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Costa Rican Teachers' Use of ICTs in the English Language Class

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Abstract
This article examines the role of the ICTs in language teaching. The writer explains that information and communication technologies play an essential role in the acquisition of a language. This article contains a brief analysis of the results of a survey questionnaire that was given to English teachers. Based on these results, the writer explains that, despite their importance, ICTs are not being fully incorporated in schools and high schools in Costa Rica.

Key words: English Language Learning (ELL), educational technology, modern language teaching tools

Resumen
El presente artículo examina el papel de la TICs en la enseñanza del idioma. El autor explica que las tecnologías de la información y la comunicación juegan un papel esencial en la adquisición de un idioma. El artículo contiene un breve análisis de los resultados de un cuestionario dado a profesores de inglés. El autor explica que, a pesar de su importancia, las TICs no son completamente incorporadas en la educación básica y diversificada en Costa Rica.

Palabras claves: aprendizaje del inglés, tecnologías educativas, herramientas pedagógicas

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1. Introduction

Technology has reshaped the way we live, the way we think and the way we interact; answers to many basic or difficult questions are fingertips away. These are the e-days when we e-play, e-communicate, e-read and e-relate. Technology is not the panacea to our problems, and many detractors have fiercely warned us about its dangerous implications. Nevertheless, it is here and it will not go away. A setting where its benefits are apparent is the educational context. Kassebaum (cited in Zhen, 2010) pointed this when she said that "There can be infinite uses of the computer and of new age technology, but if teachers themselves are not able to bring it into the classroom and make it work, then it fails." Are Costa Rican teachers able to bring it to the classroom? Are they able to make it work? Do they have the appropriate access and knowledge to do so? The answers to these questions remain unanswered. It is undeniable that there is a growing need to incorporate technology in any field of education, and the field of language teaching is no exception.

The Costa Rican Coalition for Development Initiatives (CINDE, 2012) in the report called "Education in Costa Rica" mentions that the national workforce has been known because of its high educational level and high productivity. The Ministry of Education has not only cared about general education or merely teaching reading and writing, but it has made an important effort to guarantee a good basis on computer skills and the incorporation of English as a second language (p. 2-3). These two fields became mandatory in all public schools between 1994 and 1998 (p. 6). Therefore, guaranteeing technological resources and proper training has become a national priority. However, there are no follow-up mechanisms to verify that access is not exclusive to urban or more developed high schools and that professors are well-trained and willing to use ICT's, especially in the language class.

The preliminary results of the International Survey for Teachers about the Use of Technology on Teaching (Light, Manso and Rodriguez, 2010) is a study about the use of ICT's in teaching. It was conducted in Argentina, Chile, Costa Rica and México to 847 teachers of the basic areas, English and technology. Participants belonged to public high schools that had access to equipment and connectivity. This is a first approach to serious research on the field of teaching and technology use. In the case of Costa Rica, they analyzed the results of 169 teachers, 20% belonging to ESL teachers (around 34 English teachers in total) (p. 3). Two of the main preliminary results found in this international survey are related to the access and use that teachers give to technology. In the case of Costa Rica, 2% of the teachers interviewed mention that there is no access. An alarming 92% state that there is access in the computer lab only, while 6% mention that they have access in the computer lab and in the classroom. In terms of access, Costa Rica ranks last compared to Mexico (18% of access in the lab and the classroom), Chile (35% of access in the lab and the classroom) and Argentina (15% of access in the lab and the classroom) (p. 4). Why is it so relevant to have access in the classroom? At least in Costa Rica, high schools have no more than

two labs and usually they have just one. If we consider that the survey considers access for other subjects such as Math, Spanish, Social Studies, Science, Technology, among others, chances are that the time groups are in contact with educational technology is very scarce. In terms of use, Costa Rica ranks last again compared to the rest of the countries under study. In Argentina, 39% of teachers claim that they do not use ICTs when teaching. In Mexico, only 19% teachers do not use them. Chile is the country where ICTs are used the most. Only 14% of the teachers acknowledge not using technology for teaching purposes. In Costa Rica, 48% of teachers do not use technology when teaching (p. 4). This study does not mention reasons to avoid using technology in class. A relation between access and use could be evident, but no explicit reference is made in these preliminary results. It is obvious that something is wrong when it comes to using technology in high school classes. As seen in the CINDE report, efforts have been made, but results have not been reached.

