

Written Assignments in Technology-Enhanced Postgraduate Courses in TESOL

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Abstract

The research paper explores the impact of assignments on enhancing educational technology awareness among postgraduate trainee English language teachers at the Hellenic Open University. The study focused on participants in the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) program, specifically those engaging in the 13-week training module (Agg31) on the use of modern technologies in English teaching. The training involved distance learning materials, three four-hour sessions, forum discussions, and the completion of two substantial written assignments presented in a plenary format known as VIVA. During the academic year 2022–2023, 50 trainee teachers, split between winter and spring semesters, participated in the study. The research used closed- and open-ended questions, with 10 trainees engaging in focus group discussions to elaborate on questionnaire responses. Descriptive statistics and content analysis were employed for data examination. Results indicated that the assignments, often implemented in classrooms, expanded trainees' understanding of new media methods. The VIVA sessions provided opportunities for reflection and expressing a commitment to continuous learning. Trainees felt supported and inspired, fostering a desire to explore and exchange ideas for innovative techniques and resources.

Keywords: Teacher development, foreign language pedagogy, educational technology, intercultural awareness, differentiated instruction, written assignments, educational scenarios

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Open and distance learning is a popular option chosen by millions of people around the world to widen their knowledge and build skills in various professional fields (Afolayan, 2015; Evans & Nation, 2013). There are many varied motivations that drive people to decide on a distance learning program. In Europe, and in Greece in particular, such programs are run by universities, colleges, and various public and educational institutions. These courses may have a shorter or longer duration depending on the qualifications they award. Their content is determined by the goals they set, the groups of trainees they address, and the needs of the society in which they are embedded. In Greece, learning foreign languages, especially English, is a prerequisite for employment. Children start in kindergarten and continue to learn English until they receive their high school diploma. At the same time, it is almost common practice for learners to attend English courses in language centers or to take private lessons at home. As a result, foreign language education is systematically evolving and curricula are being developed and enriched, following new trends and modern methodologies in applied linguistics.

EFL teachers usually decide to join training programs because of the need to update their knowledge and skills. Modern language learning pedagogies include differentiated teaching, the use of new technologies, experiential teaching and projects, the promotion of intercultural and multilingual awareness among learners, alternative assessment combined with traditional assessment methods, etc. At the same time, teachers need to be able to analyze pupils' needs in order to design appropriate educational scenarios, collect data that contribute to formative assessment, plan and participate in innovative activities, cooperate with other teachers and parents for the benefit of their pupils and the wider school community, etc. Open and distance learning seems to be the most appropriate form of education and training for EFL teachers who wish to develop skills such as those mentioned above in order to improve their teaching and be competitive in the labor market. Distance learning programs offered to EFL teachers employ different modes of delivery but primarily embrace blended and flipped learning and involve trainees studying remotely and developing assignments (Stavroulia, 2011).

The master's program (MSc) offered by the Hellenic Open University (HOU) focuses on specialized postgraduate training for individuals involved in or aspiring to teach English as a foreign or international language. This comprehensive program encompasses various aspects of teaching English as a foreign language and is uniquely designed to accommodate distance learning, allowing trainee teachers to participate in the program without the need to leave their current teaching environments. The program places a strong emphasis on practical learning through creative assignments, encouraging trainee teachers to apply their acquired knowledge by designing, delivering, and assessing lessons. These assignments serve as opportunities for experimentation and the exploration of the multifaceted field of education.

This paper delves specifically into the realm of assignments, examining the factors that contribute to the professional growth of trainee teachers within the program. The research project discussed was conducted as part of the MSc program at HOU. Extensive research was conducted in 2019 within the MSc program, focusing on the assignments submitted by trainee teachers. This research centered on the feedback provided by course instructors, the reflection processes engaged in by trainees following assignment completion, as well as their academic writing and research skills (Georgountzou & Calfoglou, 2019; Karagianni, 2019; Kofou, 2019; Maliotaki, 2019; Trigonaki, 2019). Specifically, the 2019 research aimed to improve written feedback,

suggestions for assignment enhancement, and the design and submission of well-crafted dissertations. However, there has been a gap in researching the impact of these assignments on trainees' professional development, particularly in their classroom practice.

The purpose of the research project presented here is to explore the extent to which two written assignments and an oral presentation (VIVA) at the end of the educational technology in TESOL course (Agg31) aid trainees in developing an awareness of how Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) can be effectively integrated into everyday language lessons, and whether they contribute to the development of good pedagogical practices. This research project began with three main questions:

1. *What tools, applications, and technologies do trainees employ in the educational scenarios they design for their written assignments? What are the reasons behind these choices?*
2. Do trainees believe that the educational scenarios they design for their assignments are practically applicable in the lessons they teach? To what extent do these scenarios help them develop awareness of how educational technology can enhance foreign language learning?
3. Do trainees believe that the oral presentation of educational scenarios, along with subsequent discussions among participants, contributes to a deeper understanding of the innovative methodologies studied during the course? If so, to what extent?

