

Project-Based Evaluation. How Can We Integrate Information Technology, Social Media and Language Learning?

Raluca Nicoleta ȘERBAN¹

Mihai ȘERBAN²

Antonia Cristiana ENACHE³

Abstract

This paper aims to present the perceptions of International Business and Economics 3rd year students regarding the usefulness of integrating social media and language learning in the context of project-based evaluation. More specifically, we aimed to grasp the reasons behind a majority rejection of the idea of using social media projects as a means of assessment, while, at least at a theoretical level, there is a vast literature considering the implications and usefulness of social media in the language classroom. Our motivation for this research was the hope of using these new media more in the classroom in the future, as means of evaluation or simply as learning tools.

Keywords: project-based evaluation; student assessment; social media; autonomous language learning

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background

In recent years, we have noticed a significant increase in the use of social media for various purposes, ranging from more predictable ones, such as entertainment and socializing, to less expected ones, as research, i.e. obtaining information in fields as diverse as history, physics, chemistry, medicine, fashion, cooking or travelling, or even for the purpose of learning foreign languages. While in some of these cases (medical diagnosis, for instance) the legitimacy of resorting to the social media may well be questionable, with others, such as improving proficiency in foreign

¹ Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE), Bucharest, Romania, raluca.serban@rei.ase.ro

² Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE), Bucharest, Romania, mihai.serban@rei.ase.ro

³ Bucharest University of Economic Studies (ASE), Bucharest, Romania, antonia.enache@rei.ase.ro

languages, especially English, the benefits of maximal exposure to productions in the respective language on the social media are obvious even in the absence of research. Empirical evidence regarding the increasing amount and availability of all types of materials, on the Internet in general, and, more recently, on the social media, as well as our own increasing use of them, do not need to be documented any further.

However, an impressive amount of research has been produced recently, which focuses on the necessity of using social media as a means of spreading scientific information more widely, of reaching more diverse audiences, on the influence of these media on language learning, in and outside the classroom, and on the implications of integrating entertainment and learning/language learning. We shall try to provide a brief overview of these recent research tendencies in the literature review part of this paper.

1.2 Research Questions and Research Hypotheses

What this general context gave rise to in our case – as language for specific purposes (LSP) teachers – was a series of questions regarding the necessity of integrating these new tendencies in language learning in our academic context, as follows:

1. Should we integrate social media and language learning?
2. Can it be done effectively?
3. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of integrating social media and language learning?
4. Are Romanian students ready for this change?
5. Can social media productions/projects be used as a means of assessment?
6. What would be the advantages and disadvantages of using social media projects as a means of assessment?

For the first three questions, most of the answers lie in the recent literature. There is a vast production of research articles and syntheses focusing on this topic and we decided that scanning it will be helpful if we are to understand the general context of recent years. Some of these answers will be thus synthesized in the literature review part of this paper.

For questions 4, 5 and 6, we designed a research project action plan, in order to obtain information from our students, to document their perceptions regarding this new trend in language education.

In the research process, we aimed to take the following steps:

- use a TikTok/Instagram post as a project, as a means of evaluation;
- collect feedback from students, identify strengths and weaknesses from their point of view;
- get together with some of them and get more in-depth understanding of potential strengths and weaknesses (focus group);
- further explore the literature;
- publish final results.

Our hypotheses were that our students are probably ready for the change and that they will be happy to integrate a TikTok/Instagram post type of project in their assessment scheme, as they use these quite a lot and are familiar with the respective social media, which would confirm our hypothesis that social media productions can be used as a means of evaluation successfully. Finally, we expected our students to be able to identify both advantages and disadvantages of the process. The expected identified advantages were probably connected to the use of creativity and to a certain degree of freedom they had in the use of language, while the expected disadvantages were related to the complexity of the project and time constraints.

