

Rosabel Roig-Vila (Ed.)

# La docencia en la Enseñanza Superior

Nuevas  
aportaciones  
desde la  
investigación  
e innovación  
educativas

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Editorial

*La docencia en la Enseñanza Superior. Nuevas aportaciones desde la investigación e innovación educativas*

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## 115. Memes and Twitter as ICT-friendly Formats of Feedback and Self-assessment Tested within the CLIL Course at the Faculty of Education

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### ABSTRACT

At tertiary education, in courses delivered in a Foreign Language, recurrently, once professors demand feedback from the students, the latter become afraid of performing poorly and hence avoid participation. Yet, Feedback and self-assessment play a complementary outstanding role within the CLIL teaching methodology, as the students are co-responsible for their own learning. This study entails research carried out with a sample of 87 students undertaking a CLIL course delivered at the Bachelor's Degree of Primary Education and at the Bachelor's Degree on Early Childhood Education at the University of Alicante. The research conducted predicted that the use of ICTs, namely memes and Twitter, would result in consistent methods for producing feedback and self-assessment. The objective of the study accomplished was to test their effectiveness. Data was gathered by means of unstructured written artefacts; both digitally and written, for the designated m-learning tasks were regarded as providers of the necessary bond with the iGen. Concerning the registration tool, checklists were created and used through coherence with the research questions. Preliminary findings seem to indicate that the student-friendly tools selected proved to be effective in terms of obtaining truthful feedback and self-assessment from students. Further investigation on the appropriateness of screen-related methods for self-assessment and feedback remains essential.

**KEY WORDS:** feedback, self-assessment, CLIL, ICTs, iGen.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

At tertiary education, in quite many of the courses imparted in a Foreign Language (FL), it tends to occur that when professors demand either feedback or participation on the part of the students, the latter seem to be afraid of not performing properly, and hence there is a lesser amount of participation (Gopinath, 1999; Imbernon, 2008; Kolb & Kolb, 2005; Morell, 2009). Learners remain silent, whilst professors deem it crucial to gain an insight into how their students feel towards the design and development of the subject with the aim of improving the effectiveness of the curriculum.

Equally, on occasions, when higher education learners observe that self-assessment accounts for some percentage of their GPA; the mark suggested by the students may not reflect actual performance and abilities, but the desired one. This tends not to be the case, especially with better performing students (Boud & Falchikov, 1989; Stefani, 1992), but it befalls more often with those performing poorly (Black & Harrison, 2001:43). Students become instrumentally motivated and predominantly focus on marks (Gibbs and Simpson 2004-2005; Higgins, Hartley, and Skelton 2002a).

The power of feedback in education resides in the fact that it can assist students to understand, participate in, or develop effective strategies for processing the concepts and skills intended to be taught (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Feedback needs to be clear, purposeful, meaningful, and compatible with students' prior knowledge.

Despite a fair amount of on-going debate amongst scholars, a not insignificant amount has been written and researched regarding the importance of receiving feedback from students (Bailey & Garner, 2010; Burke, 2009; Evans, 2013; Ferguson, 2011). Part of the debate, however, places its focus on whether or not the issue has fully developed its exploration potential, as suggested by the term ‘Cinderella’ coined by Hounsell (2007).

A great deal of the studies conducted thus far with regard to feedback have dealt with three main subtopics, namely if the students are well acquainted with the expected assessment criteria (Higgins, Hartley & Skelton, 2002), what the students’ experience and perception is (Carless 2006; Hounsell 1987), and lastly, linguistic scrutiny on the language utilized. From our student-centred constructivist approach (Biggs, 1999; Brown and Glover 2005; Hounsell 2007), the second is the one of interest for this study. The work of Poulas and Mahony (2007) associates the success of feedback with the positive perception of their teachers by the students, and the reliance in them and in their teaching. Good teaching and good feedback go hand in hand. This paper contributes to this line of research as it explores the way prospective teachers feel towards their professors and their teaching.

On the contrary, fewer research studies have been carried out focusing on the point of view of the professors, a circumstance that falls outside the realm of this research. However, such a perspective would undoubtedly lead the way for further investigation on the topic of feedback in an unlike and interesting manner.

Parallel to the fast pace at which changes occur in education, which affect the process of producing and receiving feedback, professors regard the fluctuations and the procedural standardization that has followed the Bologna Process with a mixture of admiration, stupefaction and distress. In fact, the processes of larger convergence amongst the higher education institutions of the state members of the European Union may be regarded by some as a dehumanizing procedure, and a path to *contactlessness* of the feedback practice.