The paper is structured into six main sections. Following this introduction is a theoretical framework outlining fundamental principles of modern language learning pedagogy, including the use of new technologies, intercultural awareness, and differentiated instruction, which serve as reference points revisited throughout the text. The third section details the research methodology, the fourth presents findings and results, the fifth discusses limitations, and the sixth summarizes findings and concludes the work.

Preparing EFL Teachers for Diverse Challenges: Specializations in Language Teaching Pedagogy

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) encompasses a broad spectrum of teaching approaches and methodologies aimed at facilitating effective language learning. These include communicative language teaching, task-based and project-based learning, content and language integrated learning, and technology-enhanced learning, among others, which educators are expected to leverage. As it is put forward in the relevant literature, it is customary for teachers to integrate multiple approaches to achieve a balance between accuracy and fluency while fostering a diverse range of knowledge and skills in learners (Cook, 2016; Pfenninger et al, 2013; Smith & Candlin, 2014).

As part of their training, prospective teachers (trainee teachers) need to acquire expertise in language acquisition theories, linguistics, and language structure. They must also become proficient in effective language teaching techniques, encompassing methods for enhancing students' reading, writing, speaking, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar skills (Mitchell et al., 2019). Additionally, trainee teachers must be attentive to the cultural diversity present in their classrooms, acknowledging the varied backgrounds and identities of their learners (Alyan, 2011). This awareness is vital for cultivating an inclusive and respectful classroom environment.

Teacher training programs should extend their focus to various specialized areas, including the adept use of digital media, personalized teaching approaches, catering to diverse age groups, and employing a variety of techniques for assessing language skills. The ensuing paragraphs in this section concentrate on the specific fields that garnered heightened attention from trainee teachers participating in this research project: educational technology, intercultural awareness, and differentiated instruction.

The advent of new media, tools, resources, and teaching methods has brought about a substantial transformation in the realm of second or foreign language acquisition. The proliferation of online platforms and mobile apps offering interactive lessons, exams, and assignments has greatly enhanced the accessibility of language learning. Furthermore, advancements in video conferencing technology have enabled learners to engage in interactive practice, connect with peers and educators from around the globe, and receive personalized instruction.

Interactive resources, such as online courses, podcasts, streaming services, and language learning websites, have streamlined the learning process. Additionally, the English language is now readily available through authentic reading materials like e-books, CDs, and online articles. These opportunities enable learners to expand their vocabulary by exposing them to language usage in authentic contexts. Moreover, learners can immerse themselves in virtual environments and participate in simulated discussions, providing them with enriching language learning experiences through augmented and virtual reality (Freiermuth & Zarrinabadi, 2020; Ziegler & González-Lloret, 2022).

Gamification has emerged as a pivotal factor in motivating learners of all ages and promoting language development (Reinhardt, 2018; Soares & Weissheimer, 2016). Consequently, it is essential for EFL teachers to receive training in the integration of educational technology into their lessons. This training should encompass not only familiarity with the tools and media but also the ability to effectively employ language teaching methodologies that take advantage of the possibilities offered by these applications and online resources.

Intercultural awareness forms a vital component of EFL teacher development programs, not only enhancing their teaching practice but also equipping them with the necessary skills and mindset to navigate effectively in the diverse and globalized world of English language education. In the context of learning English as an international language, the cultivation of learners' intercultural awareness takes precedence. This term pertains to their sensitivity and comprehension of diverse cultures and their social realities, an understanding that holds great significance since every language is intricately linked with the cultures and societal norms of its speakers.

Within EFL classes, instructional activities should inspire learners to respect and embrace various cultures, gain insights into different traditions, values, and practices, and discern the distinctions between their own culture and those of others (Byram, 2020; Fitzpatrick, 2019; Holliday, 2010; Jackson, 2019). Consequently, intercultural awareness becomes an integral component of a comprehensive teacher training program for EFL educators. It empowers

learners to become more effective communicators in various cultural contexts and fosters their sensitivity to diverse needs.

Various digital tools—including virtual communication platforms facilitating collaboration with learners from different cultures, multimedia resources presenting cultural aspects from various regions worldwide, educational games, and interactive applications enabling exploration of foreign cultures and languages—contribute significantly to the development of intercultural awareness. In essence, technology serves as a valuable means of offering learners rich intercultural experiences and cultivating a more receptive, sensitive, and open attitude towards other cultures and ethnic communities.

Another crucial area in which EFL teachers require training is differentiated instruction. Typically, learners in a classroom exhibit varying levels of English language proficiency, with some facing difficulties in language acquisition or possessing specific educational needs. Differentiated instruction accommodates these individual differences by allowing teachers to tailor their lessons to suit each learner's requirements and academic level (Blaz, 2016; [Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006](#)). Moreover, in many educational settings, classrooms comprise students from diverse ethnicities and cultural backgrounds. Embracing differentiated instruction can promote an appreciation for and respect of various cultures among learners, fostering a sense of inclusivity.

Differentiated instruction is a dynamic process that necessitates continuous adjustments based on learners' demands and responses. Teachers must employ a range of strategies, such as lectures, debates, hands-on activities, group work, and technology, to cater to different learning styles. Understanding learners' varied learning styles, abilities, challenges, and interests is crucial (Duquette, 2022). Teachers should foster a welcoming and respectful learning environment where every student feels valued and free to express themselves. Using various modalities, including visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and interactive approaches, and offering a diverse array of materials to engage different learner types are essential components of differentiated instruction ([Pappa, 2016](#)).

