

# Using ICT in Generating Motivation for Foreign Language Learning: from Traditional to Virtual Classroom

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*Abstract* - Language teaching and learning today are dynamic processes that are marked with continuous interaction between the participants. Having employed adequate teaching methods, the lecturer can create a quality environment for teaching thus enabling students to be motivated, learn at an adequate pace and achieve the desired learning outcomes. Foreign language teaching and learning have been closely tied to using ICT tools in classrooms for many years, since using ICT tools generates motivation in students. Therefore, teachers usually integrate a wide array of tools into their lessons, ranging from audiovisual tools, interactive presentations, whiteboards, mobile applications etc. However, with the change of setting from the physical classroom to the online classroom in 2020, ICT tools have adopted an even more important role than they had in the traditional classroom: they have evolved from the means of facilitating the teaching and learning into the medium where teaching and learning take place. The aim of this paper is to explore how motivation and attitudes of students for learning foreign languages are shaped in a new synchronous virtual medium of teaching. To explore motivation and attitudes towards foreign language learning in a virtual classroom in great detail, in-depth interviews were conducted with a selected number of students who participated in a virtual Croatian Language and Culture course.

**Key words:** language teaching, language learning, ICT tools, traditional classroom, virtual classroom, motivation, attitudes, synchronous online teaching

## I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign language teaching and learning, according to Moeller and Catalano are “the teaching or learning of a nonnative language outside of the environment where it is commonly spoken.” [1]. The interrelated processes of language teaching and learning have greatly evolved since the start of the twentieth century. The teaching of foreign languages was initially considered a process of the transmission of knowledge from the teacher to the learners. The approach was mainly teacher-centered, with students as passive recipients who were supposed to develop their linguistic skills in the process. As opposed to the traditional approach, language learning is nowadays student-centered and it implies an extremely active and engaging process for both the teacher and students. The teacher’s role is considerably different than it used to be, in fact, the teacher is no longer a transmitter of knowledge, but rather a mediator in the teaching process where students actively participate.

As demonstrated through an overview of the development of methodology of English language teaching in Thanasoulas, the foreign language teaching tradition continually evolved through the twentieth century, slowly placing more and more emphasis on students, their attitudes towards the language and consequently, their motivation. In the so-called Classical Method, the emphasis was on the translation methods, rules of grammar, syntax and pure rote memorization [2]. Since learners were exposed to the foreign language only through the textual analysis, their knowledge was mostly passive and incomplete. Communicative Language Teaching, on the other hand, represented a milestone in the development of language teaching methodology. In this approach, the emphasis was placed on the communicative language competence of the learner achieved by the use of language in “unrehearsed contexts” [3], placing thus student in the center of the learning process.

Numerous research articles point out the importance of another factor in foreign language learning which, according to Krashen in Moeller and Catalano, “occurs when the learner comprehends the language input in a low-anxiety, high-motivation situation, and proposed that the teacher’s role is to create such a learning environment.” Moeller and Catalano further argue that the place where foreign language acquisition usually happens is the classroom, which the teacher, therefore, has to adapt into a stimulating and stress-free environment [4]. To achieve this aim in the classroom, and especially when teaching kids, the teacher can employ various techniques, starting from teaching techniques, interaction patterns, behaviour management and finally, technology to generate motivation in students.

## II. ICT IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Technology shapes today’s modern world and its different aspects. Svensson, Zetterqvist and Ingerman argue that “We live in a world interwoven with technology, and life in today’s society presupposes integration with technology – physically in terms of objects and the outcomes of technological processes; intellectually in terms of the knowledge needed to make use of technological objects and processes, as well as the knowledge manifest in their development and function” [5].

The interweave of technology into all aspects of our daily lives left a mark in teaching and learning processes as well. The use of ICT in teaching processes is no longer only a tool that facilitates learning, but it has rather become the principal medium of the transmission of knowledge that is slowly but surely replacing the traditional techniques or at least adapting them to fit the new requirements. The use of technology in teaching process has numerous benefits. According to Yuldashevna and Tuhtayevich, “The use of technology in foreign language learning and teaching, as some analysis show, contributes in: [...] supporting teacher-student collaboration, creativity, autonomous learning, as well as the activation of already acquired knowledge” [6].

