Websites for English Language Teaching
Design, Contents and Pedagogical Implications

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RESUMEN
El uso de las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación está hoy en día muy extendido en el campo de la educación. En el caso de la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras se pueden encontrar una gran cantidad de recursos digitales en Internet, entre los que destaca el creciente número de sitios web. Sin embargo, la información que proporcionan estos sitios web es muy variada: actividades, enlaces a otros sitios web, lecturas, recursos multimedia, herramientas para interactuar con otros estudiantes o profesores, etc. En este contexto, el objetivo de este trabajo es analizar las principales características de un corpus de sitios web representativos. Este corpus está formado por sitios web (término que usaremos para referirnos tanto a los sitios web como a los blogs) creados por profesores de Inglés de Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y Bachillerato en España.

Palabras clave: TIC, blog, sitio web, inglés como lengua extranjera, Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO), Educación Secundaria post-obligatoria

ABSTRACT
The use of Information and Communication Technologies is widespread in the field of education nowadays. In the case of foreign language teaching, a wide range of digital resources is available on the Internet, including an increasing number of websites. However, the information that can be obtained from these sites is varied: activities, links to other websites, readings, multimedia resources, tools to interact with other students or teachers, etc. In this line, the aim of this paper is to analyse the main characteristics of a corpus of representative websites. This corpus consists of websites (general term used to refer both to websites and blogs) created by English language teachers in Compulsory and Post-Compulsory Secondary Education in Spain.

Keywords: ICT, blog, website, English as a foreign language (EFL), Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE), Post-Compulsory Secondary Education (PCSE)

1. INTRODUCTION
Nowadays, the importance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) not only in our personal and professional lives, but also in the educational area, is unquestionable. ICT play a major role in the educational context, as they may be approached from different standpoints: as a course in order for students to get to know how these technologies work, as a methodological resource in the teaching and learning of other courses, and also as a management tool in educational centres or institutions, to mention but a few (see Cabero, 2000).

Out of these three approaches, in this article we will only consider ICT as methodological resources in Language Teaching and Learning (LTL), which has experienced a substantial change due not only to the appearance of ICT but also to other changes in the teaching practice itself. Accordingly, students are no longer mere receivers of contents; instead, they can produce their own contents — hence becoming the focal point of their own learning process (Palomo et al., 2008: 13) thanks to the use of ICT and to the new methodological principles surrounding them (Roig, 2007: 223). It now seems that blackboards, textbooks and students' workbooks are not the only source of knowledge any more. Indeed, more sophisticated
main pedagogical use is the possibility to create real contexts of communication by using synchronous and asynchronous tools, especially in the latter. Last, but not least, electronic corpora — compiled especially over the last decades — can also be used both for linguistic research and for LTL. Some of the most notorious ones in this field are SACODEYL (http://www.um.es/sacodeyl/index.htm) and ELISA (http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/elisa/html/elisa_index.html), but there is still a lot to be done in the field of education, such as creating different corpora according to the objectives of the research under way.\[2\]

Such is the current importance of ICT in LTL that the official educational curricula for different educational levels in the area of English language teaching (ELT) promote their use in the development of the different skills, in the way to access cultural knowledge and even in the assessment criteria. As a matter of fact, the use of ICT is explicitly stated as one of the main objectives for the courses in which English is taught. The example of the curriculum for English courses at CSE level[3] may suffice to illustrate this point, as it gathers the following aspects in which ICT are involved:

- Technological processes raise the interest in foreign languages.
- The development of ICT turns foreign languages into an essential tool for communication.
- ICT are valuable not only for their use as information tools, but also as learning tools applied to linguistic purposes.
- The oral linguistic model must derive from a numerous set of speakers to be able to collect variations and nuances, hence the key role of audiovisual media and ICT.