Technology plays a pivotal role in supporting diversified foreign language education by aiding teachers in customizing lessons to meet the diverse needs and abilities of their students. EFL teachers can make use of educational software and applications that offer exercises and lessons at different language proficiency levels, incorporate online resources like videos, audio materials, and websites to provide supplementary content, and create personalized assessments that align with each learner's knowledge and skills.

Conducting research on how teacher education programs can prepare instructors for the multifaceted demands of language teaching is of paramount importance. As Xie (2013) explains, such research not only elevates the standard of language instruction but also promotes inclusivity and addresses the evolving requirements of today's educational landscape. It assists in identifying the elements contributing to teacher success and job satisfaction, empowers stakeholders to make informed decisions to enhance quality, encourages teachers to stay updated on best practices, and ensures that educators are well-equipped to deliver effective language

education to a diverse range of learners in various educational contexts. Subsequent sections will delve into the research methodology, findings, and implications.

The Context and the Research Methodology

The HOU's course AGG31, titled "Educational Technology in TESOL, has the primary objective of providing a comprehensive understanding of how ICTs can effectively be used in the teaching and learning processes of English as a second, foreign, or international language. This course, which corresponds to 15 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits, places significant emphasis on equipping participants with the necessary skills to proficiently employ modern ICT applications as essential tools for English language education. It also focuses on using contemporary instructional resources to support teachers in their practice and guiding them in integrating current pedagogical theories with modern ICT tools.

The course adopts a flexible approach to learning, employing a course management system and a flipped classroom model. This allows trainee teachers to engage with online resources and applications, alongside synchronous online sessions, all while having the flexibility to engage in self-study and self-access from the comfort of their homes. Various communication channels, including videoconferencing, the course management system's "Discussion forum," as well as platforms like Facebook Messenger," "Viber," or "WhatsApp" groups, facilitate interaction and collaboration between trainees and their instructor, as well as among trainees themselves.

The course spans a duration of thirteen weeks, during which trainee teachers are tasked with completing educational activities on the course's 'Discussion Forum' and submitting two comprehensive written assignments. These written assignments revolve around the creation of learning units that effectively incorporate ICTs. The focal point of these assignments is the development of elaborate educational scenarios, highlighting the benefits of the proposed tools or technologies. These scenarios encompass all required materials, offer a clear rationale and justification for their design, and elucidate the advantages they bring to the intended learners.

Towards the conclusion of the thirteen-week course, trainee teachers are required to orally present their assignments to both the instructor and their peers, a session known as the VIVA." This presentation format enables constructive feedback, focusing on the potential applications of different tools and technologies, as well as the pedagogical methodologies employed.

The research project discussed in this paper aims to assess the extent to which the course activities, including the two assignments involving educational scenarios and the VIVA presentations, helps trainees to develop expertise, and competencies related to the proficient and purposeful use of technology to enhance the teaching and learning processes within EFL classrooms. The research was carried out during the academic year 2022–2023, spanning September 2022 to June 2023. It involved the active participation of 25 trainee instructors who successfully completed the module (Agg31) during the winter semester, alongside an additional 25 trainees who had taken part in the module during the subsequent spring semester. The

research data collection process employed a combination of closed-ended and open-ended questions, administered through an anonymous questionnaire hosted on Google Forms.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first part focused on demographic data, including the trainees' sector of education and the language levels they taught. In the second part, trainees were asked about the two written assignments. Firstly, they were prompted to select tools, applications, and technologies they used in the educational scenarios they designed. Secondly, they were required to explain which of these tools they found most effective for their learners. Additionally, they were asked whether they had implemented the educational scenarios they designed in their teaching and if the outcomes met their expectations. Within this section, trainees were also questioned about whether they believed their designed scenarios helped them gain awareness of how educational technology contributes to effective learning. They were provided with three response options (not at all, a little, a lot) and were required to justify their choice. Moreover, they were asked to explain if they considered their assignments to have practical application in their teaching and instructional design.

The third part of the questionnaire addressed the VIVA. In the first question, trainees indicated the extent to which they believed the VIVA aided in their understanding of how educational technology facilitates effective language learning. Following this, they were asked to justify their response and specify which tools, from those used by their peers, they intended to incorporate into future lessons. Finally, they were invited to provide overall feedback on the assignments and VIVA, along with suggestions for improving course components to enhance their professional development as educators.

Furthermore, ten trainee teachers, evenly distributed between the two groups, participated in focus groups aimed at elaborating on their questionnaire responses. These discussions were conducted in two separate focus groups, with the first group convening in January 2023 and the second in June of the same year. Each focus group discussion session lasted approximately one hour. Focus groups allow researchers to gain in-depth insights into attitudes, beliefs, and experiences with the aid of open-ended questions that uncover motivations and emotions (Acocella & Cataldi, 2020; Barbour, 2018). The trainee teachers built on each other's comments, challenged viewpoints, and explored complex topics such as the effectiveness of the VIVA, and made valuable and substantiated proposals. Data analysis techniques applied in this research encompassed content analysis and descriptive statistics. Content analysis is a versatile research method that can be tailored to address a wide range of research questions and objectives. Its systematic and structured approach to examining communication materials makes it a valuable tool for researchers ([Neuendorf, 2016](#); Swann, 2020).