Vannestal in Yuldashevna and Tuhtayevich describes other advantages of using ICT in teaching a foreign language. “First of all, ICT helps to create more variation in the classroom, which might lead to increased motivation in the students and thus better conditions to learn the target language. Internet is full of free, authentic and up-to-date materials that language teachers can use in their teaching. Internet provides a good opportunity for students from all over the world to interact with each other through emails, online calls or in a chat room. Despite what means of communication is chosen, ICT is likely to help develop the understanding of other culture” [7]. ICT tools indeed give students an opportunity to interact with their peers from all over the world, thus exchanging their ideas and acquiring the knowledge of different cultures. Internet has made the whole world a global village, bringing closer different cultures and enabling their communication in real-time on the social media. Not only do internet and ICT facilitate learning by offering a range of different learning and teaching tools, as well as the information at anybody’s fingertips, but they also offer a possibility of distance learning. Nowadays, it is not unlikely to see students from all over the world learning at the same time in the same virtual classroom.

### III. USING ICT IN TRADITIONAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

One of the significant advantages of using ICT when teaching foreign languages in physical classrooms is greater student participation and higher motivation. In the article *The Effects of ICT on Learning/Teaching in a Foreign Language* Houcine claims that “Teachers reported on their learners being engaged, motivated and attentive [...], while the enhancement of linguistic competence combined with motivation and challenge led to more autonomy and initiative (to do research on the Web, to propose links, to use online dictionaries and encyclopaedias)” [8]. Surrounded by various digital tools in our everyday lives, such as, smartphones, tablets, laptops, smart TVs, watches and omnipresent internet, learners have started processing information differently than for example, 20 years before.

For instance, rote memorization has become an obsolete skill in today’s world because we do not need to memorize trivial details anymore, since we can access any information on internet in a matter of seconds.

Furthermore, writing on the keyboard has become more important than writing by hand, even to the point that some children do not want to be bothered to acquire the skill, since they mostly write on their computers or smartphones. Moreover, on various social media we are constantly bombarded with snippets of information, photos and videos, and as a result, we are often experiencing a lack of concentration when we have to deal with more complex tasks that demand our continuous attention, in-depth analysis or perseverance to complete them.

All these changes in our surroundings have influenced our behavioural patterns and consequently our ability to learn. Therefore, our teaching and learning techniques must also be adapted to the new digital era. As Negoescu and Boştină-Bratu argue in their article *Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages with ICT*, “The textbook is not sufficient anymore, teachers need to bring it alive by adapting it and providing supplemental resources [...] now it’s about the way teachers and students access information and via technology transform active learning into interactive learning” [9]. In teaching foreign languages today, a variety of computer tools is available to teachers to deliver more engaging and modern lessons. For instance, the mere use of Power Point presentations instead of writing on the blackboard or whiteboard will add to the teaching dynamics and provide a medium for participative learning environment. Presentations can be further enriched with audio or video effects and photos that can be integrated into the tool. Moreover, using different games, and interactive quizzes highly improves the level of student motivation, regardless of their age. If the classroom is equipped with an interactive whiteboard where teachers can project a game or an activity, this will add a pinch of innovation into the teaching. Interactive whiteboard with its touchscreen enhances collaboration between the participants in the learning process, as well as with the teacher. It, moreover, enhances collaboration between the students, which helps facilitate pair and group learning.

Finally, there are various online tools that help learners build vocabulary, check their knowledge or compete with their classmates in games and quizzes designed to assess their language skills. There are also tools for practicing the pronunciation skills, grammar skills, and writing skills. Internet itself with various news portals, dictionaries and online encyclopaedias is a rich source of teaching and learning materials that teachers can use in the classroom. There are also various learning materials sorted by difficulty for learners with different language levels. What is more, internet is a gold mine for students with higher-level language skills who can enjoy in real, and linguistically unadapted content and thus take advantage of a unique opportunity to experience language environment of native speakers.

#### IV. USING ICT IN VIRTUAL FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS

Online teaching has made an important breakthrough during the time of the pandemic. With the onset of the worldwide pandemic and the introduction of lockdown measures in numerous countries, the educational institutions were faced with unprecedented challenges. Both students and teachers were unable to physically attend or hold lessons and schools had to organize distance learning or online teaching as soon as possible. Online teaching and learning have marked a significant growth in such circumstances, accompanied by the increased usage of online teaching tools and platforms. Foreign languages teaching was no different than other fields.

As Maican and Cocorada argue in their article *Online Foreign Language Learning in Higher Education and Its Correlates during the COVID-19 Pandemic* the rise of online language courses started long before COVID-19 pandemic. "In line with the progress in other educational fields, the last decade has seen a significant expansion of online language courses, offered by educational institutions or by specialized platforms such as Mondly, Duolingo, Livemocha, Rosetta Stone. [...] Offering an overview of the studies conducted between 1981 and 2005 on the use of CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) in language learning at all education levels, a past study highlighted positive effects as regards in [...] connection with the students' involvement in the foreign language class and with their attitude towards ICT use, provided the technology stability and support are ensured" [10]. Online language teaching can be divided into two categories – synchronous and asynchronous. As their names imply, synchronous teaching happens in real time and requires student interaction, while asynchronous teaching provides learning materials for the students who can study at their own pace and at their convenience.

