STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE USE OF ICT IN ENGLISH CLASS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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Abstract: The use of ICT tools is frequently regarded as a beneficial and effective method for foreign language learning. In addition to providing tools which can help students improve their language skills, ICT can be used to motivate them and foster their interest and positive attitudes towards language learning. On the other hand, overwhelmed by a number of learning tools and apps available, as well as the multitasking required for such a learning experience, some students may find them distracting, which leads to a lower quality in the work produced.

Despite the abundance of existing studies on the topic, very few have addressed the use of ICT at the tertiary level, and almost none have aimed at including students from two different countries in the Balkan region. Hence, the present study aims to explore the attitudes of university students at two tertiary institutions in Slovenia and Croatia towards the use of ICT in their language learning classrooms. The results were obtained using an online questionnaire and were further quantitatively analysed using descriptive statistics and a t-test for unpaired samples. According to the results, the vast majority of the students acknowledge the importance of ICT tools and highlight their usefulness in relation to learning English. However, a difference between the groups is observed in the frequency of usage and types of online tools used in their language learning process. Finally, the results of this study show that the integration of ICT in learning should be carefully and thoughtfully planned in advance. Although prevalent in language settings, ICT should not be seen as a sole replacement for face-to-face learning sessions, but as a necessary complement to English classes. Teachers should first consider the diverse comfort levels and technological proficiencies of students to ensure that ICT enhances, rather than hinders, the learning process.

Keywords: language learning, English, ICT, students' attitudes, tertiary level, Slovenia, Croatia

1. Introduction

The great influence of technology on the field of education in the present day cannot be overstated (Hernandez, 2017; 341). Computers and projectors have become indispensable in the modern classroom, and technology has allowed teaching to escape the limitations of the physical location of learning, for example, through virtual education, distance learning, MOOCs, and blended learning, to name just a few (Rahim, 2019; 1165). Technology has penetrated all areas of education, with the field of English as a foreign language being no exception. In fact, technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) has become an increasingly active research field in recent years, accompanied by an increased number of practices of TELL in the classroom (Zhang and Zou, 2022; 698). The use of ICT has been shown to have a positive influence on the language learning process in many ways. In addition to providing tools which can help students improve their language skills (Balbay and Kills, 2017; Caldwell, 2020), ICT can be used to motivate them and grow their interest and positive attitudes towards language learning (Al Arif and Handayani, 2022; 25; Tran, 2020; 43). ICT tools can also provide opportunities for collaboration and interaction (Al Arif, *Indonesian University Students' Perception, 2019a;* 133) and foster student autonomy by providing access to digital course materials at home (Balbay and Kills, 2017; 236). Furthermore, the use of mobile technologies in combination with, for example, response systems that allow students to reply to instructor questions has been shown to improve student perception and engagement (Heflin et al., 2017; 93). Finally, outside the classroom, technology can provide opportunities for self-initiated use of English for students, for example, through using search engines, digital gaming, or watching YouTube videos (Lamb and Arisandy, 2020; 86).

However, the use of technology in the classroom also has some potential drawbacks. The exciting opportunities for independent use of digital technologies outside the classroom can also have a demotivating effect in formal learning settings, where ICT use may seem dry and dull to students in comparison (Lamb and Arisandy, 2020; 87). The multitasking required by the use of mobile devices might be distracting for some students, leading to the lower quality of the work produced (Heflin et al., 2017; 92). Another important thing to consider is the possibility that students might lack the information literacy skills needed to work with ICT efficiently (Tri and Nguyen, 2014; 43). Teachers might need to employ different ICT tools because they all have their primary functions as well as their limitations (Heflin et al., 2017; 98). Given the advantages that ICT can provide, as well as the potential pitfalls or

barriers related to its use in the language classroom, studies of students' attitudes towards its use in different contexts are of great relevance. For this reason, the present study aims to investigate attitudes towards the use of ICT for English language learning among students at two different universities in a post-COVID learning environment.