The responses from trainee teachers to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire, alongside discussions held in focus groups, were analyzed thematically. Key concepts used for data categorization included:

- “Accomplishing learning objectives”: examining whether the learning objectives set in educational scenarios were achieved when taught.
- “Learner needs and centeredness”: investigating whether trainees designed lessons to accommodate differentiated instruction.

- “Intercultural awareness”: exploring whether intercultural encounters influenced tool selection and learning activity design.
- “Creativity”: assessing whether imaginative and creative thinking were considered in pedagogical decision-making.
- “Communities of practice”: gathering trainees’ suggestions, frequently mentioned in both questionnaire responses and focus group discussions.

It is worth noting that responses from focus group discussions were cross-referenced with questionnaire responses to ensure triangulation of data.

Presentation And Discussion of the Findings

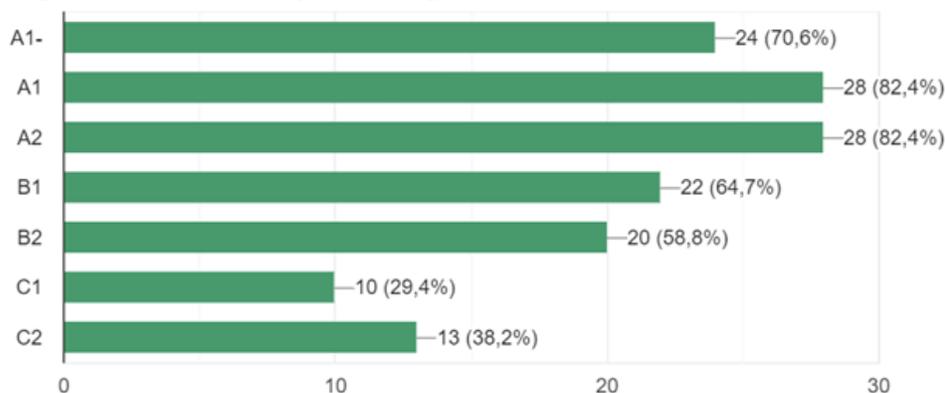
Demographic Information, Age Groups, Sectors in Education, Language Levels

The study’s participants consisted entirely of females. Within this population, 38% fell within the age bracket of 41 to 50, while the remaining 62% were aged between 20 and 40. These participants were both residents and employees in various regions across the country. In terms of their professional roles, 50% served as educators in public schools, covering elementary, middle, and high school levels, 3% worked in private elementary schools, 6% were employed in public kindergartens, and 47% were associated with private language schools. Furthermore, 44% of the teachers offered private tutoring sessions to students in their homes. Some of the participants held positions in more than one educational sector.

Concerning their language proficiency instruction, the participants were involved in teaching across all levels, with the majority focusing on A1 and A2 CEFR levels (CEFR, 2020). A visual representation of the participants’ responses regarding the language levels they taught is provided in Table 1.

Table 1

Language Levels the Participants Taught

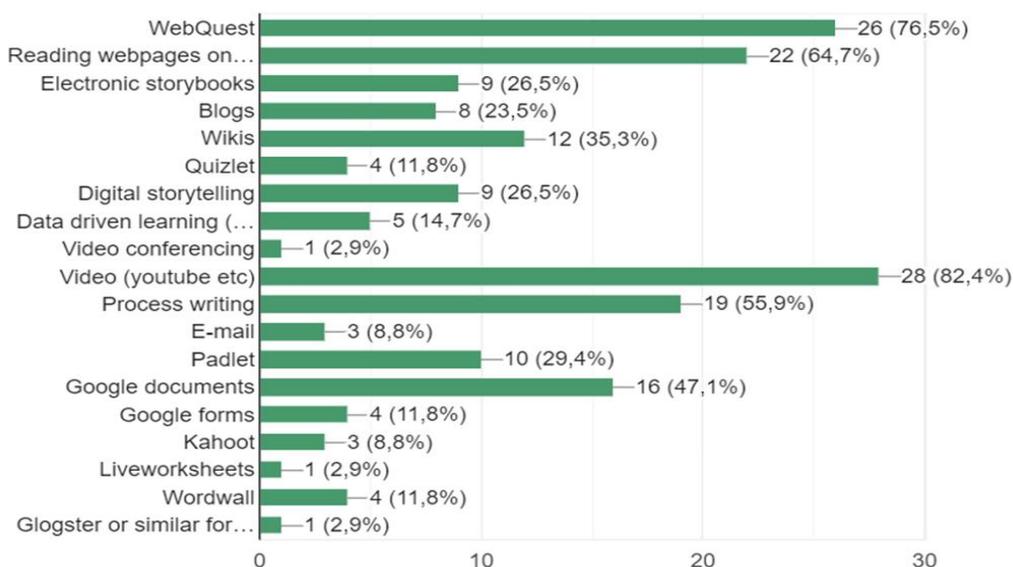


Choices in Integrating ICT Tools in Educational Scenarios

In the second part of the questionnaire the trainee teachers were tasked with choosing the tools they employed in the educational scenarios they had devised for the two assignments. The reason behind including the first research question was to gather insights from trainee teachers regarding the tools they prefer to use for teaching the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing), enhancing language awareness (grammar and vocabulary), promoting collaborative learning among learners, and ultimately, discerning which of these skills takes precedence in their teaching approach. Table 2 offers an overview of the choices made by trainee teachers in terms of tools and ICT learning models.

