Applicability of ICT-supported language teaching in contexts of social integration and international cooperation

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Abstract. This paper offers two examples of the applicability of ICT-supported language teaching in two different contexts: social integration and international cooperation. A search for methodologically innovative approaches in this field inspires a series of collaborative international projects involving Egypt and several European countries. The introduction of best practices in this field brings an improvement in the language teaching and learning process in Egyptian universities, as well as meaningful insights on the advantages and shortcomings of the different options available. ICT facilitates the creation of open access materials available to disadvantaged groups (refugees or immigrants) that are outside conventional educational contexts but need tools and resources for a fast acquisition of foreign languages. An example of these tools is the development of a new multilingual smartphone app based on communication needs. The app is currently being developed within an international consortium including 6 European and 6 Egyptian universities. Another example of interesting use of ICT-based methodologies is the MOOC-based teaching and learning of languages at Cairo University, an experience resulting from the collaboration with the European Universities that are partners in different international projects.

Keywords: ICT, language teaching, teaching innovation, international cooperation, capacity building, MOOCs

Contents. 1. Introduction. 2. Capacity building, strategic partnerships and teaching innovation in language instruction: Tempus and Erasmus+. 3. XCELING project: LICs, XVA. 4. XCELING project: Smartphone app. 5. MOOCs in the teaching of foreign languages: contemplation of advantages and challenges in the context of the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language (ELE) in the Egyptian university classroom. 5.1. Motivation and purpose. 5.2. MOOCs and foreign language teaching/learning. 5.4. MOOCs and cultural dimension. 6. The experience of Egyptian students with a Spanish MOOC. 6. 1. Context. 6. 2. Methodology. 7. Research findings. 8. Conclusions. References.

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1. Introduction

The introduction to this volume refers to the E-Lengua project (Erasmus+ KA2 Strategic Partnerships), specifically to one of its main results: the FOCO repository of best practices in foreign language teaching using ICT (García Alonso 2017). The E-Lengua project itself is the product of the conversations and concerns expressed on this topic by a group of researchers and teachers of different languages at the University of Salamanca.

The use of ICT in teaching at all levels is no longer an option (Adell 1997). It is a reality (Gisbert Cervera, 2000 and 2002; Prensky, 2001; Koutropoulos 2011). Actually, we are already qualified to assess these, until not so many years ago, unknown tools, specifically in their application to language teaching, from a methodological point of view, focused on effectiveness in the teaching-learning process (Izquierdo, Simard and Garza 2015; Burbat 2016). Indeed, the use of ICT in language teaching (Peralta Bañón 2008; Juan Rubio and García Conesa 2012; Rodríguez Pérez 2016) is explicitly mentioned in the statement of intent of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: the teaching process should be approached "making full use of information technology (ICT)."

These concerns were first discussed and shared with similar teams from other European universities, as well as with a team from Cairo University, in Egypt, and such early contacts sowed the seed for this project, which is part of a series of partnerships formed from the end of 2010 onwards (Domínguez García – Fernández Juncal – García Alonso 2016; García Alonso 2016).

2. Capacity building, strategic partnerships and teaching innovation in language instruction: Tempus and Erasmus+

The capacity-building projects of the EACEA (Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency) were until recently part of the Tempus programme (2007-2013) and are now part of the Erasmus + (2014-2020) programme, specifically framed in KA2 Capacity Building in Higher Education. Proposals focused on areas such as the one at stake are not usually submitted to this type of calls, whose essence is oriented towards a goal of capacity building in higher education that is closely linked to the idea of international development cooperation, albeit from a university context as the driving force of social and economic development in the beneficiary countries.

Nonetheless, although disciplines such as Humanities and Social Sciences in their broadest sense are rarely central to the projects that receive funding from these calls, they are by no means excluded from the different modalities of these programmes.

Teaching or university practice modernization (with an impact on research or innovation, both in teaching and technology) contributes towards institutions' capacity building and is indirectly but clearly a part of the development cooperation goals that motivate European funding of these activities, and this regardless of the area of knowledge concerned.