2. Literature review

Technology has been applied to assist language learning and teaching for decades, and educators are generally encouraged to use technology in their teaching process in order to prepare students for life in this globalised, technologically interconnected world (Chun et al., 2016; 65; Shadiev and Yang, 2020; 524). As technology affects how language is used in specific contexts, it is the teacher's task to encourage students to consider language use across different media and technologies (Chun et al., 2016; 65). That is why it is not surprising that technology is used in virtually all aspects of language learning, and studies have pointed out its usefulness for improving the quality of input, enhancing the authenticity of communication and providing feedback (Ghanizadeh et al., 2015; 74). There are numerous ways technology can be applied to language learning. In the broad sense, technology can be defined as all mediating resources used in the classroom such as video, images or audio recordings, while in the narrow sense, it is usually taken to include the use of digital devices such as computers (Chun et al., 2016; 64). In their review of 398 articles on technology-assisted language learning, Shadiev and Yang list topics covered by relevant research, such as automated feedback, social networking, games, corpora, instant messaging, virtual reality, websites and digital resources, speech recognition, collaborative writing tools, electronic dictionaries, voice recording and online video (2020; 529-537). Most of the analysed studies reported positive results, i.e. better outcomes when learning was supported by technology, as well as positive perceptions towards the technology used. Zhang and Zou reviewed TELL studies published after 2016, which focused on topics such as mobile learning, multimedia-assisted language learning and speak-to-text and text-to-speech recognition. These technologies were mostly employed to encourage practice, deliver content, facilitate interactions and restructure teaching approaches, generally reporting positive results concerning the learning outcomes and motivation of the students. The authors of this study also warn of the rapid pace of changing technology, which means that any review does not remain relevant for long (2022; 670). For example, with the launch of ChatGPT in 2022, the last two years have brought an increased interest in the potential of artificial intelligence (AI) solutions

in language learning as well as in the ethical considerations that have to be taken into account (Belda-Medina and Calvo-Ferrer, 2022; Hartono et al., 2023). In any case, it is impossible to ignore technology in the language-learning classroom. As Chun et al. put it: "It is so pervasive and so interwoven with human activity that to teach language without some form of technology would create a very limited and artificial learning environment." (2016; 65).

Generally speaking, the use of technology in the language learning classroom has been found to be as effective as traditional language learning, providing additional benefits such as increased learning motivation and more efficient means of learning for language learners (Shadiev and Yang, 2020; 524). For example, the use of mobile devices in language classrooms has been found to encourage positive attitudes, enthusiasm and engagement (Kukulska-Hulme and Viberg, 2018; 214), provide more opportunities for oral communication practice (Ilic, 2015;19) and support the learners' self-confidence as L2 users (Ushioda, 2011; 12).

On the other hand, in their review of studies on the effectiveness of technology, Golonka et al. (2014) also point out a lack of straightforward evidence on its effectiveness in the studies reviewed. Technology can sometimes be seen as harmful to the development of thinking and literacy, especially in young people, and can even cause physical discomfort and negative emotions (Chun et al., 2016; 65; Shadiev and Yang, 2020; 539). Learner proficiency may also influence the extent to which they benefit from TELL. According to Zhang and Zou (2022; 27), the results of relevant studies are not conclusive, but they do point to the importance of designing TELL activities to make them suitable for learners' proficiency levels and to provide them with sufficient scaffolding (for low-achievers) or enough challenges (for high-achievers). Other potential issues that have been reported by studies are, among others, superficial interaction, distraction from learning tasks, technical issues with software and hardware and safety concerns (Ogunduyile, 2013; Shadiev and Yang, 2020; Yang and Xie, 2013). For example, information overload can be a problem when using the internet to search for appropriate vocabulary (Lim, 2014; 366), which points to the important role of teachers in the process of technology use in the language classroom. They are the ones who should provide guidance and effective learning strategies, so that learners can benefit from the process and so that the potential negative effects on technology use are minimised (Shadiev and Yang, 2020; 539). As Webb and Doman (2020; 22) put it, the teacher is partly responsible for getting students to see the value of technology in this context. However, for this

