



How Might the Use of Technology in the Classroom Effectively Increase Second Language Acquisition?

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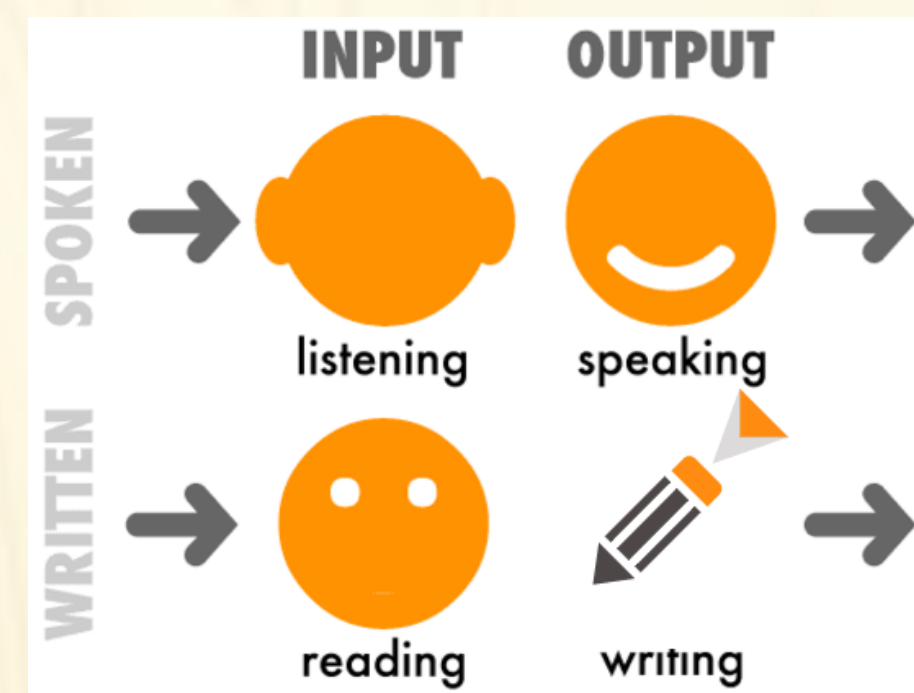
Introduction

In our increasingly globalized world, speaking two languages has become something that is necessary. Now more than ever, the need to teach a second language at school is evident. With technology being an integral part of our lives, we now have the tools to make the learning experience more meaningful and engaging for our students. Sadly, many of our foreign language classes are still heavily “teacher centered” and technology is hardly ever used.

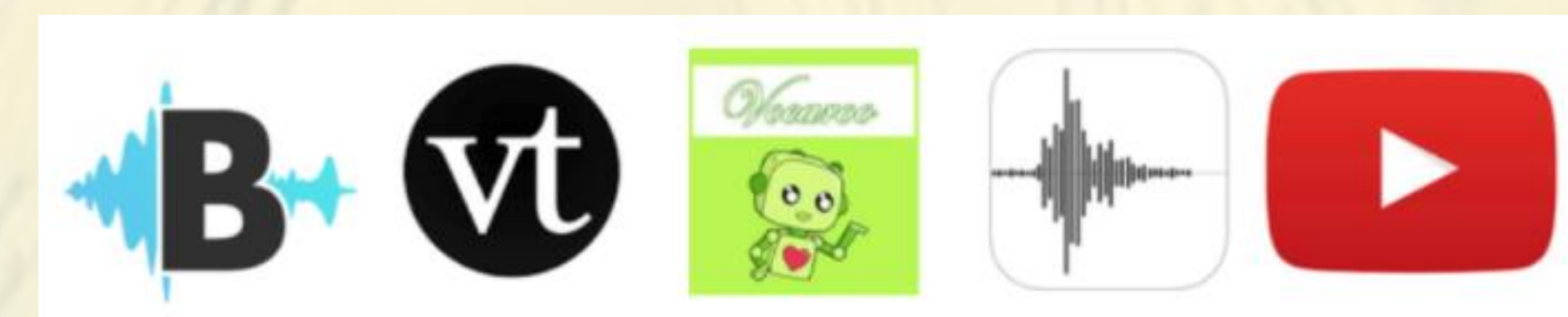
Many schools rely mostly on the class textbook as the main source of information, and the “fill-in-the-blank” handouts are still the most common activities. Students are required to know a lot of information about the language, but are not expected to use the language in real context. However, according to the ACTFL, teaching languages in the classroom is about having students use the language to communicate with native speakers of the language. This authentic communication is what prepares them to make use of the language as a 21st century skill.