1.3 Research Method and Bias

The selected research methods were mainly qualitative, although we managed to obtain 18 answers to questionnaires from the students who agreed to create a TikTok as their Business English seminar project this year. We started from exploring the literature to identify new trends in language teaching, then we had an initial phase of classroom observation and informal conversations with our students to obtain initial input, which was followed by the distribution of a brief questionnaire (see Annex 1) to International Business and Economics 3rd year students, who had the experience of being evaluated via social media projects (our own students in English and Business Communication who agreed to fill in the questionnaire). For triangulation purposes, we also organized a focus group with 5 3rd year students specializing in Applied Modern Languages/International Business and Economics, who were also involved in a similar project (i.e. filming a podcast and posting it on social media, as

a means of partial evaluation), for more refined insights into their perceptions and opinions.

Although we had access to a limited number of respondents, these students worked in groups (of 3 to 6) for their projects and their answers represent the viewpoint of their colleagues as well. Moreover, we tried to corroborate their answers with our own observations and initial evaluation of the context via informal conversations with the same students, as well as with their answers in the focus group. In this way, we managed to get a pretty clear image of our context, to be presented subsequently.

1.4 Generalizability Issues and Relevance of Findings

Due to the fact that this research study analyses a very limited number of answers to questionnaires, despite the fact that the answers represent viewpoints of bigger groups, as well as due to the similar profile of respondents (namely, 3rd year International Business and Economics students), our conclusions do not have a high degree of generalizability. Yet, our findings have the potential to prove valuable for the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, for our academic community, as they will help professors and possibly decision-makers to identify a common thread in students' perceptions regarding the integration of the social media in our education system, as a means of language learning, but also as a form of evaluation.

1.5 Paper Structure

Apart from the introduction, the paper will be divided into three more chapters, the Literature Review, meant to identify the general context of integrating social media and language learning, new tendencies of practitioners and researchers alike, Research findings and their analysis, where we shall try to see if the findings help us answer (all) the research questions. These will be followed by a brief section of recommendations and conclusions. The paper ends with one appendix, namely the English version of the short questionnaire distributed to our students for the purpose of data collection.

2. Literature review

A quick overview of the recent literature on this topic reveals that many authors have been increasingly preoccupied with the new possibilities of integrating social media and classroom language learning. For quite a while, authors have been interested in how social media and new technologies (computers and Information Technology) can help language learning, as we shall see subsequently.

In 2018, J. Reinhardt produced a comprehensive overview of 172 articles on this topic, published between 2009 and mid-2018. 87 of them were considered “focal pieces” and their findings “on the formal and informal use of social media”, i.e. blogs, wikis, or social networking, “for second and foreign language teaching and learning (L2TL)” were analysed. The author took into account the use of educational sites, as well as “vernacular sites, like Facebook and Twitter”. The article offers a “history of social computer-assisted language learning (CALL) research” and, perhaps more importantly, common findings of various authors, the most significant of which relate to the fact that social media help “the development of intercultural, sociopragmatic, and audience awareness, language learner and user identities, and particular literacies”. Moreover, the author discusses negative aspects, “problematic issues”, as well as implications for future research and practice.

Reinhardt’s impressive bibliography helps us to identify various research interests of diverse authors, as we can see below. Some are more general:

- the implications of networking and multilingualism: J. Androutsopoulos (2015) wrote about “language practices on Facebook and their implications” and “computer-mediated communication”;
- multilingualism and identity: Chen (2013);
- the “transformative potential of blogs” for language teachers: Arshavskaya, E. (2017);
- the use of Facebook data “to analyze learner interaction during study abroad”: Back (2013);
- Facebook in the language classroom: Blattner and Fiori (2009); Blattner and Lomicka (2012);
- the “promise and perils” of technology and of the internet for foreign language education: Kern, R. (2014).

Others are more directly connected to teaching and learning:

- the potential of using new media for writing activities (the majority of quoted articles): Alghasab and Handley (2017) wrote about “wiki-mediated collaborative writing activities” and further investigated “teacher-student interaction on wikis” (2019); Aydin and Yildiz (2014) on “using wikis to promote collaborative EFL writing”;
- the potential of new activities for speaking activities: Beauvois (1992) explored computer-assisted classroom conversation “in the foreign language classroom”;
- social media and language learning “(r)evolution”: Demaizière and Zourou (2012);
- the “social turn” in second language acquisition: Block (2003).