to be possible, teachers need to possess the necessary skills, both in using digital tools and integrating them into their teaching (Li and Ni, 2011; 70). Teachers might not have these skills, and this is why it is important to offer suitable training and support. Similarly, a lack of training sessions aimed at increasing the level of students' technology acceptance can negatively influence the effectiveness of TELL (Zhang and Zou, 2022; 26). For example, Shyr and Chen (2018) familiarised their students with the technologies used before conducting a flipped classroom, and the results showed positive results on the students' learning achievements and motivation. Finally, the sense of freshness that the students may experience when certain tools are first used may be lost, resulting in a decrease in the positive effects of TELL (Zhang and Zou, 2022; 26). The authors suggest the application of new digital elements and technology-enhanced strategies to counter this problem and maintain students' learning motivation and engagement.

When it comes to student attitudes towards ICT use in the language classroom, research in tertiary contexts in various countries has indicated that they are mostly positive. For example, Tri and Nguyen (2014;43) have found that Vietnamese university students had very positive attitudes towards the benefits of technology for English language learning and expected more frequent use of this technology in the classroom. Indonesian university students also found ICT to be easy, useful and beneficial for English language learning (Al Arif and Handayani, 2022; 31-32). Liu et al. (2022; 7-8) found that Chinese university students had positive attitudes towards the application of automatic speech recognition software for language learning, recognizing its advantages such as the scoring mechanism which stimulated their intrinsic motivation and encouraged them to continue practising. Webb and Doman (2020; 25-26) investigated the effect of flipped classrooms on learner attitudes towards technologically enhanced language learning and found a general development of positive attitudes in learners, with learners reporting that technology helped them master content in English, as well as their digital skills. The learners, university students from Macau, Colombia and the USA, felt that technology helped them stay organised and provided more opportunities to practice English skills, but they also found it more engaging than traditional classes. Tran and Duong (2021; 147) studied 425 non-English majors' attitudes towards autonomous technology-based language learning and found positive attitudes. The participants were highly conscious of and had positive feelings about the role of technology in autonomous language learning; however, they were unsure whether they would actually use technology in language learning themselves, prompting the authors to recommend

that they should be motivated and instructed in how to use technology for language learning.

On the other hand, Afshari et al. (2013; 858) looked at the attitudes of 100 students towards computer-assisted language learning (CALL). As opposed to the previously described studies, the students showed moderate attitudes towards CALL, with perceived ease of use and perceived usefulness directly and significantly affecting their attitudes. The authors emphasise the need to train learners in computer skills and to help foster a more positive attitude. On the teachers' side, Caldwell's study identified that while Japanese teachers see merits in integrating ICT into their teaching practice, they also face many barriers in this process, which may be of a financial, pedagogical or cultural nature (2020; 12). Similar results were obtained by Saidouni and Bahloul (2016; 137-138), with teachers mentioning issues with internet access and large classes, warning that more preparation is needed to integrate technology in the language classroom successfully.

In conclusion, research into technology in the language learning classroom has shown that it can have a very positive effect on numerous aspects of the language learning process. However, studies have also pointed to a variety of potential negative effects and issues. Both researchers and teachers have consistently emphasised that certain conditions need to be fulfilled to fully reap the benefits of technology-assisted language learning. For this reason, it is important to conduct more studies exploring the situation in different tertiary contexts, which is why the present study aims to provide insight into how students at two tertiary institutions in Slovenia and Croatia perceive the use of ICT in their language learning classrooms.

3. Methodology

Despite the abundance of existing studies on the topic, very few have addressed the use of ICT at the tertiary level, and almost none have aimed at including students from two different countries in the Balkan region. Apart from filling this research gap, this study was also initiated in response to the teachers' observation that some students appeared to be experiencing a sense of saturation with these tools. In order to investigate students' attitudes towards the use of ICT in English class, convenience sampling was employed for data collection during the spring term of the academic year 2022/2023. The first group (N=98) consisted of the students enrolled in the English study programme at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia, while the second group (N=35) included the students studying English as part of their Teacher Education programme at the Faculty of Humanities and Social

Sciences of the University of Split in Croatia.