When it comes to foreign language online teaching, synchronous approach is a much more natural option. The synchronous approach presupposes teaching in real-time, just as teaching in a language classroom does. There is a wide variety of online platforms that offer a suitable setting for synchronous online foreign language teaching, such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Google Classroom, whereby, Zoom and Microsoft Teams offer the possibility of videoconferencing apart from the option of sharing files and doing collaborative work. Zoom as a platform is more specialized for videoconferencing and chatting, while Microsoft Teams includes all abovementioned services with a few extra possibilities such as the integration of various applications. Asynchronous online foreign language teaching is a good option for self-study activities or as a platform for practicing knowledge and skills acquired in a language classroom.

#### V. VIRTUAL CROATIAN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE COURSE

The aim of the Croatian Language and Culture course is to equip students with essential language skills and provide a general overview of the Croatian culture. The added value of the course is the strengthening of students' cultural competence. All in all, the course aims to prepare students for everyday basic communication, as well as introduce them to Croatian customs, culture and history. Different interaction patterns are used in various activities, so students have a chance to work on their own, in pairs and in a team, competing against each other. Having completed the course, students will acquire basic grammar and vocabulary skills, as well as a selected array of conversational functions and thus form a solid basis for further developing and practicing their language skills. Students will also remember historical, cultural and geographical facts about Croatia.

##### A. Synchronous Online Teaching at Croatian Language and Culture course

The course was moved into an online teaching setting due to COVID-19 pandemic and was therefore taught via Microsoft Teams that was selected as the platform that would offer the most interactive interface for foreign language teaching and learning. Microsoft Teams combines the options of videoconferencing, important for synchronous language lessons, moreover it has the option to share the teacher's screen and share the presentation. Interactive whiteboard that is integrated into the tool is a good option that replaces the traditional classroom blackboard in an online setting. In Microsoft Teams, all participants can interact during the course, have their cameras turned on during the lesson and raise their hands or turn on their microphones when they want to ask a question or when the teacher calls out their name. The chat option is also useful for asking questions to which the teacher can later give an answer. Moreover, students can easily share their completed written tasks either by sharing their screens or sending the answers in the chat. It is easy to project videos from the platform or play audio files and it is also easy to integrate various applications, such as Kahoot, Nearpod, Polly etc. in the platform.

##### B. Course Structure and Learners' Backgrounds

The course was taught on elementary level since the learners had little or no prior Croatian language knowledge. Since the students came from different academic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, namely from Mexico, Italy and India, the language of instruction was English. The course consisted of 23 contact hours and took place on a daily basis. For the completion of the course, the students were awarded with 2 ECTS. The course structure was divided into two parts, practical exercises where students practiced their language skills, and a lecture aimed at developing the students' cultural competence. The teaching platform used was Microsoft Teams and teaching was synchronous, so as to bridge the gap between several different time zones.

The teacher had the camera and microphone turned on during the whole lesson in order to mimic the real classroom setting and to facilitate learning the language, for example, when practicing pronunciation skills. Students decided whether they wanted to turn on the camera and microphone or not, however, during speaking exercises, it was mandatory to have the microphone on. Additional online tools used were YouTube videos (music and movie excerpts) Power Point presentations (used to present and explain the topic, provide examples and short oral exercises), Kahoot quizzes (used at the end of the lesson as a revision tool), Nearpod interactive games (used as collaborative tools – polls, interactive pinboards). The aim of the course was to teach the students to read, write and use a selected array of everyday Croatian words and key conversational phrases, to be able to explain the general overview of the Croatian history, geography, customs, culture, and finally to create positive attitudes towards the language and culture among students, as well as to motivate them to continue learning the language. To pass the course, students had to pass two learning outcomes by doing a project on their own or in pairs and by presenting it to the whole class.

## VI. RESEARCH

The general research aim of this article is to determine whether synchronous online foreign language teaching of Croatian Language and Culture course using ICT tools can develop students' motivation and positive attitudes towards foreign language learning, as using ICT tools traditional classrooms can generate motivation in students.

To fulfill the research aim more easily, the following questions were used by the interviewer:

1. How interesting and useful were the digital tools used in the Croatian Language and Culture course? (on a scale of 1-10). Please answer the question first and then elaborate.
2. Assess the degree of interaction (student – student, teacher – student) in the CL&C online lesson (on a scale of 1-10). Please answer the question first and then elaborate.
3. Compare the quality of information you would get in a traditional physical classroom with the information obtained via the online platform.
4. Can virtual CL&C course encourage further learning of the Croatian language? Why?
5. What are the observed shortcomings of the CL&C online course? Is there anything that could be improved and how?

