Ensuring uniformity of content and assessment in multi-section, on-site ESP university courses through ICT

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents an experience of use of ICT intended to overcome some of the problems currently plaguing ESP teaching at third level in Spain, namely student overcrowding, rising grade appealing, inadequacy and/or datedness of methodologies and syllabi, multi-campus lecturing, and disproportionate course management and assessment workload. The experience was developed in *English for Commerce I*, an on-site ESP required course in the curriculum of the BA in Commerce and Marketing currently taught at the University of Oviedo, during the first term of the year 2016/2017. The main aims were (1) to update the contents and methods of the course so that they allowed for significant, collaborative and autonomous learning of commercial English; (2) to significantly reduce the time the lecturers devoted to preparing, grading and reviewing tests, as well as handling student complaints, and (3) to greatly improve staff coordination so that uniformity of content and assessment could be guaranteed. The results show that aims (1) and (3) were fully met. As regards aim (2), even though ICT did reduce the time spent reviewing tests and handling complaints, the authors feel that the preparation of computer-assisted, on-site exams took longer than expected. Whereas the literature on the use of ICT in education mainly focuses on student motivation and engagement, the experience also bears out that ICT can be effectively used to combat student unhappiness by ensuring uniformity of content and assessment across sections in multi-section courses.

RESUMEN

El artículo presenta una experiencia de uso de TIC que tuvo como propósito superar algunos de los problemas que actualmente afectan a la enseñanza de IFE en la universidad española: masificación, aumento del número de reclamaciones de calificaciones, inadecuación y/u obsolescencia de metodologías y programas, docencia

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simultánea en varios campus, y crecimiento desproporcionado del tiempo que el profesorado debe dedicar a tareas administrativas y de evaluación. La experiencia se desarrolló en *Inglés para Comercio I*, una asignatura obligatoria y presencial del Grado en Comercio y Marketing que oferta la Universidad de Oviedo, durante el primer cuatrimestre del curso 2016/2017. Los objetivos principales fueron: (1) actualizar los contenidos y la metodología del curso para posibilitar el aprendizaje significativo, colaborativo y autónomo de inglés comercial; (2) reducir de forma significativa el tiempo que el profesorado dedicaba a preparar, calificar y revisar pruebas de evaluación, así como a tramitar quejas de los estudiantes, y (3) conseguir una importante mejora en la coordinación del profesorado, de manera que la unidad de docencia y evaluación quedase garantizada en todos los grupos de la asignatura. Los resultados muestran que la experiencia satisfizo plenamente los objetivos (1) y (3). En lo que respecta al objetivo (2), si bien las TIC redujeron el tiempo dedicado a revisar pruebas de evaluación y tramitar quejas, los autores consideran que la preparación de pruebas presenciales de evaluación con apoyo informático llevó más tiempo del esperado. Mientras que la literatura académica sobre el uso de las TIC en educación se centra prioritariamente en conseguir una mayor motivación y compromiso del estudiante, la experiencia también demuestra que estas tecnologías pueden resultar eficaces para combatir el descontento del alumnado, puesto que permiten garantizar la unidad de docencia y evaluación en asignaturas multigrupo.

1. Introduction

The implementation of the Bologna Process has brought about considerable changes in Spanish higher education, amongst them the adoption of continuous assessment (CA) and requirements for uniformity of course content and assessment, and the unwelcome, usually unpaid, addition of course coordination chores to the workload of many faculty members. In practice, course coordinators are responsible for maintaining consistency of instruction and assessment across sections, writing syllabi, selecting and/or creating content, setting grading criteria, meeting regularly with teaching and administration staff, handling student complaints and grade disputes, coordinating test creation, marking and reviewing, recording and filing final grades and, last but not least, teaching multiple sections of the courses they coordinate. The difficulty and complexity of these tasks grow in parallel with the number of students, sections and faculty involved.

Coordinating *English for Commerce I* can be excruciating. Every year, between 160 and 180 students crowd this face-to-face, one-term, ESP required course in the curriculum of the BA in Marketing and Commerce currently taught at the Jovellanos Faculty of Commerce, Tourism and Social Sciences of the University of Oviedo (UniOvi). The up to seven sections the students are divided into are assigned to three or four lecturers, of whom one is also in charge of course coordination. Coursework is assessed through a common final exam and three CA tests — a Use of English (UoE) and writing test, a role play and a presentation, which each lecturer has to administer to the section(s) they have been assigned. More often than not, the course lecturers also have to teach at other UniOvi campuses in Gijón (2 km away), Oviedo (35 km away) and Mieres (45 km away). Therefore, on-site meetings are difficult to organise, which can easily lead to disparities — or student suspicion of such — in content and assessment between sections and, consequently, unhappiness with the course.