Clear proof of this is the experience of a consortium headed by the University of Salamanca. Towards the end of 2010, a team of researchers from Salamanca proposed the launching of international cooperation activities in the area of

innovation in the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language, submitting an application to TEMPUS, a European programme for capacity-building projects in the field of higher education (García Alonso 2016).

Thus, contacts were initiated with the National TEMPUS Office in Egypt, explaining the proposal to cooperate with Egyptian institutions in the area of Spanish. The idea, which right from the start emphasized the narrow relationship between language learning and significant sectors of Egyptian economy, such as tourism, was received with great interest, and with their help the Salamanca team came into contact with the Egyptian professionals working in this field at the main universities of the country.

In 2011, with funding from the AECID (Spanish Agency for International Development and Cooperation), a delegation from Salamanca was commissioned to travel to Egypt and explain their plans to the relevant Egyptian university authorities *in situ*. IDELE ("Innovation and Development in Spanish as a Foreign Language") became the acronym for this first project. They gained support from six Egyptian universities (Cairo, Alexandria, Helwan, Ain Shams, Minia and Al-Azhar) and two European universities (Coimbra and Bologna) to participate in the TEMPUS programme call for proposals. In July 2012, the EACEA notified that IDELE had been selected for funding.

Egypt's political unrest in recent times (especially from 2011 to 2014) and the intrinsic difficulty of implementing such a project, which involved complex and not always compatible bureaucratic systems in Brussels, Egypt and Spain, finally led the Salamanca team to apply for a one-year extension of the project's activities, so that IDELE ended in October 2016. The purpose of IDELE was to design, accredit and implement a joint master's degree to be delivered by the University of Salamanca (valid throughout the entire European Higher Education Area) in collaboration with the six Egyptian universities and relying on the participation of the other two European institutions in the common innovating goals. The official inauguration of MULCH (Master's Degree in Spanish Language and Culture) was held in September 2014 at Cairo University, and currently (May 2018) students of the fourth cohort are pursuing its studies. More than 200 students have already taken it. This master's degree introduced a series of ICT, methodological and educational innovations for teaching Spanish (vid. IDELE Team 2016).

The different working meetings attended by all the consortium partners since 2012 and the work carried out in collaboration with Egyptian students and methodologically varied teaching traditions, also under different circumstances, have given European and Egyptian partners the chance to get better acquainted and to better understand the personal, educational, administrative, legal, political and social realities of the other part (García Alonso 2016). Indeed, the presence of ICT in teaching (partially online) has led to enlightening debates among colleagues and has unquestionably provided Egyptian students with a novel learning experience.

These relationships awakened new research challenges and interests in consortium members in the context of using ICT in language teaching, which would result in the idea at the heart of a new project, which reflects on the use of ICT in the field of language teaching, assessing new technical options and resources and determining which of them offer the most promising results (García Alonso 2017).

In 2015, the EACEA awarded this proposal, E-Lengua (2015-2018), an Erasmus+ project (in this case in the Strategic Partnerships modality, also in KA2) to conduct an analysis, in association with leading European universities in teaching their own languages (and the participation of Cairo University), on the subject of which would be the best teaching methods using ICT in an innovative way, with the final purpose of gathering the best results in an extensive repository of best practices (FOCO) (cf. Coffield and Edward 2009; Durán Rodríguez and Estay-Niculcar 2016). Born with the promise to last and become continually enriched, this repository was conceived as a collaborative venture of the universities that have fostered it and refers to the initial group of languages (Spanish, English, Italian, French, Portuguese and Arabic), but leaving room for the participation of other institutions and for the inclusion of best practices associated with other languages.

The E-Lengua project partnership includes universities that already collaborate in the TEMPUS IDELE project, such as Salamanca, Coimbra, Bologna or Cairo, with the addition of the Universities of Heidelberg, Trinity College Dublin and Poitiers. Together they represent 7 of the most widely spoken languages in Western Europe: Spanish, German, English, Italian, Portuguese, French and Arabic. The introduction to this volume provides a description of FOCO, which is unquestionably the most important legacy of the collaborative reflections and work of these partners in the context of a project that has already reached its final stage but is willing to extend its effects into the future.

