

ICT CHALLENGES IN THE 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS ENGLISH UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Given the nature of the study, the objectives of this paper are to demonstrate practical approach to using ICT tools in teaching Business English to university-level students. By offering specific examples for efficient integration of selected technologies within undergraduate classroom the study concentrates on practical and yet motivated solutions to many issues faced by the university teachers and students within the teaching-learning process. The study explores the importance of establishing an authentic business context via the invaluable help of ICT tools. This authentic context facilitates smooth acquisition of language proficiency and multitude of other skills for students' future career use. Based on actual classroom teaching/research, this study demonstrates that meaningful use of ICT tools allows the 21st century Business English teachers and students to keep pace with the ever-changing business world.

Key Words

Authentic business context, business career, Business English, ICT, IWB, task-based learning, teaching-learning process

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Introduction

Information and communication technology (ICT) has become a fundamental part of most organisations and businesses, an inseparable part of our everyday lives and many of our activities. Specific research into this sector, namely within Eastern (Central) Europe was carried out early on by Piet Kommers (2000), who recorded his findings in an article entitled "Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for Education: Research and Development for the Educational Integration of Technology in Eastern European Countries" (2000). This research was seminal as it brought to the forefront the need of integrating, via ICT, this portion of Europe into the whole of the continent for eventual social integration.

Since 2000, the infiltration of ICT into the sphere of the quotidian has only increased. Drowned in explosive amounts of information and new technology developments, the impact of such ICT tools on the teaching-learning process is enormous, bringing unprecedented perspectives and opportunities into the classroom. New technologies have the potential to support education across the curriculum and provide opportunities for effective communication between teachers and students in ways that before were not possible.

However, this potential may not necessarily be easily realised as Dawes (2001: 61) has underlined. The development of ICT at universities and its effective implementation into the process of education is an ever dynamic process, modifying and challenging the roles of both the student and teacher. Students' characteristics alter according to society's expectations, whilst education objectives are tailored to fit the more exacting requirements of inter-country integration, and thus, the overall process of education must also be modified accordingly.

This being stated, it is evident that ICT has been penetrating the teaching processes at universities, without consideration of any technophobic proclamations. Since the focus must be directed at new methods of teaching and/or implication of technologies into the teaching process, new competencies of teachers are also required and innovative technology integration processes must be defined, since inappropriate implementation of ICT may worsen educational - and ultimately societal - results

According to Anderson, J. (2009: 3), thinking about ICT means considering all the uses of digital technology that already exist to help individuals, business and organisations access and utilize information. The ICT abbreviation encompasses computers of all types (desktops, laptops, notebooks, iPods, and servers), as well as videos, CDs and DVDs, radio and television, printers, data projectors, interactive whiteboards, satellites, fibre optics, Wi-Fi, modems and routers, and a myriad of other network equipment and software that enables electronic mail, short message service programs, and video-conferencing telephone calls. ICT also embraces other accessories, such as mobile phones, digital imaging and sensing, global positioning devices, and a range of other tools. Finally, the term ICT covers a family of transmission technologies for voice-over-Internet protocol (e.g. Skype) together with technologies for computer-mediated social interaction and networking (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace, LinkedIn).

Transforming ICT into the educational domain, Barad (2009: 1) claims that the extensive use of web 2.0 and Internet components such as blogs, e-groups, e-dictionaries, e-encyclopaedia, webcasting, cyber cafés and mobiles could also be used by students to interact among themselves, as well as with the teacher. Language teachers should consider the extensive collaboration opportunities using word processing packages,

spreadsheets, search engines, and presentation software as basic elements within the teaching-learning process. Some of these tools are already integrated in e-learning, which has been described in great detail in a number of papers and which is especially beneficial in distance-learning and mixed forms of studies. Notable information can be found for example at Liaw's E-learning and the Development of Intercultural Competence (2006) or Business English Courses Online Support (Kučírková, Vogeltanzová, Jarkovská: 2011). The implementation of some of the above-stated tools and applications in language teaching and in the process of staying up-to-date is an increasingly demanding task for teachers, whose places of employment must provide new computer-enhanced language learning environments that will enable learners to pool their knowledge in effective ways (Barad, 2009: 47).

There are a number of different types of e-learning resources especially designed for Business English teachers and learners. Some ICT tools, such as on-line presentations, on-line videos, company web pages, other Internet sources, interactive CD ROMs and CDs (which usually accompany the course books) are already frequently used in Business English classes. Useful links can easily be found on-line at: www.besig.org, www.bized.ac.uk, www.bbc.co.uk, in addition to many others. Additional web-based language learning resources comprise pronunciation guides, e-dictionaries, e-encyclopaedias, etc. However it is worth noting that all of them must be consistently checked for their credibility, up-to-date aspects and overall attractiveness to learners (Sampath & Zalipour, 2009: 3). Even the latest examples of books, CD ROMs and CDs are oftentimes at least one year old, whereas credible examples from the Internet usually deal with up-to-the-minute issues. Barad (2009: 49) reminds teachers that they should not only be up-to-date, but sometimes even up-

to-the moment, given that the business environment changes increasingly quickly as Jeskanen-Sundström (2003) validated with his research. Generally, students are certainly interested in more than lifeless definitions of business terms; they want to experience the genuine business world. This encourages an authentic context within the lesson and, taking into account the business market of today in terms of worldwide expectations, it is almost impossible to establish an authentic business context without ICT tools.