Over the year 2015-16, the CA was a constant source of concern and much time and resource wasting. About one third of the students would excuse absence from every CA test and request to take it on a different date, which made the lecturers put in a considerable amount of extra work to create, proctor and review them. Besides, tens of students would complain that assessment was not consistent at all, a claim largely based on the fact that each and every student in one section got either A or A+ in all the CA tests and the final exam, including some who boasted to have answered just a few written questions and performed poorly in both the role play and the presentation. When asked about the complaints, the lecturer responsible for the section would remain uncooperative and defiant, and dare the students in the other sections and the coordinator to prove their case, knowing well that 1) neither could request to audit the written tests and the final exams they had graded, and 2) the very nature of oral tests makes it extremely difficult for grade appeals to be successful.

Also worrying was that we were assigned to the course just two days before the start of the year. With no time to select or create new content, we had to resort to the set of printed materials previous teaching staff had been using since the late 1990s. It should also be noted that UniOvi has a Moodle-based virtual learning environment (the UniOvi VLE) for distance and blended learning. In September 2015, the course space at the UniOvi VLE, however, remained severely underused and just served as storage and download site for PDF versions of the said materials.

All in all, over the year 2015-16, *English for Commerce I* was hardly in line with current foreign language (FL) teaching theories and methods, did very little to encourage significant learning of commercial English and largely failed to comply with the requirements of the Bologna Process regarding uniformity of content and assessment. Moreover, coordination and assessment took much too long — as a matter of fact, much longer than in any other course.

The paper examines how the shortcomings above could be eventually overcome the following year through the use of ICT, which we approached with these aims in mind: (1) to update the contents and methods of the course so that they allowed for significant, collaborative and autonomous learning of commercial English; (2) to substantially reduce the time devoted to preparing, marking and reviewing tests, as well as handling student complaints, and (3) to greatly improve faculty coordination so that uniformity of content and assessment could be ensured.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. The following section describes briefly the theoretical framework supporting the experience. Next, we focus on the methods and resources used to carry it out. The fourth section examines the results obtained in the evaluation of the experience. Finally, a conclusion is presented in the fifth section.

2. Theoretical framework

Since the early 1980s, the theory and practice of FL teaching, especially in higher education, have been largely dominated by three concepts: the communicative approach, information and communication technologies (ICT), and Language for Specific Purposes (LSP, ESP for English).

Canale and Swain's Theoretical Bases of Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing (1980) is still highly influential on FL teaching, although it has been nearly forty years since

it was first published. This approach is learner-centred and promotes the use of authentic over adapted materials in the classroom, as it assumes that "learning language successfully comes through having to communicate real meaning. When learners are involved in real communication, their natural strategies for language acquisition will be used, and this will allow them to learn to use the language" (Teaching English, 2006). By authentic materials we may just mean "reading texts that were written by native speakers and published in contexts designed specifically for native-speaker consumption" or broaden the definition to include "other sources of language – or anything that might stimulate language use" (Lansford, 2014). It is hardly surprising then that ICT are currently regarded as a highly valuable asset in FL learning and teaching, especially when they are based on a communicative approach.

The vast majority of the literature points out that ICT "ofrecen la oportunidad de usar la lengua extranjera de manera significativa en contextos auténticos; suministran un acceso fácil y rápido para el uso de materiales reales y actualizados en la lengua estudiada, y presentan oportunidades motivadoras de aprendizaje tales como las salas de chat o los ambientes virtuales" (Torres-Corrales et al., 2017, p. 29). Moreover, they allow learning to become more student-centred and students more responsible for their own learning, which in turn allows teachers to assume the role of mediators (Salinas, 2004, p. 3).

The uses of especially blogs, wikis, emails, podcasts, online videos, concordancers and VLEs in FL teaching have also been widely examined in the literature (e.g., Carretero, 2005; De Juan, 2012; Dejebbari, 2015; García, 2014; Hernández, 2012; Kelsen, 2009; Lesiak-Bielawska, 2015; Pinkman, 2005; Torres et al., 2003), which often stresses the importance of these tools for breaking down teacher-student barriers, developing student creativity and digital and intercultural competence, and making students aware of the importance of English as lingua franca in the globalised world. In spite of the obvious benefits, several authors warn that ICT should not be an end in themselves or a means to pass dated pedagogies off as innovative (Díaz, 2016), but a means to better FL courses firmly based on a communicative approach. Few, though, admit that ICT can actually produce no improvements in the learning outcomes of students (De Juan, op. cit., p. 203). It is also worth pointing out that while the workload of most lecturers is being severely underestimated (Simon, 2014; Alfaro Rocher & Pérez Boullosa, 2011), the literature remains mainly focused on how ICT can help the student, without ever realising that if a lecturer has to devote most work hours to course administration and coordination, innovation is out of the question — they simply do not have the time to even consider it. Among the few who go somehow against the general trend is Simons, who claims that VLEs "pueden servir en la enseñanza superior o en el marco de enseñanza a distancia, teniendo como objetivos sobre todo la disminución de la carga de trabajo para el profesor, una administración de los estudiantes más eficaz y una mayor disponibilidad del material de curso (independiente del lugar y tiempo)" (Simons, 2010, p. 19).