For the purpose of gathering data, an online questionnaire was used as a basic research instrument. The questionnaire is based on the questions and items found in similar research studies (Garcia et al., 2013; Silin and Kwok, 2017; Nagy and Habók, 2018), but it is tailored to pinpoint the use of ICT in English language learning. It is divided into three parts. In the first part the students self-assess their English language knowledge using the CEFR as an international standard (from B1 – Intermediate to C2 – Proficient). The second part measures the students' experience and their attitudes. It contains 23 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale, which examine four dependent variables related to the use of ICT for language learning: general use, perceived ease of use, perceived usefulness and students' attitudes (values range from 1 – strongly disagree to 5 – strongly agree). Table 1 gives an overview of the four variables, including representative items and their respective Cronbach's Alpha (CA) values. The final part centres around the frequency of using ICT in the classroom, on the one hand, and the frequency of using ICT outside the classroom, on the other (1 – never/rarely, 2 – sometimes, 3 – often/always).

Dependent variable	Reliability statistics (CA)
General use (5 items), e.g. *I use ICT as part of my learning process.* *I cannot study without the use of ICT tools.*	0.579
Perceived ease of use (4 items), e.g. *It is easy to find English learning resources using ICT.* *Learning English with the use of ICT is easy.*	0.747
Perceived usefulness (7 items), e.g. *I find ICT a useful tool when I learn English.* *ICT helps me to develop English skills.*	0.857
Attitudes towards the use of ICT (7 items), e.g. *I like the idea of using ICT.* (+) *Using ICT makes me nervous.*(-)	0.823

Table 1. Dependent variables in the second part of the questionnaire.

The quantitative data were further analysed using the statistical package IBM SPSS 22.00, employing descriptive statistics, a t-test for independent samples and a Mann-Whitney U test, to address the following:

1. How do students rate the usefulness of ICT and its ease of use?

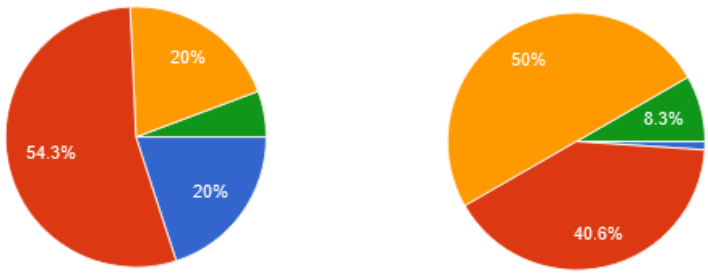
2. What is their general attitude towards the use of ICT?
3. To what extent do these attitudes differ among English language students in the two different countries on the one hand, and students of different study programmes, on the other?
4. Which ICT tools do they use and how often?
5. Are there any differences in the use of ICT tools for language learning in the classroom and language learning outside the classroom?

In accordance with these research questions, the following null hypotheses were tested:
Ho (1): There is no statistically significant difference related to the use of ICT between the two groups of students,
Ho (2): There is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of using ICT tools in the classroom between the two groups of students, and
Ho (3): There is no statistically significant difference in the frequency of using ICT tools outside the classroom between the two groups of students.

4. Findings

Figure 1 shows the students' profiles based on the self-assessment of their language knowledge. As can be seen, the majority of the Croatian students (74.3%) think their English knowledge is at the B2 or C1 level, while the percentage for these two levels is considerably higher for the Slovenian students (90.6%). Given that the latter are English majors, the obtained self-assessment results are to be expected. However, it should be noted that proficiency in English did not play a pivotal role in students' experience with ICT, as these tools can effectively support language learning across all proficiency levels.

Croatia *Slovenia*



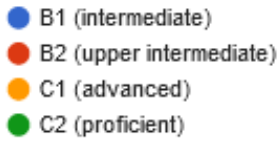


Figure 1. Self-assessment of students' English language knowledge.