Concerning self-assessment, it similarly plays a complementary outstanding role within the CLIL methodology, as ‘the students must be responsible for their assessment, the same way they are responsible of their own learning’ (Coyle et al., 2010:128). Nowadays in higher education in particular, but also in modern society in general, lifelong learning (Sambell & McDowell, 1997) becomes a must in the students’ development as autonomous individuals. In this regard, self-assessment helps develop the skill of metacognition (Hacker et al. 1998), explicitly, students’ reflecting about their own thoughts. From a general constructivist perspective, the teaching shall start from where the students are, and the way to set that initial milestone is certainly via self-assessment.

To help situating the researcher’s context, the aim of this qualitative investigation was not to verify the overrating of those performing worse as opposed to the underrating of those achieving better results as research proved (Boud & Falchicov, 1989), but to verify whether alternative means of self-assessment may deem equally suitable. There is when ICTs came into play.

Ample literature is to be found apropos the learners’ engagement and motivation of the use of e-learning, of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), and of the Technology for Learning and Knowledge (TLK) (Hernandez et. al, 2011; Passey et. al, 2004; Wilden, 2017) within higher education as well as in other learning environments. Screen-agers belonging to the iGen (Twenge, 2017; Yoon, Lee & Lee, 2013), may find it extremely difficult to efficiently communicate with their professors who have achieved their careers in a paper based context, whereas their own environment is totally screen-related. Needless to explain that timing and means related to communica-

tion are perceived differently by members belonging to emerging generations. University students at present require and demand prompt responses, which may be beyond the reach and speed of scholars belonging to previous cohorts.

Considering the Digital Competence Framework (Carretero, Vuorikari & Punie, 2017), that is, the European Union's policy towards digital literacy, the Convergence Culture (Jenkins & Deuze, 2008), and the undisputed fact that the students belonging to the iGen or digital natives are *prosumers* (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010), m-learning (Wilden, 2017) related tools were regarded as the most suitable for research purposes. They aimed at becoming appealing resources for gaining the learners' confidence, while were deemed as more adapted to the learners' needs and usual conducts.

The research predicts that the use of ICTs, in the form of two tools university students are most acquainted with; namely memes and Twitter, will result in truthful methods for producing feedback and self-assessment respectively. It is expected that student-friendly formats based on the use of ICTs and social media may lower their affective filter (Krashen, 1981) and henceforth provide reliable wholehearted feedback and self-assessment on their part.

The research objectives are, first to determine whether memes can become effective tools for receiving feedback from the students and second, to verify whether Twitter can be used as a means for students to deliver their self-assessment.

The investigation encompasses the following two research questions:

- Can memes become a suitable way for obtaining feedback from higher education students?
- Can twitter become a feasible way for university students to provide their self-assessment to the professor?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1. Description of the context and of the participants**

Students of the Bachelor's Degree of Primary Education and of the Bachelor's Degree on Early Childhood Education at the University of Alicante take, on an elective basis, a course on CLIL. The subject aims at introducing prospective teachers to the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) teaching and learning methodology. Such practice places particular emphasis on feedback and on self-assessment, for they are considered paramount aspects when designing sound CLIL materials (Mehisto, 2012:15-33). Feedback is understood as a means for facilitating the creation of a safe and enriching learning environment.

As for the research sample, it consists of 87 students belonging to two groups of the morning shift of the CLIL subject. The professor of the two groups was the researcher and author of this paper. A total of 3 other groups of students undertook the same subject with 2 different professors. Approximately, a third of the CLIL students belonging to these 2 groups had previously been students of the researcher, as the CLIL subject is elective in the 3rd and 4th year, but within the curriculum the course English Language Teaching is a compulsory subject of the first year.

The course is delivered on an intensive basis from early September until the end of October involving daily tuition with two-hour sessions. The compulsory task, corresponding to the practical part, is to be performed and hand in by January, coincidentally with the date of the theoretical exam. Besides the final task, which entails the designing of a CLIL didactic unit for primary or pre-primary students, plenty of activities are to be accomplished during class hours aiming at performing higher order thinking skills (Krathwohl & Anderson, 2009).