The use of ICT in LTL is widely known as Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL). This term appeared in the 1980s and was used to refer to learning a language by using computer technology. Understandably, and as suggested above, the use of such kind of ICT evolved over the following decades. Hence, in the 1990s a new term appeared, TELL, which stands for Technology Enhanced Language Learning and which accounted for a new phenomenon at that time: the Internet. The Internet and web-based tools have changed the methodologies used in LTL, as they go beyond the use of digital software and other physical media. Nevertheless, the widespread term used nowadays to refer to the use of ICT in LTL is CALL.

The history of CALL has been traditionally divided into three phases, which Warschauer and Healy (1998) called behaviouralistic, communicative and integrative. After revising Warschauer and Healy’s proposal, Bax (2003) re-named the previous phases restricted, open and integrated. Through these phases, the use of ICT makes it possible for the student to evolve from being a mere receiver of information (reflected, for instance, in fill-in-the-gaps exercises) to having a wider range of options that allow for team work and for autonomous and active learning.

It is true that ICT are very useful in LTL, insofar as their main characteristics (i.e. interactivity, innovation, interconnection, digitalisation, image and sound quality and diversity, fast access to a vast amount of information, immediate communication and storage capacity; see González and Mouriz, 2007), allow us to cater for the three paramount aspects in our discipline: motivation (Istifci et al., 2011), the use of communication tools and the access to information and other resources (Marques, 2000). Yet, some drawbacks of their use in LTL have also been reported in the literature, such as the anxiety and addiction that they may create among users, the availability and technical maintenance of resources in the centres, and the lack of teacher training.

Nevertheless, the use of these resources and their effectiveness must be assessed by identifying some assessment criteria that may help determine whether their current use is correct. This way, deficiencies can be spotted and solutions that may be of help for both students and teachers can be proposed accordingly. In this line, some proposals to assess the use of ICT in education can be found in Barberà et al. (2008), or in Dudeney and Hockly (2007) in the particular case of websites. However, each resource must be individually analysed and evaluated taking into account its specific features.

This will be the starting point of this article: to analyse a corpus of websites created by English language teachers belonging to Compulsory and Post-Compulsory Secondary Education (CSE and PCSE, respectively). For the purpose, the aims and methodology of the study are first described, together with the data analysis procedure. Then, the results are presented along with the discussion. Finally, the conclusions and the pedagogical implications of the study are drawn.

2. THE STUDY
The present section describes the procedure followed to carry out the study, including the selection of objectives, the methodology followed and the mechanisms used to analyse the data obtained.

2.1. RATIONALE AND AIMS

In the light of the discussion in section 1, the present study seeks to survey the structure and contents of websites (including blogs and websites) that may be used for the teaching of English in CSE and PCSE in Spain, in an attempt to cast light on the potentialities of such resources. Hence, the following research questions have been taken as objectives for the research:

- Are there any common patterns as for the structure of websites?
- What types of exercises can be found?
- How are the skills promoted in these websites?
- What type of interaction takes place, if any?

2.2. METHODOLOGY FOR CORPUS COMPILATION

In order to provide an objective answer to these questions, an ad-hoc corpus has been compiled for the purpose. The process followed to compile the corpus has gone through several phases of sifting. First, a hundred websites related to the learning of English were found by using the search engine Google, which lists first the most frequently visited web resources, especially when such a general term is keyed in. Second, the websites specifically aimed at the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) in the stages under scrutiny (CSE and PCSE) were selected. The number of resulting resources amounted to fifty, a figure that was further reduced by choosing only those that were identified as products created by a CSE or PCSE teacher or promoted by a secondary education centre. Valuable as they could be, unidentified resources were discarded on the grounds of the fact that they might not correlate with the contents, skills and competences — as well as their distribution — across the stages in CSE and PCSE. These steps led to the final configuration of the corpus, which comprises eighteen websites.[4]

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

In order to suitably analyse the corpus, a series of objective and well-defined parameters had to be sought. For the purpose, Dudeney and Hockly’s list of criteria (2007: 34) served as a model. According to them, there are four standard criteria, which can be further specified to assess websites for language teaching as follows. They also remark that particular criteria may stand out depending on the ultimate objectives, although linguistic accuracy and content is clearly an essential factor when using websites for LTL (2007: 35):