### A. Research Sample

Due to a small number of students in the course (11), two student volunteers who completed the program were chosen to take part in semi-structured in-depth interviews. This research method was selected to get a broader overview on a smaller representative sample. The prior Croatian language and culture knowledge of both students was elementary. The students came from different

linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

### B. Research Methods and participants

Since there were 11 students participating in the Croatian Language and Culture course, two students were chosen to participate in the research. One student came from India and the other from Mexico, they were aged 21 and 27, respectively and both of them were female. The aim of the student 1 (aged 27, from Mexico) in taking up the Croatian Language and Culture course was to get a general overview of the Croatian language, as well as to learn simple everyday conversational phrases. The student had no prior linguistic knowledge and had a vague idea about the culture; the student was poorly motivated at the beginning of the course. The student developed interest in the course early on and was relatively active during lessons. The student 1 passed the course and earned 2 ECTS. The aim of the student 2 (aged 21, from India) in taking up the Croatian Language and Culture course was to further develop basic linguistic skills the student had already acquired and also to improve the general knowledge about the Croatian culture, history, geography and lifestyle. The student had prior elementary knowledge about Croatia and the Croatian language because she spent 5 months living in Croatia during Erasmus+ mobility. The student was highly active and motivated since the start of the course and was very eager to learn more and do the extra tasks. The student passed the course and earned 2 ECTS.

The research was conducted using a semi-structured in-depth interview with nine questions, out of which six were open-ended questions and three closed-ended questions. Additional questions at the beginning of the interview were related to demographics. For some questions, the participants had to indicate the extent to which they agree or disagree with them. The level of agreement or disagreement was defined using a Likert scale.

Finally, a qualitative method was used to analyse the results of the research. For the purpose of this article, the emphasis is put on the analysis of the 5 selected questions, which are listed in the following paragraph.

### C. Research Results – Interpretation

The students were asked the following set of questions in the semi-structured in-depth interview:

1. How interesting and useful were the digital tools used in the Croatian Language and Culture course? (on a scale of 1-10). Please answer the question first and then elaborate.

*Student 1 - 9, because the inevitable glitches that occur break up the flow of the class. The standard communal sense of the classroom that is created when students are playing guessing games using digital tools breaks up fast if the tool glitches or communication is broken due to poor WIFI.*

*Student 2 - The meetings arranged through Microsoft Teams helped in creating an interactive session between the students and the teacher. Along with that, the*

teacher took us on the virtual tour around Croatia through Youtube videos which made us feel more intrigued. Kahoot is my personal favourite tool for the Croatian language & Culture multiple choice quizzes. Being apart from each other, sitting in different countries but connected remotely we felt like sitting next to each other in the same classroom.

Student 1 finds the digital teaching tools useful but exemplifies the problems in synchronous online teaching/learning that can arise due to a slow internet connection. Student 2 finds the digital teaching tools interactive and thinks that they helped create class cohesion.

2. Assess the degree of interaction (student – student, teacher – student) in the virtual CL&C lesson (on a scale of 1-10). Please answer the question first and then elaborate.

**Student 1** - 10, given that the group of students had no interaction previous to attending the online CL&C lessons, the sense of togetherness and classroom comraderie that had developed during the course was extraordinary. We first started attending the course without any particular interest in its subject-matter, however; we had grown to appreciate the course material and explore the topics covered in more depth for their final presentations.

**Student 2** - The degree of interaction (student – student, teacher – student) in the Croatian Language and Culture online class was 10. We could smoothly share our views by unmuting or writing in a chat box. The teacher led the discussion and encouraged us to participate in the class. In that way, we got the opportunity to learn from each other. The teacher increased the involvement of learners by organising online quizzes, asking questions. It was amazing to ask “Bok! Kako ste?” and greet each other at the end of the class in Croatian language making classes amusing and interactive.

Student 1 thinks that the interactivity of the course helped create a sense of togetherness and group participation in a group of students that had not known each other before the start of the program. Student 2 thinks that it was easy to communicate with the teacher and other students during the lesson due to the microphone and chat options. Also, the teacher encouraged class interaction.

3. Compare the quality of information you would get in a traditional physical classroom lesson with the information obtained via the online platform.

**Student 1** - Information acquired in a classroom onsite would doubtlessly be of a higher quality as more ground could be covered and more spontaneous interactions could develop. I also believe that the level of student attention is much higher when they are facing the teacher in comparison to following the classes via their personal computers.