There are authors who directly explore the importance of computer technology and IT in the context of language learning:

- Bax (2011) was interested in the “effective use of technology in language education”;
- Chapelle and Sauro (2017) wrote a *Handbook of technology in second language teaching and learning*.

Finally, some describe particular case studies from different parts of the world. Below are only a few examples:

- Antenos-Conforti about “Social networking in intermediate Italian classes” (2009);
- Arnold *et al.* about “culture projects in intermediate German classes” (2009);
- Brick about “the role of social networking sites for language learning in UK higher education: The views of learners and practitioners” (2012);
- Carroll (2008): Puerto Rican language use on MySpace.com;
- Clark and Gruba (2010): “the use of social networking sites for foreign language learning: An autoethnographic study of Livemocha”;
- Dizon, G. (2016) proposes a “comparative study of Facebook vs. paper-and-pencil writing to improve L2 writing skills”;
- Jin, S. (2015) investigates using Facebook and Korean EFL teaching;
- Jin, L. (2018): the connection between WeChat and Chinese as a second language (2018).

As far back as 2016, the *Routledge Handbook of Language Learning and Technology* fronted the acknowledgement that

The exponential growth and development of modern technologies in all sectors have made it increasingly difficult for students, teachers and teacher educators to know which technologies to employ and how best to take advantage of them,

Thus, research into the topic became, indeed, has become, increasingly important.

Kern (2014) identified globalization and the development of the Internet as the main sources of increased “language learners’ opportunities for exposure to foreign languages and cultures”.

Today, videoconferencing, email, chat rooms, online forums, social networking sites, massively multiplayer online games, collaborative writing and editing, and multimodal production tools provide new kinds of social encounters, new kinds of communities, and new prospects for learning. Business has not turned a blind eye to these opportunities: in just a few years, online language learning sites like Livemocha, Verbalplanet.com, and Babbel.com have attracted millions of members in hundreds of countries. This is part of a broader trend involving the development of massive open online courses (MOOCs) and complete online undergraduate and graduate degree programs (e.g., Laureate Education). (Kern, 340)

On the other hand, the mediation involved in all online communication is identified as a drawback, as a potential hazard. The solution would be to address this in class.

Today it is not a question of whether to use technology or not in FL education. More and more of our daily activity and communication takes place online, and in the course of a day it has become commonplace to interact with people in distant locations using multiple languages. Our students will be called upon to use their languages in technology-mediated environments, and we need to prepare them with a critical awareness of how mediations affect meanings. (Kern, 352)

Researchers have become more and more interested in the topic and the majority of authors focus on how we can benefit from this association, more than on the potential drawbacks. Some researchers associate increased learner motivation with the use of social media, due to the features of these sites, such as “award systems” (Brick 2012). Others explore

the relationship between multilingualism, social media presence and identity (Chen 2013), which seems to lead to a “social turn” in language acquisition (Block 2003). Understanding “digitally mediated multiliterate practices - by researchers, teachers, and learners alike - may provide insight into pedagogies that recognize and even affirm these practices.” (Chen 2013) The association between language learning and social media is labelled a genuine “(r)evolution” (Demaizière and Zourou 2012).

In 2015, Liu *et al.* pointed out the necessity for further, more in-depth study of the phenomenon: “Although educators are excited about the potential of social network sites for language learning (SNSLL), there is a lack of understanding of how SNSLL can be used to facilitate teaching and learning for English as Second language (ESL) instructors and students” (Liu *et al.*, 113).

Similarly, in 2016, Dizon noticed that, although Facebook managed to grow into “the world’s largest social-networking site (SNS)”, research on Facebook and its efficacy “to improve L2 writing”, namely “writing fluency, lexical richness, and grammatical accuracy”, lagged behind at the time. This is to say that research into the technical aspects of using social media in the foreign language classroom, as well as into benefits, disadvantages, perceptions, is relatively recent.

