EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF ICT ON IRISH IN THE CLASSROOM

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Overview of Research

In outline the research sought to assess the attitudes of a group of transition year students to the Irish language and to teaching methodologies employed to teach the Irish language. In particular the research sought to ascertain the role of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in student motivation and attitudes in the Irish language classroom. The research question was: Can the use of ICT in the Irish language classroom improve students' motivation and attitudes to L2 learning? In this case, L2 learning (second language learning) refers to Irish which was not the main language of the school.

Rationale and Aims

A number of objectives were identified for the study. These included investigating the motivational levels of the students and their attitudes towards the Irish language and culture, investigating student attitudes to ICT and to Irish language teaching and learning, investigating the potential of ICT to help students become more motivated language learners, monitoring student attitudes to ICT integration, and engaging in reflective practice by the completion of a teacher diary.

Design and Method

Action research availing of both qualitative and quantitative analysis was used. Eighteen mixed ability transition year students participated in the study over a thirteen week period during which various strategies were featured. Students engaged in three different activities during the programme which began with the 'internet friend' (effectively an e-mail pen pal) with an all-Irish school student. Students then went on to use the Photo Story 3 and Comic Life software applications preparing presentations on a subject of interest, after which they partook in a group role play exercise recording on digital video a self-scripted 'Late Late Show' interview. Data was collated using tools such as pre- and post-test questionnaires, focus group interviews, and data collected in the use of the ICTs in the classroom. Ethical considerations were taken into account and the appropriate college guidelines were followed.

Findings

Findings were presented under the five objectives of the study. The first of these investigated the motivational levels and attitudes of the students prior to the ICT intervention. Analysis of the data shows that only 22% of students expressed strong motivation in the learning of the language but only 14% of students reported a strong desire for the language. As regards the second objective the findings on student attitudes for the use of ICT in the classroom were positive overall with 75% of respondents indicating a positive attitude towards ICT. Post-test questionnaires however reported a slightly more negative attitude and desire for the learning of Irish after the intervention of ICT in the classroom though motivational intensity on the other hand increased. Overall, respondents saw the Irish/ICT intervention positively. The facilitating aspect of ICTs for authentic communications in Irish

(as a second language) was seen as a strength in the research. Interestingly attitudes and desire for the language amongst students in the post-intervention period appear to have declined. Relevance seems to have been a factor with many students questioning the place of the language in their future lives. The research found an overall increase in motivation to learn Irish.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The results obtained provide some valuable information for Irish language teachers and particularly for transition year teachers in second level schools.

Recommendations include a "blended learning" approach or the integration of ICT into Irish language teaching and learning, an emphasis on the role of facilitating communication using ICTs, the importance of CPD for teachers, and greater support structures for ICT in schools.