1) Accuracy
   - Who wrote the page? Is this person an expert in the subject matter?
   Check qualifications, experience — look for an ‘about me’ link.
   - Is the page content reliable and factually correct?
   Cross-reference with other similar websites and encyclopaedias.
2) Currency
   - Is the content up-to-date?
   Check factual information against other reliable sources.
   - When was the page last updated?
   Check for information at the bottom/top of the page.
3) Content
   - Is the site interesting and stimulating?
   Consider the content from your learners’ point of view.
- Is it attractive and easy to navigate?
  Check the colour combinations, the logic of the links and visual structure.
4) Functionality
- Does the site work well? Are there any broken links?
  Be sure to check all pages, and follow all links to all pages you intend to use.
- Does it use a lot of large files or alternative technologies (e.g. Flash?)
  Check how quickly it loads for learners; check sound, video and animation work.

An adapted evaluation template was devised on the basis of the former and filled in for each website under analysis. Besides the key aspects reflected in the research questions, other data were gathered for an adequate identification and categorisation, and these were eventually found to be valuable to analyse other aspects not considered at first. Therefore, four blocks of information have been completed for each website:

a. Identification. This block gathers information on the author (this is of paramount importance, since this was one of the criteria for inclusion in the corpus), the centre of education he or she is based at, the stage(s) of CSE or PCSE that the resources are aimed at, and the date of the last update.
b. Macrostructure. Under this heading, information about the layout and parts of the website is collected.
c. Contents. Information on the activities relating to the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) is presented together with remarks on the grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary promoted in each resource.
d. Interaction. Since websites and blogs fall within the limits of Web 2.0 (which seeks to foster communication and interaction among users), one of our main interests is to check whether this interaction really takes place. In order to analyse it, its presence or absence in each website is stated and, in the case of the former, attention is paid to the type of interaction (i.e. student-student, teacher-student and student-teacher).

All these variables were plotted into several charts, and the number of activities complying with each requisite calculated. Since our study keeps in line with the teaching and learning of EFL, the grids mostly account for types of exercises, as well as for the skills promoted.

2.4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the following sections, the main findings regarding the four blocks of information outlined in section 2.3 are presented and discussed.

2.4.1. IDENTIFICATION

As specified above, only those websites designed by CSE and PCSE teachers have been selected, an item of information that may be gathered in many cases from the URL itself. Accordingly, four groups have been established for classification for practical reasons, as shown in Table 1: a) eye-catching URL, which are those intended to catch the attention of potential users, as in http://goodatenglish.com.blogspot.com.es; b) URL including the teacher’s name, as in the case of http://www.isabelperez.com; c) URL including the name of the educational centre, as with http://ieslavereda.ingles.wordpress.com; and d) others, a category under which URL not related to the previous ones have been placed, as in http://www.alternativa-joven.org/pilarotano/indices/indice_1ciclo.html:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>URL</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eye-catching URL</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL with teacher’s name</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL with educational centre’s name</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in Table 1, the most widely used ones are those in group a) (6 out of the 18 websites). The main reason to use these URL is that other users interested in EFL — apart from the students themselves — become interested in the website and access this information. The URL with names of teachers or of educational centres amount to 5 and 4, respectively, all of which are blogs. These seem to be the most reliable ones since, although the date of the last update may not be explicitly given, it is easy to know the last time that a user accessed the website by checking the last post.

An additional and interesting detail that the data show concerns the origin of the websites, since more than half have been created in Andalucia (10 websites). Madrid and Valencia rank second, with 2 websites each. The retrieval of these data responds to the selection criteria used by Google to select the information, not to any preference in the design of the study.

### 2.4.2. MACROSTRUCTURE

Before proceeding any further, and in the light of the examination of the data gathered from the corpus analysis (see Table 2 below), a distinction has to be made between blogs and websites, two options that are found at the macrostructure level.