Table 2

ICT Tools and Learning Models Trainee Teachers Used for the Design of their Educational Scenarios



Reading and Listening Skills

As evident from the choices made by the trainee instructors, the language skills that took precedence in the development of the educational scenarios were “reading” and “listening.” More specifically, the trainees opted for the WebQuest learning model (76.5%), which is rooted in project-based learning pedagogy and provides opportunities for both receiving and producing written language, including reading webpages (64.7%). On the other hand, they favored video (82.4%), which encourages the reception of spoken language. As is reported in the relevant literature, both options are known to stimulate learner motivation, making the lessons engaging

and effective (Dodge, 2001; Goodman et al., 2017; Terantino, 2011; Tschirner, 2011; Vlachos, 2020)

Writing Skills

Concerning the production of written language, the majority of trainee teachers used Google Documents (47.1%) for constructing their scenarios. As it is endorsed in the literature (Abrahms, 2019; Suwantarathip & Wichadee, 2014; Zhou et al., 2012), Google Documents not only promote collaborative learning but also enhance creativity through the process of writing (55.9%). Interestingly, a smaller percentage of trainee teachers chose blogs and wikis (23.5% and 35.3%, respectively), which, according to the literature, facilitate student interaction (Kuimova & Zvekov, 2016; Li & Zhu, 2017). During the discussions in the two focus groups, when the researcher inquired about the choice between blogs, wikis, and Google Documents, the trainees explained that, in their view, all three tools are highly useful. However, Google Documents appeared to be more accessible to learners and were more easily integrated with other learning models, such as digital storytelling, where students are required to co-author the narrative script multiple times. As Table 2 indicates, fostering learner collaboration and interaction appears to be a significant criterion for trainee teachers when designing educational scenarios, as substantial percentages were attributed to tools that support student interaction, such as Padlet (29.4%), blogs, wikis, and Google Documents.

Language Awareness

Interestingly, less emphasis than expected was placed on teaching the structure of language, i.e., grammar and vocabulary, when designing the tasks. Only 14.7% of trainees used data-driven learning and online resources like the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) to create activities aimed at developing language awareness. However, an overall percentage of 23.5% used tools like Quizlet, Kahoot, and Liveworksheets to help learners assimilate grammatical structures and vocabulary through engaging games that capture students' attention and interest.

Intercultural Interactions and Collaboration

Another notable observation is that only 2.9% of respondents chose to use videoconferencing applications, which have the potential to facilitate intercultural interactions among students from different countries. As discussed by Vlachos (2009a, b) and Vlachos & Papaefthymiou-Lytra (2008), cross-national educational projects involving students from diverse cultural backgrounds create an authentic learning environment where students can enhance their communication, collaboration, and intercultural skills. As emphasized in the second section of this paper, in the context of learning English as a second language, it is crucial to grasp cultural realities, show respect for other traditions, and nurture intercultural awareness. Engaging in cross-cultural, real-time interactions, typically facilitated by videoconferencing, aids in the process of learning about and embracing the distinctive characteristics of various cultures.

When this matter was discussed in the two focus groups, the participating trainee teachers unanimously concurred that videoconferencing and students collaborating with peers from different countries are among the most effective methods for fostering intercultural communicative competence. However, they clarified that they often choose less time-consuming and effort-intensive learning models and scenarios, such as WebQuests. In WebQuests, students

access authentic resources to acquire cultural information, which they can then analyze and compare with the cultures of their own societies. To accommodate the principle of collaboration, they prefer to assign WebQuest tasks in groups and pairs and encourage their learners to engage in collaborative problem solving.

Comments on Tools and Applications

Additional comments made by the trainee teachers concerning various applications, tools, and ICT pedagogical frameworks can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Trainee Teachers' Comments for Tools and ICT Pedagogical Frameworks

Live Worksheets and Wordwall	Easier to use by trainee teachers
Kahoot	Effective in pre-teaching vocabulary, and learners love it
Wordwall & Padlet	More effective in facilitating learning
Video	Videos, including authentic ones are seen as interesting and motivating
Google Docs	Highly effective for collaborative writing tasks
Email	More challenging for learners
Video Ant	Useful for viewing videos in sections
YouTube & Google Docs	Highly effective and easy to access
WebQuest	Interesting and inspiring for learners
COCA	While considered demanding, some learners found it helpful
Wikis	Effective educational tools
Digital Storytelling	Challenging but effective
Blogs	Effective for improving writing skills
Interactive Tools (e.g., Quizizz)	Effective for engaging learners
Mindmap & Questionnaire	
Tools	Effective for specific tasks

Perspectives on Integrating Technology In EFL: Effective Practices

In the second section of the questionnaire, trainee instructors were surveyed regarding their experience teaching educational scenarios. Specifically, they were asked whether they had conducted the lessons and, if so, whether the outcomes aligned with their expectations. An overwhelming 90% confirmed that they had indeed taught the scenarios. Additionally, they were invited to provide feedback on how well the scenarios matched their anticipated outcomes.