Language Skills are Enhanced through Technology

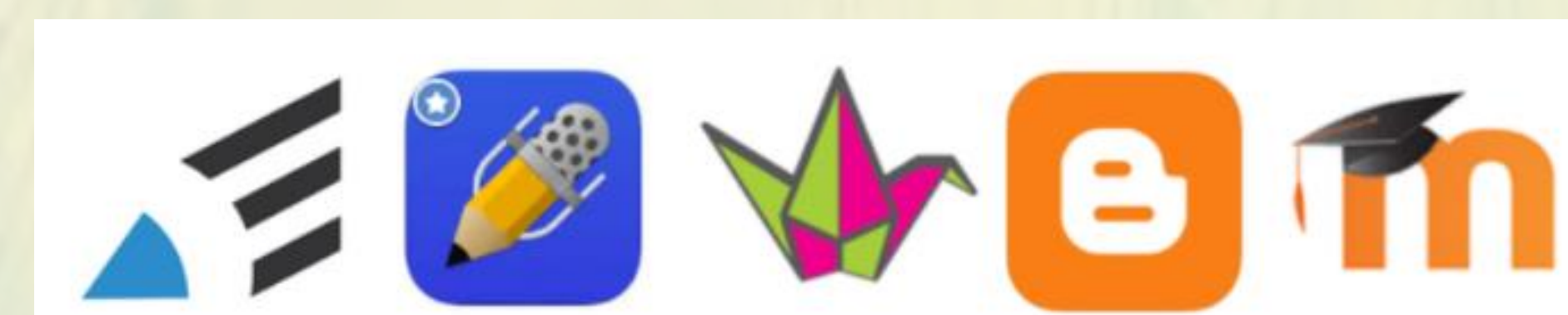
Listening and reading are the “Input skills” and speaking and writing are the “Output skills” of language. However, when it comes to technology integration and the types of digital tools available, we need to group together listening and speaking (Spoken skills) and reading and writing (Written skills).



To develop and enhance the Spoken language there are many tools that allow students and teachers record and listen to the language. Some of the tools that I mention in my Capstone are: Audioboom, VoiceThread, Vocaroo, Voice Memo, YouTube etc.



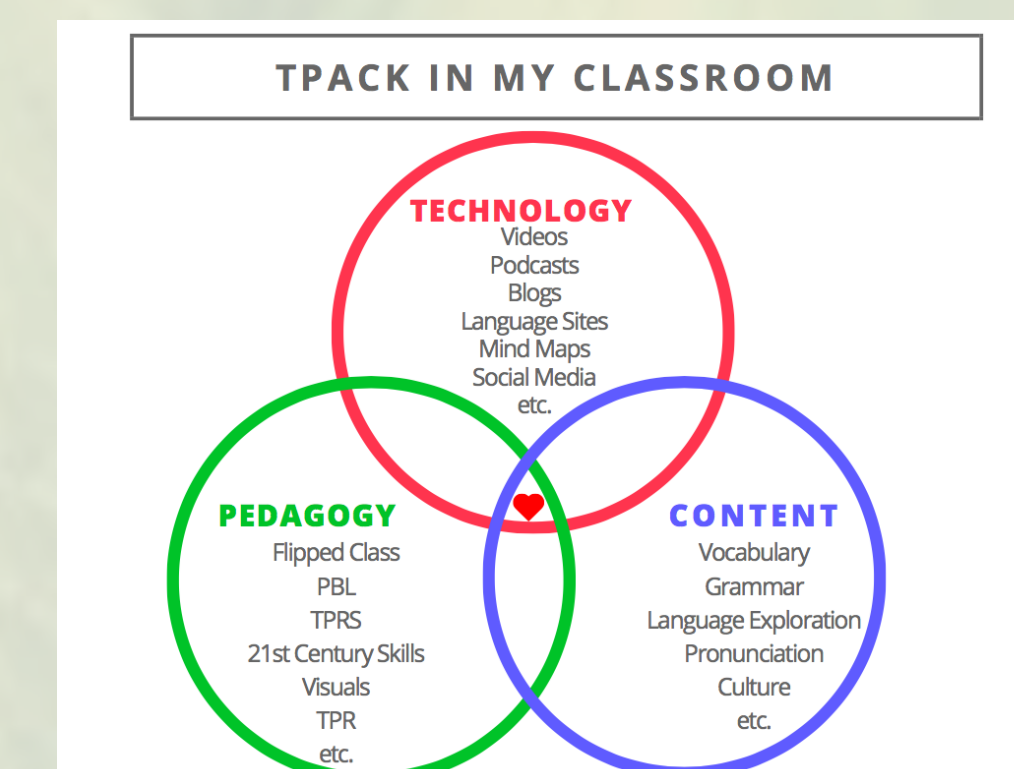
To develop and enhance the Written language, numerous tools allow students to read and write while allowing for teacher and peer feedback. Some of the tools that I mention in my Capstone are: WriteAbout, Blogger, Notability, Padlet, Moodle, etc.



It is important to remember that “apps” are constantly changing and evolving. For this reason, we must continue exploring and incorporating new technologies into each of the four areas of language.