## 2.2. Instruments

The data obtained was gathered by means of unstructured written artefacts allowing the students to produce any number of narratives. It was decided that a genuine and undisputed method for collecting reliable narratives would be achieved by means of anonymous written notes. No limit with regard to the number of issues dealt was established.

Concerning the collection of memes, the investigation resorted to a WhatsApp group to where all memes were sent. With regard to the narratives created by the Twitter simulator, they were assembled by means of email and by online tutorials which allowed the results to be stored for the longer term.

Structured observation of the procedure was conducted to assure the production of reliable data as well as its classification on fixed categories, while easing the researcher to acknowledge patterns and relationships. These patterns led to the groups established.

With regard to the registration tool, for the qualitative analysis of the data, checklists were created to help classify the accounts of the students. Each narrative was assigned a label in accordance with the two research questions and all accounts categorized according to the established categories. These responses were recorded in tables according to the pertinent variables, namely the categories for the written notes, the memes and the Twitters created by the participants.

## 2.3. Process

Within the normal development of the subject, at its latest stages in October, several debriefing activities were proposed to the students from whence their feedback and self-assessment narratives were collected. These debriefing activities were intertwined with the other tasks designed for the course which acted as distractors. As it was usual for them to conduct warming up activities and farewell activities, both of them combined with the use of ICTs and TLK, learners were not aware of the research that was being carried out by means of these activities, and hence the sample was not contaminated.

As for the constructivist approach to the analysis of their feedback, the debriefing activity was conducted the very last session of the course, and it was developed as follows: firstly, they were asked to share with the classmates what their 3 takeaways were, meaning which aspects had they enjoyed the most in relation to the development of the course. As expected, there was a great deal of praising and mutual respect, since the assignment was completed openly. Next, they were asked to suggest any means of improving the subject they may deem suit. To guarantee confidentiality, their answers had to be written on a small sheet of paper of their choosing. These anonymous notes were placed in a box.

Weeks before, in small groups, they had been requested to create a meme which represented how they perceived the subject. This activity had been carried out in the context of the unit dealing with games in the primary education classroom, *gamification* and the use of ICTs. To perform the task they were informed of various online apps which they could make use of.

By no means were they warned of the realization of the research, nor were they informed that they were in fact fulfilling an actual feedback activity. The research strategy designed aimed at comparing their hand written anonymous narratives obtained in the last session, with the ICT-friendly narratives previously gathered on the frame of the games and ICTs unit through the meme creating activity.

Concerning the research motivation to grasp the students' self-awareness, in accordance with the research question number two, with the designed activity students were asked to write about the discernment of their own performance in the course using the 140 characters of a fake Twitter tool. That limit imposed to their responses aimed at achieving truthfulness. Within the syllabus of the subject it is clearly stated that a 10% of their mark is related to the performance and participation in all the var-

ied activities accomplished in class. Self-assessment, on the contrary, is not mentioned as belonging to the assessment rubric.

### 3. RESULTS

From the hand-written anonymous notes gathered from the 87 students of the CLIL course 122 items were labelled. The reason for the discrepancy is the wide range of responses allowed as an open ended, unstructured data collection tool was utilized. Every student was assigned with a number: S1, S2, S3 and a total of 12 categories were identified. The procedure of labelling all answers in order to include them in any of the 12 established categories was achieved by a cross-check process in which another professor of the faculty intervened. A minimum of 10% of participants agreeing with the terms of the category was established for relevance purposes, that is, 8 students or more considering the issue proposed. Fewer numbers of accounts in one category were deemed not relevant, which excluded six categories.

From the narratives of the students, three of the categories incorporate the students' main concerns. What seems to lay much trouble on their minds is the preparation for the exam, which was perceived as not sufficient. Some 26 narratives out of the 122 items identified (21.3%) indicate that despite the fact that the exam accounts for 50 % of their final mark, it is still the part which worries them the most.

Their second concern was about the peer-teaching performed with some parts of the theoretical units, as according to 23 of their descriptions (18.9 %) estimate that the presentations done by their classmates had not fully or properly explained the content. The fact of having classmates explain bits of the theory seems to have raised little enthusiasm.

The last of the main three categories that accommodated the opinions of the majority of the learners was the complaint about the number of units (they number 14 for a 2 month intensive course) and the excessiveness of the content. The third category combined 21 explanations (17.2%).