Given the nature of this study, the objectives of this paper are to provide certain practical reasons for using ICT with the groups of Business English students, as well as sufficient reasons for larger, suitable integration of ICT tools into university-level classrooms. This paper does not aim to encompass the use of all potential ICT tools in the classroom, but instead focuses on selected communication technologies which can be used in the everyday contact of teachers/learners and mutually among learners; this, in turn, can partially fill the gap between the potential of technology and the trends still current in traditional classroom practices. Notably, the selected technologies are set in an entirely authentic business context within the classroom. By offering this type of an example-based framework, this paper concentrates on a practical and yet motivated solution to the multi-faceted issues faced by the university teachers who decide to implement ICT into their lessons. Various sources are used/suggested, as appropriate to intermediate university students, to encourage teachers to implement ICT into their teaching methods, in spite of the many internal and external barriers.

The methodology used to formulate this paper comprises a scholarly assessment of several methods used to deliver authentic business contexts for the students, thereby helping

them enhance the complete scope of their language skills (speaking, reading, writing, and listening) within the university context. This is followed by a description of their implementation in practice. Having established the observation research processes and explained the organization of the classes, a cohesive integration of new language skills and other external language measures are offered. All of the described procedures have been tested in the classroom, as evidenced by the number of students, genders, ages, professional goals, etc. Subsequently, this paper provides a methodological discussion of the strengths and limitations of ICT implementation into teaching Business English, including those faced by both the teacher, as well as the student, before offering various solutions to specific classroom situations. Special attention is given to the presentation of effective strategies and practical approaches to establishing authentic business contexts for the learners. Finally, the scholarly results are summarised with a reflection on the importance of sensitive ICT integration into Business English classes, considering the barriers which are likewise discussed.

Material and Methods

This paper reviews the practices of integrating ICT into Business English lessons for undergraduates who have little or no experience within the professional business world. (Their prior experience to taking this course may have consisted of an internship for a term, etc.) The term 'Business English' is used to cover English taught as a second language to a range of full-time and distance-learning students who intend to work in the business sector. According to Thornbury (2006: 26), "Business English is distinguished from general English by its more specialised vocabulary and its more narrowly defined field (e.g. banking, trade, and manufacturing). Teaching Business English

involves coaching learners in such business skills as speaking on the phone, giving presentations, conducting meetings and negotiations, etc."

This paper focuses on several teaching methods which incorporate the above-stated widely-used ICT tools into Business English lessons. The research concentrated on the enhancement of the students' speaking/communication and writing skills. Via several exercises and projects, students experienced video-recorded presentations, video-recorded brainstorming session and on-line stock market demo-trading. Improving their competence in writing skills, the lessons emphasized acquiring conceptual, linguistic, morphological and syntactical knowledge concerning special documents, such as CVs, emails, memos, reports, etc. Students compiled 'real time' written documents and collective reports. Most of the activities were smoothly and flexibly presented with the support of an interactive whiteboard (IWB) and special attention was given to the creation of a real business context for the teaching-learning process. The specific aims of this Business English course, as further explained below, were to improve the students' abilities in communicating in English within a wide range of business situations and enlarge their knowledge of the business world. Students' familiarity with essential business vocabulary and grammar was built up, based on resource materials from the actual business market, using topics of high interest to everyone involved.

The methods and subsequent results analysed below were tested over the course of four full-length university semesters at the University of Finance and Administration in Prague, Czech Republic. Class sizes varied from 10 to 15 students, included both genders (however the majority were male - 75 %) and covered an age range of 19 – 30 year olds. The total number

of students was 120. The courses were aimed at both full-time and distance-learning students. Most of the students were native speakers of Czech; however some of them came from multinational backgrounds (including Russian, Ukrainian, Kazakh and Vietnamese families). The Business English course in which use of ICT was incorporated was a required course for the B.A. degree majors in Company Management and Finance, Marketing and Communication, Banking, Insurance, Public Administration, Public Finance, and Applied Informatics. Thus, it was clear that the students' career focus would strongly benefit from these especially-developed lessons of Business English and their motivation was consequently solid.

Moreover, in order to validate the improved student motivation, a survey was taken before the start of the course and at the end. Answers were given in multiple choice format, where appropriate, and in written sentences elsewhere.

