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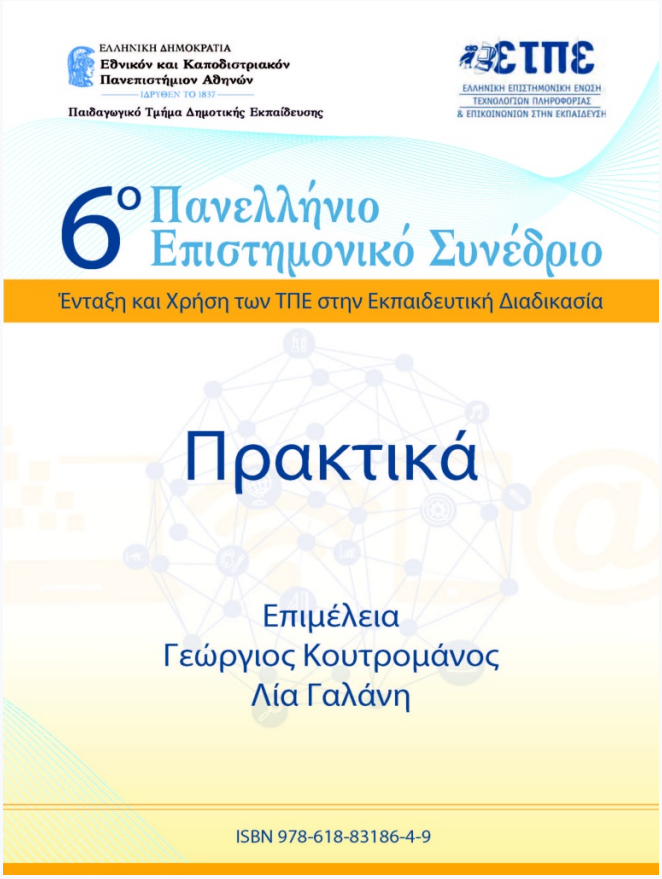

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Using the TESOL Technology Standards Framework to evaluate students' technological knowledge in an undergraduate Italian course

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Abstract

The ubiquitous nature of technology has offered unprecedented opportunities for the learning experience. Various technological tools have become commonplace while many elaborate on the possibilities of authentic learning experiences created by immersive virtual applications. This reflective paper aims to evaluate how the integration of the TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of other Languages) Technology Standards Framework can help align an Italian undergraduate course with the expected student learning outcomes in terms of technology. The students' part of the TESOL Technology Standards Framework was used for this reflective evaluation. Each standard makes use of performance indicators that are reviewed and commented on. Furthermore, specific and general outcomes are supplemented in the Discussion and Conclusion section regarding the findings and the results of the overview. The course used for the purposes of this paper is Italian I, an A2-level elective course, offered at a public University. Italian I aims to develop students' four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking through contextualized learning, enhanced by innovative technological tools.

Keywords: TESOL technology standards framework, Italian language course, Student education, Technology

Introduction

Technology and education

Technology has facilitated communication in various contexts through an abundance of modalities such as text, audio and video (Kessler, 2018) while technology-mediated lessons have been known to present a plethora of opportunities for student learning. In fact, according to Schwienhorst (2002), research on CALL (Computer-assisted language learning) has shifted from seeing the computer as a tool to using it as virtual environment tool through which students can collaborate and gain better language and linguistic awareness. Technology has fostered an increasing variety of learning contexts as either face-to-face or online (Kessler, 2018). Virtual reality simulations of a foreign language culture can aid in student comprehension and production of foreign language within an authentic context while they can, simultaneously, retain student engagement through interaction (Martín-Gutiérrez, Mora, Añorbe-Díaz, & González-Marrero, 2017). Carl Blyth (2017) emphasised upon the use of technology in language learning by proposing to make a more learnable context through the use of video and multimedia.

TESOL - Technology Standards Framework

The TESOL Technology Standards Framework (TTS) provides a basis for understanding concerning what is expected for teachers to teach and for learners to learn in terms of

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technology (Healey et al., 2008). The standards are designed to clarify appropriate users of technology and support best practices in CALL in diverse settings around the world (Healey et al., 2008). In spite of the growing use of technology in the field of language teaching and learning, there have not been clear guidelines on how to successfully implement technology to promote language learning and the TESOL Technology Standards attempts to fill this void (Healey et al., 2008).