We said above that the communicative approach, ICT and LSP/ESP have largely dominated the theory and practice of FL teaching since the early 1980s. The concept of LSP/ESP began to develop in the 1960s on the basis of pioneering studies such as *The Linguistic Sciences and Language Teaching* (1964), although it did not really come into wide use until two decades later. According to Hutchinson and Waters, ESP would be "an approach to language teaching which aims to meet the needs of particular

learners" (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 21), that is, ESP would take the student-centredness and significant learning goals of the communicative approach one step further. In practice, these needs usually have to do with developing the language skills necessary to communicate effectively in a specific academic or professional context, which makes most ESP courses be aimed at adults with at least a basic knowledge of general English (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998). This aim, which at first glance may seem simple, can actually be quite overwhelming for both students and instructors, given that ESP courses tend to be rather brief and academic and professional interactions can take many different forms and occur across many different channels.

ESP course design is often far from easy, even more so if we take into account that "ESP assumes that the problems are unique to specific learners in specific contexts and thus must be carefully delineated and addressed with tailored-to-fit instruction" (Belcher, 2006, p. 135). Accordingly, the analysis of the learners' needs is regarded in the literature as the most important issue in ESP course design (Dudley-Evans & St. John, op. cit.; Hutchinson & Waters, op. cit.; Robinson, 1991). Once this analysis has been performed, "goals and objectives of the course can be determined, a process which involves consideration of specific grammatical functions, terminology comprehension, and the abilities required for future workplace communication. Last but not least, assessment and evaluation should also be integrated into the design process to ensure that these goals and objectives are achieved" (Gao, 2007, p. 106).

Although much has been written about LSP/ESP not having a distinctive methodology, we quite agree that any LSP/ESP course should include "contenidos gramaticales, discursivos, sociolingüísticos y socioculturales" (Rodríguez-Piñero & García, 2009, p. 923), and "métodos de trabajo que se fundamenten en actividades que frecuentemente desempeñen los profesionales del campo, entre los que destacan la simulación global, los proyectos, las tareas, las presentaciones orales y los estudios de casos" (ibid., p. 924). Accordingly, all the activities in an ESP course should be geared towards helping the students acquire "la lengua que necesitarían emplear en situaciones reales para desempeñar su profesión" (García, op. cit., p. 259), which in turn calls for an integrated skills approach. Besides responding to the same principles, the assessable tasks should also allow the ESP instructor to objectively determine if and to what extent the student is able to use English to communicate effectively across different academic or professional situations. As Ahmed (2014) points out, "ESP tests are based on our understanding of three qualities of specific purpose language: first, that language use varies with context, second, that specific purpose language is precise, and third that there is an interaction between specific purpose language and specific background knowledge" (p. 29).

3. Methodology

During the 2016/2017 academic year, there were 162 students enrolled in *English for Commerce I*, who were divided into four morning and three afternoon sections, and assigned to the authors of the present paper. The experience, which unfolded over the first term of the year, required intensive use of two ICT tools, the Moodle-based UniOvi VLE and the Microsoft Office 365-based UniOvi intranet, as well as a rigorous and detailed four-stage work programme. The first three stages were devoted to creating, marking and reviewing the CA tests: a role play, a UoE and writing test, and a presentation. Finally, the experience was evaluated by the faculty and students involved.

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The role play was done as an out-of-classroom activity to promote autonomous learning and avoid having to cancel classes to make time for the test. The students were asked to make pairs or groups of three and simulate and video record a 4-5 minute business telephone conversation on their smartphones. They also had to edit and submit electronically the resulting file to be double marked on the standardised rubric the lecturers could access on the UniOvi intranet (see Table 1). To our surprise, many students lacked even basic skills in recording, editing, compressing and uploading video, and had to be assisted throughout the whole process.

STUDENT:	
Group score (0-10; 30%)	
Length / structure (0-5)	
Role playing according to instructions (0-5)	
Individual score (0-10; 70%)	
Vocabulary / functions (business telephone English) (0-4)	
Vocabulary / grammar (general) (0-3)	
Pronunciation (0-2)	
Contribution length (0-1)	
TOTAL SCORE:	

Table 1. Standardised grading rubric for the role play.