To date, there has been no specific survey study conducted on the three main basic components of technology and education. The purpose of this study is to discover how prepared teachers are to use specific technology, how much access they have to it and how much they use it. For the present study, the following questions were asked: (a) How much access do English teachers have to specific technology? (b) To what extent do they feel ready to use it? (c) How often do teachers use ICTs in the English Language class?

The present study is limited to students that could be located and agreed to be part of the study. Only teachers who are currently working in public or private high schools or elementary schools were selected.

2. Review of Literature

It is quite common to equate technology to computer use. Although this is almost always the case, a distinction should be made when considering the different possibilities it offers. This study focuses on blended learning rather than on distance education. In distance or virtual education, teachers and students never have face to face interaction. All interaction is done on the internet or other means (letters, discs, TV, among others.) In "Blended" or Hybrid" learning there is a combination of face to face interaction in the traditional fashion, but also a digital component that supports the learning process (Kern, 2011, pp.206). Some of these resources or activities teachers can use in the language class will be defined below using Downing et al. Dictionary of Computer and Internet Terms (2009).

Wikis: a multi-user BLOG or set of web pages where all users can add content and edit other people's ideas. The term comes from Hawaiian wiki "quick" (p. 528).

Blog: a "web log"; a type of personal column posted on the Internet. Most blogs consist of small, plentiful entries. Some blogs are similar to an individual's diary while others have a focused topic, such as recipes or political news (p. 59).

Podcasting (video casting): (from iPod and broadcast, but not confined to the Apple iPod) the practice of preparing audio and video programs such as radio and TV broadcasts, but distributing them through the Internet for playback on MP3 players, iPods, and similar devices (p. 370).

Smartboard: an interactive, electronic whiteboard manufactured by SMART Technologies, which often captures all notes and diagrams written on the board so that students can access them online later (p. 441).

Online forums: a public forum or discussion area on a computer network where all users of the network can post messages and read all the messages that have been posted by others (p. 330).

Video conferencing: the use of video cameras and computer networking to enable participants to converse while seeing one another (p. 513).

Virtual learning environments: a way of providing a teaching and learning environment online (p. 7).

Shared documents: a service […] to easily share information that includes spreadsheets and presentations that can be edited by a group of people, such as co-workers (p. 513).

By examining these definitions, three main aspects of technology become evident. In the first place, it promotes collaborative learning. Most of the activities and resources described above encourage group work and a positive interdependence between the members of a learning community. Secondly, technology promotes independent learning because learners are not limited to teacher-centered classes where knowledge is spread by a single person. Lastly, by using technology in the classroom, teachers can help lower anxiety levels and provide individualized instruction to those students that require it the most. The following paragraphs aim at broadening these ideas in order to reinforce the positive outcomes that technology can bring to the language class.

Cooperative Language Learning promotes the acquisition of language by interacting in meaningful situations with peers or teachers. It is assumed that the idea of cooperation and learning dates back to primitive ages when humans needed to gather knowledge and share it in order to survive. As a documented method, it was promoted and developed in the United States during the 1960's and the 1970's. It has been refined since then and still remains a solid method in language teaching. Olsen and Kagan (1992) defined cooperative learning as a

> group learning activity organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning or others. (p. 8)

Freeman and Anderson (2011) support that it is not only the group arrangement that makes learning effective. It is rather the interaction among teachers and peers what makes Cooperative Learning relevant (p. 186). As stated before, forums, shared documents, or video conferencing or podcasting can be easily or-

ganized around a collaborative learning environment. One advantage that can be added over more traditional forms of cooperative learning deals with time. In traditional classes, students and teachers must gather in the same place at an agreed time of the day. On the other hand, technology offers students and teachers the possibility of working from distant places without having to psychically commute from their homes to school. In addition, students can choose to work in synchronous or asynchronous manners. In a synchronous style, students can use technology as well as interact with each other at the same time. The use of a smartboard, for example, may require students to work at the same time forming a puzzle or arranging sentences. Presentations or explanations prepared by the teacher followed by a jigsaw reading activity are better performed in synchronous environments where students can see each other and move from group to group at ease. Asynchronous learning permits students to do collaborative activities at different times. This permits that students work at their own pace or build up projects and hold discussions through days or weeks. In an online forum, for example, students can leave a comment that will be replied later that day or after several days. The student can later come and continue the conversation and if he or she had never left. Richards and Rodgers (2002) mention five main goals of this approach in language teaching. These goals are:

- to provide opportunities for naturalistic second language acquisition through the use of interactive pair and group activities;
- to provide teachers with a methodology to enable them to achieve this goal and one that can be applied in a variety of curriculum settings (e. g., content-based, foreign language classrooms; mainstreaming);
- to enable focused attention to particular lexical items, language structures, and communicate functions through the use of interactive tasks;
- to provide opportunities for learning to develop successful learning and communication strategies; and
- to enhance learner motivation and reduce learner stress and to create a positive affective classroom climate (p. 193).

It is evident that teachers should not only have the necessary knowledge about the method; they should also have the necessary skills and appropriate resources to successfully reach the goals previously proposed. From focused attention to particular linguistic items to an increase in motivation, complementing education with ICTs proves to be feasible and efficient when learning a second language. Technology provides a myriad of possibilities. The Cooperative Method can be as ubiquitous as technology. By bringing both together, not only the acquisition of linguistic components, but also social skills will increase through a more open and flexible learning experience.

This essential flexibility has been at odds with traditional language classrooms. Creating activities, copying materials and working with a rigid book have given little room for independent learning. Independent learning can be better achieved when complemented with technological resources. An example of this

is given by Cook (2008) when she explains that "At North-East London Polytechnic (now University of East London), we had a system in which students could make use of language teaching material of their own choice from the selection provided in a language laboratory at any time" (p. 269). A language lab can offer different possibilities for learners. A wiki, a blog or a virtual learning environment lets students choose what content they want to incorporate and share with their classmates. Although it is true that in virtual learning environments students are not usually entitled to make changes or include activities, they can nevertheless suggest their teachers what content can be included and how. On the other hand, with a well designed virtual course (or course complement), students have the opportunity to choose the activities that they want to complete and how they want to approach them. There is no intention to claim that technology will substitute teachers. In terms of autonomy and efficiency, digital resources are subject to what teachers and researchers do to improve the ESL field. Cook (2008) says that "SLA research can assist autonomous learning by ensuring that the support systems for the learner reflect a genuine range of choices, with an adequate coverage of the diverse nature of L2 learning" (p. 270). Therefore, technology cannot guarantee student-centered lessons or autonomy. Teachers remain a key element when designing lessons and guiding students in their learning process. Any new device or piece of software designed to facilitate learning autonomy has to be incorporated by professionals willing to incorporate and adapt what they find useful. Teachers are responsible for making the right decisions when promoting autonomy through technology. Reinders (2009) explains that

> One thing that these and other current developments have in common is that they increasingly require students to be able to make decisions about their own learning and to manage that learning by themselves. Perhaps this is the greatest change that we are likely to see from technology in the near future, and one that may have a strong impact on the classroom. The challenge for teachers will be more one of helping learners develop their skills to deal successfully with the increased control and independence that technology demands. (p. 237-238)

Literature often highlights how crucial it is for teachers to move from a teacher-centered to a more student-centered approach. Despite this assertion, teachers often complain that this is impossible because of the number of students they have in their classes and the little time they have to devote to each one of them. Although autonomous learning may solve this problem, many teachers fear that they will lose control and will become dispensable. The challenge, as Reinders (2009) mentions, is to help students to learn through technology in the best way possible. Technology is just another resource, but one that has been very effective for developing autonomy in the language class. In a study conducted by Chen (2012) on autonomous learning and computer-based multimedia contexts, he concluded that

> The subjects under the computer-based multimedia teaching model were much more autonomous on their real learning performance. Most of them enjoyed the cooperative work, adapted to reading and listening activities outside the class and were voluntary to take responsibilities for their learning activities; most of them easily to choose the material for English class, to define their own objectives and evaluate their level of English. (246)

Therefore, technology promotes autonomous learning on the three main areas of autonomy: choosing materials, defining objectives and evaluating or learning outcomes. This type of approach may require more preparation time and more technical knowledge than traditional classes. Nevertheless, the benefits of using new and more sophisticated technological resources are clear and sound. The autonomous learner of today will have the advantage of knowing about technology and using it in real life contexts to learn from it and transmit that knowledge to others.