The following three categories taken into consideration contemplate labels such as; there has been insufficient explaining on how to create the CLIL didactic unit (10 reactions corresponding to 8.2%), a partial exam or no exam at all for this subject gathered 9 opinions (7.4%), whereas lastly the category in which students confess that they do not pay much attention to whomever teaches the theory received 8 narratives (6.6%).

The aforementioned 6 categories which were excluded from the research due to low participation included minor topics such as the dossier of the course being too extensive, the need to practice more English in class, the fact of being the groups too crowded for this sort of subject, a petition for a more organized course, the request of starting the classes earlier and the assumption that participation is not appreciated.

From the meme creating activity that had been carried out earlier in the course, the two groups of students created 30 memes in small groups which were shared at the end of the session and allowed moments of humour and hilarity. The concept of meme itself produced the expected lowering of the affective filter which led to a great deal of sincerity and disinhibition on the part of the students.

The 30 created memes were similarly classified according to 6 categories. The most numerous of the categories encompassed 10 memes (33.3%). The content was related, in a witty way, to the manner the professor had conducted the teaching, accounting the number and variety of the activities performed, a comparison with another subject which was being taught simultaneously in a more traditional way, and aspects and notions which students considered quite useful for their future careers.



On the other hand, acknowledging that they did not pay the required attention as well as some apathy towards the course gathered 7 memes (23.3%). The third category explicitly accounted the fashion in which the professor required volunteers by means of coffee sticks with the names of the students in them (6 memes, 20%). The number of units was the content of 3 memes (10%). A reference to the exam combined 3 memes (10%) and lastly, the task of creating the CLIL unit was the target of 1 meme (5%).

Regarding the second research question, despite the limiting factor of having only 140 characters of the Twitter simulator tool, the narratives of the students were largely varied, almost each and all differentiated and unique. However, 3 categories could be identified. Of all the participants on the experience, 57.9% managed to properly conduct their self-assessment, describing and evaluating their own performance in the subject. As within the syllabus of the course the breakdown of the assessment does not contemplate the self-assessment, not a single participant suggested the deserved mark. Furthermore, 26.3% of the students did not essentially perform their self-assessment, but expressed their opinion towards the course and towards its utility as a teacher training resource. Lastly, 15.8% of the Twitters gathered both, self-assessment and the students' opinion towards the course.

#### **4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

It was not the aim of this investigation to deepen into the answers provided by the students of CLIL as feedback by means of their written notes. Similarly, the self-assessment provided with the twitter activity, specifically, the degree to which learners were able to assess themselves properly, fell off the scope of this study.

When comparing the narratives gathered from the students during the debriefing activity by means of the written notes with the memes they created in small groups some sessions before, there is no doubt both represent a truthful and reliable way for professors to gather honest opinions from the students enabling the students to become more involved in the teaching learning process. Although the identified categories and the percentages do not entirely coincide both in the written notes and in the memes created, it should be borne in mind that as the two activities were conducted at a different stage of the course, the concern of the participants varied. However, without a doubt, the level of sincerity and involvement achieved by both methods in collecting feedback is incontestable. Hence, the use of ICT-friendly formats for obtaining proper feedback is encouraged as for the results of the present research.

By contrast, either the participants were not prepared to provide a suitable self-assessment of their performance, it should be recalled that it is not part of the rubric of the subject, or the instructions were not clear, the fact is that the results are less evident. It may be due to the fact that the investigation was incorporated into the usual dynamics of the class. Therefore, in respect of the conclusions to the second research question it is peremptory to consider the few instructions that were provided. Hence, the issue will require of further research and analysis of the data obtained.

One could more easily draw the conclusion that a remarkable percentage of the students of the Bachelor's Degree of Primary Education and of the Bachelor's Degree on Early Childhood Education at the University of Alicante lack the preconception of self-evaluation (1 in 4 students), therefore, it seems an interesting field for future research.

At this point, it should be reminded that the object of study was not to evaluate the correct self-evaluation of the participants, but rather the suitability of the method of the TWITTER simulator. In this sense, the narratives obtained have shown total sincerity.

Hence, to the first research question proposed, with the analysis of the narratives obtained from the undertakers of the CLIL course, the answer is that memes have proved a suitable and enjoyable means for providing feedback of a subject or course.

Similarly, despite some erratic narratives obtained, produced most certainly when the instructions for the activity were provided and the context where it took place, the utility of twitter for self-assessment purposes, can be confirmed. Students' performance was not at stake, but the degree of sincerity in their production. However, further research is required to shed more light into the issue.

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