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## Much Ado About Nothing? Revitalizing Literature teaching and learning in Higher Education through ICT

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## I. Abstract

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720



Is the use of ICT overestimated, or is it really an important part of today teaching and learning? If it is important, how can technology make a great impact to the teaching and learning of Literature?

This paper tries to answer these questions taking into account all the improvements that technology introduces to education, and analyzing some of the criticism that surrounds this issue as well; we base our research on a qualitative analysis in which we collect the opinions of some students and teachers from some of the Literature classes of the English Studies Degree at Jaume I University about the needs for a correct use of technology in the classroom. This analysis suggests that integrating ICT into Higher Education is necessary for improving the learning process and for better acquiring the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) competencies; the paper concludes that there is a need for revitalizing the teaching and learning of Literature subjects because of the many benefits that the study of Literature brings to the student.

The paper follows pointing out some of the reasons why most of the teachers refuse to use technology in their classes. Teachers are an important pillar for this integration, but it is not them on their own who must make this integration come true. Changes coming from this technological integration imply a process of systematization, formalization, monitoring and evaluation, and this can only be done by institutions.

Further conclusions point at the fact that there is still much work to do for a correct integration of ICT onto education. We also point out that there is a growing need for training teachers in the proper use of technology, and that there is also a need to make students realize of how important the study of Literature is for their learning development. Technology can do so.

**Paraules clau:** ICT, literature teaching, teaching with ICT, technology.

## II. Justification and aims

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Nowadays, all teachers from all degrees and subjects must reach a point where they should ask themselves “should I use technology in my classes?”.

According to Porter (1999: 24) <<there are a number of claims made for the advantages which the appropriate use of technology can offer to the learner.>> These advantages are:

- <<Technology can give students a greater degree of control over the delivery of their learning>> (Porter, 1999: 24). The number of part-time students is increasing due to their particular needs (family duties, jobs), and technology can help them in accessing resources, tasks, all the information they need to acquire the required knowledge, at any time, no matter where they are.

- Through the variation of technological resources, students <<feel that they have control of their own learning>> (Porter, 1999: 24).
- The interaction between students can be highly increased by the use of email conversation, video-conferencing software, and the like. These discussions of ideas can take place even if students are not physically together, and can occur both inside and outside the classroom.
- <<Technology can provide a gateway to better research methods and analytic approaches. [...] Technology offers advanced research tools, and it can also provide the interface which helps the teacher to guide the student through the implementation of new techniques.>>, (Porter, 1999: 24).
- <<Technology can help to provide the motivation to learn and experiment>> (Porter, 1999: 24). When introducing new methods in the classroom, students may feel a new interest in the course, new reasons to learn.

The conclusion we can draw from these advantages is that technology improves the learning process in many different ways.

However, it is not technology alone that enables these improvements in the classroom. It is its appropriate use thanks to the teacher. It is the teacher who must take the initiative. Teachers today should be aware that our society is surrounded by technology, and they must not exclude it from the educational process because they would deprive students a new, invigorating and very rewarding experience, if used in the right measure and manner.

All this being said, we must also emphasize that the use of ICT is not only a matter of innovation; it is a matter of educational needs, of adopting new roles and methodologies in the classroom, of developing the new competencies required from the EHEA (European Higher Education Area). These achievements should be enough for teachers to use ICT, but we can still encounter teachers who do not use technology.

Giving an answer to this problem is not an easy issue, because a lot of factors must be taken into account. Let us state the main ones:

The first reason may be a kind of *psycho-socio-cultural* issue. Teachers are comfortable where they are and doing what they do (teachers and the rest of society, indeed). Bringing teachers to come out of their comfort zone is a difficult task that takes time, dedication and effort by both the institution and the teachers themselves. Do teachers need to be idealists, utopians, in order to reshape their teaching methods? Is it true that one has to be like Mr. Keating from Dead Poets Society, the innovative but annoying teacher, that one who told students “You will learn to think for yourselves again”? Well, surprisingly, maybe the answer to this question should be yes. Yes because all teachers have a Mr. Keating inside themselves, maybe not now, not always, but that part was there when they once came to the idea of “I want to be a teacher”. All teachers know society

is changing, and most of these changes are produced by technology. Students are changing too, of course, and they are seeking for a new way of learning, of developing their competencies for a better professional career, of managing themselves in this technological environment in a proper way. There is another way of teaching and learning, another way that, among other things, make students feel motivated to experiment with their learning. Let us, teachers, join the bandwagon of change and rekindle our enthusiasm for teaching. Technology can help us do so.