3. XCELING project: LICs, XVA

These collaborations in E-Lengua and IDELE and the association of research teams from the universities that make up both consortiums are the seeds that led to the design, presentation, approval and launching of XCELING (2017-2020), a new Erasmus+ project (in the Capacity Building modality), awarded by the European Commission in August 2017.

XCELING is framed on the one hand in the collaboration initiated by the University of Salamanca with the Egyptian university system in 2012 and, on the other hand, in the academic relationships around the subject of second language teaching with teams from the partner institutions of the E-Lengua consortium, described above.

This new project (XCELING) closes the loop with respect to the two former ones. While IDELE initiated collaboration between three European and six Egyptian universities, taking an innovative approach to foreign language instruction enhanced by ICT, providing and installing innovative teaching equipment, and E-Lengua contributed a more theoretical approach, in a strategic European association with the participation of an Egyptian partner, on how to best use ICT in the foreign language teaching-learning process (leading to the creation of a best practices repository), XCELING seeks to deepen the analysis of a large number of the participating teams' findings and best practices in second language teaching. The idea is to apply the results of the IDELE experience and the analysis developed by E-Lengua and put it all at the service of introducing best practices in the language departments of Egyptian universities.

XCELING responds to the national priorities established by Egyptian education

authorities in relation to the Erasmus+ KA2 Capacity Building in the Field of Higher Education programme: it contributes towards the modernization of the curriculum through the implementation of innovative methodologies, fostering the modernization of higher education, improving teacher quality and developing new teaching-learning tools, especially those involving ICT. Accordingly, it adapts to a new eight-year Egyptian plan for higher education (2014-2022), developed by the eponymous ministry, which proposes, among other aspects, to enhance the level of educational services offered to students and to improve their basic skills (such as foreign language learning), fostering the integration of technology in the education system. XCELING seeks to create language instruction programmes at three main levels:

TEACHING: Methodological update for active professionals. A survey of Egyptian students and teachers conducted in 2015 (277 questionnaires and 12 interviews) helped us shape the team's point of view on the subject. The study revealed the importance the respondents attached to language learning in the context of the Egyptian higher education system and students' desire for innovative teaching methodologies, an aspect on which 48% of the interviewees agreed. This need for improvement is also ratified by foreign language teachers themselves, who identify weaknesses in terms of teaching methodologies, technological resources, or international experience and student mobility. All the teachers who took the survey were unanimous in acknowledging that there should be an organization to take charge of teachers' lifelong training, a goal that XCELING will try to meet, placing particular emphasis on ICT.

RESEARCH: Introduction of future PhD holders from Egyptian universities' language departments to the most recent lines of research in applied linguistics. The implementation of the IDELE project and its tangible product, the MULCH Master's Degree (vid. IDELE Team 2016), have provided insight into postgraduate Egyptian students' demand for long-term training opportunities aimed at fostering lifelong training and learning in applied linguistics. The purpose of XCELING is to bridge this training gap and promote research methodology learning in this field. Drawing on the IDELE experience and on the E-Lengua theoretical analysis, XCELING extends its reach to 7 of the most widely spoken languages in the world (Arabic, Spanish, English, German, French, Italian and Portuguese).

OUTREACH: Production of open access material for foreign language instruction intended for social groups at risk for exclusion, such as immigrants or Arabic-speaking refugees in Europe (cf. Fernández Vítores 2013 and Gutiérrez 2013). This aspect will be further elaborated on in a specific section below. The driving force behind this third level is the social disadvantage situation itself, and it is framed in the tensions triggered by the interaction between the Arabic and the so-called Western worlds, each with their own political, social, religious, cultural and economic particularities (vid. Izquierdo Escribano 2008; Collins et alii 2009; Otero Roth 2011; Pujol Berché 2015). According to the UNHCR, the global number of people displaced against their will has grown dramatically in recent times, with 65,300,000 people forcibly displaced worldwide at the end of 2015. That same year, there were 1,300,000 asylum applicants in Europe, a clear majority of them native Arabic speakers (according to Eurostat data). Obviously, knowing the host country's language plays an important part in the social and cultural