Analysis of their responses revealed a notable trend: the instructors harbored positive expectations, which were largely fulfilled. They reported that their learners not only enjoyed the lessons but also that the instructors were successful in accomplishing their teaching objectives. Below are excerpts from their feedback:

- My students loved the lesson and my teaching aims and objectives were fully accomplished.
- The learners loved it. The objectives were achieved.

- I taught part of my scenario of the WebQuest with my proficiency class as a type of relief from their exams and they loved it!
- I taught the WebQuest I designed in the assignment and the feedback was positive. The teaching objectives were met and the students at the end of the lesson said it was the most interesting lesson.

Furthermore, several trainee teachers stressed the significance of tailoring tools and applications to accommodate the diverse needs of learners at varying proficiency levels. Some expressed an eagerness to incorporate more advanced tools into their lessons, demonstrating a willingness to adapt and innovate their teaching methods. In one instance, a trainee teacher noted the need to shorten tasks to match the attention span of younger learners. A few mentioned challenges related to technology availability or resource limitations in the classroom, which could potentially affect the implementation of specific teaching strategies. One trainee instructor expressed a desire for greater creativity, particularly in the evaluation phase of the lesson, indicating a continuous improvement mindset.

In line with relevant literature (Kourtis Kazoullis & Skourtou, 2007; Kourtis-Kazoullis, 2008; Kourtis Kazoullis & Vlachos, 2014), the trainees' primary focus was clearly on engaging learners and effectively using technology to enrich the learning experience. In their responses in this part of the questionnaire they acknowledged the significance of a variety of resources and programs in improving their English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes. The effectiveness of these tools often depended on factors such as ease of use, level of interest, and alignment with the learners' needs. Even if some tools were considered more challenging, they were still valued for specific tasks. The ability to be flexible and adaptable in employing these tools played a crucial role in meeting the expectations of both teachers and students.

Awareness of how Educational Technology Contributes to Effective Learning

When asked whether the educational scenarios they had devised contributed to their understanding of the role of educational technology and new media in language learning, 100% of the trainee teachers indicated a heightened awareness. Consistent with existing literature (Borsheim et al., 2008; Cummins et al., 2007; Kalantzis & Cope, 2008), their responses to the open-ended question emphasized the pervasive presence of technology and media in learners' daily lives. They acknowledged the significance of integrating ICT tools into education, noting that such integration not only captures learners' attention but also enhances the effectiveness of EFL learning. One comment exemplifying this viewpoint states: The new media can play an important role in the EFL classroom. They give the teachers the potential to enrich their lessons in a way that can facilitate teaching and learning. Computer-mediated environments lay the foundations for a learner-centered classroom where the learner assumes a more active role and responsibility for his/her learning."

This newfound awareness led them to appreciate the potential of new media and educational technologies in enriching language lessons and creating learner-centered classrooms. By doing so, they believed that they could encourage learners to take a more active role in their own language acquisition, which aligned with the modern pedagogical principles discussed so far in this paper.

Furthermore, they acknowledged the versatility of technology in making lessons more engaging and appealing to learners of varying linguistic competencies. While they were not oblivious to the possible technical challenges associated with technology integration, they firmly believed that the benefits, such as heightened learner motivation through computer-based projects, outweighed these obstacles. Furthermore, they recognized that while there might be a time investment required to prepare digital materials, the resulting motivation and engagement facilitated by online tools are invaluable assets in a language classroom. Their comments exemplifying these two points states:

Even though there are some technical difficulties involved, mainly managing to get access to the school's computer lab, there is great potential for increasing the learners' motivation through computer-based projects.

There may be some time required in order to prepare the digital material for the lessons, but the motivation online tools bring to a lesson is worth it.

In light of this awareness, the trainee instructors expressed their determination to continue leveraging technology in their future lessons, as they now felt more confident in designing engaging, technology-enhanced learning experiences.

Practical Implications of Assignments

Regarding the practical implications of the two assignments they submitted for the course, the trainee teachers firmly believed that these assignments had a tangible impact on their future teaching endeavors. The comments in the open-ended questions suggest that they viewed the assignments as opportunities to experiment with a wide array of digital tools, enabling them to achieve specific teaching objectives and create lessons that were not only effective but also motivating for their learners. Below are some illustrative comments:

I think that the assignments give us the opportunity to generate ideas of how we can integrate the technological tools in our lessons and also see how these tools work in practice. I strongly believe that without the assignments we would just theoretically know the tools and we wouldn't know their actual use.

