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DIGITAL TOOLS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN PORTUGAL: IMMEASURABLE OPPORTUNITIES AND MULTIPLE CHALLENGES

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Pedagogical innovation in higher education is a delicate subject that has already been the object of many studies. Today, it is clear that students must take responsibility for their own learning, in a process that is both increasingly individualised and collaborative, in line with the ever-changing demands of the labour market. Pedagogical innovation can be based on various active methodologies which rest upon numerous tools, among which digital tools currently stand out. However, it is undeniable that the various studies have attempted to draw firm conclusions about the advantages and disadvantages of the different tools. However, more, there are so many digital tools readily available to users on the internet that it is often difficult to make a reasoned choice that will guarantee positive learning outcomes right from the beginning of the work with students. In fact, each student has their own particular needs and reactions. This means that teaching must be highly flexible and able to quickly adapt the teaching sequences they had prepared. They also need to be familiar with a wide range of active methodologies and tools to support students' work and they have to be constantly updated to keep pace with the demands of emerging technologies. The challenge is to guarantee motivation for all those involved in the educational process.

This article is intended as a contribution to the discussion on the implementation of active methodologies for foreign language (FL) learning in higher education by a wide range of up-to-date digital tools. The experiment presented, which is the result of projects developed at the School of Education of the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (Portugal), took place during the second semester of the 23-24 academic year, as part of a FL curricular unit (English and French) of the 3-year Bachelor's Studies, with a group of 25 second-year students. The general aim of this curricular unit is to deepen the communicative skills pertaining to the students, by mobilising the professional skills of these forthcoming media professionals. Other skills, such as the cultural and intercultural skills involved in working in a globalised environment, were also worked on. The preferred methodologies are project-based learning, mobile learning, flipped learning, gamification and peer assessment, with a focus on a constructive environment. In addition to these obvious hard skills, soft skills such as creativity, flexibility, empathy, critical thinking, interpersonal communication and learning progress. The study shows the evolution of the didactic sequence developed at the beginning of the semester, justifies the decisions taken to use digital tools, and of positive didactic repercussions particularly with regard to the choice of the digital tools used (for the production and dissemination of documents by students or for gamification), systematises the reasons for the adaptation throughout the semester and outlines the difficulties encountered, as well as these teaching choices from the point of view of the student, the teacher and the assessment procedures. It concludes with prospects for future research considering AI as an inevitable asset within teaching-learning contexts.

Keywords: Higher education, Foreign languages, Pedagogical innovation, Active methodologies, Digital tools, Hard and soft skills.