integration of these individuals (vid. Andrés 2002; Bravo García 2014; Nikleva 2014 and 2017), and, therefore, capitalizing on the joint efforts of the European and Egyptian institutions working on this project, with the support of the RED CROSS and the CEPAIM (Consortium of Entities for Full Action with Migrants), XCELING seeks to assist in covering the language needs of these groups.

This three-level programme aims to contribute to a modernization of instruction, research and outreach in the field of foreign language teaching, with due attention to lifelong learning and to updating Egyptian professionals' expertise. The open access virtual material for foreign language education available to Arabic-speaking immigrants and refugees in Europe will facilitate learning of the host country's language, which is one of the most effective means for integration (vid. Cuadros and Blanco 2014; Orellana and Gutiérrez 2014).

This threefold block of actions will be launched from a Network of Language Innovation Centres or LICs that will be created in the partner universities, provided with the appropriate technology and ready to produce a suitable collaborative breeding ground to enhance the teaching and research work of the European and Egyptian partners.

In time, XCELING will generate a virtual archive of relevant training material in this context of modernization of language teaching methodologies using ICT support. From the beginning, and through XCELING, this archive will be available on the LIC platforms, in what will be explicitly called XCELING Virtual Archive (XVA), for use by Egyptian professionals. Moreover, it will remain open in the years after the project finishes, independently managed, only dependent on the new Network of Language Innovation Centres at the organizational level.

Finally, XCELING complies with one of the objectives of the European language policy, clearly described in documents such as the "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" (2001), the "Framework of Reference for Pluralistic Approaches to Languages and Cultures" (2007) and "Multilingualism: an Asset for Europe and a Shared Commitment" (2008).

4. XCELING project: 7Ling Mobile app.

In the context of the third major goal of the XCELING project, university outreach, the consortium has started work on a free multilingual mobile app that is expected to be available by Spring 2020.

The main feature that differentiates this app is precisely, and unquestionably, its multilingual nature. The purpose of the consortium is to somehow provide an innovative and accessible tool to meet the most pressing language needs of people at social disadvantage (newly arrived Arabic-speaking refugees or immigrants in Europe) with no or limited access to conventional education systems.

Driven by their, often difficult, vicissitudes of life, individuals with all kinds of cultural backgrounds and personal circumstances suddenly find themselves living in host countries whose language they do not know and where they need to become integrated, a need that both they and the host societies are aware of.

One of the paradoxes of modern societies is that people who frequently lack the most basic essentials, such as a quiet, dry and warm place to spend the night, might own smartphones that are often the last thread still linking them to their family in their native countries, one of the few treasures among the belongings they bring

with them when putting their lives at risk by crossing land and sea.

In this context, the partners of the XCELING consortium aim to design a multilingual app for these individuals to be able to use their phones to easily access the basics of several of the languages these groups may need to coexist with. It is frequent for one same person to need to be familiar with the basics of more than one European language. Or they might already know one so that, by comparison, they can use it to help in the learning of the new one.

The development of XCELING's multilingual app (7Ling) is complex as far as task content and organization are concerned, working towards providing the target user with a useful and user-friendly product. The mobile app seeks to cover the linguistic basics needed for learning these languages. It will not focus only on vocabulary, as is frequently the case with this type of app, but neither will it be organized around grammar points or the traditional contents of foreign language manuals. The internal structure will reflect the most predictable communicative needs the app's target users might encounter in the six European languages of the consortium.