Another reason is the existence of subject cultures stated by Hennessy et al. (2005). The beliefs acquired (maybe unconsciously) about a certain subject (Literature, Maths, etc.) have an impact on the integration of technology into teaching. Thus, there is a tendency to believe that Science subjects have more to do with technology than Arts subjects such as Literature, History or Philosophy. This comes from the misconception of the use of technology and how to integrate it into a subject.

Finally, the last reason but perhaps the most disturbing one if you consider the century in which we are and the great advances that have taken place in our society, is the “material” issue, the one of the equipment needed, the time needed to develop expertise, resources needed. We could include here Internet access in class, hardware (computers, laptops etc.), software, training needed, and the like. At this point, it is the Institution that plays a major role. Salinas (2004) suggests that the integration of ICT must be carried out globally, institutionally, and not by individuals. Changes coming from this technological integration on education imply a process of systematization, formalization, monitoring and evaluation, and this can only be done by Institutions. Thus, the proper integration is a well-planned process, not just spontaneous actions of some teachers. However, many researchers state that if the institution does not take the first step, it must be the teachers who begin with the integration of technology in their classes, with projects and results, and be in constant communication with the institution about those improvements and results (Jauregui 2014).

Considering everything said, we are able now to answer the first question of the paper. Yes, technology is really an important part of today teaching and learning and its use is not overestimated at all. Let us now try to answer the second question of the research: how can technology make a valuable contribution to the teaching of literature?

Let’s have a look first at the reasons why Literature has been chosen for this paper.

Governments, and as a consequence, Universities, have in recent years decided to give greater weight to science education at the expense of the humanities. However, we must not forget that the study of Literature must be an essential part of higher education since it is a practical discipline because Literature improves the processes of reading, thinking, discussing, and writing; it increases our vocabulary and allows unconsciously integration of grammatical structures. It gives us language awareness. In the classroom, a literary discussion makes students think, analyze different

points of view and argue their opinions. All these are verbal skills which are transferable to other situations (and subjects).

Literature also increases our knowledge in a challenging way. By reading Literature we know about history, culture, science, religion, social issues and almost every branch of human knowledge. Literature is rich, and so it enriches our minds.

Finally, Literature makes us able to sympathize with others, to understand human nature in all its faces, to broaden our imagination. Imagination makes us creative, and with creativity we have the power to change things, to improve our society.

Having in mind all the reasons why the study of Literature is important and vital for the proper knowledge development of students, let us now analyze how the use of ICT can improve the teaching and learning of Literature, and if there is a need for this improvement.

### III. Objectives

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The goals of this research are focused on providing evidence for the following hypothesis. First, technology can improve the learning process, and second, literature subjects can benefit from the integration of ICT tasks.

### IV. Method

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A qualitative design has been used for the purposes of this research, so that we have studied small groups of people to guide and support our hypotheses. For the study of these groups we have used the *key informant interviews* technique, which consists of an informal discussion with the selected subjects of study (the key informants) in a one-time event.

Subjects of study:

1. Some students and instructors from different Literature subjects on the English Studies degree at Jaume I University.
2. Some students and teachers from a different scenario (private tutoring off campus). These key informants came from an unofficial online training center called Kankiü. They had private classes on Maths, Grammar, and Literature. All students were under 18 (High School students).

For the design of the script to follow in these informal conversations we took into account all that has been discussed in this paper:

- attitudes towards the need of using ICT in class
- attitudes towards being a truly practitioner of ICT, motivation, etc.
- attitudes towards Literature subjects.

The questionnaire is included in Appendix 1.

## V. Results

The results show a clear statement of all the research that has been carried out in this paper.

