

Chapter 3: methodology

As was mentioned in the two previous chapters, people in general are spending an increasing number of hours online per day; this has led to the inclusion of the technological factor in the teaching-learning binomial. The selection and implementation of Web 2.0 tools in a language classroom require to keep in mind several aspects and standards; first and foremost, the theoretical framework that back this particular choice. A qualitative research method took place in order to attempt to identify some of the conditions and underlying SLA theoretical principles needed for successful learning to take place using technology in the classroom, as well as to answer the research questions this thesis addresses. The detailed procedures that were carried out are explained in this chapter.

3.1 Location

The study took place at a private university in central Mexico. The university's population is made up from approximately 8,000 students, and 750 faculty members, people that come from different parts of Mexico, and of the world. The university offers 100 academic programs in different areas and students can study abroad for a semester or a year in over 300 universities in 30 different countries around the globe.

3.2 Participants

3.2.1 Teachers.

The teachers that participated in this study teach university level language classes. The four participants have a Masters Degree in second/foreign language teaching or in linguistics. Out of the four teachers, two are Mexican, one is Cuban and one is from the United States of America. They all work at the university as foreign language professors. They teach a between three and nine hours a week, plus three hours a week intended for individual tutoring. The languages and levels that the participants teach vary (English, and Italian). The educators participated through an open call sent out to all the teachers in the university's language department and those who were interested, volunteered to take

part in the study. Because the study is intended for second/foreign language instruction in general, teachers did not need to teach a specific language.

3.2.2 Students.

The students in the research project study are aged between 18 and 24 years and are studying their Bachelors degree. Those students who are enrolled in an English class are doing so because of university policies (all students must obtain at least 500 points in the TOEFL exam). Those who are studying a language different from English have obtained the required points in the TOEFL exam and chose that particular language due to personal interest. The role of the students in the study was to take part in the technology enhanced learning activities designed by their teachers as they would do in an activity without technology. Because the activity they participated in was done as part of their regular language class, they were not explicitly asked to be partakers.

3.3 Instruments

3.3.1 Theories' handout.

Teachers were given a handout that contained a checklist with theoretical principles to consider when deciding what Web 2.0 to use in their language lessons. This checklist contains nine items that comprise a wide range of SLA theories and principles (input, output, interaction, learning styles, etc.). This checklist was developed by reviewing the relevant SLA theory and choosing the principles, premises and hypothesis that best applied to the objective of the research. This handout is comprised of different information, including the theory or principle, the basic ideas, relevant authors and years of publication and fore and foremost, a question for teachers to answer: "Does the activity with the web tool consider this?" The answer options for this question are *yes* or *no*.

In addition to the information regarding SLA theories, this particular handout gives teachers an insight to the criteria proposed by the ISTE for using technology in the classroom. The standards comprise what is expected of students when it comes to the use of critically using technology and to

become productive in our global society. The complete handout, including the introduction given to the teachers can be seen in Appendix 3.

3.3.2 List of possible Web 2.0 tools.

This handout briefly explains what Web 2.0 entails and the difference between 1.0 and 2.0. It contains a variety of free web 2.0 tools and software available online. These sites were not developed with a specific language in mind and some were not necessarily designed for language teaching, however they offer teachers the possibility to carry out activities that can focus on different aspects of language learning. The tools or sites on the list were selected under the following criteria: that they are free (with or without registration), require minimal download of add-ons or plug-ins, do not need a specific internet speed, function with any operating system, and are not specially designed for teaching. The complete list can be seen in Appendix 4. The proposed resources were found in various teacher internet sites dedicated to web 2.0 and education. The links and tools were tested before being offered to the teachers to ensure they had not crashed and were still available. The list offers the teacher a brief description of the tools or sites, but does not include any evaluative comments as to whether the tool is “good” or “helpful”, or gives any ideas on its use, that is for the language teacher to decide.

3.3.3 Lesson plan template.

This template is designed as a structure for the lesson, and to collect relevant information for the study, such as reasons to select the tool and set goals. This lesson plan template was adapted from the “Technology-Connected Lesson Plan” developed by *INtegrating TEChnology* of the Georgia Department of Education--Educational Technology Training Centers. The complete lesson plan template is in Appendix 5.

3.3.4 Tool evaluation handout.

The tool evaluation handout’s purpose is that of having the teachers reflect on the Web 2.0 tool they used in their classrooms and decide if it delivered the intended benefits, as well as if their students

reached the desired learning goals for that class. This evaluation was inspired by The Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO) software review guidelines, and by the evaluation criteria proposed by Bovard (2009). It is divided into three main areas, with a total of 43 items. The first area specifies the characteristics of the language classroom that is using the Web 2.0 tool (language, level, age group, number of students, etc.); it also states the language skill to be enhanced, the vocabulary focus, the lesson's objective and a description of the learning activity carried out in the classroom.

The second area is comprised of five different criteria. The first one is *Access*. This criterion assesses the technical aspects of the tool: if it can be used with Windows or Mac, if it is free and how much time it takes to upload. *Usability* explores how user friendly the tool is, if it requires registration, if it is easy to learn to use, if there is a help section, and links to download the required software etc. The third criterion, *Privacy and Intellectual Property* evaluates if the tool allows restricting access to the work done by the students and if it protects personal data. Criterion four, *Workload, time management and implementation* is the section with the most items as it explores the actual practice of the Web 2.0 tool in the classroom. The questions on this section cover different areas related to the learning process such as student motivation, the integration of various learning styles, the reaching of instructional goals, student evaluation, etc. The last criterion labeled *Fun factor* appraises through different questions to what extent the tool allowed students to be creative, to collaborate towards a common goal, and what kind of feedback was given by the students.

The third and last area of this evaluation gives an overall grade of the Web 2.0 tool and general comments of the tool used in the classroom. The entire Web 2.0 tool evaluation handout can be seen in Appendix 6.

3.4 Procedure and time frame

The teachers participating in the study were provided with the four previously mentioned documents, plus an additional page with detailed instructions about how to use the handouts and carry out the study. Teachers were given two weeks to apply what was given to them. First they had to read

the theories and select a tool out of the list. Their choice of Web 2.0 tool had to be supported by the SLA theories and principles that focused on what the particular learning objective was for that class. The teachers had the option of choosing any other tool that was not on the list given to them, as long as they could back up their choice with the theories' handout.

After choosing a tool to use in their classrooms, teachers were asked to explore it and design an activity that was appropriate for their students (considering their level, cultural makeup, specific learning goals, language skills, grammar and vocabulary focus) that could be integrated harmoniously in their language program.

When designing the activity, teachers were told that the goal was that this Web 2.0 tool should enhance the already existing curriculum, and not to design a new curriculum that revolved around the specific tool. Teachers were open to decide whether to design an activity that was carried out as part of the class, in the language lab or as homework that was later presented to the rest of the students in the classroom. They also had complete control of the time that was spent developing the task and if it would have an impact on the students' grade or not. All of these specifications were noted and detailed by the teacher in the lesson plan template. Teachers were asked to deliver this activity and then assess the tool, the learning outcome and their students' feedback using the tool evaluation handout.

The tool evaluation handout, as well as the theories' handout and lesson plan template will serve as examples on how to use these handouts for the selection of appropriate technological tools to implement in classrooms, to justify software acquisition and to evaluate the effectiveness of a specific tool.