These assignments and the educational scenarios not only helped me to explore the new media and new technological tools, which I wasn't aware of beforehand, but also enabled me to open my horizons and realize how a simple lesson can turn into a fun, interesting and enjoyable process for everyone involved.

Additionally, they noted that the process of preparing these assignments had heightened their understanding of the importance of differentiated instruction and how technology could be harnessed to cater to the diverse needs of learners in their classes. This newfound knowledge was not just theoretical; it was practical and applicable, equipping them with valuable skills and insights they could immediately put into practice in their future language teaching endeavors.

The assignments are created in such a way that force you to create something practical and put the theory learnt into actual use. The knowledge obtained from the study material

and the contact sessions was put into use and made me experiment with tools I could use with classes of mixed abilities. The assignments created a need for me to be creative and design lesson that suit the different needs and language levels of my students.

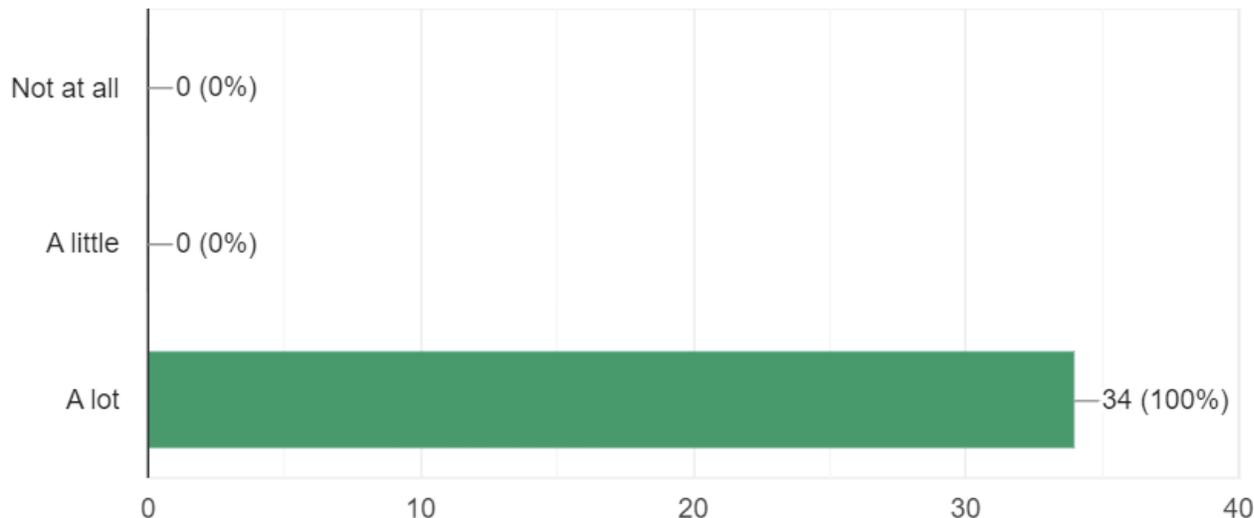
The trainee teachers believed that these assignments not only expanded their awareness of educational technology and new media but also equipped them with practical ideas and skills thus enabling them to design learner-centered, technology-enhanced lessons and ultimately improve their teaching methods. They viewed technology as an indispensable tool for creating engaging, inclusive, and effective language learning experiences and were committed to exploration of digital tools to enhance their teaching practices.

Perspective on the Impact of VIVA Presentations

All trainee teachers who answered question 10 of the questionnaire agreed (100%) that the VIVA at the end of the course significantly contributed to their awareness of how educational technology and new media can facilitate effective language learning. Table 4 illustrates their responses.

Table 4

VIVA and Its Contribution to Awareness of How ICTs Facilitate Language Learning



They found the scenarios presented during the VIVA sessions to be inspiring and engaging for learners with topics such as fashion, aliens, and others capturing their interest. They acknowledged that most of the projects presented could be easily implemented in their future classrooms, depending on the learners' language levels and interests. Many of their colleagues' projects featured creative ideas and practical applications of various digital tools, which left a lasting impression on them. Several specific tools and technologies were highlighted by the trainee teachers as particularly inspiring, including Wordwall, video lessons, digital storytelling, blogs, Google Docs, Wikis, StoryJumper, Edpuzzle, VideoAnt, Kahoot, Padlets, films with captions, Mentimeter, LiveWorksheets, Ted puzzle, and various web tools like WebQuests and Wikis.

It was established that the VIVA presentations provided a platform for trainee teachers to exchange ideas, learn from one another's projects, and explore innovative ways to incorporate technology into their future lessons. They recognized the value of these exchanges and expressed their intent to apply the insights and tools gained from their colleagues' projects in their own teaching practices. The VIVA sessions not only showcased the potential of educational technology but also fostered a sense of inspiration and collaboration among the trainee teachers, motivating them to enhance their future language lessons with the integration of digital tools. Here are some of their observations:

To see your colleagues being creative and apply the same theory and principles learnt in the course from their perspective is really inspiring! More or less the tools were the same, but it was the task sheets that they came up with and the way they structured their lessons that was also motivational.