Table 1. Overview of Technology Standards for Italian I

Goal 2: Language learners use technology in socially and culturally appropriate, legal, and ethical ways.	
Standard 1: Language learners understand that communication conventions differ across cultures, communities, and contexts.	
Performance indicators	How this standard is met during the course
Identifying similarities and differences in local and global communication.	Yes. Students learned during the course that local and global communication are very different. Locals languages exist in every country dialects and rules that follow the communication.
Demonstrating understanding of multiple ways that Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) can be (mis)interpreted.	Yes. Students practice the difference between the 2nd person singular (addressing friends) and the 3rd person singular (expressing formality).
Showing sensitivity to communication conventions, according to the context.	Yes. The principles of these conventions are met via role-play tasks, our Facebook group and Google sites.
Conforming to current social conventions when using technology in communication.	Yes. Students sometimes use their phone for purposes other than the ones the course requires.
Being able to identify cultural variables in interpreting and responding to a message.	This is not fully met. Students are exposed to cultural cues and variables but they are not able to interpret them fully and respond in this level (A1).
Standard 2: Language learners demonstrate respect for others in their use of private and public information.	
Performance indicators	How this standard is met during the course
Demonstrating understanding that public information in one community may be considered private in other communities.	Yes. Students become aware of cultural differences and taboo issues.
Demonstrating understanding that images may carry different connotations in different communities.	No. This is not met due to the cultural similarities between L1 and Italian.
Using communications and digital media tools ethically and responsibly.	Yes. Students know that course-related material is for course purposes only according to the course outline given at the beginning of the semester.
Practicing legal, responsible, and ethical use of technology systems, information, and software.	Yes. Students are discouraged from making illegal use of material.

Table 1. (continued)

Accommodating different communication styles online.	Yes. They use written and verbal communication in formal and informal contexts.
Goal 3: Language learners effectively use and critically evaluate technology-based tools as aids in the development of their language learning competence as part of formal instruction and for further learning.	
Standard 1: Effectively using and evaluating available technology-based productivity tools.	
Performance indicators	How this standard is met during the course
Using technology-based productivity tools as aids in production	This is partly met. Tasks and assignments are created in Word, presentations are prepared in a presentation template. Web-design software is not a requirement for a foreign language course. Students use readily-made social media sites such as Weebly, Wix, Wordpress etc.
Using technology-based productivity tools as aids in comprehension.	Yes. This is a requirement for a language course. Google Drive, Kahoot, Virtual Reality application.
Applying criteria to evaluate the appropriate use of particular technology tools for specific language learning tasks.	This is partly met. The overall expected learning outcomes of the course are given at the beginning of the semester but not technology-oriented outcomes.
Using technology-based productivity tools collaboratively and individually in order to enhance their language learning competence.	Yes. Students participate in individual and group activities and use various technology-based productivity tools such as Dropbox, Kahoot etc., in order to empower their learning experience.
Standard 2: Appropriately using and evaluating available technology-based language skill-building tools.	
Performance indicators	How this standard is met during the course
Employing age- and proficiency-appropriate vocabulary and pragmatics/body language during collaborative work that uses technology.	Yes. Collaboration through Google Docs. Using the Virtual Reality application "Mondly".
Demonstrating that they know when to ask for help in order to achieve their language learning objectives when using technology.	Yes. Teacher help. Peer help. Software help tools.
Deciding when to use language software and devices as available and appropriate to enhance specific skill areas.	Yes. Students recognize the appropriate device, and software that contributes to assist/ help the improvement of specific skills.
Critically evaluating Internet resources as available and appropriate to enhance their language learning.	Yes. Students practice with a big number of Internet resources provided by the teacher and are capable of recognizing the type of resources that are helpful for their language learning.
Standard 3: Language learners appropriately use and evaluate available technology-based tools for communication and collaboration.	
Performance indicators	How this standard is met during the course

Table 1. (continued)

Communicating in appropriate ways with those from other cultures and communities using digital tools.	No. Students practice communicative tasks but full communication in Italian cannot be performed.
Actively encouraging others to fully participate in conversations that use technology-based tools in a language-learning context.	Yes. Through Google Docs and Facebook, students are able to communicate and encourage other classmates to participate in conversations for the purposes of the lesson.
Using criteria to determine which technology tools function best as a means of collaborating with others for specific types of language learning.	This is partly met. Students do not use the comment function in Word; teachers do. Students only use the comment function in Google Doc for shared documents.
Using and critically evaluating the use of particular digital resources to communicate ideas effectively to peers or a wider audience (e.g., blogs, podcasts, movie making tools).	Yes. Students use blogs, vlogs, movie-making tools, voice recording tools and "Mondly".
Using available technology individually or collaboratively to creating content to share with peers or a wider audience, online or offline.	Yes. Students share content through Facebook, links and Dropbox access.
Standard 4: Language learners use and evaluate available technology-based research tools appropriately.	
Performance indicators	How this standard is met during the course
Employing technology to locate and collect information from a variety of sources.	Yes. Students use computers or mobile devices to locate and collect a variety of information, images etc. from different sources.
Employing strategies to evaluate online information.	This is partly met. Students do not learn to evaluate online information. Students learn to distinguish between the correct register for course-related content.
Documenting source material appropriately.	Yes. Referencing is a required section for every activity submitted for the course.
Determining which technology tools to use to organize information from research.	Yes. Students know which technology tool to employ in order to organize points for presentations or for writing tasks.
Standard 5: Language learners recognize the value of technology to support autonomy, lifelong learning, creativity, metacognition, collaboration, personal pursuits, and productivity.	
Performance indicators	How this standard is met during the course
Selecting the most appropriate available technology for independent language learning and being able to provide reasons for their choices.	Yes. They resort to Google Docs for writing, they employ online dictionaries for their assignments, they use "Mondly" for vocabulary practice.
Demonstrating the ability to set language learning goals and objectives that employ technology, with a teacher's support or independently.	Yes. They are aware of the technology dynamic and they use it to pass their tests and assignments.

