THE USE OF ICTs IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE FOR BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED: A CASE STUDY

RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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THE USE OF ICTs IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS AN ADDITIONAL LANGUAGE FOR BLIND AND VISUALLY IMPAIRED: A CASE STUDY

Research proposal presented to the Language Arts English/Portuguese College of the Departamento Acadêmico de Línguas Estrangeiras Modernas – DALEM – and the Departamento Acadêmico de Linguagem e Comunicação – DALIC – of the Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná – UTFPR, as a requirement to obtain the Teaching degree.


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ABSTRACT


This project is inserted in the Applied Linguistics scope and aims at investigating how blind and visually impaired learners use Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) to communicate and also to learn English as an additional language. For the development of this topic, a literary approach will be taken, in order to review the literature in teaching English as an additional language for blind and visually impaired. Based on Lankshear and Knobel (2005) and Glisters (1997), that analyzed the growing filed of digital literacies, and also on Vigotsky (2002), through his mediation theory; this article reports to a case study which took place in the project – *Inglês Básico para Deficientes Visuais* – carried out at the Federal University of Technology – Paraná from February to December 2014 (UTFPR). In order to gather data, a profile of the students will be collected and analysed. Also, a questionnaire will be applied, classes will be observed, and an interview will be made. By the end of this brief research, it is expected to collaborate with the blind and visually impaired learner’s learning process.

**Key words:** English. Information and Communications Technology. Blind. Visually Impaired.
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1. Introduction

“It is a press, certainly, but a press from which shall flow in inexhaustible streams… Through it, God will spread His Word. A spring of truth shall flow from it: like a new star it shall scatter the darkness of ignorance, and cause a light heretofore unknown to shine amongst men.”

Johannes Gutenberg

“Technology is nothing. What’s important is that you have a faith in people, that they’re basically good and smart, and if you give them tools, they’ll do wonderful things with them.”

Steve Jobs

“The Web as I envisaged it, we have not seen it yet. The future is still so much bigger than the past.”

Tim Berners-Lee

As noticed, this section started with three epigraphs: the first one, is from a man who introduced printing to Europe: Johannes Gutenberg, and in his view, technology would nourish God’s word; the second, from Steve Jobs – North American inventor, who was the co-founder, chairman, and CEO of Apple Inc –, expose his perspective, in which technology is only a tool, that can help people achieve great things; and, finally, the last one, is from Tim Berners-Lee, also known as “TimBL”, a computer scientist, best known as the inventor of World Wide Web, from which is possible to come to the conclusion that the development of the technology, as we know, is not even close to what has to come.
These contrasting points of view, were chosen to demonstrate how technology has been seen and, even more, has yet to be seen for many years to come. In this complicated and growing technological world, there is the, even more confusing, applicability of all this new information in the educational sphere. Our newest generation, and even the not so newest generations, according to Klopfer et al (2009) are creating things in new ways, learning things in new ways, and communicating in new ways with new people.

Green and Hannon (2007, p. 38) complement this, by saying: “Children are establishing a relationship to knowledge gathering which is alien to their parents and teachers”); and, this context can, also, be used to refer to teenagers and adults, as well. Klopfer et al (2009), also reminds us that this transformation has serious implications in the space of education; almost all institutions – business, industry, medicine, science and government – have used aspects of this technology for many years, and that leaves us with the question: why have these tools not been used in education as long as the other institutions have?

Concerning the use of ICTs in the teaching of the English language, the first thing that we need to keep in mind, is that the English Language Teaching (ELT), is an area that has gone through changes throughout the past years, and Richards (1985) recalls that these advancements moved the perspective from teacher-centered approaches to learner-centered ones. In other words, these new approaches have to provide the means for the learners to improve their own learning process, as well as, self evaluation it.

Besides that, it is well known that the limited hours in which most – if not all – English courses (even the most communicative approaches) take place, does not provide the enough amount of time for interactions in the target language; and, also, there is the fact that classroom context is far off from the reality in which students will face it. In this sense, ICTs can be a great help, not only to assist the teachers, but also to give learners the possibility to practice the target language in its authentic context.

So far, we have, briefly, mentioned the following aspects: technology, its use in education, and the ICTs in teaching English as an additional language. Therefore, what needs to be addressed, is the combination of all the aspects mentioned previously with the subject of this research: ICTs in the teaching of English as an additional language for blind, and visually impaired learners; which is, basically, the theme of this work.
2. **Aims**

General aim: investigate how the blind and visually impaired learners use ICTs to communicate and learn the English Language.