Video-recorded presentations and brainstorming sessions

The following two samples of extensive use of ICT have been designed to extensively practice all of the language skills within authentic business contexts. The first project asked the students to prepare interesting presentations comparing two companies from the same industry (e.g. McDonald's and KFC, Apple and Microsoft, IBM and HP, Société Générale and Erste, Allianz and AXA, etc.). The actual web pages of selected companies were presented. Use of IWB supported such Internet presentation efficiently. Fundamental web page items were saved in an appropriate format (to be used on the IWB). Thus, essential vocabulary could be highlighted, whilst synonyms and opposites, delivered by the students themselves, could be written directly into the presentation during the lessons. This

active participation in the dynamic lesson made for considerable student enthusiasm. Many business topics were discussed and related vocabulary was practiced (company establishment, objectives, missions, organisation charts, brands, product portfolios, logos, business development, branches, employees, marketing mix, advertising methods, mergers and acquisitions, credit and debt, investment banking and commercial banking, issues affecting public versus private companies, business strategies, and other business-related plans). The presentations required both reading and researching of on-line documents prior to a required class delivery of the research (5-7 minutes in length). The presentations were video recorded, the aim of which was to preserve the learner's performance for analysis and correction of both language and presentation skills. In the first instance, the students had to overcome any initial feelings of embarrassment or self-consciousness. Such challenges unambiguously contributed to the authentic business context, as business students would certainly face similar situations in their future careers. Once the confidence of the students was reinforced, the method provided "excellent feedback about language performance and competence" as Lonergan also experienced (1984: 113). Later, the recordings were reviewed and commented on by both the teacher and the students themselves.

In the second video-recorded project, the students were asked to run a brainstorming session on reducing company costs in the upcoming year. Students were given substantial data on the companies from their publically-available annual reports which was further simplified and adjusted by the teacher to fit the students' knowledge of business vocabulary. However, the simplification was kept in perspective as a means of leaving enough challenging material for them in terms of vocabulary

increase. Students were requested to diagnose problem areas and contribute any spontaneous suggestions and ideas during the session. The brainstorming session was also recorded on video. The exercise focused on spur-of-the-moment, natural communication: speaking/debate skills, expressing agreement and disagreement, talking about varying points of view, reporting what others say, talking about meanings/nuances, drawing conclusions, giving reasons and offering explanations, phrases of interruption, language of comparison, language of cause and effect (Lustigová, 2011: 25).

Both video recorded activities were implemented into the teaching plan twice, once at the beginning and once at the end of the academic year. Since the recordings were preserved for analysis and correction, significant improvements were observed by comparing both versions. The video material also provided a model for business language use, with several key structures subsequently highlighted via language analysis. Both the comparison and the analysis were carried out by the teacher after the first and second implementation. The presentation skills, in and of themselves, were likewise commented on by the students, making the evaluation process an integral part of the language teaching-learning process within the class itself. The most obvious features of feedback concerned pronunciation, choice of lexis and errors of syntax. This business-oriented project also brought the opportunity to practice grammar, vocabulary, use of appropriate register, synonyms, fluency of speech and accuracy, etc. Students consolidated their language skills, practiced speaking, developed a tactful approach to opinion expression and enjoyed the process along the way. The ongoing discussion of the approaches and language structures contributed invaluable to the practice of speaking / communication skills for eventual frequent use in the students'

business careers. It was observed that if the process was to be worthwhile, the following principles needed to be maintained: the aim defined and strictly adhered to, the feedback immediate; and the evaluation selective, yet sympathetic. According to Lonergan (1984: 116), selectivity and sympathy implies that comments should only be focused on things which merit attention and should be made in a friendly, constructive manner. The learners indeed had the opportunity of seeing what was filmed as soon as possible and there was enough time devoted to feedback, otherwise this major learning component would never have been fully accessed.

'Real time' written documents

Effective utilisation of ICT was chosen as the medium for practising writing skills. Teaching modern forms of communication from 'real time' letters, instead of elaborating on artificial letters covering imaginary topics, once again reinforced the authentic business context. Email was used as the medium to send CVs, motivation / covering letters, memos and business letters. Emails were sent directly from the classroom to the actual companies. Two similar projects were applied for practising Business English writing skills.

The first project focused on the recruitment and selection process. Students were encouraged to search through English servers to look for actual advertisements of part-time students jobs which interested them. The main websites which were used are the following: <http://www.jobsite.co.uk/>, <http://www.monster.com>, and <http://engineers-international.com>. Oftentimes the websites presented many tips for preparing a resume, applying for a job, writing application letters and preparing for job interviews. Many samples of the said documents were also posted. The advertisements and additional material gained from the web

sites were presented via IWB in the classroom, followed up by lexical and syntactical analysis. Special attention was given to the choice of proper register.

