



Journal of Language and Education Policy
ISSN: 2691-6096 (Print) 2691-6118 (Online)
Issue: Vol. 4; No. 2; April 2023 (pp. 12-14)
Website: www.jlepnet.com
DOI: 10.48150/jlep.v4no2.2023.a2

The Role of Technology in Teaching Portuguese as a Second Language

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Abstract

This article will explore the various ways in which technology is being used to facilitate the teaching of a Second Language. It will also describe how technology can be used to create interactive and engaging language learning experiences, such as virtual reality and gamification. The potential benefits of different contexts and technological tools for language learners will be analyzed and evaluated based on their effectiveness in helping students to improve their language skills. Additionally, synchronous, and asynchronous teaching will be explored, as well how to properly assess students through technology. Overall, the article will examine the benefits and drawbacks of technology-assisted teaching and learning and suggest how educators can make the most of technology in their second language classroom.

Technology and the teaching of a second language

The use of technology has become an essential part in the teaching of languages. It has evolved from simple drilling and repetition as initial activities to more complex interactive activities. Today's online activities address language skills, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and other features required to learn a language. Hoopingarner (2009) argues that "language teaching can be enhanced by the effective use of technology" (p.222). He also emphasizes the importance of using technology to develop language skills, such as listening strategies and process writing (2009). Kessler (2018) points out that in today's world instructors easily create activities for learners to record their oral production. Such activities address both the students' speaking skills and improve their pronunciation. A big advancement in technology comes through communication. People are communicating with one another through increasingly different contexts. Instructors can make use of these different modalities, such as text, audio, video, images, and others (Kessler 2018). Such modalities are introduced in a second language learning class. For example, in a reading class, students can have a video as a pre-reading activity, and then answer some questions about the video. Then they can read the text and answer questions about it, all done electronically. As a post reading activity, students can discuss topics about the reading, by recording their voices, and thus interacting through the computer. Such authentic activities and materials certainly enhance effective learning. This new worldwide participatory culture presents foreign language teachers with limitless opportunities to create meaningful, authentic language practice experiences that situate learning in truly compelling contexts (Kessler, 2018). Students exposed to authentic materials in the foreign language classroom are better able to process foreign language input in real-life situations and have a more positive attitude towards learning the foreign culture (Erbbaggio, Gopalakrishnan, Hobbs, Haiyong, 2012).

Social Media Tools and Contexts

The variety of contexts available have also helped to support language learning. They include a variety of social media contexts and gaming platforms. According to Gee & Hayes, (2011) gaming provides huge engagement, and it also puts learning into perspective. The use of these tools has been the focus of early research into the potential use of Web 2.0 (What is Web 2.0?) in language learning and continues to offer promising instructional avenues into the future (Kessler 2018, p.208).

In addition to the above tools, instructors can make use of mashups to enhance second language learning. Mashups are combinations of media forms. For example, instructors can mix images with popular songs, or YouTube videos combined with grammar activities. As Kessler (2018) says, mashups are good resources to improve communication among students, and thus produce effective learning.

Another tool that can be used to enhance learning through technology is automation. Automation offers the use of bots to address learners needs. Bots can address many students at the same time, something that would be impossible for a human instructor. Moreover, they generate automated feedback. Kessler (2018) suggests some free websites for instructors, in which they can create this type of service: Chattytype.com, Botsify.com, and Robot.me. Another tool that teachers can make use of is virtual reality. This is a technology that has been growing and improving throughout the years. Through virtual reality students can interact with one another in a familiar space in wholly new and varied ways (Kessler, 2018, p. 213).

Synchronous and Asynchronous Language Classes

Some of the technological teaching tools have been divided into synchronous or asynchronous. Synchronous learning refers to instructors and students gathering at the same time and (virtual or physical) place and interacting in “real-time”. As stated by Skylar (2009): “Advantages of using a synchronous learning environment include real time sharing of knowledge and learning and immediate access to the instructor to ask questions and receive answers. However, this type of environment requires a set date and time for meeting, and this contradicts the promise of “anytime, anywhere” learning that online courses have traditionally promoted.” (p.71). Asynchronous learning refers to students accessing materials at their own pace and interacting with each other over longer periods. According to Perveen (2016), “Asynchronous environments provide students with readily available material in the form of audio/video lectures, handouts, articles, and power point presentations. This material is accessible anytime anywhere.” (p. 22). Raymond, Atsumbe, Okwori, & Jebba (2016) point out that “the teacher may decide to deliver his lesson through digital video media while the students can later respond through the use of communication modes like e-mail” (p.4).

Instructors can also assess students’ work through synchronous and/or asynchronous classes. Online assessment can be adapted from traditional classes and there are technological tools that can be used to prevent students from cheating, such as Respondus lockdown. Gaytan (2004) says that “the following assessment tools (used in traditional classrooms) can successfully be adapted for online delivery: essay exams, thought-provoking discussion questions; and projects that require students to demonstrate proficiency in content knowledge, solving problems, working well with each other, and communicating effectively” (p.29).

Both can be applied to second language classrooms, depending on the students’ needs, and availability. Therefore, before applying any media methods in language courses, instructors and administrators must consider the learners’ needs in conjunction with the teaching and learning approaches. Yen-Tzu, Liu, and Wong” (2007, p. 222).

Technology in Language Education: Benefits and Drawbacks

As with everything in the world of teaching and learning, technology also has benefits and drawbacks. The advantages of technology for language learning include engagement; improvement in academic ability; a paradigm shift in teaching and learning – from teacher-centered to student-centered; an assessment shift – students are able to assess their own work; collaborative learning enhancement – through the technological tools described above; and lowering learner anxiety level as it increases learning autonomy (Riasati, Allahyar, and Tan, 2012).

Some of the drawbacks that the use of technology brings to the second language learning class include: lack of access – not every student has access to the internet or even to a computer; lack of effective training – in many institutions teachers may not receive adequate training to include technology in their classrooms; teachers’ attitude – some teachers may be resistant to changes; student’s attitude – some students may have a negative reaction towards an abrupt shift in their learning; lack of time and technical support – incorporating technology into the classroom requires more time than it does in traditional learning (Riasati, Allahyar, and Tan, 2012).

Conclusion

This paper has presented the role of technology in a second language classroom. It has described how technology can be used in a second language classroom, as well as explained about different contexts and technological tools that can be incorporated in a second language classroom. The study has also described synchronous and asynchronous classes and how online students can be assessed. Finally, the article has pointed out the advantages and drawbacks of using technology in a second language classroom. It is imperative that when changing traditional classes to online classes, either synchronous or asynchronous, to be

sure to provide teachers with adequate training, and students with adequate equipment and access to the internet.

This will make both teachers and students to be more engaged in the whole process, and thus provide a smoother transition from the traditional class to the online class.

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