Specific aims:

- Review the literature on the use of ICT in teaching English;
- Review the literature on the use of ICT in teaching English for the blind and visually impaired;
- Investigate which ICTs blind and visually impaired learners of the extension course (Inglês Básico para Deficientes Visuais) use, inside and outside the classroom, to learn and study the English Language;
- Investigate which technologies the learners teach each other with the purpose of learning English and communicating;
- Investigate how the learners teach ICTs among themselves;
- Study which ICTs the undergraduate students present to the blind and visually impaired as teaching tools;
- Study how the undergraduate students introduce these new technologies to the group.

3. **Rationale**

The purpose of this research is to investigate a field of study which is usually overlooked: the teaching of a foreign language to learners with disabilities; in order to be more specific, teaching English to blind and visually impaired learners. There are many
reasons why this field is neglected: the lack of formal instructions that undergraduate students have when the matter is coping with different disabilities; teachers that will remember that there are many different disabilities only when they happen to receive a learner with any kind of impairment; the fact that this area is not as profitable as many others; the fallacy that the only needed thing to be done is to 'integrate' these students in school, the common sense that ICTs can only be used for amusement; the ludicrous idea that people with disabilities are not as capable as any other; and, finally, the preposterous that learning English cannot be seen as an empowerment to blind and visually impaired students.

In this sense, it is plausible to asseverate that, after raising all of these assumptions, there is a great amount of work to be done in this area. That is the reason why the Federal University of Technology-Paraná (UTFPR), through Drº. Miriam Sester Retorta and Allan Martins Mohr, created a project – *Inglês Básico para Deficientes Visuais*. And, this case study will investigate some of the assumptions made previously, as well as comment others.

4. Conceptual Framework

This section will briefly mention four studies that were conducted in Brazil, from 2010 to 2013 and that can somehow be related to the subject addressed in this work: “*A apropriação da Língua Inglesa pelo aluno cego matriculado no ensino fundamental: um estudo de caso*”, Perinni (2013); “*O ensino de língua inglesa a alunos deficientes visuais na escola pública: uma busca aos lugares verdadeiros*”, Dantas Silva e Medrado (2010); “*A GENTE VIVE NUM MUNDO NORMAL*”: Afetividade e construção do conhecimento na aula de língua inglesa para deficientes visuais”, Silva (2010); and “*O ensino de língua inglesa para pessoas cegas, um desafio para a inclusão na era digital*”, Correia dos Santos e Fontes (2010). In the sequence, three international studies will be presented: “Pathfinder Project:

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1 Project, in which, initially, twelve undergraduate students majoring in Languages (Portuguese and English) at Universidade Tecnológica Federal do Paraná (UTFPR) worked as guides; and twenty four blind and visually impaired learners, from ADEVIPAR, (Associação dos Deficientes Visuais do Paraná e do Instituto Paranaense de Cegos). Classes are held on Saturday mornings lasting for two hours and a half (09:30 until 12:00); learners gather in small groups, with the guides – who help in with the activities proposed by the teacher. In order to provide necessary conditions for an effective learning, Information and Communications Technology (ICTs) are applied.
New Ways To Access English for Blind Students in Argentina”, by Barbarán e Requejo (2012); “Lesson Planning for Visually Impaired Students of English”, by Galetová (2012); “New Ways of Language Learning for Blind or Visually Impaired Children and Teenagers”, by Quatraro e Paiano (2010).

Perinni (2013) – in “A apropriação da Língua Inglesa pelo aluno cego matriculado no ensino fundamental: um estudo de caso” –, aims at understanding how a blind student in an elementary public school learns English. In order to achieve this goal, the author chose to work with a qualitative approach, in a case study, with the assumptions of a social-historical approach, based on authors such as Vygotsky, Bakhtin and some others. The research corpus was obtained through document analysis, semi-structured interviews, observation of the English classes and school environment. And, the data analysis showed that the blind student did not show a learning process different from any of the other students, the only difference is that that specific student needed other ways to perform as well as the others.

“O ensino de língua inglesa a alunos deficientes visuais na escola pública: uma busca aos lugares verdadeiros”, by Dantas Silva e Medrado (2010) intent to understand the following aspects: interaction, affect and cognition that are involved in the teaching-learning English processes of an visually impaired student. Based on Vygotsky and Tomasello, the authors use an ethnographic and qualitative-interpretive methodology; and collect their data through the researchers who went to two schools in João Pessoa – PB – Brazil, attended eleven classes and took notes, interviewed the teachers from those classes, students and the visually impaired students. The results showed that both teachers argued that they did not had the knowledge on how to work with visually impaired students, and that the affective aspect can influence how the students learn the language.