Afterwards, students were then asked to draft their own CVs and covering letters, keeping in mind the actual positions for which they were applying. Naturally, several sample fictive CVs and covering letters were provided for them as reference tools. Such settings established a genuine environment and the students were exceedingly motivated to deliver documents which corresponded to the actual situation. The students' drafts were projected via IWB in the classroom, whilst major lexical and grammatical insufficiencies were discussed and corrected. These drafts provided enough material for further practice of vocabulary and grammar structures. At the end of the day, covering emails were drafted collectively and sent to the actual recruitment companies with the help of a GPRS connection to the Internet. Any replies received were discussed in the classroom. The delivered texts were used during the lessons to practise the structuring of a business letter and the type of language used. Typical vocabulary and grammar structures were learned and repeatedly practised using this method. Such actual communication between the students and the companies allowed the students to thoroughly understand the topic, ask the relevant questions of the company and of the teacher, as well as acquire the accompanying essential skills in a much more efficient manner, rather than simply reading letters printed in textbooks. The following would be a typical advertisement chosen by the students:

Telesales - Ringwood - Full & Part Time

About the Job

Telesales Advisor

No experience required

Full time hours will be 12.30 - 8.30 Monday to Friday + one weekend day every other week

Part time hours are flexible but must be a minimum of 15 hours per week ideally covering the hours of 9.30am - 12.30pm 3 days per week plus either a Saturday (9.00am - 5.00pm) or Sunday (10.00am - 4.00pm)

Duties will include new business sales, research and data entry, £6.50 per hour plus bonus.

Bond Williams Professional Recruitment is an equal opportunity employer and operates as an Employment Business and Recruitment Agency

(Retrieved on March 21, 2012 at <http://jobview.monster.co.uk/Telesales-Ringwood-Full-Part-Time-Job-Ringwood-South-East-Southern-UK-108023317.aspx>).

The latter project centred on claims or requests sent to genuine e-stores abroad. The majority of the students had had prior experience with international e-stores and were thus asked to think about 'actual' problems, inquiries or complaints that they might have encountered. Students mentioned the problems related to customs and processing fees and after-sale service of electronic items, among others. The topics were discussed in the classroom setting, thereby training business vocabulary substantially. The students then drafted their complaints in email and SMS formats during the lessons and all of them were sent directly to the authorised departments of the actual companies. The drafting of replies was carried out in small group format so that the students could help one another improve and function as a second layer of mutual control, after the teacher's primary checking role. Again, mostly auto-replies were received, however, some of the problems were indeed solved and it was a moment of great satisfaction. The

communication with the companies generated enough written material to be discussed and analysed within the lessons with the support of IWB.

Webquest - collective report writing using Google Docs

Students were assigned the task of writing a collective report on customer satisfaction in the field of mobile telephone providers. The educational task was assigned in a form of webquest, carried out by means of the Internet. As Thornbury (2006: 244) states, “the aim of a webquest is to focus on processing information rather than simply copying it, and thereby to encourage analytic thinking and synthesise information.” All of these are skills which will be required of the students as they progress into the work world.

Substantial time was devoted by the teacher to instructing the students, prior to accomplishing the given task, how to write short, simple reports and the style and language appropriate to them. Again, IWB became a vital tool for practising and viewing the examples of actual reports, enabling active work with the document. The sample documents were read collectively, which lead towards better comprehension of report concepts and helped for the acquisition and understanding of essential vocabulary and grammar structures. It also allowed for those students who were less comfortable with the writing process to acclimatize to the task at a more personal pace, further developing cognitive reading skills. Later all the students were given the main source of data at http://www.czso.cz/csu/redakce.nsf/i/mobilni_telefonni_sit. This authentic business context used up-to-date data which was saved in word processing format for the students to comment on at a later time. For the purpose of collective report writing, the documents were shared by selected students and the teacher via Google Docs

(an on-line service provided free of charge by Google: <http://www.google.com/google-d-s/tour5.html> [Košťálková, Králová, Lorenc, 2010: 51]). This enabled fast cooperation in ‘real time’ by sharing the documents on-line. The documents could be edited from any computer or smart phone with an Internet connection. At the same time, the students contributed to mobile providers’ research data by adding more actual information which they downloaded from different websites, cross-checking for accuracy. Students were assigned different roles – report administrator, report owner, etc. These roles could be changed during the entire process. After generating enough data, the students were asked to elaborate their collective report on customer satisfaction in the field of mobile telephone providers. The teacher’s role was not limited to monitoring overall, but instead also concentrated on commenting on the students’ work throughout the process and in this manner supported the students’ development. It was noted that the students acted responsibly and accepted the team project aspect, fulfilling their inseparable roles within the team. Moreover, Google Docs enabled efficient cooperation, without any necessity of sending emails with attachments back and forth. Current versions of the students’ presentations were projected on the IWB in the classroom, permitting the related speaking / communication / discussion skills to be practised. 100% of the students were engaged in the project. Generally, the students were enthusiastic and offered insightful and appropriate comments. They also enjoyed being able to add their input in ‘real time’. Besides the many language learning benefits, this project utilized the same practice as in many companies, in this manner also enhancing the authentic quality of the task and offering an opportunity for the students to gain additional soft skills, imperative for their future business careers.