On the one hand, blogs are defined by Dudeney and Hockly as follows: ‘A blog is an abbreviation of the term ‘weblog’. A blog is a regularly updated journal or newsletter in the form of a web page, usually kept by one individual and intended for public consumption” (2007: 183). On the other hand, a website is described as “a collection of files on the Internet, which can be accessed by a user via a single ‘url’ or website address” (2007: 187).

A series of differences may then be pointed out: while websites are more stable and may be simply used by the webmaster to store files (or data of various kinds), blogs are regularly updated and are created with a conscience for a potential audience, hence fostering communication. This means that posts can be added by any user(s). The structure also differs: a journal format is preferred for blogs, but there are no such restrictions for websites. Thus, the most important difference in terms of their use for LTL is that blogs encourage communication and interaction in various directions (see also section 2.4.4), from which students can benefit:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Template / domain</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blogs</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Blogspot</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wordpress</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>.com</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.org</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Macrostructure: data on formats and templates

As shown in Table 2, blogs clearly outnumber websites. Even though blogs are normally less flexible in terms of the distribution of contents than websites (since standard templates are commonly used, with the posts in the middle and the tags on either side), they are more in tune with the tenets of the Web 2.0, hence facilitating communication and interaction (via posts, for instance). Other practical reasons for the prevalence of blogs may also be found: it is more difficult to create a website than a blog, inasmuch as more technical knowledge is needed.

As for the template used, the data evince a clear preference for that of blogspot. On the contrary, no preference has been found for domains in websites, since the frequency for .com (which is more common for commercial entities) is slightly higher than that for .org (frequently used for non-commercial websites, such as the ones of educational institutions).

### 2.4.3. CONTENT
The main data on the content obtained in the analysis are presented in Table 3. As can be seen, the variables used are those of the different sections in which this block was divided: on the one hand, the skills and other relevant aspects in LTL (see section 2.3) and on the other hand the types of activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Listening</th>
<th>Speaking</th>
<th>Grammar</th>
<th>Vocabulary</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Error correction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap-fill</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matching</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple choice</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentence building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transforming</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation exercises</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True/False</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two options</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word order</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Content: types of activities

The grammar and vocabulary sections stand out in Table 3 on account of their high frequencies (67 and 27, respectively), while oral skills like listening (9) and pronunciation (5) show some of the lowest frequencies. The number of listening activities is slightly higher due to the fact that resources from other sources (such as Youtube) can be uploaded to websites and blogs to develop students’ listening skills. Only two (productive) skills, speaking and writing, are never addressed in the corpus under analysis. This may be put down to the fact that those skills are fairly difficult to assess by using electronic means.

As for the types of activities used to develop the aspects previously analysed, multiple-choice exercises are the most common (37), followed by gap-filling ones (26). In turn, sentence building and error correction are the least used ones (found in 1 and 5 websites, respectively).

An analysis of the relationship between both parameters (skills and types of activities) evinces that gap-fill exercises are indeed frequent when dealing with grammar (17 websites), followed by multiple-choice activities again in the grammar section (15 websites). In 10 websites word-order activities are used to cater for grammar, hence ranking third in our classification. The section on vocabulary appears in the fourth and fifth positions (9 websites each) with matching and multiple-choice activities.

These data allow us to suggest that in spite of using ICT to present the activities, some skills (such as oral ones) and some kinds of activities which demand a more complex cognitive process from students are frequently neglected. Hence, they should be promoted in a near future to get closer to the main pedagogical principles in LTL.

2.4.4. Interaction

As shown in Table 4 below, no interaction has been found in 13 out of the 18 websites analysed. In other 4 websites the kind of interaction found is teacher-student, since the teachers propose some topics to comment on and the students have to discuss them. Only one website fosters the interaction between peers, and this may be explained by the fact that the blog includes a forum in which students can talk to each other. The scarcity of interaction noted in the corpus under analysis calls for a reflection to take advantage of the possibilities offered by ICT to communicate with each other and to interact, which are some of the key issues at stake in LTL:
3. CONCLUSIONS AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

As explained above, it is clear that ICT have gradually entered the educational scene with the aim to improve the LTL methods, as in the case of EFL for CSE and PCSE. In this scenario, students are encouraged to become autonomous learners, as well as to be responsible for their own learning process. That is precisely the main role intended for ICT in the teaching environment. However, the present analysis has shown that work still lies ahead in order to make the most out of ICT in LTL.