Silva (2010), in “A Gente Vive num Mundo Normal”: Afetividade e construção do conhecimento na aula de língua inglesa para deficientes visuais”, bases her investigation on the theoretical framework of Vygotsky and Tomasello, and aims at discussing how an English teacher’s actions can contribute to the teaching-learning English process of visually impaired students. To collect her data, she conducted interviews and observed classes of a group that had two students with visual disabilities. The qualitative analysis revealed that the teacher’s actions built and affective environment, that helped students to develop meaningful learning.
And, in the last Brazilian research reported here– “O ensino de língua inglesa para pessoas cegas, um desafio para a inclusão na era digital” –, Correia dos Santos e Fontes (2010) studied about teaching English to blind students using the computer as a didactic-pedagogic tool, and mentioned some technological resources that can help with the English classes. Their study was based on a bibliographical research and aim at contributing with other studies in this area, due to the limited number of bibliography.

“Pathfinder Project: New Ways To Access English for Blind Students in Argentina”, by Barbarán e Requejo (2012), intends to design an English course with blind teachers and students. The project is an ongoing study that has the objective to develop improvement in the English instruction through forum with teachers that had already worked with blind students, and the classes method based on Internet and multimedia.

Galetová (2012), in “Lesson Planning for Visually Impaired Students of English”, aims at showing some differences of activities made for non-handicapped and for visually handicapped students, and uses a list of learning tools to cope with those students. For the theoretical framework, Armstrong and Hlusi are used to underlie the study. And, as for the results, the researcher found out that, the teachers of visually impaired students: do not spend more time on lesson planning. They use the same lesson plan some other times and, modify or handcraft more materials.

Finally, in the last international article – “New Ways of Language Learning for Blind or Visually Impaired Children and Teenagers” –, Quatraro e Paiano (2010) intend to disclose the ELLVIS (English Language Learning Programme for Visually Impaired Students) project, which has the purpose of improving the access of visually impaired students. The project is a second version of another self-learning project: AllVip (Accessible Language Learning for Visually Impaired People), and this second version is designed for children and teenagers.

5. Theoretical Framework

Taking into account that in this research we intend to study the relation between the Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) and the learning process of English as
an additional\textsuperscript{2} language for blind and visually impaired learners; two lines of theoretical basis were needed: ‘Digital Literacies’ by Lankshear and Knobel (2005), and Glister (1997) and mediation theory by Vigotsky’s (2002).

‘Digital Literacies’ will be used in the plural form in this work, because I agree with Lankshear e Knobel (2005), when they say that this form is more appropriate than Digital Literacy for three main reasons: a) the diversity that there are of specific “digital literacy”; b) the improvement that can be seen when dealing with a perspective of literacy as practice; and c) the benefits that can be achieved by adopting and expansive view, especially in the field of educational learning. Also, it is relevant to add that the perspective taken into account, is the view of ‘Digital Literacies’ as sociocultural; in which it has “to make sense of reading, writing and meaning-making as integral elements of social practices” (Lankshear e Knobel, 2006, p. 12), that is not to face the literacies as “simply reading and writing”.

In this regard, Glister (1997) adds that digital literacy is the art of mastering ideas, not keystrokes, in the sense that ‘digital literacies’ need to be more than the use of digital sources effectively. And, when the subject is the use of the Internet, the author defends the idea that the work with this tool differs from other formal tools for several reasons, some of them being: it is not all about text – multimedia computers give teachers and students the possibility to work with videos, audios, photos –; the way the information is disposed differs from other platforms; and, it is multidimensional and interactive.

It is important to add another view of the subject: Eshet-Alkalai’s (2004), when concerning the inconsistency in two particular groups, those that conceive digital literacy as mainly related with technical skills and those that see it as focused on cognitive and socio-emotional aspects of dealing in a digital environment. The curious part, it that, in our group – Inglês Básico para Deficientes Visuais – there are people researching this matter in both of the ways presented; but, for clarification, the approach taken in this investigation is the second one, in which the ‘digital literacies’ are applied in order to be focused on the cognitive and social-emotional aspects of the digital environment.