On-line stock market demo trading

One of the most exhilarating parts of teaching Business English for both the teacher and the students is the portion devoted to share capital, securities, trading on the stock market, derivatives, etc. Firstly, the method of term definition and explanation was employed to allow all the students to launch from the same platform of understanding. To accomplish this, the students were required to read a great deal in home preparation. Eventually, an authentic business context was created as the students and teacher registered with the website of an on-line stock market demo trading which simulates trading securities. The site <http://www.xtb.co.uk/> was used with great success. This demo version was free of charge and soon the students grew in their enthusiasm about trading on a regular basis. As the trading progressed, the students were sent reports about their standing on the market by the demo-trading provider. A common spreadsheet was elaborated in Google Docs and all the results, both gains and losses, were continually listed there. Students were required to access the spreadsheet whenever they received new data from the website. The students' profits and losses were openly discussed in the classroom, founding a friendly atmosphere of competition. Enough teaching material was likewise generated to provoke realistic debates on the reasons for the profits and losses, optional solutions, future strategies and the interpretation of graphs based on the actual data of individual students. Students gained adequate vocabulary related to the above-stated issues, whilst practising the reading of figures, and ultimately, their skills of describing financial trends improved enormously. Discussions were often held in groups. For efficient discussions, small groups of 2-3 turned out to be ideal, requiring even the quiet students to contribute to the dialogue process. The group members were

either assigned by the teacher or the students determined the groups by themselves. For such activities, the groups were systematically rearranged "so that the students could cooperate with dissimilar people, learn to test their own opinions on a variety of people and be open to different ideas", as outlined in (Lustigova, 2011: 21).

Results

This paper has demonstrated the applied methods and strategies of creating a genuine business context for intermediate students of Business English with the help of ICT. The above-described and documented scholarly work confirms that ICT provides a powerful environment of learning tools, in turn encouraging the students themselves to be interested and actively involved in the teaching-learning process. Implementing ICT in Business English classes is relatively straightforward as business students are quite receptive to technologies. Overall, the results of meaningfully merging ICT into the classroom produced students who were noticeably more confident and capable of supporting their own language-based success, as well as a classroom where learning was made tangible. By using ICT tools which focused particularly on language use, Business English was able to be exploited in the classroom to both the challenge and the interest of the learner and teacher simultaneously. As the students developed communicative competence in Business English, the teacher directly benefited from a more interactive classroom atmosphere and new perspectives were shared by all. Using ICT tools, such as IWB projection, aided the students' sensory perception: they could listen, read and see the material at the same time. Since there are various types of learners (auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, etc.), the teacher could more appropriately address the various needs of the diverse learners

with the help of ICT (Barad, 2009: 55). Students using all of these three senses at the same time tended to increase their proficiency without difficulty. Important in terms of classroom fluidity, the specific projects described above in the Material and Methods section could be used only with a lower number of students in a class (up to 15). Any attempt to assign such projects to larger groups proved unwieldy in terms of classroom time, teacher guidance and student/teacher feedback.

By and large, the students improved their proficiency in understanding professional texts, compiling their own reports, writing business letters/covering letters/emails and developing CVs of excellent standard, all of which could be used in their future careers with small adjustments. Taking into account the four language skills, the students manifestly improved their speaking, writing, reading and listening skills, as was evidenced within the classroom and enhanced performance in written homework, oral consultation sessions, exams throughout the year (for example, vocabulary tests, and other oral and written activities during the semester also demonstrated a sufficient increase of gained knowledge) and year-end exams. The students equally benefited by improving their critical thinking skills, in addition to gaining multiple soft skills for future career benefit.

Furthermore, the ICT tools contributed to the enormous motivation of the students. 100% of the students participated in most of the activities, which was not always true when regular homework from their textbooks was assigned. As the course continued, some students also took it upon themselves to specifically request using certain tools or a repetition of projects which they had enjoyed. This correspondingly encouraged some students to apply similar practices, even outside the classroom

(e.g. sharing documents, on-going on-line stock market demo trading, etc.).

In order to validate the improved student motivation, two surveys were taken, one before the start of the course and one at the end. The survey was meant as an indicator of original motivation versus end-course progress and included the following questions, among others:

- What motivated you to take this course?
- If any, what is your previous experience with ICT?
- Do you feel that your career will be influenced by ICT? Why – why not?
- Evaluate to date the positive influence of ICT use during the lessons on your career prospects.
- Evaluate to date any potential negative influences of ICT on your career prospects and Business English lessons.
- How do you think that ICT use can be further developed in the lessons to help students?