The use of technology in language classes provides other remarkable benefits to students. One of these benefits is the reduction of anxiety levels. Language anxiety, as it has commonly been referred to, is associated with

> subjective feelings of apprehension and fear associated with language learning and use. Foreign language anxiety may be a situation-specific anxiety, similar in that respect to public speaking anxiety. Issues in the study of language anxiety include whether anxiety is a cause or an effect of poor achievement, anxiety under specific instructional conditions, and the relationship of general language anxiety to more specific kinds of anxiety associated with speaking, reading, or examinations. (Richards and Schmidt, 210, p. 313)

These feelings hinder students' desire to participate during classes and, thus, they miss the opportunity to practice and improve their linguistic skills. In contexts where English is not the first or even second language, students are very often limited to linguistic input in the foreign language only during classes. Out of class resources are often limited and are not tailored to meet students' needs. Therefore, maximizing participation and guiding students to produce language is essential to develop all linguistic skills. Although it is true that there are different types of anxiety, and some authors distinguish between a positive and a negative type of anxiety, designing digital learning experiences can greatly reduce negative factors associated with anxiety. Brown (2009) distinguishes three different sources of negative anxiety:

1. Communication apprehension, arising from learners' inability to adequately express mature thoughts and ideas.
2. Fear of negative social evaluation, arising from a learner's need to make a positive social impression on others.
3. Test anxiety, or apprehension over academic evaluation (p. 162).

It is the teacher's role, together with the help of the student and peers, to develop appropriate activities and use different strategies to minimize the effects of anxiety. From the technological point of view, these significant sources can be reduced or even eliminated. Communication issues often arise in face to face conversations or at times when students do not feel ready to speak. Through forums or podcasts students may communicate and produce language when they are ready. They can rehearse what they want to say until they feel safe. Students will produce language in the way of monologues or asynchronous conversations, giving them the confidence they need to start synchronous interaction. The same is true of social evaluation. Learners are often afraid of being laughed at. When they have time to prepare, to practice and to reflect on what and how they are going to produce, their output will improve. In other words, because technology gives time to truly analyze what they want to communicate, performance, and therefore the perception others have on it, improves. In terms of academic evaluation, there is no reason to assume that an online test leads to less anxiety than a pen a paper test. Nevertheless, through technology, students can be assessed by means of projects, electronic portfolios, or podcasts that will remove negative feelings towards assessment. In terms of evaluation, another benefit drawn from technology is the amount of practice. Students can have access to more practice than it would be possible in traditional classes. If they feel insecure about a specific subject or language skill, they can reinforce it through electronic tests that are programmed by the teacher to give them the correct answer and an explanation in case the answer is wrong. At the same time, students can receive a more individualized instruction. Li and Lu (2012) define Individualized instruction as "a method of instruction in which content, instructional technology (such as materials) and pace of learning are based upon the abilities and interests of each individual learner" (p. 1). When using technology, individualized attention does require conscious preparation and plenty of time. So far, teachers can create videos or audio files that simulate a class through virtual learning environments and create practices that recognize objective answers and can provide pre-written feedback accordingly. A more powerful system called iCALL (intelligent computer assisted language learning) has started to become popular. Robert (2011) explains that

> iCALL systems should be designed to anticipate students' mistakes, offer helpful suggestions, and keep track of their behavior while using the program. Accordingly, one of the key features of an iCALL system resides in the detailed and individualized level of feedback that the program offers the student, along with keeping track of each student's most common mistakes. (p. 20)

As teachers implement new technology in their classes, they become aware of new possibilities. These days, providing individualized attention with technolgoy is, with some exceptions, as complex as providing individualized attention in

traditional classes. Nevertheless, as technology improves, new ways of tailoring classes to the learners' needs become more feasible.