Regarding the students' opinions about the importance of ICT tools for language learning, independent-samples t-tests were used to compare the scores for the dependent variables for Croatian and Slovenian students. The findings, summarised in Table 2, indicate that there is no significant statistical difference between the two examined groups in scores for perceived ease of use (t=1.018, p=0.314), perceived usefulness (t=0.910, p=0.368) and students' attitudes (t=1.493, p=0.142).

	COUNTRY	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	*t*	*p*
generaluse_AVERAGE	Slovenia	96	3.7062	0.53031	2.377	0.019
	Croatia	35	3.4343	0.69871		
easeofuse_AVERAGE	Slovenia	97	4.0026	0.55726	1.018	0.314
	Croatia	35	3.8500	0.82069		
usefulness_AVERAGE	Slovenia	96	3.9003	0.51659	0.910	0.368
	Croatia	34	3.7563	0.87041		
attitude_AVERAGE	Slovenia	96	3.9777	0.51208	1.493	0.142
	Croatia	35	3.7673	0.77404		

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and t-test results for four variables.

According to the mean results, the students acknowledge the importance of ICT tools, claim that they are easy to use and highlight their usefulness when learning English. In addition, their overall attitude is mainly positive. On the other hand, the t-test showed a significant difference in terms of general use ($p<0.05$, $p=0.019$), because the average scores for two items were higher for the Slovenian students (Table 3), who seem to regard ICT tools as more indispensable for learning. The first null hypothesis is, hence, partially confirmed.

Item	Country	N	Mean	SD	*t*	*p*
I use ICT as part of my learning process.	Slovenia	98	4.29	0.642	3.901	0.000
	Croatia	35	3.46	1.197		
I cannot study without the use of ICT tools.	Slovenia	97	3.18	1.061	2.037	0.044
	Croatia	35	2.74	1.120		

Table 3. Statistically significant differences in individual items.

Interestingly enough, after looking into individual items in the questionnaire, the findings also reveal that one third of the students do not solely rely on online tools when studying and state that they can learn without the use of ICT tools. Although belonging to the generation of digital natives, one in ten students admits that interacting with ICT for English language learning does require mental effort and that using these tools for language learning makes them nervous. With regard to the use of ICT in the classroom, both groups have such experience because their teachers (sometimes referred to as digital immigrants) are active users of online tools. However, almost 23% do not agree that ICT enables English language teachers to provide them with more individualised attention.

The two groups were also compared in terms of the frequency of using ICT tools in class with teachers and outside the classroom when they learn on their own. The students could choose how often they access various tools for the purpose of language learning, in particular, social media (SM), YouTube (YT), websites (WS), apps (AP), games (GM), translation tools (TR), online dictionaries (OD) and Moodle (MD). For this purpose, the Mann-Whitney U Test was used because the data are ordinal. Some students also specified their favourite tools for learning, such as Mentimeter, Kahoot, Quizlet, or Grammarly. According to the results of the nonparametric test (Table 4), there is no statistically significant difference between the students from the two countries only in the frequency of accessing YouTube ($Z=-1.791$, $p=0.073$) and websites in class ($Z=-1.291$, $p=0.197$). Both groups often access different websites and watch YouTube videos in language class. It is assumed, based on the nature and dynamics of English classes at the tertiary level, that the teacher engages students by playing a video or showing an educational content online, which then serves as a prompt for further discussion or additional activities.

	SM	YT	WS	AP	GM	TR	OD	MD
Mann-Whitney U	1145.000	1385.000	1490.000	1002.000	1188.000	1068.500	1166.000	1199.000
Z	-4.097	-1.791	-1.291	-4.329	-3.640	-3.484	-3.240	-2.834
p (2-tailed)	0.000	0.073	0.197	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	0.005

Table 4. The Mann-Whitney U test results for the frequency of using ICT tools in class.