This is due to learners’ and practitioners’ understanding of the importance of technology and social media in education. Healey noticed that “few teachers now fear losing their jobs to a computer, but they may fear losing their jobs to those who know more about technology than they do.” Yet, there are changes that we all witness that are responsible for new styles of learning:

As learners are better able to access learning resources via technology, their role and that of the teacher will continue to change. The Internet has been a large force for change in language learning over time. [...] the social web has emerged and become part of most people’s lives. These two factors are creating another revolution in ways that people communicate with each other, and thus how we can learn languages.” (Healey, 9)

Apparently, there are cultural spaces that adopt these changes less easily than others, and, even if adopted, they are perceived as not mainstream: in 2011 DePew placed “social media at academia’s periphery”. However, the author acknowledges the benefits of this new approach to learning:

These alternative and unconventional sites for learning provide language learners opportunities to acquire language by using multiple modalities to respond to various rhetorical situations. In comparison to these sites, academic writing contexts, particularly the developmental-writing course, impose monolingual norms and deficient identities on students. (DePew 54)

The same author goes on to argue that, despite being considered responsible for students' worse academic performance, especially in writing, the electronic media actually have notable advantages when it comes to learning:

While there is a common trope that students' participation with electronic media is ruining their ability to write (Baron, 2008; Keen, 2007) - especially for academic or professional audiences - an examination of the social networking sites interfaces also exhibits how students have the option to engage in what the New London Group (2000) calls multiliterate practices and can make sophisticated choices about their literacy experiences (DePew & Miller-Cochran, 2010, apud DePew 57).

Teachers' perspectives are also taken into account by Orsini-Jones *et al.*, who summarize the positive features of these new ways of learning, such as "personalised language learning", and "some troublesome aspects that occur when learners engage with Web 2.0 tools":

initial motivation towards these tools can turn into frustration [...], these global ubiquitous platforms pose a dilemma for language practitioners who work within institutional teaching settings. Teachers recognize the language learning potential of these tools, but are also worried by the ethical threat they can pose, which can normally be avoided, or at least moderated, within institutional proprietary and "less exciting" platforms. (Orsini-Jones *et al.* 2013)

As for the learners' perspective, one of the most important advantages of social media used for language learning, as identified in the literature, seems to be learner autonomy:

Informal learning contexts can be considered as arenas in which learner autonomy becomes even more essential, as it involves the least amount of teacher support and less scaffolding than regular language instruction. (Zourou *et al.*, 144)

We could not identify Romanian research related to this topic, as the phenomenon of integrating IT, social media and language learning in the classroom is quite isolated in our environment. What we propose is a case study in the Romanian academic context, a context in which, although the use of new technologies already has a tradition, the integration of social media in classroom teaching and/or evaluation, as well as research into it, are at their dawn. Moreover, our focus is on student perception regarding the usefulness, advantages and drawbacks of the use of technology and social media in the foreign language classroom.

3. Research findings

Students' perceptions before the TikTok project

The first stage of our project coincided with the beginning of the second semester. The start of our collection of data was a series of informal classroom conversations with 3rd year International Business and Economics students, specializing both in International Business/International Economics and Applied Modern Languages.

In an environment in which they feel safe and are stimulated to reflect on their learning experiences and learning style, students admit to it that they *did* learn, *do* learn and *would* learn languages in the same way in which they learned their mother tongue, i.e. through interaction, without fearing that their mistakes would be corrected and they would be judged. In other words, after some reflection, most of them admit that, at least to some extent, their proficiency in English owes a great deal to interaction with other speakers, not necessarily native speakers of English, on gaming platforms or social media. Since it is confirmed by the majority, this type of learning seems to represent an important, complementary trend to classroom, textbook-based learning, a more natural way to learn, apparently more effective than formal education.

If, as practitioners, we ask why this new trend is gaining in importance, the answers probably revolve around the fact that the foreign language is learned more naturally, like the mother tongue, in a less controlled environment, in which students are not afraid to make mistakes, in which they are not assessed, i.e. in which their effort and progress is not formally – and stressfully – measured. Moreover, their motivation to use the second language is higher, as language is used naturally, authentically, for natural, authentic purposes.