Out of all the websites analysed, and taking into account the parameters surveyed through the evaluation template employed, the most comprehensive one is that by Isabel Pérez. Indeed, this website is a reference for teachers at all educational levels on account of the wide range of resources and didactic proposals presented in it. Yet, this is clearly a website (used in a general sense), a type of resource that does not particularly lend itself well to fostering interaction (a typical feature of blogs); instead, this is a repository of materials of various kinds. In this line, it must also be stressed that almost all the resources analysed are repositories of materials, which are grouped into categories and which vary from website to website. On the contrary, and as also pointed out above, blogs typically show a standard structure based on the template employed.

As for the contents identified through this corpus-based analysis, receptive skills receive much more attention than productive ones (both writing and speaking), which are clearly neglected. This may be partly justified on the grounds of the characteristics of the ICT employed (websites and blogs), which do not especially favour the assessment of such skills. Nowadays, and despite the potentialities of ICT to address other areas and contents, grammar has not lost its prevalent position, since most of the resources surveyed contain a wide range of exercises on this area. This is combined with the clear preference for gap-fill exercises. Thus, the corpus analysis suggests that students’ creative potential is not significantly fostered; instead, a behaviouristic approach seems to have been adopted – one which was typical of the first stages of development of ICT.

The results obtained for the interaction parameter are, contrary to our expectations, rather negative. There are very few sites which encourage it and, in most of these cases, there is only teacher-student interaction, that is, there is room for a simplified type of bidirectional interaction but no exchange of ideas and opinions among peers. Such type of interaction is one of the cornerstones in LTL, and it is essential for students to become involved in communication situations and to interact with other peer students (Dukes, 2005: 4).

To conclude, it can be argued that this study has, to a certain extent, evinced that there is a need to create websites which are more efficient in the field of EFL both for CSE and PCSE. This points out at two areas in which more work should be conducted: on the one hand, students’ creativity must be enhanced especially when giving an answer to particular tasks set; on the other hand, resources should be used as spaces that allow for interaction and communication to take place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Interaction</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No interaction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-student</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student-student</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Types of interaction
REFERENCIAS BIBLIOGRÁFICAS


ANEXO

[1] See Dudeney and Hockly’s classification and analysis of the main digital resources used in LTL and their pedagogical proposals for effective use (2007). This classification includes word processors, websites, Internet-based project work (such as webquests and treasure hunts), resources known as Web 2.0 (blogs, wikis and podcasts), e-mail, online reference tools (dictionaries and thesauruses) and technology based courseware (DVD, CD-Rom, etc.).

[2] See Reppen (2010), Römer (2011) and, in the case of secondary education, Braun (2007), for a more detailed state of the art and for the research lines using corpora in LTL.

[3] See the Decreto número 291/2007, de 14 de septiembre por el que se establece el currículo de la Educación Secundaria Obligatoria en la Comunidad Autónoma de la Región de Murcia.

[4] The full list of the websites compiled in the corpus is provided in the Appendix.

[5] Dudeney and Hockly also provide a classification and description of the types of blogs that may be found in the field of language teaching (2007: 87-90), along with a series of guidelines on how to use them with learners (2007: 91-93). See also Solís Becerra et al. (2011) for more features of blogs, as well as for the pedagogical implications of their use in LTL.

[6] This classification of activities has been adapted from Verdú and Coyle’s proposal (2002).

This appendix collects the URL of the websites examined and included in the corpus. The compilation process was carried out from December 2011 to April 2012.

d. <http://englishteachermargarita.blogspot.com/>
e. <http://iesalveredaingleses.wordpress.com/recursos-2/1%C2%BA-bachillerato>
g. <http://www.wildriverrunner.blogspot.com/>
m. <http://www.montsemorales.com/>