On the other hand, a statistically significant difference was observed for all other ICT tools used in class ($p<0.05$). Therefore, the second hypothesis is rejected. Taking a closer look at the percentages, it can be concluded that the non-English majors in Croatia tend to use social media, online translation tools, apps and games more frequently than the English majors in Slovenia. Furthermore, the English majors in Slovenia tend to use Moodle more frequently than the non-English majors in Croatia. This stems directly from the fact that Moodle is widely used at the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana as an online platform for sharing learning content.

Finally, when it comes to the use of ICT tools outside the classroom, the results differ to a certain extent. As shown in Table 5, the Mann Whitney U test revealed no significant difference in the frequency of using social media ($Z=-0.851$, $p=0.395$) and YouTube ($Z=-0.408$, $p=0.683$) between the two groups when they learn on their own, outside the classroom setting. Social media is an integral part in the lives of younger generations, mainly used for entertainment purposes, but also for learning, as was proven here.

	SM	YT	WS	AP	GM	TR	OD	MD
Mann-Whitney U	1565.500	1648.500	1229.000	1166.500	1280.000	1242.500	767.000	1199.000
Z	-0.851	-0.408	-3.047	-2.575	-2.578	-2.388	-5.968	-2.943
p (2-tailed)	0.395	0.683	0.002	0.010	0.010	0.017	0.000	0.003

Table 5. The Mann-Whitney U test results for the frequency of using ICT tools outside the classroom.

However, differences between the groups were observed again in the frequency of usage of most ICT tools used as part of their language learning process ($p<0.05$). This leads to the conclusion that the third hypothesis is also rejected. To illustrate the point, the non-English majors in Croatia tend to use apps, online translation tools and games more often outside the classroom than the English majors in Slovenia. Another significant difference lies in the use of websites, online dictionaries and Moodle, which are accessed more frequently by the English majors in Slovenia.

5. Discussion

The present study aims to explore the attitudes of university students at two tertiary institutions in Slovenia and Croatia towards the use of ICT in their language learning classroom. As expected, the students from both groups expressed generally positive attitudes. They were aware of the importance of ICT tools in the language classroom, they found them easy to use and useful for learning English, with no significant differences between the groups. These results are in line with other studies in different tertiary contexts, which reported on students' positive attitudes and their awareness of the potential benefits of ICT for the language learning process (e.g. Al Arif and Handayani, 2022; Liu et al., 2022; Tran and Duong, 2021; Tri and Nguyen, 2014). However, there was a statistically significant difference between the two groups in the scores for general use, with the Slovenian students reporting more frequently that they find ICT an indispensable part of their language learning process. The digitalisation of education is the official policy in both the Republic of Croatia and Slovenia, based on the European Union initiative as elaborated in the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)[1], which has two long-term strategic priorities: 1) to foster the development of high performing digital education ecosystem, and 2) to enhance digital skills and competences for the digital transformation. However, there are many challenges to this process, such as uneven access to technology, the need for additional teacher training, as well as securing data privacy and internet safety for students. According to the findings of the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, only 54% of people aged 16-74 have at least basic digital skills (2023). The percentage is much higher for the younger population aged 16-24 (71%), however, 34% of students were rated as underachieving in digital skills. For that reason, it could be argued that

[1] Slovenia: https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MVI/SDIG/SI-Digital-Education-Action-Plan-EN-web.pdf

the students in the sample may still not have experienced an education setting where technology is indispensable, which may be why a third (30.1%) stated that they can learn without the use of ICT tools.

Although the students generally reported positive attitudes, it is interesting to note that one in ten stated that interacting with ICT required mental effort and that using ICT for language learning made them nervous. Previous studies have found that a negative effect of the use of ICT in the classroom may be the high cognitive load it brings (Chu, 2014; 341), and the multitasking required by the use of devices in the classroom has also been found to be potentially distracting (Heflin et al., 2017; 92). Some studies also reported on potential negative effects such as physical discomfort (Shadiev and Yang, 2020; 539). Thus, it is not surprising that some of the students in our study also reported on some potentially negative feelings in relation to technology use.