**Student 2** – The teacher used modern tools to bridge

the gap between the traditional teaching and online teaching. So the quality of information was good. But if there had been traditional classes then we could have tried speaking Croatian at different places and observe the speaking skills. We could have seen the Croatian culture on our own. Now after online learning we can easily manage to travel physically to Croatia and explore more.

Student 1 thinks that information acquired in a traditional classroom would be of a higher quality and that the level of student attention is higher when they are attending onsite lessons. Student 2 thinks that the digital tools used in online lessons managed to provide a stimulating learning environment. Student 2 regrets not having the opportunity to physically experience the culture come in contact with the native speakers of the language.

4. Can virtual CL&C course encourage further learning of the Croatian language? Why?

**Student 1** - Absolutely. Primarily because they are well targeted for the specific audience consisting of young people. The historical overview was just enough to intrigue the students but not bore them and the pop culture references have been well chosen to appeal to an international audience while still representing the Croatian mainstream.

**Student 2** - Yes, virtual CL&C course can encourage further learning of the Croatian language. The materials provided by the teacher helped us in basic understanding of Croatian Language, which will make the advanced learning more interesting.

Both students agree that virtual Croatian Language and Culture course can encourage further learning of the language.

5. What are the observed shortcomings of the CL&C online course? Is there anything that could be improved and how?

**Student 1** - The only shortcoming would be the glitches that occurred on several occasions during the teacher's presentation. Namely, problems with sound reproduction, poor WIFI or issues with audio, however; these are mainly beyond the control of the teacher.

**Student 2** - I am fully satisfied with the performance of CL&C coursework and I would rate 10 as classes quite engaging. Starting from basic Croatian language letters to ordering food in restaurants was a fabulous journey. We get to know about the different Croatian cities, foods, festivals, inventions, songs and many more. It was a wholesome package to explore Croatian Language and Culture.

Student 1 exemplifies the technical problems with sound reproduction or poor WIFI connection as the main shortcomings of the online course. Student 2 does not name any shortcomings and expresses overall

satisfaction with the course, especially thanks to engaging classes.

## VII. CONCLUSION

The results of in-depth interviews carried out among the participants of the Croatian Language and Culture course have shown that virtual classrooms provide a good platform and a stimulating environment for foreign language teaching and learning.

Microsoft Teams proved to be a suitable platform for online teaching when it comes to the Croatian Language and Culture course, because it simulated a real classroom environment with the options of videoconferencing, student participation (raise your hand, chat, microphone, camera), as well as many integrated applications and a whiteboard. The research on whether using ICT as a platform for virtual foreign language learning can generate motivation and positive attitudes in students was conducted using qualitative research method (in-depth interviews) on a smaller sample of students. Qualitative research on a small sample was chosen rather than quantitative research on all students in class, since there were only 11 students and the sample would not be representative for a qualitative analysis. The answers received from the students proved that teaching in a virtual classroom can generate motivation and positive attitudes towards foreign language learning in students, regardless of their initial level of motivation. Interactivity of digital tools in virtual language classrooms helps create positive attitudes towards language learning, generate the interest of students and motivate them to learn more about the subject matter. This research, however, opens up some space for additional research of this topic on a larger sample that could confirm or deny what was established in this research.

ICT in foreign language teaching and learning have definitely proved to be a useful tool in providing language instruction to learners, whether they are in used traditional or virtual classrooms. Whether discussing traditional setting or the online classroom, which became its principal alternative during the COVID-19 pandemic, ICT tools give valuable teaching assistance in both scenarios. In a traditional classroom, the teacher can use ICT tools to enhance student participation and motivation. Virtual classrooms offer a good alternative to traditional classrooms if ICT tools are employed, since they help bridge the gap between different time zones, students with different backgrounds, as well as help create class cohesion and a sense of interaction among students, which, consequently, help generate motivation. Synchronous virtual teaching presupposes teaching in real-time, and it is important in foreign language teaching and learning because the students can interact among themselves and with the teacher, as well as practice their listening and speaking skills in real time. The shortcomings in this approach are technical difficulties, such as poor WIFI quality or occasional glitches that can hinder the process of teaching. Asynchronous online foreign language teaching, on the other hand, gives students the possibility

to review study materials which are easily available, but does not create class cohesion or a sense of togetherness among students.

However, an undeniably added value of virtual foreign language teaching and learning is the possibility of simultaneously connecting learners from all around the world via an online platform. In such an environment, students can not only learn the foreign language and explore the culture of the nation in question, but also strengthen their intercultural competences by interacting with their peers from around the globe without having to leave their home country or their home.

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