Thus, there will be 6 main units, each of them first developed by collaboration between a European and an Egyptian partner of the consortium, so that the division yields six pairs. To date (May 2018), the six main units are defined by the consortium as follows: **Unit 1** *Just arrived;* **Unit 2** *In the city;* **Unit 3** *Shopping;* **Unit 4** *Looking for accommodation;* **Unit 5** *Looking for a job;* **Unit 6** *At the doctor's.*

Each unit will consist of six sections and more or less equivalent contents that will cover the communicative needs of the unit concerned (*Useful phrases, Rules and words*, *In context* (conversation models with audios), *Practice*, *Relevant information* (Sociocultural information), *Numbers and letters, Procedures and papers, Glossary, Conjugator*), sections and contents already almost agreed upon at the time of drafting this document, albeit with certain details that are still being discussed.

Each European partner will undertake the creation of the contents of one of the units in the corresponding language it represents in the consortium. Accordingly, the six European partners will simultaneously cover the six units. In each case, the corresponding Egyptian partner will collaborate in the preparation of the unit, providing an introductory version in Arabic to the topic of each unit for the correct use of the materials and their assimilation by the target users. This Arabic version will not only assume linguistic customization of the content, but also its sociocultural, intercultural and multicultural adaptation (vid. Castillo 1998).

At a second stage, each European partner shall produce a version in its own language, assisted in each case by the relevant Egyptian partner, of the five remaining units in which they have not been initially involved. This, again, requires not only linguistic, but also sociocultural customization.

These two initial steps will capitalize on the group's ability to collaborate in the production of a unique multilingual app, with the due contribution of the European partners' experience in the teaching of their own languages and of the sociocultural characteristics of their countries, and with the Egyptian contribution as a means to access the expectations of the target users, socially disadvantaged newly displaced Arabic speakers in Europe (refugees or immigrants).

5. MOOCs in foreign language teaching: reflections on benefits and challenges in the context of Spanish as a Foreign Language (ELE) in the Egyptian university classroom

All innovations involve opportunities and limitations. MOOCs (*Massive Open Online Courses*) are an innovating concept in e-teaching that has gradually gained ground in recent years because of its flexibility and high accessibility, since they are based on the possibility of offering courses to a large number of target users without the limitations of time and space. Many universities and institutions have already chosen MOOCs as a vehicle to convey their knowledge to all those who are interested in it. See the specific study on MOOCs included in this same volume.

The purpose of this section is to describe a case study of the use of ICT in foreign language teaching at Egyptian universities. The example chosen to this effect was the case of MOOCs in the context of foreign language teaching in general, and Spanish as a foreign language teaching (ELE) in particular, applied to students in Egyptian universities.

The idea at the core of this study was conceived in 2014 and 2015 and consolidated in 2016 and 2017 for several reasons. Years earlier, there had already been a proliferation of platforms offering thousands of MOOCs in all areas of expertise, and many international universities had chosen them as complementary to their academic offer.

Our idea emerged as the result of different meetings over time with academic teams from Egyptian universities in different areas, mainly engineering and computing, working on projects for the modernization of higher education in the framework of European programmes like TEMPUS and its current version, Erasmus+. At these meetings, MOOCs were suggested as a possible valid and sustainable means to deliver the different academic contents of programmes and courses that were being modernized or developed with the support of these projects involving the collaboration of Egyptian and European teams.

The idea gradually took on a more specific shape at the meetings held between the teams of Cairo University and the University of Salamanca on the subject of the IDELE project, since at one of the visits of a team from Cairo University to the University of Salamanca, they were introduced to the ELELab group, responsible for the design and development of the Spanish as a Foreign Language (level A2) MOOC offered by the University of Salamanca. At this visit, the ELELab group explained how the MOOC was developed and provided evidence of the number of students in the different editions offered through the MiriadaX platform, etc.

5.1. Motivation and purpose

The purpose of this study is to answer two questions: Will the educational and academic ecosystem have an impact on how teachers and students receive this type of courses? How will Egyptian students interact with MOOCs in the case of Spanish as a foreign language?

The study was conducted by performing a general search of the main platforms offering MOOCs, such as Edx, MiriadaX or Coursera, which revealed the limited number of foreign language courses on offer. In the Class-central.com portal, accessed in 2016, only 13 out of the 449 courses scheduled to start in August 2016

were language courses, of which only two were of Spanish. This result is consistent with the data published in the study by Martín-Monje and Bárcena (2015), where only 25 MOOCs from 14 platforms are devoted to languages.