Both groups stated that their language teachers used ICT in their language classes. However, almost a quarter of the students reported that this does not necessarily enable teachers to give them more individualised attention (for example, feedback on individual tasks submitted online or through formative assessment activities delivered digitally). Although one potential benefit of ICT in the language classroom can be seen as its potential for allowing more personalisation, this has not always lived up to expectations (FitzGerald et al., 2018). Effective use of ICT in the classroom and taking advantage of all the benefits it can bring still depends largely on individual teachers – notably their digital competences as well as the time available to them to invest in, for example, providing individualised attention to students using digital tools.

The participants reported on using different digital tools in class and when learning on their own. YouTube and websites were used by both groups of students in the classroom, while there were statistical differences between the reported frequencies for other tools. The Slovenian students, for example, use Moodle, which is not surprising, as it is a widely used platform at their faculty. On the other hand, the Croatian students reported using apps and games more frequently in class, which may stem from the fact that they are studying Teacher Education to become teachers at the primary level, where they work with young children. This prompts their language teachers to resort to these kinds of activities in class more often. Outside the classroom, YouTube and social media were reported by both groups as digital tools used for language learning, which is not surprising given the importance of social media for younger generations. Other studies have also found that university students often use social media for language learning

(e.g., Al Arif, *The Use of Social Media,* 2019b; Slim and Hafedh, 2019), and the potential of different social media apps and sites for language learning has been an important topic given their general availability and popularity with young people (Lin et al., 2016).

Although the results of the present study show the students' perception of ICT use in the language learning classroom is generally positive, some of the results may serve as a reminder that the use of ICT for language learning in tertiary contexts should continuously be reassessed in order to reap the benefits. The application of technology in language learning should never be seen as an end in itself – how it is incorporated should directly stem from the learning goals and the learners' interests and their abilities, but it will also inevitably be affected by the available resources and the institutional policy (Chun et al., 2016; 76). In order to maximise the positive effects, students should be given further explanation of why technology is being applied and how it can help with their learning, as well as guidance on which tools and devices to use effectively (Zou, 2020; 225). In other words, much depends on the teachers themselves and the institutions that they work for. It is important to invest time in preparing students to use ICT tools for language learning efficiently (Shyr and Chen, 2018; 60). However, for this to be possible, it is of crucial importance to make sure that teachers know not only how to use digital tools, but also how to integrate them efficiently in their classes (Li and Ni, 2011; 70). This is not always the case as teachers have reported that they face different barriers when it comes to technology use in the classroom (Caldwell, 2020; Saidouni and Bahloul, 2016). The studies also showed that university teachers need more support and systematic training when it comes to the implementation of ICT in their classes in both Croatia (Müller and Aleksa Varga, 2019; 42-43) and Slovenia (Špur et al., 2020; 674). It is critical that university teachers be able to determine the best possible approach to incorporating technology by evaluating their students' learning goals, the resources they have at their disposal, and the potential ways to assess the effectiveness of their students' use of these resources in achieving the established learning goals (Chun et al., 2016; 76-77). Some other recommendations for teachers might include the use of ICT tools that have been found to facilitate interaction, collaboration and application of newly acquired knowledge in the classroom, such as social media, interactive games and collaborative tools such as *Google Docs*, as well as the use of the flipped classroom model (Zhang and Zou, 2022; 23).

6. Conclusion

The use of ICT fosters greater student autonomy, as learners can access resources and engage in activities, thereby extending learning opportunities. This research study once again confirmed the generally positive attitude the students of different study programmes have towards the use of ICT tools for foreign language learning, both inside and outside the classroom setting. Although it was only limited to a smaller sample, the obtained data provide more understanding of the students' experience and learning habits related to the use of different tools. Future research could further investigate the potential of ICT by including students of other study programmes from different countries and could also focus on longitudinal studies to explore the long-term impact of ICT on language proficiency. Moreover, a correlation between their attitudes, be it positive and negative, and their academic outputs could be established. In addition, more focus should be put on the teachers' perspective, especially how they use ICT tools in class and whether the age differences have an impact on their ICT teaching methods (cf. Keržič et al., 2021).

