ETWINNING AS A TOOL FOR THE TEACHING OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN PRIMARY EDUCATION

ETWINNING COMO HERRAMIENTA PARA LA ENSEÑANZA DE UNA LENGUA EXTRANJERA EN EDUCACIÓN PRIMARIA

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Resumen

Este proyecto se ha centrado en la revisión bibliográfica de varios documentos que analizan desde distintas perspectivas los efectos que tiene el programa eTwinning sobre la adquisición de la competencia comunicativa en la enseñanza del inglés como una lengua extranjera en nuestros estudiantes de primaria. Para ello, se han recopilado los datos de una muestra total de 11 documentos con distintas perspectivas y resultados.

Abstract

This paper has been developed as a bibliographic revision of some documents that analyse from different perspectives the effects that the eTwinning program has in the acquisition of the communicative competence in the teaching-learning process of the English Foreign Language. To do that, a sample of a total of 11 essays with different perspectives, ideas and results have been analysed.

1. Introduction

eTwinning is an initiative of the teaching and learning program known as eLearning of the European Commission. It was developed in 2005 and it became part of the educational program Erasmus+ in 2014. eTwinning allows teachers from any country that belongs to the European Union and other countries from eTwinning Plus, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Jordan, Lebanon, the Republic of Moldova, Tunisia, and Ukraine to make use of it. It offers a platform for staff (teachers, head teachers, librarians, etc.) working in a school in one of the member countries to communicate, collaborate, develop projects, share, and, in short, feel and be part of the most exciting learning community in Europe. It promotes collaboration through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), by providing support, tools, and services for schools. eTwinning also offers opportunities for free and continuing online professional development for educators.

At the heart of eTwinning are collaborative projects that are carried out at least by two schools. The projects can have any topic but they should have a good balance of ICT use and classroom activities and should preferably fit into the national curricula of the schools participating in the project. The exemplary projects are awarded national and European Quality Labels or receive the highest recognition by becoming one of the eTwinning prize winners. It is important to remember that the teaching and learning process of the English Foreign Language (EFL) goes beyond memorizing some vocabulary items and grammar rules. There are many other areas of knowledge that must be dealt with when teaching a foreign language such as social, cultural and discourse conventions. According to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), it is also necessary to develop the 5 skills: listening, speaking interaction and production, reading and writing, and follow the natural way of children to learn a language, which must go from the oral to the written skills.

Figure 1. Representation of the 5 skills.
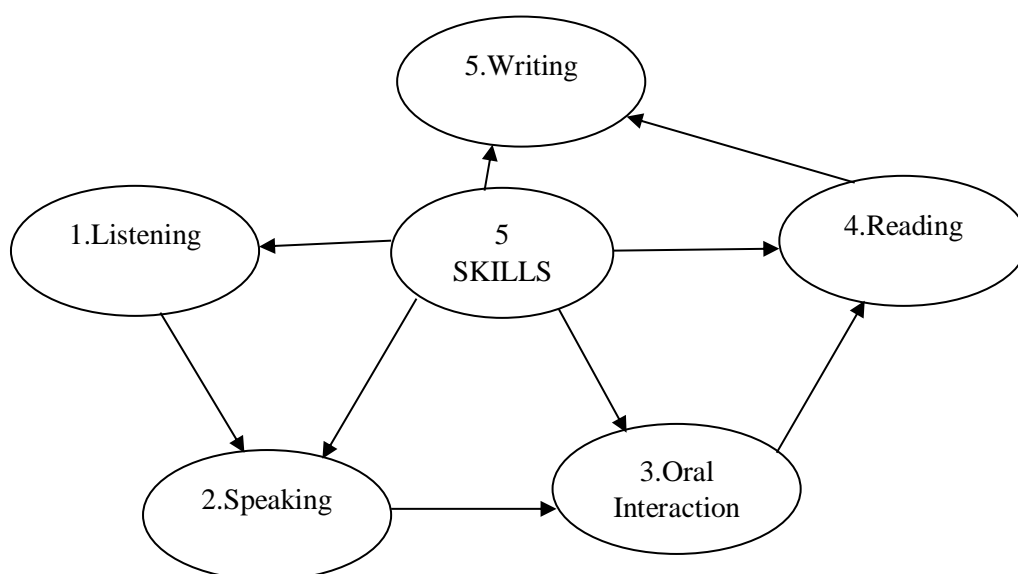
2. Communicative competence