Students were given sufficient time to respond to the question and were encouraged to ask for help from the teacher in expressing themselves, in case of any difficulties. Answers were given in multiple choice format, where appropriate, and in written sentences elsewhere. Several examples of answers furnish evidence of initial- versus post- student motivation (for the purposes of this paper, only a few selected answers written in sentences are listed):

- 'I took this course because of course requirement and because it was recommended by another student from last year.'

- 'This course seemed more interesting than a normal business English course, we can use computers and I am handy with technology.'
- 'I did not have much experience with ICT. The school I come from did not have the money to purchase the tools, so I was not sure if I would enjoy this method or even understand what I should do. However, I enjoyed every moment of the course and I believe it helped me a lot to be better prepared.'
- 'After this course, I believe that ICT will influence my career – maybe for the good and bad. But at least, I feel better prepared.'
- 'It is difficult to stay updated; however, the business lessons helped a lot.'
- 'I see that ICT is going to be a big influence for me, but I hope that I am able to keep a personal approach to the consulting cases.'
- 'It is hard to know how technology will develop. It seems that it is often used just because it exists, not because it is actually helpful. Nevertheless, I within this actual course I found very exiting to solve the real business problems within the real company context. And the used technologies were really necessary for the task we were assigned.'

In addition to the survey results quoted above, attendance over the term of the course improved dramatically. Given that the answer to the first question listed above for course motivation was primarily 'course requirement', the enhanced attendance from an initial 70% to 98% was understood as direct proof of student interest in the subject matter, teacher presentation/ use of ICT tools and student motivation towards future career prospects.

It was observed that if the process of implementing ICT into the classroom is to be beneficial for both the teacher and the students, then there are several principles that should be maintained:

- the activity's pedagogical aim must be defined and strictly adhered to
- once the activity's aim is defined, it is key to determine if ICT makes a significant difference or not in the learning process (if ICT is not determined to be valuable, then either another pedagogical aim should be established or ICT should be used at another time, i.e. nothing forced)
- acclimation time – some students are more geared towards technology than others – the teacher himself/herself needs to have patience accordingly – for those students who are gifted in technology, additional tasks (within the project itself) can be assigned on an on-going basis
- the feedback for the students should be immediate
- enough time must be allocated to feedback, otherwise the educational results deteriorate
- the evaluation of the students' work should be selective and sympathetic
- the teacher must be well-prepared and confident in using the ICT tools (i.e. ICT tools should be tested in advance of the lessons)
- the teacher must be convinced himself/herself of the importance of using ICT in the classroom as Bingimlas (2009: 242) argues – only once the teacher is convinced, will the students themselves also begin to see the corresponding value

Ultimately, the classroom research for the course under discussion proved that the teacher's role changed pointedly in such projects, as Anderson comments (2010: 15). He argued that the teacher must be keen to fulfil multiple roles at the same time – that of learning facilitator, collaborator, coach, and co-learner. Concurrently, the learners were given more options and responsibilities for their own learning. They became active participants in the teaching-learning process, learning to collaborate with others. It was observed that “in the classes where ICT was routinely used, students were likely to participate in virtual excursions and be active researchers”, as claimed in Anderson (2010: 16).

Discussion

Strengths of ICT promotion in Teaching Business English

The use of ICT in the classroom is no longer a choice; today it has become a necessity. This is especially true in teaching Business English students. They are acutely attuned to new approaches and generally interested in learning to manage certain technologies to their own future success. ICT enables an entirely authentic business context to be constituted early on within the lessons, thus simulating the actual environment of business companies which students will join in the very near future. According to Bingimlas (2009: 236), “traditional educational environments do not seem to be suitable for preparing learners to function or be productive in the workplaces of today's society”. The classroom-based research for this paper proved that wisely used technologies have a measurably positive impact on the improvement of students' language skills, various soft skills and on the delivery of objectives required by the curricula.

Thus, it was proved that receptivity of students to chosen ICT tools were more than satisfactory.

As stated in Barad (2009: 48), “business students are much more receptive in using technologies. This receptivity of commerce and management students helps the teacher to go beyond the horizon in experimenting with innovative practices in the classroom.” The above-described research for the course under discussion experimented with video-recorded presentations and brainstorming sessions, ‘real time’ business letters, collective report writing, and online stock market trading. All these activities provoked attention, motivation and the ultimate active participation of the Business English students and prepared them for actual workplaces at business companies.

Lewis (2009: 54) claims that the great advantage of using online tools in the classroom is their accessibility, possibility of language level choice and the appropriateness of the tasks according to the focus, experience and age of students. Within the research, these components were thoroughly considered by the teacher when the tasks were set and assigned. In several cases, it proved to be important to verify the accessibility of online sources before the lesson. Functioning and suitably selected on-line tools supported the establishment of genuine business contexts. If authentic background materials and documents were to be used (in collective report writing, presentations and brainstorming sessions), some of their parts had to be adjusted by the teacher and used in an off-line mode to better correspond to the students' current knowledge of the subject matter and their language proficiency. This necessitated a certain amount of extra preparation time outside of the classroom.