Behind the first assessable task was the triple aim to motivate the students, develop their digital competence and foster significant, collaborative and, as said above, autonomous learning. That students can greatly benefit from this kind of tasks is further proved by Mejía's study (2016) on the integration of mLearning into foreign language lessons, which explicitly quotes motivation and autonomous learning as major benefits:

> The results of this study then demonstrate that students can achieve the ability to actively take charge of their own learning process by developing a self-independent way of learning. In addition, their self-confidence is boosted and they acquire the positive attitude required to continuing learning the target language (p. 93).

Mejía's study also endorses our claim that the activity promoted significant learning by engaging the students in a dialogue that simulates a business telephone conversation. The majority of individuals in her study attributed a positive value to using the foreign language "in an everyday life activity, which they felt was real and practical" (p. 89).

Collaborative learning was promoted by arranging the students in pairs or groups of three, which fostered peer-peer conversation. Several studies point out that group work is more beneficial for the development of the learners' communicative competence than individual work. Swain et al. (2002), for instance, argue that the collaborative dialogue that governs all interactions between students while practising any of the four main skills has a positive impact on language learning. Martínez Flor and Fernández Guerra broaden the scope of this line of research and conclude that collaborative discourse

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is a valuable asset for developing students' linguistic and pragmatic competence, "as long as we design communicative tasks which target the grammatical and pragmatic features that learners still need to acquire" (Martínez Flor & Fernández Guerra, 2005, p. 105). The role play engaged the students in such kind of collaborative dialogue in order to complete a task that targeted linguistic and pragmatic skills they will need in the workplace.

The second stage of the experience focused on the UoE and writing test. We originally intended to use for this purpose a number of ICT tools tailor-made to carry out computer-based Erasmus language tests at UniOvi, but our request was declined. It was therefore agreed to create the test using the Moodle exam module, mainly because we estimated that the "add random question" option would speed up the creation of different quizzes and the automatic scoring tool, besides speeding up grading, would contribute significantly to achieving uniformity of assessment across sections. Additionally, we considered that a computer-based UoE and writing test would develop the students' digital competence and promote significant learning of ESP.

The design of the second test entailed creating a question bank made up of ninety items, which were then distributed in three categories and ten subcategories (see Figure 1). Six quizzes with ten questions each were manually created so as to prevent questions from being repeated across quizzes. Only the quizzes not initially planned — and necessary for latecomers, excused absentees, special needs students and course sections which had to be splat into smaller groups due to the limited capacity of the Faculty computer labs — were created automatically, but never without ensuring that the system would put questions from every category and subcategory into the quiz.

Figure 1. *Categories and subcategories for the UoE and writing test.*

Some other measures had to be taken to ensure reliability. To this purpose, open and close times were specified for each quiz, a time limit of 45 minutes was set for completion and the number of attempts was limited to one. Besides, the quizzes were only accessible via password, the Safe Exam Browser was activated, and the students were forced to go through the questions in order. Finally, question order was random and different for each student.

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Once all the quizzes had been properly configured, they were previewed and tested in-depth to prevent any technical issues from arising while the test was in progress. A standardised rubric was also created and uploaded to the lecturers' Office workgroup on the UniOvi intranet to ensure consistent assessment of the only question in the quiz which had to be graded manually: an essay question where the students had to write a short professional text.

Given the scarcity and limited capacity of the Faculty computer labs, a request to use them had to be submitted well in advance. After going through a substantial amount of paperwork, each section was granted use of a computer lab on a specific time and date. Nevertheless, as some labs did not have either enough seats or enough working computers, further requests had to be submitted, some course sections splat into smaller groups and, consequently, additional quizzes created. It can also be added that, although the main focus of the experience was the course CA, these problems led us to definitively rule out any possibility of a computer-based common final exam.

For the third test, the students were asked to write the business profile of a well-known multinational company and present it in class with the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, which they had to create and submit electronically the day before. The presentation was delivered in front of their assigned lecturer, who was also in charge of audio recording it on either a digital recorder provided by the Department or their smartphone, and sharing it online with another faculty member for double marking. Although standardised rubrics were also used to grade this test, it should be noted that 10% of the mark was awarded by just one lecturer, as the audio files, for obvious reasons, did not allow for assessment of the non-verbal aspects of the presentation.

Effective presentations are essential in professional communication and, therefore, must be part of the syllabus of any ESP course. Moreover, when considered from a linguistic point of view, they offer very interesting possibilities to foster integrated learning, as a presentation "integra todas las destrezas comunicativas, pues hay que documentarse sobre el tema, seleccionar la información relevante, trasladarla de forma sintetizada a una plantilla de exposición, póster, etc., explicar con algo más de profundidad los datos proporcionados, etc." (Rodríguez-Piñero & García, op. cit., p. 926).