According to Noah Chomsky's theory of transformational generative grammar (1957), the human language is shaped by a set of basic principles that are part of the human brain, making the process of acquisition of language an innate process for humans. If English teachers take into consideration the generative grammar theory, they can understand the process of acquisition of the 5 skills as shown in figure 1. As many important factors are involved in the teaching and learning process of a foreign language, the study and development of many different methodologies, tools and resources has become a critical issue for teachers all around the world. This is the reason why methodologies like content and language integrated learning (CLIL), the communicative language teaching (CLT), the Grammar translation method, etc.

Even with the methodologies mentioned earlier, it is important to be aware that to make pupils develop their proficiency in the 5 skills of English, English teachers will have to put extra effort to prepare their lessons and their activities, as it is not the same to be efficient in grammar and knowledgeable in vocabulary than to be efficient and skilled in the use of a language. According to Noah Chomsky, the linguistic competence is divided into competence and performance.

- Competence represents the set of knowledge existing inside the head of the speakers of a language. All the rules that allow language speakers to identify phonemes potentially useful to form morphemes, to identify meaningful morphemes, to construct syntactically valid utterances from morphemes, to communicate meaning via syntactically valid utterances and to interpret utterances produced by others.

- Performance is the application of competence, including mistakes. Mistakes are defined as violations.

Hymes' theory of ethnographic communication (1964) adds a new paradigm to Chomsky's theory of transformational generative grammar. Where Chomsky assumed, a priori, that competence is the knowledge shared by all fluent native speakers, Hymes drew on ethnographic research to show a variation between individual speakers' underlying knowledge. And where Chomsky assumed that the only knowledge that counted in the linguistic theory was knowledge of formal structure, Hymes argued that such theory had to account knowledge of patterns of use. The addition of this new paradigm to the definition of the linguistic competence would end up with the creation of a new competence in the future: the communicative competence. The 1966 conference where Hymes first publicly discussed communicative competence was entitled "Research Planning Conference on Language Development among Disadvantaged Children," held at the Ferkauf Graduate School of Education (Hymes 1972 is the version presented at that time). The June conference had been preceded by a small invitational conference sponsored by the federal Office of Education to brainstorm needed research on how the language of 'disadvantaged' children might be implicated in their school success or failure. Hymes' negative critique towards Chomsky was that Chomsky never considered relevant the ethnography of communication and the effects of social background on the development of linguistic competence.

Canale and Swain (1980) completed Hymes' communicative competence definition by combining the following four components:

- Linguistic competence: The knowledge of the linguistic code (grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, etc.)

- Sociolinguistic competence: the mastery of the sociocultural code of language use (appropriate application of vocabulary, register, politeness, and style in a given situation).

- Discourse competence: the ability to combine language structures into different types of cohesive and coherent texts (e.g., letter, political speech, poetry, academic essay, cooking recipe, etc.).

- Strategic performance: the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which can enable us to overcome difficulties when communication breakdowns occur and enhance the efficiency of communication.

The acquisition of the communicative competence in primary education pupils in their mother tongue is different than in a second language. Because of that, Krashen (1982) developed the theory of 6 hypotheses for second language acquisition. These six hypotheses are based on an acquisition-learning method. Krashen (1982) states that acquisition is a subconscious process based on meaningful interactions and communicative acts that depend on both the motivation and attitude of the pupil, while learning is a conscious process based mainly on grammar and formal instruction which depends on pupils' aptitude.