Bearing that in mind, that is the reason why the ICTs were chosen to assist the teaching of English in order to try to give another stimulus to blind and visually impaired

\textsuperscript{2} We need to explain that this terminology is used – and we need to affirm that it is a new one – because it refers to both second and foreign languages; and that is why additional language is used.
learners in the English as an additional language learning process. In order words

A blind can also see, look, and contemplate, obviously not by sight, but by touching and hearing, which are the means that they use to have contact with the outside world. Therefore the seeing restrictions are compensated by other strategies. Because he/she use more broadly these other senses, a teacher needs to resort to other means, that can be used inside and outside the classroom, so that students can learn and be included in the school's context and that is where the technology comes to support their specific need. (RETORTA; MOHR, 2013, p. 2) [translated by the authors]

Concerning Vygotsky, there is one concept that we need to discuss before deliberating about his mediation theory: the Zone of Proximal Development (from now on ZPD), defined by himself, as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). This author goes on to describe the ZPD as “a tool through which the internal course of development can be understood” (op. cit, p. 87). In other words, by investigating the level of mental development in children, Vygotsky perceived that they can perform tasks that are not forecast for their ages, when helped by others.

Menezes (2010, p.3), argues that, by applying this concept to the collaborative learning process by young learners and adults, especially when in the field of acquiring a foreign language, implies in "romanticize the participation of the most competent peer, and minimize the role of cultural artifacts that can be effective mediators in autonomous learning." (Menezes, 2010, p.3) [translated by the authors]. Nevertheless, her opinion can be, easily,

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3 Um cego também pode ver, olhar, contemplar, não obviamente através da visão, mas através do tato e da audição que são os meios pelos quais eles utilizam para ter contato com o mundo externo. Portanto as restrições do campo visual são compensadas por outras estratégias. Pelo fato dele utilizar mais amplamente esses outros sentidos, um professor necessita lançar mão de outros meios, que possam ser utilizados dentro e fora de sua sala de aula, para que esse aluno consiga aprender e ser incluído no contexto escolar e é aí que a tecnologia vem de encontro à essa necessidade específica. (RETORTA; MOHR, 2013, p. 2)

4 “romantizar a participação do par mais competente, e minimizar o papel dos artefatos culturais que podem ser mediadores eficazes na aprendizagem autônoma.” (Menezes, 2010, p.3)
contradicted in the case of the study dealt in this research, mainly by two reasons: first, is that the most competent pair, here, can be seen as both ways: most competent in using and understanding the language, but also, as the one that can deal more efficiently and effortlessly than the other with technology; and, second, the autonomous learning can be hardened by the fact that the learner cannot use the technology as well as some others.

That being said, we can, now, move on, to the mediation theory; which is, according to Wertsch (2007, p. 181) a central theme throughout Vygotsky’s writings. In Vygotsky’s own words, ZPD is “a tool through which the internal course of development can be understood” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87). And, Moll (2000, p. 257) summarizes the centrality of mediation to learning as follows: “to put it simply, human beings interact with their worlds primarily through mediational means; and these mediational means, the use of cultural artifacts, tools and symbols, including language, play crucial roles in the formation of human intellectual capacities. When analyzing the learner’s process of acquiring a new language, as teachers and researchers we should pay close attention to the ZPD of students, the mediation tools that we can provide to help the scaffolding of their learning development, and the amount of social interaction needed to assist their learning process.

It is clear, that, in this research, the interaction between learners and teachers is fundamental to the course of action of achieving success in the learning of a new language; and, Vygotsky will argue that the human way of functioning is intrinsically social because it “incorporates socially evolved and socially organized human tools” (Wertsch & Tulviste, 1992, p. 551).

6. Methodological design

This research will be conducted in an Applied Linguistics view, which means a linguistics field that identifies, investigates, and offer solutions to language-related real-life problems, to deal with the English Language learning process. Also, this work is based on a qualitative approach, that being, a research in which the aim is at gathering a deep understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that rule it; and, it will be dealt with as a
case study, due to the fact that the group that we work with, is a small one, and also, that there is not a regularity in the learner’s frequency in the classroom.

For the data collection instrument, four measurement will be taken place: first, a profile of the students will be analyzed, which were completed by the learners in the beginning of the course; second, a questionnaire will be applied, which will be made out from questionnaires already applied in this field of study, always making references to the authors; third, classes will be observed, and, to help the researcher to keep all this data, all classes will be recorded in the interest to facilitates the analysis of the data collected; finally, an interview will be made with the assistance of an interview outline, for the sake of directing learners to collaborate with the research questions.

7. **Expected outcomes**

At the end of this research, it is expected to understand a bit more on how the ICTs can facilitate the learning process of acquiring English as an additional language for blind and visually impaired learners.

The researchers are completely involved in this entire process; so, it is, also, expected that the connection among teachers and learners, and, as well as, learners and learners can smooth and dynamize the learning process. And, this network will be evaluated in the positive and negative points of social practice for the language, and also through the view of the own learners.

One point that needs to be made is that of the difficulties faced by students when using all this new technology that it is out there; that point being made, another outcome is that the support provide by teachers, undergraduate students, and other learners can easy out this adversity.

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