I was surprised with the creativity with which my colleagues approached the various scenarios and the multitude of ways in which each digital tool can be used. I would like to experiment with digital storytelling in the future.

I liked the idea of the webtool with subtitles which I intend to experiment with in my future lessons. I also liked the idea of having the learners simultaneously work on a mindmap instead of a PadletWall.

I loved the approach to travelling (a trivial issue) blended with the element of responsibility which gives the topic a different perspective.

The VIVA was very interesting and inspirational and I am sure that the scenarios presented will form the basis for my future lessons.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight that some aspiring trainee teachers expressed their intention to take their commitment to professional development to the next level. Specifically, they planned to actively engage in the exchange of educational scenarios and lessons, with the primary objective of witnessing how these instructional approaches manifest in real classroom settings. This collaborative endeavor was underpinned by a shared commitment to providing constructive feedback at a later stage. In essence, these trainee teachers were enthusiastically inclined towards establishing enduring communities of practice that will persist well beyond the completion of the Agg31 course.

The concept of communities of practice in education represents a dynamic and collaborative ecosystem that empowers educators to continually refine their craft, nurture professional growth, and actively contribute to the advancement of language teaching and learning. These communities extend the boundaries of traditional learning environments, enabling educators to thrive through collective expertise, shared experiences, and the continuous exchange of pedagogical innovation.

As substantiated by the relevant literature (Haligamo, 2021; Reardon & Leonard, 2013; Tummons, 2022), communities of practice within the realm of education serve as indispensable catalysts for nurturing collaboration, fostering professional development, and facilitating the dissemination of knowledge among educators and various stakeholders. For EFL educators seeking to collaborate, enhance their professional competencies, and share their wealth of knowledge, the concept of communities of practice emerges as an exceptionally fruitful proposition. These dynamic collectives contribute meaningfully to the ongoing evolution of techniques and methodologies in second and foreign language teaching and learning.

Limitations and Recommendations For Further Research

Throughout an entire academic year, our research project diligently engaged two cohorts of participants. However, it is evident that the inclusion of additional cohorts and an extended duration would have enriched our dataset, enhancing the robustness of our findings. Particularly, augmenting the quantitative data to capture participants' tool and application preferences would have provided deeper insights into the methodologies envisaged by postgraduate trainee teachers for their future professional practice.

Moreover, a more comprehensive questionnaire, delving into preferences for integrating AI tools into teaching practices and the pedagogical strategies aimed at fostering critical thinking skills, would have furnished us with contemporary insights. Such data would be invaluable in shaping the curriculum of future postgraduate courses in educational technology.

This realization propels us toward the next phase of research, namely, investigating the integration of AI into trainee teachers' assignments within postgraduate courses. Understanding

their attitudes and practices regarding the implementation of educational scenarios in their classrooms is imperative for informed curriculum development.

Furthermore, there exists a pressing need to delve into the potential formation of communities of practice among trainee teachers upon completing the course. This entails examining the goals they set, the modes of interaction they adopt, the collaborative content, as well as the reactions, benefits, challenges, and difficulties encountered by their learners.

In summary, extending the research to encompass additional cohorts, incorporating diverse data collection methods, and exploring the dynamics of communities of practice are vital steps towards advancing our understanding of the intersection between educational technology and teacher training. These efforts are crucial for informing the design of future postgraduate courses and enhancing the effectiveness of teacher education programs.

Summarizing Findings and Conclusion

The emergence of new media, digital tools, and instructional strategies has revolutionized second/foreign language acquisition, rendering it more accessible and engaging. It's imperative for trainee teachers to have a heightened awareness of educational technology's role in language learning to ensure their effectiveness as educators. This paper presents findings from a research project aimed at shaping future training courses. It underscores the importance of integrating ICT tools into the educational process, as acknowledged by trainee teachers in Agg31. These tools not only capture learners' attention but also enhance the effectiveness of EFL learning. The practical assignments within the course, particularly the design of educational scenarios, encouraged experimentation with various digital tools, promoting learner engagement and motivation while emphasizing the principles of differentiated instruction and intercultural interactions. This equipped trainee teachers with valuable skills and insights for their future language teaching endeavors.

In addition, VIVA presentations at the end of the course played a crucial role in fostering awareness and collaboration among trainee instructors. The scenarios presented during these sessions served as inspiration, catalyzing additional ideas and discussions. Trainee teachers expressed a desire to continue their educational journey by establishing connections within a community of practice, facilitating the exchange of valuable insights and experiences and enhancing the collective toolbox of teaching methods. This research project underscores the critical role of educational technology in language education and teacher development, highlighting how well-designed courses, practical assignments, and collaborative experiences can empower language educators to effectively integrate technology into their teaching practices, benefiting both teachers and learners.

Teacher education programs must encompass a wide range of pedagogical methods and techniques to empower educators to be adaptable and responsive to their learners' needs. These programs play a vital role in raising the standard of language instruction, fostering inclusivity, and preparing teachers for the evolving demands of the educational landscape. By promoting ongoing research and teacher development, stakeholders can make informed decisions to

improve educational quality, encourage best practices, and ensure that educators are well-equipped to provide effective language education in diverse contexts.

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