Knowledge has become the main element of the technological revolution. Creating and sharing knowledge in open and worldwide communities has shaped the way we perceive information and is reshaping the way we teach. Collaborative communities in and out of school grow faster and develop information at higher rates than individuals alone. With the advent of ICTs, the classroom, be it psychical or virtual, has started to become a place where knowledge belongs to all its members. Students are now able to learn by themselves and explore other possibilities that the classroom does not always offer. The inquisitive student can check the inside of a cell or the surface of the moon with just some clicks of the mouse. He or she does not have just to imitate the accent of the teacher but listen to many different accents in one day. Students can work without pressure and at their own pace. They can do research and rehearse, feeling better prepared to face the demands of the school and their peers. It is not possible to know where technology can take us. As Reinders (2009) states…

> The future direction for the use of technology in the classroom may well be more disruptive that it has been so far. Although less has changed about teaching in the last 20 years than some might think, this may not be true for the coming 20 years. At the risk of making false predictions, it is clear that young learners now have vastly improved access to information, and more important, have tools available to them (at no or a small cost) that increasingly firmly place control over may aspects of their lives, including education, into their own hands. (p. 235)

What is true is that society must provide students and teachers with the resources, the knowledge and the motivation to incorporate new technologies in the classroom. Hopefully, this study will shed some light on how technology is being used in Costa Rican classrooms.

3. Method

Participants

A personal electronic mailing list of 113 ex-students from the B.A. in English Teaching was created. The list consists of students who have graduated in the last five years. From the list, a sample of 50 ex-students was selected and sent survey materials. A total of 30 surveys were returned (60% return rate). Data from these surveys was collected and analyzed. No survey was kept from analysis. It is important to mention that there are many English language professionals who are not currently working in the English language field. They were explicitly asked to obviate the survey.

Survey Materials

An 11-item survey was developed to obtain information about teachers' impressions on the use of technology in their institutions. A copy of the survey can be found at the end of this document. The survey was pilot-tested with five students with the same affiliation as the target population. It was later revised on the basis of the pilot-testing.

Each item on the survey was categorized into one of the following four sections: (a) background information, (b) access to technology in the workplace, (c) knowledge about how to use certain technology and (d) frequency of use of technology. Two question formats were used in the survey, including forced choice and at least two open-ended questions. For example, some items asked the participants to indicate whether they had access to certain types of technology in their workplaces. These items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale that included the following choices: 1=Strongly disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Agree, and 4=Strongly agree. This type of scaling format, or a similar one, was also used for other items on the survey.

The last part of the survey contained two open-ended questions. The first one asked participants what other types of technology they had used for teaching purposes. The second one was an open-ended question asking participants whether they wanted to provide any additional information or comments. The total time to complete the survey materials was estimated between 10 and 15 minutes.

Procedure

This study used a survey study design. The first electronic mailing was sent to 50 randomly selected ex-students from the B.A. in the Teaching of English as described previously. The electronic mail included a consent form addressed to the participants that briefly described the purpose of the study and encouraged him/her to participate. A second electronic mail was sent approximately 1 week after the first one. The purpose of this second mailing was to thank those who had already completed the survey and encourage those who had not completed it to do it promptly. After two weeks, a final mail was sent thanking all graduates for their participation and offering research results to those interested.

4. Analysis of the Results

To answer the initial research question "How much access do English teachers have to specific technology?", each technological component that teachers cannot use without the institution being involved was analyzed. Four main types of technology were part of this section: the computer lab (or access to computers), the language (or audio) lab, the smartboard and a virtual learning environment. Table 1 summarizes the responses to the 4 devices or technological activities investigated.