Using ICT tools in the Business English lessons facilitated task-based learning, as the learners are given opportunities to use the full range of language skills they have at the given

time, according to Lindsay and Knight (2006: 24). The benefits of task-based learning were especially obvious in collective report writing. Within this project, as commented extensively above, listening, reading, writing and speaking skills were engaged. Moreover, the pre-tested teaching methods, which used different technologies, facilitated the acquisition of many important soft skills: presentations, discussions/debates, collaboration and team-work, capability of being sensitive and considerate, constructive criticism, etc.

The research for this study proved that ICT enables a unique mixture of learning styles to enter the Business English language classroom. The teacher is challenged to identify these learning styles and then likewise has the opportunity to choose the best ones to suit the needs of individual learners. This is reinforced in the research of Lewis (2009: 86), "There is a strong correlation between student learning styles and technology option". Within the classroom tested techniques of the course under discussion, the following results were observed:

- logical thinkers benefitted from the on-line polls and surveys
- visual learners enjoyed projects based on the video recording of presentations
- learners with a strongly reflective side found collective report writing, as well as the feedback sessions, stimulating
- social learners liked the compilation of 'real time' emails and other social networking facets of the business projects
- kinaesthetic learners benefited from the IWB-based exercises

According to Lewis (2009: 86), this relationship between learning styles and technology tools can be applied to any specific activity. However, such a selective approach cannot

be always chosen as the teacher must work with the entire class, consisting of different types of students. Nevertheless, the different teaching methods based on the learners' needs, as described above, can meet the needs of most of the students, if the individual tasks within the projects are wisely assigned, distinguishing among learning types.

The success of the above-described projects benefited from the supportive use of IWB as a means of media interaction with the students. It was observed that IWB is highly beneficial for reviewing language, saving lessons, modelling presentations, and audio transcripts. It also supported the development of personalised content and the so-called heads-up learning style, as described in Sharma, Barret and Jones (2011: 10). These benefits, as actually tested in the classroom within the course under discussion may be summarized as follows:

- IWB helped to direct all eyes in the same direction towards the screen
- the texts could be seen, especially in writing exercises, allowing for the adjustments to be followed by all the students at the same time
- given the ease of changing what is projected on the IWB, the attention of the students was able to be maintained for lengthy periods of time
- overall, the IWB promoted collective learning and team-work, as students were required to absorb the same information and comment/constructively criticize as a group

It was observed that the IWB should not be overused or integrated into the lesson only as a powerful presentation tool as discussed by Sharma, Barret and Jones (2011: 11). The value of using the IWB remains in its audience mode. Within

this audience mode, the interactive features of IWB brought much better value to the lesson and to the individual learners as the multi-sensory character of the board appealed to various learning styles (visual, audio, physical), as noted by Lewis (2009: 33).

ICT-Integration Challenges and Suggested Solutions for the Business English Classroom

Despite all of the above-mentioned worthwhile results in terms of Business English lessons, a second set of potential challenges is also engaged, as faced by the teacher who decides to implement ICT in the classroom:

- the teacher's thorough preparation
- the teacher's sensitive involvement in the teaching-learning process
- the teacher's potential low competence in ICT use
- the teacher's potential technophobic aspect
- lack of adequate technical support
- lack of adequate funding for ICT tools and/or technical support
- lack of adequately-funded teacher training opportunities for ICT projects
- lack of time for such training (as stated above), given outside time constraints
- the students' limited knowledge
- the students' various language capabilities
- the students' various levels of technology proficiency

To overcome time constraints within the lessons, the teacher must be well-prepared and devote enough time to lesson preparation

to feel confident in applying the above-described tasks within the Business English lessons. All the tasks must be tested in advance. The accessibility of the web links must also be verified prior to the lessons. The teacher's competence can be further enhanced by providing sufficient teacher training opportunities for ICT projects where the teachers can gain additional knowledge about ways of integrating ICT for curriculum enhancement. Teacher training can also be complemented with intensive self-study, as well as research from/discussion of other teachers' experiences. It is likewise valuable for the teachers to have access to the necessary technology at home which eases the out-of-classroom preparation process. Furthermore, even though the teacher is enthusiastic about using ICT in his/her lessons, he/she might experience lack of ICT department support at the place of employment. The place where the teacher works should have a proper infrastructure with a constant power supply and high-speed Internet connectivity. Finally, the listed barriers can only be overcome if the place of work makes ICT integration into the education and language-teaching process a priority.

