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ICT in the English classroom. Qualitative analysis of the attitudes of teachers of English towards its implementation in Secondary Schools

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Abstract

The government of Extremadura proposed the introduction of a computer for every two pupils in state secondary schools since 2000. With the project Escuela 2.0, the aim of the Ministry of Education in Extremadura is providing each class with a digital blackboard and each student with a lap top computer from their first to their last year at secondary schools. Given the enormous cost of this programme, it is imperative that schools make the best use of ICT. Our study therefore, was designed to find out whether this was so and if not why not. We chose as subjects of the study English language teachers in the province of Badajoz, based on the hypothesis that any problems which might arise with the implantation of the plan would be found principally in the negative attitudes of teachers involved. This work aims at establishing the reasons for the failure to normalize the use of computers in the English language classroom analyzing in depth the data proceeding from the interviews carried out among sixteen teachers of English from public and private Secondary Schools.

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1. Introduction

The difficulty of providing quality education in Extremadura, an area whose widely dispersed population in small rural groups forms an educational subsystem with specific peculiarities, is especially serious in the case of speciality

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subjects like English. It is, on the other hand, the first local government in Spain to design a wide scale technological literacy project.

The literature on attitudes is abundant in sociolinguistics but scarcer in the specific area of teachers' attitudes towards learning and teaching. In recent years, however, there have been an ever increasing number of studies into the possible reasons for the lack of impact of ICT in improving educational results (Somekh, 2004), the different aspects which could be influential such as self-efficiency of teacher's own computer skills (Paraskeva, Bouta & Papagianni, 2008) or the part emotions play in accepting computers (Veen & Slegers, 2006) as well as numerous studies on the problems facing the introduction and use of computers in the classroom especially from the point of view of differing expectations and attitudes between students and teachers (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). Finally several studies have emerged which establish teachers attitudes as the probable basic cause of the wide distance between expectations and results. (Todman & Dick, 1993; Gobbo & Girardi, 2001; Albirini, 2006; Hermans et al, 2008; Shoffner, 2009; Galván 2010 & 2011). In this sense, Ertmer (2005, p.27) quotes Marcinkiewicz (1993, p.234) when he noted that the "full integration of computers into the educational system is a distant goal unless there is reconciliation between teachers and computers. To understand how to achieve integration, we need to study teachers and what makes them use computers".

One of the principal obstacles for the production of normalization of ICT in English teaching is teachers' attitudes towards them, marked in many cases by fear of expressing opinions about ICT or of admitting the use they actually make of them in the classroom. To admit that they do not use them nor possess the necessary training to integrate them in their teaching could be considered in many cases as something politically incorrect. McGinity (2002) considers in this sense the conflict between what teachers really believe about the use of ICT in the classroom and what they consider that society demands.

Bax (2011) uses Vygotsky's mediation model to explain the normalization of ICT in the teaching of languages, According to this, the development of the child's higher mental processes can only be explained in terms of social interaction and cultural engagement with the group we belong to. For that reason, it is very complicated to separate ICT from the identity of the human beings who use it. Summarizing, ICT will not have a real impact on the teaching-learning process until there are significant changes among all the members of the educational organisation, both at pedagogical level and in the structure of the current educative system. For these reasons, we wonder if the priority of the Ministry of Education in Extremadura should be investing on teachers' training for the introduction of ICT in education, instead on providing all students with a computer. Teachers are responsible for integrating ICT in their classes because they are the ones who have to manage these changes once they close the door of their classrooms to start each working day.

2. Objectives

Bax (2003) defines normalization as the "*stage when the technology becomes invisible, taken for granted in everyday life, embedded in everyday practice and hence "normalised" to the extent that we hardly even recognise them as Technologies*" (p.23)

This study aims at establishing the reasons for the failure to normalize the use of computers, specifically in the English language classroom. The subjects of the study are English language teachers in the province of Badajoz, based on the hypothesis that any problems which might arise with the implementation of ICT would be found principally in the attitudes of teachers involved.

3. Methodology

Our research provides a qualitative analysis based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 16 teachers in the Province of Badajoz, 14 from state schools and 2 from state supported private schools. All the interviews were recorded with a digital recorder at different schools and later transcribed for their analysis.

In order to respect the anonymity and confidentiality of the interviewees, we will refer to them in our quotes as PCP (Profesor de Centro Público / State school teacher) or PCC (Profesor de Centro Concertado / Private school teacher).

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