Table 1
Teachers' Opinions about Access to Technology in Their Workplace

Type of resource or activity	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
computer labs	11 (37%)	6 (20%)	6 (20%)	7 (23%)
language labs	17 (57%)	8 (27%)	1 (3%)	4 (13%)
smartboards	19 (63%)	5 (17%)	4 (13%)	2 (7%)
Virtual Learning Environment	16 (53%)	6 (20%)	3 (10%)	5 (17%)

Results show that teachers lack access to most technological equipment. Computer labs seem to be the most common types of technology. Having the computer as a basis is good because it is essential to develop activities as wikis or blogs. Nevertheless, the amount of teachers who have no access remains high. In terms of language labs, only 13% of interviewees have full access while 57% have no access to them. Language labs are an important component of English classes. The possibilities it offers go beyond audiolingualism and drilling, but they remain scarce in schools and high schools. Smartboards have been gaining popularity in educational settings. In spite of this, 63% of teachers in this study do not have any access to them. Only 2% have an acceptable access to smartboards and the resting 30% have some access to them. Virtual learning environments throw similar results. 53% of teachers do not have any access to them while 17% have complete access to them. The remaining 30% have some access to them.

The second question corresponds to "To what extent do they feel ready to use technology in the English class?" Table 2 summarizes the responses to the 10 devices or technological activities.

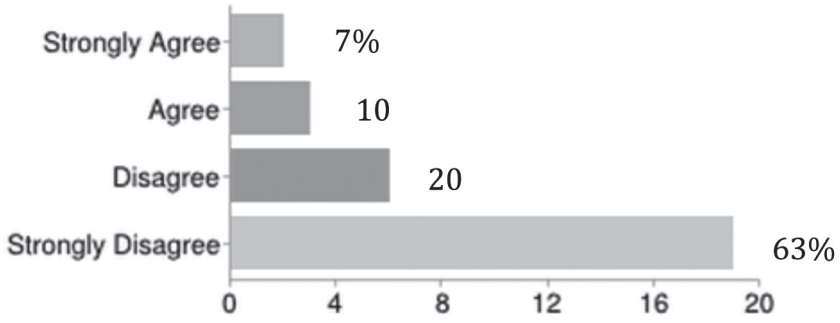
Table 2
Teachers' Opinions about How Ready They Feel to Use Technology in Their Workplace

Type of resource or activity	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
wikis	13 (43%)	7 (23%)	6 (20%)	4 (13%)
blogs	12 (40%)	5 (17%)	10 (33%)	3 (10%)
podcasting	15 (52%)	8 (28%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)

smartboards	13 (45%)	7 (24%)	5 (17%)	4 (14%)
online forums	13 (43%)	8 (27%)	5 (17%)	4 (13%)
language labs	10 (33%)	7 (23%)	8 (27%)	5 (17%)
computer labs	6 (21%)	5 (17%)	12 (41%)	6 (21%)
collaborative documents	8 (27%)	5 (17%)	11 (37%)	6 (20%)
Virtual Learning Environment	12 (40%)	10 (33%)	6 (20%)	2 (7%)
video casting/ video conferencing	11 (37%)	8 (27%)	7 (23%)	4 (13%)

There is a lot of variation when comparing the different types of technology teachers can use in their classes. The ones that rank the best according to the teacher's opinions are computer labs and collaborative documents. In the case of computer labs, 41% agree to have a good knowledge at using computer labs and 21% believe their knowledge to use them is very good. In terms of collaborative documents, results were more standard considering that 44% are below average in terms of knowing how to use them for pedagogical purposes while 56% consider themselves to be above average. Next, we have resources such as language labs and video casting/video conferencing. In this case, teachers believe that their knowledge is not sufficient, although some teachers know how to use them. 56% consider that their command of language labs is below average. 44% consider that they can use them quite well. For video casting/video conferencing, 64% of interviewees believe their knowledge is not acceptable. The remaining 46% consider their knowledge of video casting/ video conferencing adequate. The last places correspond to blogs, wikis, podcasting, smartboards, and online forums. More than 40% do not know how to use them. More than 60% believe that their ability is below average, with the exception of blogs (57%). This means that even with full access to these types of technology, teachers would not be able to use them and students would not be able to benefit from them. To wrap up this section, teachers were asked if they had received any training in their institutions. Graph 1 summarizes their responses.