It should not be overlooked either that presentation activities can also promote the practice of non-verbal communication, "still [...] a neglected issue in foreign language teaching" (Surkamp, 2014, p. 15) which nonetheless should play a more prominent role: "As an essential part of communication is non-verbal, communicative competence cannot consist solely of the correct use of verbal language" (ibid.). In fact, the concept of strategic competence within Canale and Swain's model contemplates verbal and non-verbal strategies that a non-native speaker will resort to in an exchange to make up for lacks in grammatical, sociolinguistic or discourse competence. Still, as Birjandi and Nushi (2010) argue, the functions of non-verbal communication should go beyond contributing to "solve communication problems" or "enhance the effectiveness of interaction" (p. 17). In order to raise the students' awareness of the important role non-verbal language plays in all communicative interactions, the standardised rubric used to grade the presentation included assessment of the non-verbal aspects of the delivery (see Table 2).

STUDENT:	
Structure (introduction, development, conclusion) (0-2)	

Specific vocabulary (0-3)	
Vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar (0-2)	
Voice, pace, pronunciation (0-1)	
Non-verbal language (0-1)	
Visual aids (0-1)	
Length penalty (if applicable) (± 15 seconds: -0.5; ± 30 seconds: -1; ± 45 seconds: -1.5; ± 1 minute: -2)	
TOTAL SCORE:	

Table 2. *Standardised grading rubric for the presentation.*

In the fourth phase, devoted to evaluating the experience, the records of student complaints were examined and compared to the previous year. Besides, two questionnaires were created and made available to further measure lecturer and student satisfaction with the experience, and the answers were collected and analysed. Finally, these data were compared against the main aims of the experience.

4. Results

As said above, the means used to evaluate the experience included a register of complaints, two satisfaction questionnaires, one aimed at the lecturers and the other at the students, and several informal interviews with the students. The questionnaires consisted of 10 and 18 items, respectively, and satisfaction was assessed on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree". Table 3 below sums up the methods and results used to evaluate the experience.

Indicator	Method	Average global score	Result
Lecturer satisfaction	Questionnaire	4.5/5	Very satisfied
Student satisfaction	Questionnaire	3/5	Moderately satisfied
No. of complaints	Record keeping	12	Low

Table 3. *Evaluation of the experience.*

4.1. Lecturer satisfaction

The lecturers completed the questionnaire at the end of the term. The average global score was 4.5 out of 5, which reveals a high level of satisfaction with the experience. Figures 2 and 3 represent the questionnaire and the average score per item, respectively.

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LECTURER SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please rate your satisfaction with the CA on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

1. The content of the tests has been consistent with the syllabus across sections: _____
2. The scheduling of the tests has been consistent with the syllabus across sections: _____
3. Test assessment has been conducted fully in accordance with the syllabus across sections: _____
4. The automatic scoring of the UoE test has expedited and ensured uniformity of assessment: _____
5. The time and resources spent creating, marking and reviewing CA tests have diminished compared to the year before: _____
6. The use of ICT has brought the CA tests closer to the working world: _____
7. The use of ICT has brought the written tests closer to the assessment systems used in other educational institutions, especially those responsible for administering ESOL examinations recognised worldwide: _____
8. The integration of ICT in the course has led to improved language learning outcomes: _____
9. The integration of ICT in the course has promoted collaborative learning: _____
10. The experience has improved the students' chances of being considered for a mobility program:

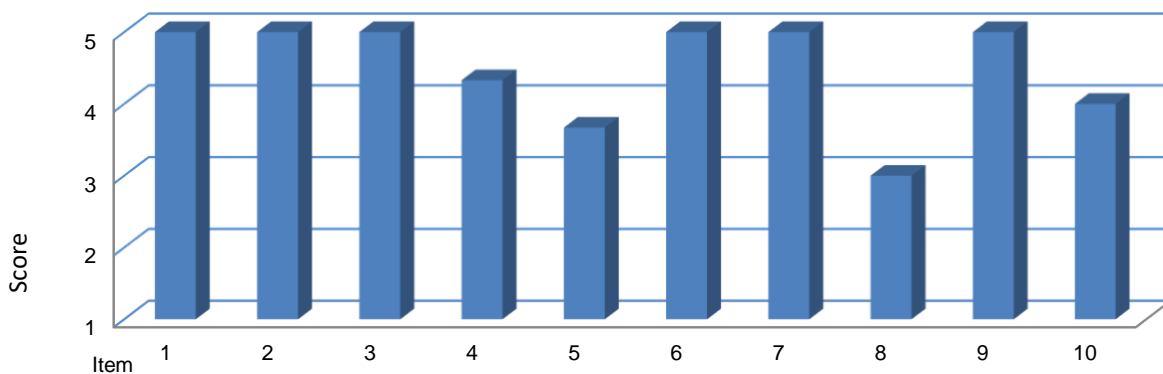*Figure 2*. Lecturer satisfaction questionnaire.