Thus, one important hypothesis we operated with was that students would be happy to get involved in a TikTok/Instagram project for seminar evaluation, as they would have the opportunity to use language in an environment in which they learned a lot and that they use a lot.

However, right from the beginning, even before the project assignment, we collected a lot of negative feedback and the majority of students, who had been given the possibility to opt for the TikTok/Instagram project or a poster, chose the poster. In brief, their reasons revolved around the fact that they felt they did not have the expertise to produce these types of texts, they intuitively realized they needed expertise to produce these new genres, which they didn't have, as nobody had ever taught them these in school. Additionally, to some it seemed too much effort, while others refused to be exposed on the social media.

As a result, only approximately a quarter of the total of 81 targeted students, agreed to take the TikTok/Instagram project, in groups of 3 to 6 peers. Although the explanations were clear and repeated, most of them were still skeptical at the beginning of the project production.

Students' perceptions after the TikTok project

As expected, after handing in their TikTok assignment, the collected feedback was divided, some students confessed to enjoying it, expectedly or unexpectedly, while for others, the disadvantages outweighed the advantages. The following section presents a brief summary of their perceptions, as obtained via a short questionnaire (see Annex 1).

The positive part of the feedback contained reasons related to the "interesting", "fun" part of the learning experience, which made them want to repeat the experience: "I enjoyed doing a TikTok as a project. From my perspective, it's a different way to present a subject, without being boring. I also think that me and my colleagues had fun discussing, planning and doing it. We would do that again, for sure, if we'd have the chance to. Thank you for the 'opportunity'!". Labelling it as an "opportunity" demonstrates the value they attach to the project.

The keywords "interesting", "fun", or "enjoy" appeared in 11 of the 17 answers, although the activity was described positively in 15 of them. The following examples illustrate these viewpoints:

"I especially appreciated the idea of making TikToks, it was the first time I did something like this and it was a really fun experience", or

"I liked this activity a lot and I enjoyed working on it with my team. I found it fun and easy and I think it's a much better idea than the usual projects." Additionally, "fun" is associated with "easy", although for many peers the activity seemed, on the contrary, too difficult.

Moreover, being "fun" goes hand in hand with integrating every member of the team: "It was so much fun and each of us has contributed somehow on building it", as well as with recent tendencies in the market, i.e. authenticity: "Consider că este mai interesant să construim un clip/afiș/poster care să ia în calcul cerințele unei piețe reale." ("I think it's more interesting to build a video/billboard/poster that takes into account the requirements of a real market.")

More positive adjectives used to describe the experience of this project are "creative", "interactive", "topical". Positive nouns, such as "freedom", can also be noted:

"Tema a fost una bună din punctul meu de vedere, interactivă, de repetat pentru generațiile următoare." ("The theme was a good one from my point of view, interactive, to be repeated for future generations.")

"For me, this requirement was very interesting, regarding TikTok, because it is topical, as we are surrounded by people who use this platform at any time of the day. Also, you really have to be creative, think very carefully about how you can get people to look at [it] and even appreciate what you're building." "Interesting" is this time associated with "topical", i.e. new, and "creative".

The use of technology and the possibility to experiment with different ideas and types of texts were also appreciated: "Consider că acest proiect legat de crearea unui TikTok a fost o idee foarte bună, deoarece a fost o experiență interactivă care ne-a permis să îmbinăm creativitatea cu tehnologia. Mi-a plăcut faptul că am avut libertatea de a experimenta cu diferite formate și idei." ("I think this TikTok project was a great idea because it was an interactive experience that allowed us to combine creativity with technology. I loved the freedom to experiment with different formats and ideas.")

Other students appreciated the fact that the project was not very time-consuming: "Am avut o temă destul de ușoară și interesantă, proiectul ne-a luat puțin timp și consider că ar trebui să fie mai multe proiecte de genul." ("We had a fairly easy and interesting topic, the project took us little time and I think there should be more projects like this.") while for others, getting engaged one way or another on the social media is a better

way to learn a foreign language: "I hope more teachers would assign such a project to their students because it can be a much better way of learning English than the typical book exercising procedures."