Graph 1
Teachers' Opinions about Training Received in Their Institutions



In this case, 63% of teachers strongly disagreed, 20% disagree, 10% agreed and only 7% agreed. It is evident that most institutions are not currently developing any strategy in order to improve their teachers' ability to use technology in their workplace.

The third question "How often do teachers use ICTs in the English Language class?" seeks to identify the amount of exposure students have to technology for pedagogical purposes. Table 3 summarizes teachers' responses. In this case, teachers were given the option to write "does not apply" if they did not have any access to the resource.

Table 3
Teachers' Use of Technology in Their Workplace

Type of resource or activity	Always	Most of the time	Sometimes	Not very often	Never	Does not apply
wikis	1 (3%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	5 (17%)	16 (53%)	7 (23%)
blogs	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	1 (3%)	3 (10%)	17 (57%)	7 (23%)
podcasting	2 (7%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	3 (10%)	14 (47%)	9 (30%)
smartboards	3 (10%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	10 (33%)	16 (53%)
online forums	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	1 (3%)	18 (60%)	7 (23%)
language labs	4 (13%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (13%)	10 (33%)	12 (40%)
computer labs	6 (21%)	2 (7%)	3 (10%)	3 (10%)	6 (21%)	9 (31%)
collaborative documents	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	4 (14%)	5 (17%)	10 (34%)	6 (21%)

Virtual Learning Environment	2 (7%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	3 (10%)	12 (40%)	11 (37%)
video casting/video conferencing	3 (10%)	0 (0%)	2 (7%)	2 (7%)	13 (43%)	10 (33%)

In terms of use, different devices or activities fall into a well determined stratum. If we consider the people that do not have access to the equipment and the people that despite having access do not use it, we can see how little exposure students have to digital tools. According to these results, the tools that are used the most are collaborative documents and computer labs. In both cases, more than 40% of professors have used them with certain frequency. The rest of the resources have been used by teachers from 12% to 20%, but never more than 14% have been used "most of the time" or "always".

In terms of other gadgets teachers have used, 26% answered that they have used cell phones. 10% have used tablets and only one person has used voice recorders. It remains important to find out if teachers know how to use these gadgets, how much they use them and what training they have received in order to use them properly.

5. Conclusions

It is evident that students in the English language class are not getting the benefits of digital resources. Access issues are the ones that require most attention. Very few teachers have adequate access to technology. Although computer labs are accessibly to many teachers, other resources like language labs, smartboards and virtual learning environments remain unfamiliar to most of them. Without access, there is no possibility of improvement. It does not depend on the teacher or the students whether access to technology is available or not. The government and other institutions should cooperate to increase resources or increase the potential of the existing ones. For example, a computer alone does not guarantee the rest of the resources, but it may work as a basis to include other resources. After computers, institutions should provide connectivity. An internet connection boosts the usefulness of a computer. With a computer and Internet, a virtual learning environment is possible. The initial investment may be high at the beginning, but the outcomes are high and future investment is minimal.

Another aspect that deserves attention is training. Most teachers do not feel ready to use what we may consider basic or common types of digital communication. Where should this training come from? They are three main entities responsible for providing significant training. In the first place, universities should include, as part of their curriculum, the use of technology. Using technology in university settings is not enough if students who will later become teachers are not taught to use it. Some courses include components on how to use the video or the book, but using technology for pedagogical purposes is minimal or non-existent. The second

entity in charge is the institution. More than 80% of teachers mention that their institutions have not given them training in using technology to teach English. Although it is true that universities should provide this training, institutions should close any gaps that teachers may have. In addition, institutions should provide constant training. During the 90s, Costa Rica lacked a lot of connectivity and Internet was not present in many communities. Five years ago, a smartboard was rare. All those professionals who graduate before each new gadget is invented or becomes popular will not use it if they do not know how, even if access is possible. Finally, teachers are also responsible of updating themselves and creating communities of expertise. Teachers should be leaders in investigation and creative in using new methods, activities, strategies and technology in their classes. Inside the same institution, we can find teachers who are more tech savvy than others. Why not sharing that knowledge with their colleagues? Whatever effort is done in this direction becomes an investment for the future.