According to Dhawal Shah (2018), over 9000 MOOCs were published in 2017, produced by more than 800 universities and with student numbers above 81 million. Out of the 9000 courses offered, only 9.5% belong to the area of arts and humanities, approximately 900 courses, and of these only a limited percentage is devoted to language instruction.

5.2. MOOCs and foreign language teaching/learning

We believe that, notwithstanding the possibilities for student-student and student-teacher interaction offered by MOOCs, the fact that they are delivered in a completely virtual modality is a limitation, especially in the Egyptian context, since its ecosystem still favours foreign language teaching based on a direct and face-to-face communication model. Thus, MOOCs may become reduced to a supplement to face-to-face modalities. For this reason, the impossibility of meeting the needs of a very large number of students in different time zones and to assess their speaking skills makes oral tasks a challenge for MOOCs. Therefore, in the case of Egypt, we believe that they are an excellent option for blended-learning models.

5.3. MOOCs and cultural dimension

The cultural dimension plays a highly relevant role in each and every teaching/learning process. In this framework, MOOCs have their own advantages and disadvantages. One of their advantages is their success in overcoming time and space barriers, allowing massive access of students who can log on to the platform at any time from different parts of the world, thus creating a multicultural virtual space. However, at the same time, multiculturalism can pose a challenge when designing the course and its activities, since a neutral approach that may favour diversity and consider it an additional benefit in task development is required. This aspect is consistent with the theories of connectivism proposed by George Siemens and Stephen Downes (2004) and on which the MOOC concept draws.

Accordingly, the cultural aspect is part of learning and connections among students should be established to overcome sociocultural and geographical barriers. On the other hand, foreign language teachers should be familiar with MOOCs and their potential to design contents and tasks that may encourage cultural competency.

6. Egyptian students' experience with Spanish as a foreign language MOOCs

To assess the use of MOOCs in the context of Spanish as a foreign language teaching, the choice made was to introduce the A2 level Spanish language MOOC, offered by the University of Salamanca and available on the MiriadaX platform for students in the second semester of the first year of the bachelors' degree delivered by the Department of Spanish Language and Literature of Cairo University. The study was undertaken in 2016. Field work was approached and monitored as part of the Master's Thesis of a student of the University Master's Degree in Spanish Language and Culture (MULCH) (Rabie, 2016), offered jointly by the University

of Salamanca and Cairo University. In this volume, we take the opportunity to present the community with the results of the use of MOOCs as a supplementary Spanish as a foreign language teaching resource in the context of a university programme. For better understanding of the results and the assessment process, it is necessary to first provide certain data regarding the bachelors' degree programme and the students' profile.

6.1. Context

The programme established for the bachelors' degree in Spanish Language and Literature delivered by the Faculty of Arts of Cairo University is arranged into four years divided into eight semesters. Most students begin these studies with no prior knowledge of Spanish, so that level A1 is delivered to begin with in the first semester and the goal is to achieve level B2/C1 by the end of the programme, meaning in the four-year span of the degree. Intensive Spanish language courses are taught in the first two years of the programme, with many hours and several subjects to develop different language skills: reading, listening, writing and speaking, with special emphasis on grammar. The following two years, making use of the already developed language skills, students are trained in philological and linguistic aspects so that they can be introduced to the original texts using a more analytical approach.

The philological nature prevails in the design of the programme and the courses it offers. However, it pursues to cover more practical aspects, devoting several courses to translation and specialized terminology to offer a comprehensive programme able to meet the demands of the labour market. It should also be noted that target students are not mere language learners for whom language is no more than a means, but that they are receiving specialized training in Spanish language and culture. Therefore, language is not only a means, but also an end in itself.

