according to the European standards, level A1 can be learned in maximum 7 days of work for the subject who learns English or Italian; level A2 can be mastered by the subject in 14 days; level B1 in 30 days and level B2 in 45 days. The most difficult is to master level C1 and extremely difficult level C2.

Table 2. Distribution of periods of time for the levels of language acquisition

	A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
Period of time	max.7 days	max.14 days	max.30 days	max.45 days		

In our opinion, the results above can be useful to other researchers in the field of digital education, in particular in the acquisition of foreign languages, self-learners, teachers/tutors and authors of digital textbooks, IT publishers.

REFERENCES

- [1] Ausubel, D.P. (2000). *The Acquisition and Retention of Knowledge: A Cognitive View*, Springer
- [2] Bont, J.I.C., Castilla, C.D.S., & Maranon, P.P., (2004). Comparison of three fear of flying therapeutic programs, *Psicothema*, 16(4), pp. 661-666
- [3] Ciolan, L., (2008). *Învățarea integrată, Fundamente pentru un curriculum transdisciplinar*, Iași: Ed. Polirom
- [4] Cristea, S., (2005). *Teorii ale învățării. Modele de instruire*, București: EDP
- [5] Giurgiulescu M., Turculeț A., 2015 Digital Technology in education-skills development through play *Research and Science Today* No. 1(9)/2015:237-244
- [6] Key Competences for Lifelong Learning — A European Framework (2006/962/EU)
- [7] Kapp, Alexander (1833): *Platon's Erziehungslehre, als Paedagogik für die Einzelnen und als Staatspaedagogik*. Minden und Leipzig: Ferdinand Essmann.
- [8] Knowles, Malcolm S. (1989): *The Making of an Adult Educator*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- [9] Landsheere, G., (1979). *Evaluarea didactică și examenele*, București: EDP.
- [10] Mion Pop, M., (2013). *Manualul școlar, Repere de metodologie și competență evaluativă - Învățământ primar*
- [11] Mion Pop, M., Giurgiulescu, M., (2015). *Științele Educației între Tehnologia Informației și a Comunicațiilor – TIC și Tehnologia Asigurării Calității – TAC*, Cluj-Napoca: International conference “Education, Reflection, Development”, ERD 2015
- [12] Mion Pop, M., Giurgiulescu, M., Magherusan, V. (2016). *Percepția microexpresiilor în perioada deprinderii limbii engleze și italiene prin tehnica computerizată*, lucrare

- pregătită pentru: 7th International Conference Intercultural Education “Education, Health and ICT: From a Transcultural Perspective”, Almeria, Spain
- [13] Pop - Mion, M., Tacea, F-A. (2015). Micro Expressions and Graphology in Education – A psycho-educational analysis model, “The 39th Congress American Romanian Academy Conference Proceedings”, Roma, Italy
- [14] Shahriarpoura, N., Kafib Z. (2014). On the Effect of Playing Digital Games on Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners’ Motivation toward Learning English Vocabularies, *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 98 (2014) 1738 – 1743
- [15] Konchady M. (2009). *Learn English Vocabulary and Writing*, Mustru Publishing
- [16] Vrăsmaș, E., (1999). *Educația copilului preșcolar*, București: Ed. ProHumanitate, p. 9
- [17] Zlate, M., (2004). *Leadership and management*, Iași: Ed.Polirom, p. 101.