This investment will only be valid if teachers are willing to use technology. Sometimes, teachers have the access and know how to use technology, but they do not use it. Reasons may be diverse. Some might think that it is time consuming or difficult. Others may not see the pedagogical value in them. In other cases, access is not widespread and teachers may think that they will benefit some groups more than others if they use technology with some groups and not others. Whatever reasons they may have, they have to be demystified. Teachers need to move from the traditional approach where the teacher delivers the information and students remain passive to it, a traditional approach where books continue to be the center of the learning process. Nevertheless these books that lack the "flexibility, adaptability to the individual, enormous range of information sources and various interactive options of computer hard- and software" (Urr, 2012, p. 9).

Technology is called to boost and improve learning. The discussion should not revolve around whether to use it or not, but how to use it and how to transform it. Technology should be at the service of the teacher and the students, not a means in itself. As Penny Urr (2012) mentions "technology is not a supplement…, but a staple component in the materials and facilities used for learning and teaching worldwide" (2012).

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Appendix 1

QUESTIONNAIRE
University of Costa Rica
BA in English Teaching

I. Personal Information

1. Please select your gender below:
   Female
   Male
2. Please write your age: _____
3. Including the current year, how many years of experience do you have as a English teacher? _____
4. Which of the following is the most appropriate description of the place at which you teach?
   Elementary School English Teacher in a Public School
   Elementary School English Teacher in a Private School
   High School English Teacher in a Public School
   High School English Teacher in a Private School

II. Technology and Teaching

Answer the following questions based on your experience as an English teacher.

5. In the institution where I work, I have access to…

Type of resource or activity	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
computer labs				
language labs				
smartboards				
Virtual Learning Environment				

6. I know how to use the following resources/activities in my class.

Type of resource or activity	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
wikis				
blogs				
podcasting				
smartboards				
online forums				
language labs				
computer labs				
collaborative documents				
Virtual Learning Environment				
video casting/video conferencing				

7. In my workplace, I have received adequate training in using technology for pedagogical purposes.

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree

8. I have used the following resources/activities in my class. (Choose does not apply if you do not have access to that resource.)

Type of resource or activity	Always	Most of the time	Some-times	Not very often	Never	Does not apply
wikis						
blogs						
podcasting						
smartboards						
online forums						
language labs						
computer labs						
collaborative documents						
Virtual Learning Environment						
video casting/ video conferencing						

9. Please add any other comment you believe necessary.

Appendix 2

STUDENTS' COMMENTS ABOUT FREE-FORM ITEM #9

-Most of the knowledge I have regarding interactive boards, I learned it at Centro Cultural.

- Regarding virtual learning environments, I have used them just to upload grades.

-These kinds of tools are extremely difficult to use and time consuming.

-I would really love to have those technological features in my teaching context, but my institution is kind of poor.

-The high school where I work has computers, but there is not Internet connection. Some computers are very old. I would need to teach my students how to use certain things in order to assign out-of-class assignments that involve the use of technology.

-In some cases we have the technology but we don´t really know how to use it. That is something that we must learn at the university, not at the workplace :/

-It's important to remember that using technology in class also demands activity coming from the student at home. In Costa Rica we are far from believing that everybody has access to technology, and more important than that, that everybody enjoys using it.

-The school where I work is new and is not finished yet. It doesn´t even have a computer lab for that reason.

-I have used wikis, blogs, virtual learning environments but as a student not as teacher. I used it when I was taking my Licenciatura at UNED.

-It is difficult to use most technological options because students in elementary school level are not ready to work that way. However, if I worked at a high school level I would try to use every tool I could even if the institution doesn't provide the equipment.

-There is not internet conection where I work. Neither can one expect all or even most students to have it.

-In this moment, I am working in a rural high school and they received computers, video beams and some other things, so we have a lot of resources. However, that is not the case in most public high schools. Also, I know that despite the fact they have all those resources and materials, the regular teacher (she's in a maternity leave) does not use them because she does not know how to operate many of them. Finally, I don't use wikis or other similar tools because most of the students in that place don't have internet access at home; consequently, I prefer to use only the language lab and some online sites because they are less time consuming. Besides, very often I have to "train" students before they start working on something new.