As regards students, they begin the degree at the age of 17 or 18, after achieving their secondary education certificate. The Egyptian pre-university education system allows students to study two foreign languages, the predominant being English with few students choosing French as their first foreign language option. Students' foreign language levels differ widely depending on the type of secondary education school and the type of pre-university education they have received, since in Egypt there are different types of international bilingual schools and secondary education institutions, as well as state-funded schools and secondary education institutions. Nevertheless, most of the students in the Department come from the state-funded education system and their level of English or other languages is intermediate.

6.2. Methodology

The research that is the object of this study was structured into the following phases:

- Preparation [Length: 5 months]. The action plan consisted of:
    • A work schedule to organize the tasks and an initial approach to MOOCs, their history, evolution, types and language MOOCs available.
    • General theoretical guidelines on MOOCs' general aspects, including readings, study of MOOC platforms, and initial register of the language

courses offered by the different platforms and the courses related to Spanish as a foreign language on said platforms.

• More specific approach to the characteristics of the A2 MOOC offered by the University of Salamanca in collaboration with its ELELAB team, which hosted the Egyptian researcher during a two-week stay and introduced her first hand to the process involved in the preparation and technical and educational management of the MOOC.

- Implementation and follow-up [Length: 3 months].

• Preparation of a pre-MOOC questionnaire aimed at obtaining a quantified picture of students' knowledge of MOOCs, their motivation and whether or not they make use of ICT during their learning process.

• Guidance session to introduce students to MOOCs.

• Creation of a forum through social networking to answer questions and ensure better monitoring of the students enrolled in the MOOC.

- Analysis and results [Length: 2 months]. A quantitative and qualitative analysis was carried out as follows:

• Elaboration of a post-survey for students to take after completing the MOOC to assess their experience, the challenges they had met and the benefits they had obtained from its completion.

• Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the survey results.

7. Outcomes of the study

It is quite interesting to observe the number of students that participated in the different sub-phases of the implementation process. At the informative session organized for students, a total of 54 showed an interest on starting the Spanish A2 MOOC offered by the University of Salamanca. However, only 38 took the pre-survey, 16 started the course and only 10 completed it (Rabie, 2016). This proves a common phenomenon associated with MOOCs: the dropout rate, which is considered one of their disadvantages. Nevertheless, the percentages yielded in this study are above the general dropout rate of MOOCs, which shows students' motivation and interest in continuing with the course.

Nonetheless, MOOC dropout has been approached from different angles. According to certain studies (Huin et al., 2016), students' intention, motivation, commitment and behaviour while taking a MOOC are key towards completing it. Thus, MOOC-based learning requires a certain student profile with qualities such as self-regulation, self-motivation and self-determination.

Other studies such as that by Khalil and Ebner (2014) place the responsibility for MOOC dropout rates on factors such as time constraints, lack of motivation, feelings of isolation, lack of a sound knowledge base and potential additional costs. Bouzayane and Saad (2016) add language barriers that lead to difficulties in following instructions, lack of educational support and absence of face-to-face interaction between teacher and student.

Taking into account the general observations about the groups of students used as a sample for this study, we will now present the results of the surveys.

The pre-survey focused on three initial blocks:

- Previous knowledge of MOOCs

- Students' motivation and expectations concerning the MOOC
- Students' general use of ICT and their use of it to support the learning process of Spanish in particular

Most students were unfamiliar with MOOCs, although 12 of them stated that they knew of them from friends, social networks or other courses.

As regards motivation, the pre-survey shows that 39% of the students were interested in enrolling in the MOOC to improve their language proficiency. In contrast, their interest in obtaining a certificate as a motivation is barely relevant, with a meagre 2%.

On the other hand, on the subject of students' expectations, they were asked what they expected from the MOOC. The results show that their expectations revolved around the improvement of grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, which students consider priority aspects in their learning process. In turn, writing ranks lower in their expectations.