Another barrier of efficient integration of ICT into Business English lessons might be the students' unwillingness to experiment with technology in terms of language learning. This can be solved by partial integration of ICT, in combination with other more traditional classroom practices. For example, within the course under discussion, the large majority of students were geared towards technology prior to their participation in the class; however, approximately 5% needed additional time to acclimate. This was accomplished by assigning (to the entire class) a series of short and specific articles for home preparation on the importance of ICT within the business environment/future career. The level of language within the articles, which complied with the language capabilities of the

students, was equal to that of the on-line texts. If the download text was too complicated, it was first modified by the teacher. Home preparation was followed by in-class discussions over the period of a week, 15 minutes at the start of each lesson. During the discussion sections, the assigned articles were used in an offline mode with IWB support if needed. In terms of a conversation builder with business vocabulary, this preparation process proved crucial. It also allowed the less technology-gearred students to ease into the idea of using ICT regularly in the Business English classroom.

If the group discussion session was not flowing as planned, the teacher separated the students into smaller groups or pairs and assigned a specific question to discuss about the article. This proved an easy method for the teacher to diagnose any specific problems faced by the individual students. After an article was analysed as the subject of group discussion, the students were called upon to answer questions in terms of their own capabilities.

In addition to the above-mentioned challenges, Bingimlas (2009: 237-241) defines other barriers to the successful integration of ICT in the teaching and learning environments: lack of teacher confidence and competence, resistance to change and negative attitudes, and lack of accessibility of sources. However, these were not experienced within the course under discussion. Teaching/research in ICT tools integration would not have been possible without sufficient levels of confidence, training, and preparation to improve the desired skills and competencies of the students. The accessibility of standard ICT sources, such as computers, data projectors, and interactive whiteboards are, in large part, well facilitated at universities today. The same

applies for good quality software and fast Internet connections. However, a lack of flexible technical support, as described earlier, was indeed experienced in various cases.

Conclusion

This present study aimed to research selected ICT-driven tasks into the process of teaching Business English via the establishment of an entirely authentic business context (video recording of presentations, elaborating 'real time' written documents, collective report writing in Google Docs and on-line stock market demo trading). As the students felt increasingly motivated by the 'real' environment and the combination of multiple approaches which suited different types of learners (kinaesthetic, visual, logical thinkers, social learners), both the students and the teacher found the teaching-learning process beneficial and highly effective. The study also indicates that insisting on an authentic business context brought substantially increased positive effects, far beyond the simple improvement of the students' language skills. Although these ICT tools were tested within a Business English classroom, with purposeful modification they can be potentially applied in most ESP (English for Specific Purposes) classes.

Since technology has transformed from a choice into a necessity, the considerations of how to implement technology into the classroom should be made with the utmost attention, maintaining the ultimate language learning goal in focus, as Lewis (2009: 89) states. With each use of ICT, there needs to be a defined language component as the target of the session. Furthermore, ICT must be looked at critically and the best tools selected wisely and thoughtfully. Even though there are certain barriers linked with ICT integration into language teaching, the teachers should not be technophobic, but instead continue

experimenting in this unlimited space of freedom, as the benefits of new approaches to the teaching process correspond with the current thinking of young learners.

In the university context, the traditional educational environment and curriculum must keep abreast of the learners' needs for eventual work positions after the university years are finished, as the students need to "function in the workplaces of today's society" (Bingimlas, 2009: 236). Within the context of teaching Business English, the students themselves must become knowledgeable, able to collect and analyse information, communicate and collaborate. All these skills are gained as a side effect of efficient and sensitive integration of astutely chosen ICT tools into the Business English lessons. Along with the many soft skills acquired and the collaborative team spirit established, the students develop their capacities for technology integration into their own lives/careers. As they learn to facilitate clearer thinking within the field of technology integration, the students can likewise more effectively contribute to society.

As educators seek opportunities for research and testing, the options in terms of choice for appropriate teaching materials will only increase (examples include, but are not limited to: systems of modular on-line units, cloud computing and mobile technologies). Other prospects for learning tasks within an ICT-integrated classroom may be the creation of class wiki sites, practising polls and surveys, chats, and using social networks, such as Facebook and Twitter. This final suggestion is supported by research which states that "Students spend up to a quarter of all their time online interacting with Facebook. Educators cannot afford to ignore such a major phenomenon," (Anderson, 2009: 9), but should instead harness the technology for learning purposes. Consequently, however, the students themselves may be termed 'smart learners' and can be polled

for ideas of how they would like to see technology used to their own benefit. The fact remains that there are more students than teachers; as a result, the value of manifold perspectives can be coupled with teachers' increased research to increasingly excellent educational standards. Indeed, despite their inherent value, all of these ICT products and methods cannot substitute for genuine moments of learning and comprehension unless they are purposefully incorporated into the task at hand. Information and communication technologies must remain the tools of the teacher to aid students purposefully in being more productive in the teaching-learning process.

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