The following testimonial contains all the above-mentioned elements: "I really enjoyed this assignment! It was both engaging and creative, allowing us to explore a relevant and modern topic in a format that resonates with our generation. The idea of combining research with a fun and visual medium made the task not only educational but also entertaining. It encouraged us to think critically while also showcasing our creativity and digital skills."

Interestingly, the same student made really valuable suggestions for improvement, which only proves that, at least some of them appreciated the project and treated it very seriously and professionally, not mistaking it for simply "fun": "If I were to suggest an improvement for future generations, I think it might be interesting to incorporate a peer review element, where we could share and discuss their videos with classmates before submission for more constructive feedback."

To summarize, the main advantages of this types of project, as perceived by our students, were that the project was interesting, funny to tackle with a team of peers, not very time-consuming, creative, interactive, or authentic. The high degree of freedom students had in getting organized and in creating their projects, in experimenting with technology and new types of texts, were also appreciated.

Some of the mentioned disadvantages are as follows: the project was difficult to manage, which created some degree of anxiety ("I admit that at first we were a little skeptical because we didn't know exactly how to divide our roles, but in the end we succeeded.").

It is interesting that, despite their initial reluctance, some students appreciated the experience retrospectively: "Initially, even though I liked the concept, I was hesitant to participate because I'm an introverted person and don't have a social media presence at all. I generally avoid putting myself out there online. However, I decided to give it a try and, in the end, I enjoyed working on it. [...] Also, it allowed me to step a bit out of my comfort zone and I really had fun creating the video, even if I wouldn't feel comfortable making it public. [...] It clearly was a unique and creative approach and we have to thank you for trusting us and encouraging us to push beyond our limits."

For some, their initial anxiety was overcome due to the excitement of experimenting with new techniques, and to the fact that this was more than just a language project: "The project in which we had to talk about working from home while also filming ourselves using TikTok initially didn't seem like a great idea to me, as I've never liked the idea of video projects. However, I thought we should give it a try because, who knows? Maybe I'd enjoy it this time, and that's exactly what happened. I actually enjoyed making the video using TikTok, experimenting with all sorts of effects and transitions to make everything look more dynamic. It was a pleasant experience, and next time I have a similar task, everything will turn out much better, having this experience behind me!"

Finally, some students gave us feedback on the reasons why they refused to take the TikTok assignment, although these were mainly rooted in a misunderstanding of the concept, namely that they had to film themselves and appear in the TikTok film, which was not compulsory: "I did not find the TikTok idea a good one for me, as I personally don't like filming myself and would rather work for the project in a different way. I chose to do the poster with my classmate because that idea felt more suitable for us."

For other students, refusal was grounded in reasons related to bad timing: "I believe that such a project would be more fun and less stressful for a student that is not in a terminal year because he can then focus solely on completing the task and feel more motivated to do so."

Last but not least, for some not using TikTok platform or social media in general is an informed choice, based on strong principles: "I no longer use the TikTok platform, and I avoided installing it unless absolutely necessary. Many (at least in my circle of friends) have started to limit or even uninstall their social media applications, because they take up too much time and reduce our attention span, causing 'brain rot'. Another reason why some people refuse to use social media platforms so much is the fact that lately they have been filled with false information, designed to manipulate the user."

Focus Group

The focus group conclusions came as a confirmation of the findings of the questionnaires, namely, students perceived this type of assignment as challenging, as well as interesting. The main ideas revolved around the fact that timing was the most pressing issue. Students felt that this type of

assignment was very time consuming in general and having to complete it as 3rd year, 2nd semester students was challenging, as they had to focus on much more pressing assignments and especially on their Bachelor thesis:

“...in my opinion, the last year of college, especially the 2nd semester, was not the right time for such projects. Maybe when I was a first-year college student it was appropriate, but now our focus is on the Bachelor degree. The extra things are super demanding and take time. I wouldn’t necessarily repeat the experience.”