Table 1. (continued)

Can use technology to monitor their progress.	All kind of progress report or assessment is done through technology.
Can express themselves using technology.	Yes. They create their own assignments. They use Facebook to express and exchange ideas for the purposes of the course. They have the abilities and the skills to choose the appropriate application from a wide range of technology tools and applications in order to express themselves in a productive way.
Providing reasons for the value of technology in maintaining communication for personal and professional purposes and having access to authentic material that supports their language learning.	Yes. Authentic material and sources (articles, videos, blogs, vlogs, songs, posts, VR applications etc.) in a contextualized learning environment is the base of the course in order to identify cultural elements and being involved in a cultural discovery together with the foreign language learning. Students are able to recognize the importance of the mediation of technology to maintaining communication for personal and professional purposes through the use of synchronous online communication and asynchronous online communication.
Using technology to work in English more effectively.	Yes. Students possess the knowledge that using technology as a source for covering their needs in language learning can be a faster or more efficient choice but they recognize that they can use and combine more than one source which is available in order to satisfy their learning needs.

Italian language course

Italian Language I is a 4-hour per-week, 6 ECTS-elective university course with duration of 13 weeks. The main aim of the course is to provide students with the basic knowledge of communicating and interacting in authentic contextualized environments while developing their skills in listening, writing, speaking and reading. Students will be able to understand and employ language through familiar and everyday expressions, use simplistic language, describe events in the present tense and refer to past events concerning their daily personal, social, student life and their professional research interests in A1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Method

The fundamental question of this evaluation paper is the reviewing of the alignment of the TESOL Technology Standards for Learners with the Italian I university language course and how these standards can be applied in the varied contexts and assignments in which Italian I language instruction occurs. Similar work involving the standards was conducted by Tschichold (2016) who applied the teachers' part of the Standards Framework to provide curriculum planning and evaluation. The TESOL Technology Standards include goals and standards for teachers and learners. For the purposes of this project, only the students' standards are used. The students' standards comprise of three goals. However, goal 1 (Language learners demonstrate foundational knowledge and skills in technology for a

multilingual world) is not reviewed due to the fact that students already have the necessary knowledge and skills prior to the course. Initially, the two remaining goals and their standards are reviewed (Table 1: Overview of Technology Standards for Italian I).

Discussion and conclusion

This paper aims to evaluate how the TESOL Technology Standards Framework can reflect on the students' knowledge in terms of technology in Italian I undergraduate course. The standards have been revised by other researchers in the field of language learning through technology, such us Gonzalez (2012) for prospective integration of the standards in teachers' practice. The main perspectives for the completion of this evaluation is firstly to get a complete picture of the technologies used in this course over time and understand the impact on students' technological knowledge. Secondly, there is no analogous framework for using technologies in the Italian language for speakers of other languages and for this reason, the TESOL framework was an extremely useful tool for this evaluation. Thirdly, it is very important to achieve an equilibrium between what the teacher and the lesson aim to offer regarding the knowledge that can emerge through the use of the technology and the technology that students can use either regarding their personal knowledge and skills, the university facilities and or the time and facility control on behalf of the teacher. Frameworks such as TESOL Technology Standards can help guide teachers towards a thoughtful, reflective technology use, but this is just a foundation (Kessler, 2018). The TESOL Framework Standards constitutes a valuable base for the review of the current study. The review has shown that, through the evaluation of the syllabus of an undergraduate language course in terms of student technological knowledge and skills, there is a predominal need to individuate and evaluate the pre-existing knowledge of students. The latter will provide a way of separating between the knowledge and skills that they acquire before and after the course. Furthermore, as the reflective evaluation has shown, the Italian language course is very intertwined with the TESOL Technology Standards Framework and, more specifically, the indicators of the goals that are evaluated. From a total of 33 performance indicators, 26 are fully met, 5 are partially met and 2 are not met. Our suggestion is the dissemination of a pre- and post-test for future research so that the skills of the students are more evident before the course. A proposed continuation of this paper is also to conduct further research as a way of providing scientific evidence for the students' actual knowledge in technology. Moreover, through our experience of reviewing the Framework, we found that a simple yes or no is very vague pertaining to whether a standard is met or not. As Pennycook (1999) stated, there is a need to develop critical approaches to TESOL because they can help us understand in much more complex ways the contexts in which TESOL occurs and offer the prospect of change.

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