Figure 3. Average score per item – lecturer satisfaction questionnaire.

All the items received at least 3 and, in fact, 8 of 10 items ranked between 4 and 5. The highest scores are found in two different sections of the questionnaire: the first one includes items that analyse if test content, scheduling and assessment were in accordance with the syllabus in all sections (items 1-3); the latter delves specifically into the use/integration of ICT in the course and whether it contributed to better serving the needs of would-be marketing and commerce professionals (items 6, 7 and 9).

The scores of items 4 (4.33) and 5 (3.67) highlight that the use of standardised keys, grading criteria and rubrics, as well as the Moodle automatic scoring tool, did expedite and ensure uniformity of assessment. However, the creation, grading and review of the computer-assisted written test and the decision to double mark the oral tests offset part of the faculty time saved through the use of ICT. Besides implementing the security measures explained above, which were quite time-consuming and tedious, the lecturers had to grade the writing exercise manually and perform a manual revision of the UoE test in case there were answers that had not been included in the lists of acceptable answers. As said above, the scarcity and limited capacity of the Faculty computer labs and the presence of faulty computers in them also led to substantial faculty time-wasting.

The second half of the questionnaire shows that the lecturers consider that the integration of ICT in the course has been beneficial for the students. It has brought the writing test closer to the working world, as computers and especially email play a central role in professional communication (item 6). It has also put the CA in line with the assessment systems used in other educational institutions (item 7). As a matter of fact, it should be noted that most English certification exams (i.e., Cambridge English Qualifications, TOEFL, IELTS, etc.), as well as Erasmus language tests, are nowadays computer-based. Therefore, we believe by introducing our students to this kind of assessment we increase the likelihood of them succeeding at these exams.

Items 6 and 7 become especially relevant if we concur with De Miguel in that we cannot ignore that we are educating future professionals, so we have to "clarificar este perfil, concretando tanto los conocimientos como las destrezas, habilidades, técnicas de trabajo, actitudes y valores que hoy se consideran necesarios para que los titulados puedan adaptarse a un mundo social y laboral en constante proceso de cambio" (De Miguel Díaz, 2003, p. 18). As a matter of fact, item 7 is closely related to item 10, whose score (4) highlights the fact that the experience has also enhanced the students' prospects of participating in mobility programs.

Finally, item 8 received the lowest score (3). Even though the integration of ICT in the course allowed for collaborative, autonomous and significant learning, the learning outcomes — and in consequence the final course grades — were similar to the year before, mainly because many students obtained quite good grades in the role play and, in spite of our warnings, some of them erroneously assumed that the computer-based written tests would be ridiculously easy.

4.2. Student satisfaction

In 2016/2017, 144 out of the 162 students enrolled in the course sat the CA tests. Once they had sat the common final exam, the questionnaire was uploaded to the UniOvi VLE and made available for completion for a week. Even though the rate of students who took the CA tests was very high (88.88%) and the questionnaire was anonymous, only 15 decided to participate in the survey. Figures 4 and 5 represent the questionnaire and the average score per item, respectively.

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STUDENT SATISFACTION QUESTIONNAIRE

Please rate your satisfaction with the CA on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).
1. The CA tests have been conducted in accordance with the syllabus: _____
2. The CA schedule has been adequate: _____
3. The CA tests have been consistent with course content: _____
4. The instructions for each CA test have been clear: _____
5. Attending lectures has had a positive effect on my CA test results: _____
6. I have attended lectures regularly: _____
7. The time allotted to prepare for each oral test (1 week) was enough: _____
8. The time allowed for completing the UoE and writing test (45 minutes) was sufficient: _____
9. The use of video recording and editing tools in the role play has been useful and interesting: _____
10. The use of PowerPoint in the presentation has been useful and interesting: _____
11. The voice recording of the presentation has been useful and interesting: _____
12. The use of the UniOvi VLE for completing the UoE paper has been useful and interesting: _____
13. The use of the UniOvi VLE for doing the writing test has been useful and interesting: _____
14. The knowledge and skills acquired on the course are useful for my academic/professional future: _____
15. The CA tests have helped me to develop my commercial English knowledge and skills: _____
16. The double marking of the oral tests has led to increased objectivity in the assessment of my oral skills: _____
17. The recording of the oral tests has led to increased objectivity in the assessment of my oral skills: _____
18. The use of the UniOvi VLE for assessing the UoE and writing test has led to increased objectivity in the assessment of my written skills: _____