In order to confirm the development of each pupil in the communicative competence for the EFL, it was necessary to create a framework that would establish the different skills that pupils need to achieve. This is known as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (2001), and it establishes the 5 skills that pupils need to develop in order to be communicatively competent. The CEFR is the main guide for teachers of English as a second language. The CEFR (2001) defines competence as a set of areas of knowledge, or aptitudes, skills, attitudes, and existential competences. The CEFR (2001) divides the communicative competence into three other competences: linguistic competence, socio-linguistic competence, and pragmatic competence.

Linguistic competence comprises the knowledge and skills related to lexis, phonology and syntax and other features of the language systems, considered independently of the sociolinguistic impact of variations in use and of the pragmatic functions of the utterances produced (CEFR, 2001). It concerns not only the range and quality of knowledge but also involves cognitive organisation and the way this knowledge is stored in memory. This can be conscious and capable of being made explicit or not. It is thought that the cognitive organisation of vocabulary, the way in which phrases are stored in memory depends, together with other factors, on the cultural characteristics of the community in which the language user's socialisation takes place and on his or her different learning experiences.

Socio-linguistic competence (CEFR, 2001) refers to the knowledge and skills involved in using language functionality in a social context. Since language is a social phenomenon, its use requires sensitivity to social norms and customs which affect to an important degree all linguistic communication between representatives of different cultures, even if the participants are frequently unaware of them. These social norms affect, amongst other factors, rules of address, greetings and politeness, the way in which relations between generations, sexes, people of different social status, social groupings are expressed through special language markers, linguistically codified rituals, differences in register, dialect, and accent. Socio-linguistic competence leads us to consider social and intercultural parameters and the way in which they influence language use

Pragmatic competence (CEFR, 2001) involves the functional uses of linguistic resources using scenarios or predetermined scripts of interactional exchanges. It also involves mastery of discourse, cohesion, and coherence, the recognition of text types and genres using irony or parody. Even more than in the case of this factor than for linguistic competence, the development of pragmatic skills is strongly influenced by interactive experience and by the cultural environment. If we observe the three sub-competences that complete the communicative competence (CEFR, 2001), we can confirm that it deals with all 6 components of language.

Figure 2. The 6 components of language (Crespo, 2016).
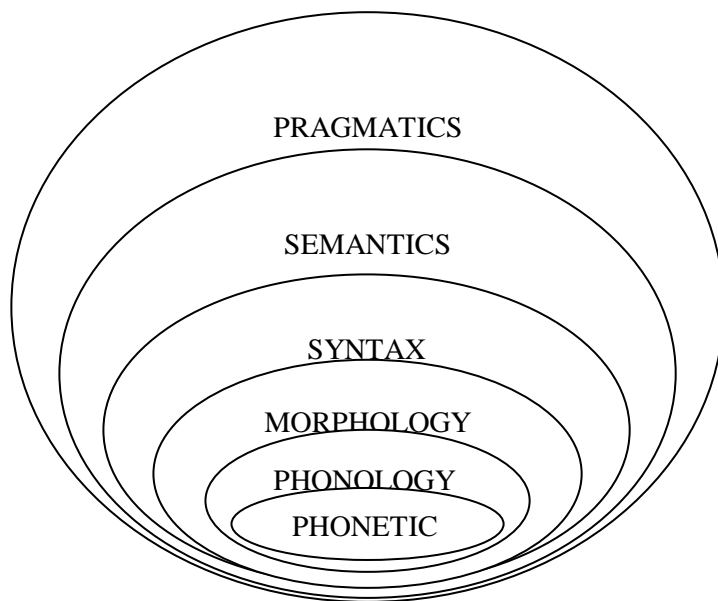
- Phonetics refers to the level of study of sounds.

- Phonology can be defined as the study of arrangement of sounds

- Morphology deals with the study of words' structure

- Syntax is the level of study of word combination for the formation of sentence structure.

- Semantics refers to the process of studying the denotative meaning in sentences and bigger language structures.

- Pragmatics deals with study of language in real communication. It is the study of connotative meaning, so it studies the meaning of sentences and bigger language structures attending to the context where the communication act takes place.