As expected, the results provide evidence of a high use of ICT among students in general. 45.9% of the students claim to use the Internet between 3 and 7 hours a day, while 13% state more than 7 hours a day. Most of them claim that mobile phones are the devices they most use to connect. With regard to the use of ICT in the process of learning Spanish, 86.8% of the students claim to use ICT in such process, e-dictionaries being the most frequently consulted resource. Hearing takes second place according to students, who affirm that they use the Internet and ICT tools to improve their oral comprehension. Likewise, 63% of the students claim to use specialized Spanish learning websites and portals. However, only 12.5% of them mention having taken Spanish courses on the Internet.

During the implementation of the MOOC, the forum established to monitor and answer the students' questions became a highly active site, which shows students' interest, on the one hand, and the type of difficulties they encountered, on the other hand. The problematic issues they raised proved the language barrier as the greatest challenge students faced, since there were several cases where they were unable to follow the instructions provided because of their lack of knowledge of the language. One of the most surprising results of the analysis of the difficulties and questions students expressed is their limited digital competence as users despite their regular use of the Internet and ICT. Certain students found it hard to differentiate between registering on the platform and enrolling in the corresponding MOOC. Likewise, there were students who found difficulties in using the different accounts to follow the course, feeling lost among platform, MOOC user and email account to send and receive tasks. That is, these difficulties are proof of poor digital competence despite being Internet users.

The post-survey was conducted following the guidelines established by the study of Gamage, Perera and Fernando (2015) describing MOOC assessment criteria from a user/student perspective. They list ten criteria: technology, education, motivation, accessibility, content, student support, certification or diploma, interaction, course assessment, collaboration (among students or among students and teachers, etc.).

Post-survey results provide evidence of considerable student motivation, since 38.8% of them completed the MOOC's six modules. Even though most of them did not finish, 38.8% is a fairly high percentage for a MOOC. According to the

students who completed it, they did so because they found it interesting and useful. In fact, most of them mentioned that the course provided them with new information and that they could learn from their mistakes. Against this, those who did not complete the six modules stated lack of time and not having a clear motivation as the main reasons for not finishing the course.

With regard to contents and the time students spent on each unit, 44.4% answered less than an hour per unit, while 55.6% stated over an hour per unit. On the other hand, most of them (61%) indicated that, to be able to answer the questions and perform the tasks of each unit, they watched the corresponding videos once, while 39% watched them between two and four times.

On the matter of collaboration, students' participation was low. 72% did not take part in the peer assessment tasks, the main reasons being lack of time, not knowing what they were expected to do or lack of confidence in their ability to correct others. Conversely, active participation on the wiki was non-existent and only two students accessed it, although they did not participate.

In terms of certification, most showed an interest in obtaining a course certificate, a datum that reveals a change from the pre-survey where students did not appear particularly interested in the certificate.

Finally, results yielded by the survey show a positive impact of the MOOC experience on students, since 77.7% expressed an interest in enrolling in other MOOCs, while 66.6% mentioned that this MOOC had made it easier for them to find other resources on the Internet for learning Spanish as a foreign language.

8. Conclusions

The purpose of this study is to present a first approach to the use of MOOCs as an ICT resource for the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language in the Egyptian university classroom. It is a case study of a real use of this resource as complementary support to traditional face-to-face teaching. According to the findings, the students taking part in the study show considerable interest in MOOCs and assess their usefulness in a positive manner. As expected, and as indicated in earlier studies on the topic of MOOCs, although there is indeed evidence of characteristics such as dropout, either due to language difficulties or to lack of time, the figures are lower if compared to the results yielded by other studies on MOOCs, where, according to certain reports, dropout can be as high as 85%.

Nevertheless, students did not display a fully collaborative attitude during the MOOC, given their total lack of participation in the wiki and their low degree of participation in peer assessment tasks. We believe that such failure to collaborate is the result of students' lack of self-confidence in such matters, although it could also be attributed to a traditional education system where the idea of students as passive recipients prevails.

Certainly, MOOCs potential in the language teaching classroom and in the Egyptian classroom in particular requires greater efforts and more studies. Likewise, it is essential to inform both students and teachers of the benefits offered by MOOCs as a main axis for their internationalization strategies to reach a larger number of students at the regional (Arabic, African) and the international levels.

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