	Off campus students	Off campus teachers	On campus students	On campus teachers
Motivation increase	100%	100%	36%	20%
Technology expertise	97%	92%	88%	46%
Knowledge on integrating ICT	87%	91%	12%	26%
Satisfaction with assessment	100%	100%	21%	86%



Within the off campus environment, there is an important improvement of the motivation students have about their classes once ICT tasks have been integrated into their learning activities, and their grades highly improve as well. After the integration of technology, their motivation increased so much that this had an impact to the improvement of their grades. All students had bad grades before the use of ICT, and, astonishingly, the 100% of them passed all their exams after using technology when learning.

The software these students used was the Wiziq Virtual Whiteboard. They connected with their teachers through their computers. They could speak to each other and write on a whiteboard at the same time, upload documents, draw diagrams, etc.

Almost all students and teachers were satisfied with the assessment methods.

Both students and teachers thought they were quite experts on the use of technology outside and inside the virtual classroom. Moreover, it seemed that both knew some reasons why technology is necessary for a proper learning process and both knew different ways of integrating it onto a class.

Regarding their attitude towards Literature, unluckily almost all students thought it was useless for their future professional career.

Within the on campus environment, there is not a significant increase of motivation.

Regarding the level of use of technology that students and teachers have outside the classroom, almost all teachers and students think they are

great users. The results about the knowledge both students and teachers have about how technology can be integrated into education and in which ways it can improve the learning process are also interesting. Few teachers think they have good knowledge about this issue, and just a couple of students showed some knowledge about it. The satisfaction both feel about the assessment process also brings out astonishing results. While almost all teachers are satisfied with it, again just a few students are. We also knew that while almost all students feel they are quite experts on the use of technology, just half of the teachers think they are. This means that, although teachers are users of technology, they do not have a feeling of expertise.

Regarding the conception students have about Literature subjects, some thought that Literature is almost needless for their future professional career, and just a few of them felt that these subjects are important.

## VI. Discussion and conclusions

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In this paper we try to tackle two issues:

First, to what extent technology can improve the learning process, and second, to what extent literature subjects can benefit from the integration of ICT tasks.

Technology improves the learning process because, mainly, it increases students' motivation.

Literature subjects can be revitalized through the use of technology, but also students can. Motivation, control over learning, interaction with others, and critical thinking, are just a few advantages that technology may bring into the classroom.

The lack of knowledge that some teachers and students have about how technology can be integrated onto education and how it can improve the learning process states out the need for a training process in the teaching area that must be carried out, mainly, by institutions. This lack of knowledge is what makes teachers fail into the use of ICT tasks, and what makes students feel there is no need for integrating technology in their classrooms.

Regarding how Literature subjects can be revitalized through the use of technology, it is obvious that there is a need for making students realize of how important these subjects are for their learning development. Technology helps to do so by introducing new methods, tasks and creative processes.

The results from our research show the need for a new methodology which integrates technology onto the educative environment. However, the emergence of a new methodology involves a great new challenge, that of understanding in which ways adults learn better and faster, and how to integrate this understanding with ICT tasks.

## VII. References

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726



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## VIII. Appendix 1

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Questions for teachers:

1. Do you think you're already using ICT in your classes?
2. What technological resources do you use?
3. Do you think it is important to use ICT in the classroom?
4. Do you feel you have enough knowledge to use ICT correctly?
5. Do you feel motivated to include ICT in your teaching method?
6. Do you think that the Literature subjects be revitalized with the use of ICT?
7. Do you think that the most effective way to assess a student is by examination and / or papers?
8. Do you think it should be the university that applies some sort of program integration of ICT in the classroom, the same for all



teachers, with the proper training and the appropriate support? or do you think that every teacher must act in their classes at their discretion, as individuals?

9. Do you feel comfortable with new technologies, or do you feel they mean more work for you?
10. Do you consider you are an expert user of new technologies?

Questions for students:

1. Do you consider Literature as an important subject for your professional future?
2. Do you think you can make an interesting and innovative research on a topic of the subjects of Literature?
3. Honestly, you get bored in Literature classes?
4. Could you define what ICT is in education?
5. Do you think your teachers should make a better use of technology to teach in their literature classes?
6. Do you think that an increase in the quantity and quality of ICT tasks would make you develop the skills required by the EHEA, and better prepare you for your career / future job?
7. Do you think that the use of ICT in the classroom is part of a unified university program, or rather every teacher does what they want?
8. Are you happy with the assessment methods?
9. Do you consider you are a great technology user?