3. Results

According to Alcaraz-Mármol (2020), the essay "*Developing intercultural communication in the EFL primary education classroom: Internationalization through virtual team collaboration with eTwinning*" aimed to find out if telecollaboration through eTwinning with students from another country improves students' communicative awareness within the primary education. To do that, this study held a sample of thirty-eight twelve-year-old students. Those students had the same level of English as they belonged to the same state school in Madrid and had been taught by the same teacher. For this project, 18 of these students were placed in the experimental group, while the other 20 were placed in the control group. Both groups were asked to complete the same activities, but the experimental group could work along with another group of pupils from Poland. The result of this experiment was that the average mark for the activities of the experimental group

was 4.67, while the average for the control group was 3,27. The difference in the total average proves that the use of eTwinning to promote a more appropriate development of effective communication was a success in this experiment.

Selçuk (2017) developed the essay *eTwinning in Language Learning: The perspectives of successful teachers* was developed with a total of 7 ELT professionals (4 female, 3 male) from Turkey. The participants of this essay were selected since all of them had successfully completed at least 3 eTwinning projects.

Table 2. Data from the teachers that worked on essay 2. (Selçuk, 2017).

Pseudonym	Age	Experience (year)	Number of eTwinning projects completed	Quality labels
Deniz	32	6	3	2
Ahmet	44	17	4	2
Burcu	26	2	3	2
Can	34	9	4	3
Ethan	41	15	4	2
Eda	29	5	3	2
Ayse	48	23	5	3

According to Selçuk (2017), the aim of this project was to find out if eTwinning is an appropriate tool for the teaching of a foreign language by asking to the teachers mentioned in table 2 about their experience with the development of projects with eTwinning. Their answers were pretty similar to each other's since they explained the different advantages and disadvantages that they found while working with eTwinning.

According to these teachers, the main advantages are the ones that follow:

- Enabling intercultural exchange.

- Enhancing learning/teaching.

- Raising student engagement.

- Developing language skills.

The main disadvantages of eTwinning according to these teachers are the ones that follow:

- Lack of ICT literacy.

- Infrastructural drawbacks,

- Difficulty in finding a suitable partner.

- The need to follow the curriculum.

According to Miñarro (2018), the essay "*eTwinning, a successful program in the European context of education*" presents a summary of the story and uses of eTwinning regarding the teaching of the EFL nowadays. The conclusion of this essay was that the tools and methodologies used for the teaching of EFL need to evolve in order to be adapted to the needs of children nowadays. We live in a society that is leaning more and more towards the use of technologies, so teachers need to be able to adapt themselves to be able to implement the elements that children will have in their daily lives. The use of ICTs like the eTwinning Program will make children more comfortable throughout the whole teaching-learning process.

4. Conclusion

The results of these different essays gathered into this project show that, when used correctly, eTwinning is a very useful tool for the development of communicative competence in the EFL, as it allows pupils to work on the development of the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and pragmatic competences (CEFR, 2001). This project shows that eTwinning is a good tool for the development of the communicative competence in the English Foreign Language for pupils and students as long as both the teacher and students have a minimum level of digital competence, since nine out of the eleven essays had positive effects on pupils. If the activities are developed in a controlled way and pupils feel secure while they are working in activities through eTwinning, then eTwinning is a very good tool for the development of the communicative competence in a foreign language. However, the foundation in the digital competence is necessary for eTwinning to be an useful tool for that task. According to Bozdag (2018), it is essential that both teachers and students talk to each other for the development of activities. The experience for Bozdag and the students with eTwinning was not successful because of lack of communication.

It is also necessary to point out that teachers who want to work with eTwinning to help pupils develop their communicative competence with the EFL need to be knowledgeable and confident in their digital competence. According to Holmes et al. (2010), the first-time teachers tried to develop an eTwinning activity with their pupils, it ended up on failure because they were not able to keep the class in check nor introduce the activities properly since they were not sure about what to do. However, the second try of that same activity ended up being a success since the activities were modified for teachers to be able to keep control of the lesson (Holmes et al., 2010).

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