Otherwise, they appreciated the fact that they were taken out of their comfort zone and that they had to use their creativity, which they don’t normally do in typical assignments:

“I’ve enjoyed this, as it has pushed me to be more creative and innovative in my work. I love social media and conducting interviews, so this experience was overall really fun, though somewhat time-consuming.”

Integrating digital skills, social media and classroom projects was identified as particularly relevant for their generation, labelled as “digital natives” (cf. Prensky, 2001):

“Using social media in the classroom for evaluation or projects was really engaging and relevant for me, especially for digital-native students. It has encouraged my creativity, collaboration, and real-world communication skills.”

Suggestions for improvement were placed in the same area, that of integrating feedback in the activity, this time not peer feedback, but teacher feedback and guidance:

“If it had been more well-guided, it would have been more enjoyable and effective. Yes, I’d definitely do it again, but in a different context, not necessarily in the third year.

3.1 Interpretations of research findings

All the data sets we collected - via classroom observation and informal conversations, questionnaires and focus group - converge in the same direction: students were reluctant at first to get involved in this new type of project, for a variety of reasons, the most frequently mentioned of which were the bad timing (being a 3rd year student involves a lot of academic responsibilities and this type of projects are time consuming) or

the lack of guidance or expertise. Quite reasonably, some students identified their lack of expertise in the creation of new, digital, genres (that they did not name as such, but that they correctly pointed at) as a major obstacle to overcome for this type of project.

However, most of the students who chose the TikTok project over the classical poster, despite their initial reluctance and even anxiety, admitted to having enjoyed it and were able to identify important advantages of this new type of project: they appreciated the fact that they had a fairly high degree of freedom in making all their choices, the teamwork, the management of their colleagues and of the project, the creativity and digital skills integrated in the project, apart from language, the fact that it felt “fun” and authentic.

When they made suggestions and recommendations for improvement, those were really valuable. The idea of receiving peer feedback before handing in the project is quite new and very useful, but it will increase the amount of effort and the time frame necessary for the completion of the project. Better guidance from the teacher was also mentioned as one important suggestion, however, that might decrease the authenticity of the task, and make it more similar to classical, typical classroom tasks.

4. Concluding remarks

Our aim to integrate digital skills, social media and (classroom) language learning may not be an easy task, but it certainly is one worth striving for, due to its many advantages. If it is a trend nowadays, in both literature and practice, it is for a good reason: it manages to replicate a more authentic, a more natural type of learning, a safer learning environment and it also manages to boost student motivation. However difficult, due to the obstacles inherent in any new endeavor, it is a challenge worth being taken by practitioners and literature seems to confirm there is a new trend in this direction.

To be born a “digital native” is not to say one does not need training in the production of new, digital genres. On the contrary, the lack of assistance and training of this sort is perceived as one of the major drawbacks of using this type of project in class. The solution to this problem would be introducing new modules of training in our already existing writing courses, offered by our and other universities, so that

students, even digitally native students, may be better prepared for their future assignments and their future jobs, better equipped to face the challenges of a shifting (work) world.

Last but not least, we, instructors, in the field of languages and perhaps not only, we may also benefit from this new trend. Integrating this new, more autonomous, style of learning – with a strong focus on the authenticity of the learning experience and the motivation of the learner – with digital competencies and the social media might be beneficial for the future of language learning itself.

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Annex 1

Questionnaire

1. Did you choose a TikTok project over the more traditional option of the poster, as a means of evaluation?
If your answer to question 1 is yes:
2. What were the advantages/disadvantages of working on this type of project?
3. Would you repeat the experience?
If your answer to question 1 is no:
4. Why did you reject getting involved in this type of project (TikTok or Instagram post)?
For all students:
5. Any other comments.

Annex 2

Questions for Focus group

1. How would you describe your experience of filming a podcast as a school project?
2. Was it difficult? Why? What were the most important difficulties you had to overcome?
3. Do you think it help you in any way for the future (practicing, improving new skills, etc.)? Would you repeat it?
4. What was the best part of it?
5. Overall, did you enjoy the experience?