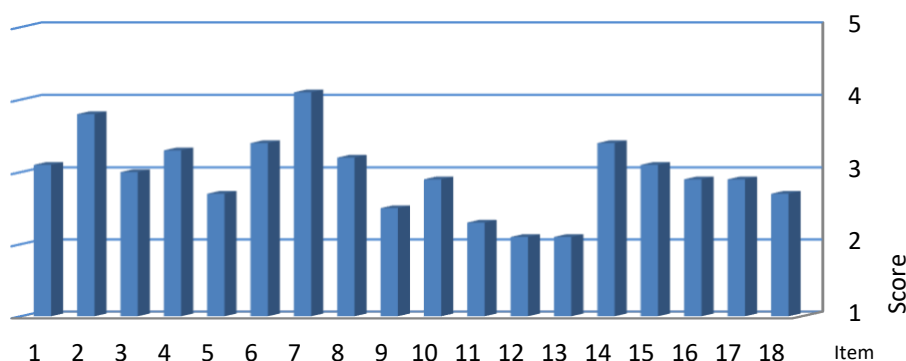*Figure 4. Student satisfaction questionnaire.*

Figure 5. Average score per item – student satisfaction questionnaire.

The average global score was 3, which reveals a moderate level of satisfaction with the experience among the students. Half of the 18 items (items 1-4, 6-8 and 14-15) received scores equal to or higher than 3. More importantly, some of the highest-ranked items highlight that the CA was well scheduled, test timing adequate and the course helped the students develop the language skills they need for the workplace, that is, it met one of the most important aims of an ESP course.

Items 10 and 16-18, related to the use of PowerPoint in the course and the perceived objectivity of the assessment process, also ranked close to 3. Nonetheless, the lecturers found the scores of items 16-18 surprisingly low, as the lack of uniformity in assessment across sections had been the main reason for student unhappiness the year before and, besides, the number of complaints received plunged dramatically compared to 2015-16.

The scores of other items also point out some inconsistencies. For instance, item 6 had a score of 3.4, meaning that the students attended lectures regularly; however, attendance in some sections was very low or very irregular throughout the term. The scores of items 9 (2.5) and 10 (2.9) mean that the students regard the use/integration of ICT as only moderately useful; however, that of item 14 (3.4) points out that they consider the digital and language skills acquired through the course quite useful for their future in the working world.

Finally, items 12 and 13 had the worst score (2.1). This can be partly explained by the fact that some lower-grade students did blame the UniOvi VLE and the computers for their poor performance in the UoE and writing test. That notwithstanding, some other students admitted that they liked paper-based exams better because they think human scorers are more prone to skip mistakes and interpret ambiguous answers in favour of the student.

4.3. Number of complaints

The authors kept record of the complaints received during the term, as well as any relevant information gathered at informal conversations with the students. The number of complaints was evaluated on the following scale: none (0 complaints), very low (1-10 complaints), low (11-15 complaints), moderate (16-20 complaints), high (21-25 complaints) and very high (>=26). In spite of the moderate enthusiasm for the experience the students expressed in the satisfaction questionnaire, the total number of student complaints was 12, that is, low and dramatically lower than the previous year, when tens of students kept complaining throughout the term. Moreover, it goes without saying that the use of ICT greatly sped up the handling of the few complaints received:

- Five lower-grade students blamed the computers for their numerous mistakes in the computer-based written test, explaining they were due to the fact that they had had to type it. They also claimed that the time allowed to complete the test (45 minutes) had not been sufficient. The UniOvi VLE activity logs showed, however, that all the students, including them, had completed it in about 35 minutes. Furthermore, these students made pretty much the same mistakes in the paper-based final exam, which showed that their poor grades had actually nothing to do with the use of a computer.

- Two weeks after the deadline for submitting the role play files, one student insisted that the assessed video was not the one he had submitted. The UniOvi VLE activity logs proved that the lecturers had indeed assessed the file submitted by the student.

- Two students appealed their oral tests marks, arguing that their level of English was much better than that of some others with better marks. The voice and video files stored on the UniOvi VLE and the standardised rubrics allowed the lecturers to easily justify the marks awarded.

- Three students who had hardly attended any lecture complained that the content of the written test was very much related to commercial English. Leaving aside the fact that the course is called *English for Commerce I* for a reason, the syllabus clearly states that one of the main goals of the course is the acquisition of the specific terminology used in the world of marketing and commerce.

- One student demanded to resit all the CA tests just before the end of the term. He claimed he had been busy and had not had time to prepare for them.

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4.4. Results discussion

The results show that aims (1) and (3) were fully met. More specifically, the results bear out that the course contents and methods were successfully updated to allow for significant, collaborative and autonomous learning of commercial English, and the use of ICT also improved faculty coordination and ensured uniformity of content and assessment across sections.