To conclude, this paper highlights the importance of using ICT in language learning in a systematised and organised manner, especially because these tools nowadays present an inevitable part of the language learning process. Nevertheless, a notable finding of this study relates to a surprisingly high number of students who feel intimidated by the overuse of these tools. Therefore, it is essential that their integration in learning be carefully and thoughtfully planned in advance. The responsibility for this should not lie on teachers, but on curriculum developers and educational policymakers. The study's findings underscore the need for increased professional development for teachers in Slovenia and Croatia, who need to be provided with the necessary guidance in the form of practical sessions, workshops and technical support.

Although prevalent in language settings, ICT should not be seen as a sole replacement for face-to-face learning sessions, but as a necessary complement to English classes. Teachers should first consider the diverse comfort levels and technological proficiencies of students to ensure that ICT enhances, rather than hinders, the learning process. The results of this study can help teachers provide a better learning setting and also find more effective ways to help students acquire language skills by integrating these tools into their curriculum, but more importantly, by first acknowledging potential drawbacks and challenges associated with their use. Insights into how students in both countries prefer to learn could be used to create more personalised learning pathways. The

findings on student preferences can guide the development of language curricula that accommodate various learning styles and emphasise autonomous learning practices by giving students the flexibility to learn at their own pace.

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EINSTELLUNG DER STUDIERENDEN ZUM EINSATZ VON IKT IM ENGLISCHUNTERRICHT IM TERTIÄRBEREICH

Der Einsatz von IKT-Tools wird häufig als nutzbringende und effektive Methode für das Erlernen von Fremdsprachen angesehen. Neben der Bereitstellung von Instrumenten, die den Studierenden helfen können, ihre Sprachkenntnisse zu verbessern, können IKT eingesetzt werden, um sie zu motivieren und ihr Interesse und ihre positive Einstellung zum Sprachlernen zu fördern. Auf de anderen Seite, überwältigt von einer Reihe verfügbarer Lerntools und Apps sowie dem Multitasking, das für eine solche Lernerfahrung erforderlich ist, können einige Studierenden sie als ablenkend empfinden, was zu einer geringeren Qualität der produzierten Arbeit führt.

Trotz der Zahl bestehender Studien zu diesem Thema haben sich nur sehr wenige mit dem Einsatz von IKT im Tertiärbereich befasst, und fast keine hat darauf abgeziehlt, Studierende aus zwei verschiedenen Ländern der Balkanregion einzubeziehen. Daher ziehlt die vorliegende Studie darauf ab, die Einstellungen von Studierenden an zwei Hochschulen (Universitäten) in Slowenien und Kroatien zum Einsatz von IKT in ihrem Sprachunterricht zu untersuchen. Die Ergebnisse wurden mit Hilfe eines Online-Fragebogens erhoben und mit Hilfe von deskriptiver Statistik und einem t-Test für ungepaarte Stichproben weiter quantitativ analysiert. Den Ergebnissen zufolge erkennt die überwiegende Mehrheit der Studenten und Studentinnen die Bedeutung von IKT-Tools an und hebt deren Nutzen für das Erlernen der englischen Sprache hervor. Ein Unterschied zwischen den Gruppen zeigt sich jedoch in der Häufigkeit der Nutzung und der Art der Online-Tools, die für ihren Sprachlernprozess verwendet werden. Schließlich zeigen die Ergebnisse dieser Studie, dass die Integration von IKT in das Lernen im Voraus sorgfältig geplant werden sollte. Obwohl IKT in sprachlichen Umgebungen weit verbreitet sind, sollten sie nicht als alleiniger Ersatz für Präsenzunterricht angesehen werden, sondern als notwendige Ergänzung zum Englischunterricht. Lehrer sollten zunächst die unterschiedlichen Komfortebenen und technologischen Fähigkeiten der Studierenden berücksichtigen um sicherzustellen, das IKT den Lernprozess verbessert und nicht behindert.

Schlüsselwörter: Sprachenlernen, Englisch, IKT, Einstellung der Studierenden, Tertiärstufe, Hochschule, Slowenien, Kroatien