As regards the second aim, the use of ICT did reduce significantly the time the lecturers devoted to reviewing tests and handling complaints, mostly due to a dramatic plunge in student complaints in comparison to the previous year. Nonetheless, the computer-assisted tests took longer to prepare and review than expected. Furthermore, the decision to have every oral test double marked did increase the grading workload to a great extent. That notwithstanding, it allowed the lecturers to prove that when standardised keys, grading criteria and rubrics are properly used by every lecturer in a multi-section course there is no real need for double marking, as the difference between the grades awarded by the two lecturers will be negligible. All in all, we cannot but concur with Gibbs (1995) in that,

> It is common for very large student groups to be divided into smaller groups for the purposes of teaching but for each of the smaller groups to be taught in a different way by a different person with little co-operation or uniformity of approach between those involved. Teams almost always produce better performance than the individuals within them could produce independently ... Simply organising and undertaking teaching on a more co-operative basis could have a dramatic impact on quality (p. 153).

5. Conclusion

The experience shows that ICT can be of invaluable assistance in coordinating multi-section on-site ESP courses at multi-campus third-level institutions. Both Moodle and Office 365 allow for constant faculty collaboration, discussion and supervision regardless of time or place, which effectively prevents discrepancies in content or assessment between sections and, as a consequence, dramatically decreases student unhappiness. Furthermore, ICT also act as a deterrent to faculty uncooperativeness and unjustified student complaints, as they both are well aware that all online activity is logged, traceable and accessible. Unfounded or false claims by either cannot be sustained for long, which obviously speeds up the handling of complaints.

The use of standardised keys, grading criteria and rubrics should be enough to ensure that all students in a multi-section course are assessed fairly in relation with the syllabus. The truth is that it usually is, even though any difference in grades between sections is immediately met with suspicion, especially when it comes to oral exams. The act of recording and digitally storing these exams gives additional guarantee of fair assessment, as students know that should they be assessed otherwise there will be evidence to prove their case. As digital recordings can be easily shared online, assessment validity and reliability can also be further ensured by making two lecturers asynchronously assess every oral exam and upload the score to the VLE, which will then calculate each student's grade as the arithmetic mean between the scores given. This, however, should be a last resource measure to be implemented only when there is every reason to believe that someone may be grading far too leniently or far too severely, as it literally doubles the grading workload of all lecturers.

Computer-based exams also ensure consistency of assessment across sections. Besides automated scoring and lists of acceptable answers, the Moodle question bank allows all faculty full, immediate access to each other's quiz data, which encourages mutual control and eases and speeds up the resolution of grade disputes. Another benefit of these tests is that questions and categories in the bank can be easily and quickly reused, edited and/or rearranged to create additional quizzes for latecomers, excused absentees, special needs students and extra groups, which allows dramatic savings in faculty time. Unlike traditional paper-based exams, these exams also provide teachers with a massive amount of aggregate and disaggregated data, which in turn can be used to improve the course.

The benefits of using technology in a face-to-face, third-level ESP course do not end here. 21st century FL teachers cannot afford to ignore that ICT skills are essential for achieving effective communication, even more so in the workplace, and therefore should integrate them in their syllabi if they truly aim to make learning significant for students. We firmly believe that by integrating audio-visual recording and edition, PowerPoint creation, virtual workgroup, typing and computer-based exams into the CA, we have better served the needs of our students and, therefore, greatly improved the relevance and quality of the course.

We wish student satisfaction had improved equally. Although the number of complaints did plunge compared to the year before, the experience shows that some students welcome the use of ICT in the classroom simply because they erroneously assume that computer-based tests are much easier than paper-based ones, and feel bitterly disappointed when they find out that this form of assessment can be as rigorous — in fact, traditional and computer-based test scores and errors were practically identical, but some lower-grade students convinced themselves that the latter had damaged their grades. Closely related to this is the fact that most Generation Z students just use ICT for social networking (i.e., recreational purposes) and, as the experience bears out, lack or have a very limited knowledge of many digital skills considered essential in today's workplace.

Teachers should not take for granted the digital skillset of their digital-native students. However, for these skills to be effectively integrated into curricula and syllabi much greater effort at institutional level is also necessary. Third-level educational innovation cannot thrive without appropriate institutional support in the form of greater flexibility in procedures and structures, acknowledgment and incentives for innovative teachers (Salinas, op. cit.), and especially substantial, continuous investment. Most universities in Spain, including ours, boast their commitment to educational innovation. However, having had to put up with scarce, cramped computer labs; malfunctioning PCs, and often unreachable, unresponsive VLE administrators, we can only wonder whether this commitment is real or simply rhetorical. Maybe it is real — as long as faculty members are willing to carry the burden of innovation on their own.

About the authors

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