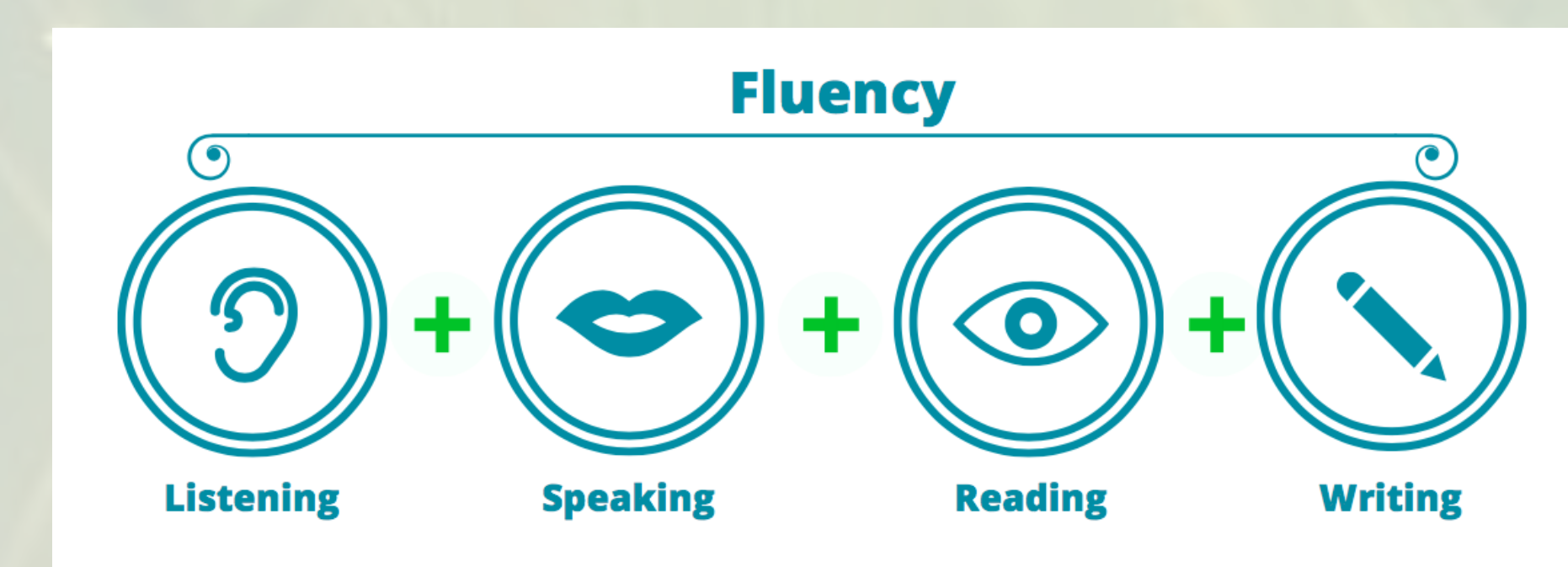
Methods

When it comes to second language learning, digital tools are oftentimes used in isolation instead of being part of a comprehensive unit of study. In some classrooms technology is driving the lesson plan rather than being used as a tool that can support and improve the lessons and the learning experience of our students. Through my innovative learning journey I discovered that TPACK should be the foundation of my instruction.



I use TPACK to guide my teaching and I know that great lessons will only be possible if I'm able to infuse them with a solid Pedagogy (best way to teach and learn), Content (what we teach) and Technology (how to use technology) knowledge.

However, even if we know how technology works, “not all digital tools are created equal” and not all of them can facilitate language learning or language acquisition. When we teach languages, specially to beginner students, we are aiming to develop the four areas or skills of language: Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Complete fluency is only acquired when these four skills are mastered.



In my Capstone I review and show examples of digital tools that can be used to grow each one of these skills of language. My hope is to provide a specific and categorized selection of tools that teachers can use depending on the area or language they wish to develop.

Action Research Methodology

My action research was conducted to investigate the effects of digital tools on second language learning. Because of the short span of the research, I only used two language tools: Quizlet and Conjuguemos. These tools were selected to facilitate vocabulary repetition, which could potentially lead to vocabulary learning. The results were not surprising and confirmed what I had been witnessing with my students for a while: technology is a great tool for learning languages.

For the research, all students were given a pre-test and a posttest to determine their vocabulary knowledge before and after instruction. The pre-test consisted of 40 true/false questions and included most of the vocabulary words of the new unit of study. The students had not learned any of those words in the classroom prior to the study.

The material covered in both, the control and the treatment groups, was exactly the same. However for two weeks the delivery was different. The control group did traditional “paper-based” activities while the treatment group did computer-based activities.

In order to assess the students’ attitudes and perception of the usefulness of digital tools, I also conducted a questionnaire survey at the end of the experiment.

Results

The average pre-test scores for both groups were similar but with a difference of 2.4 (Figure 1). After all the learning activities were completed, the average posttest scores were even more similar with a very small difference of 0.2 (Figure 2). Although the change was not significant, the treatment group made more progress and basically caught-up with the control group after all the learning activities were completed.

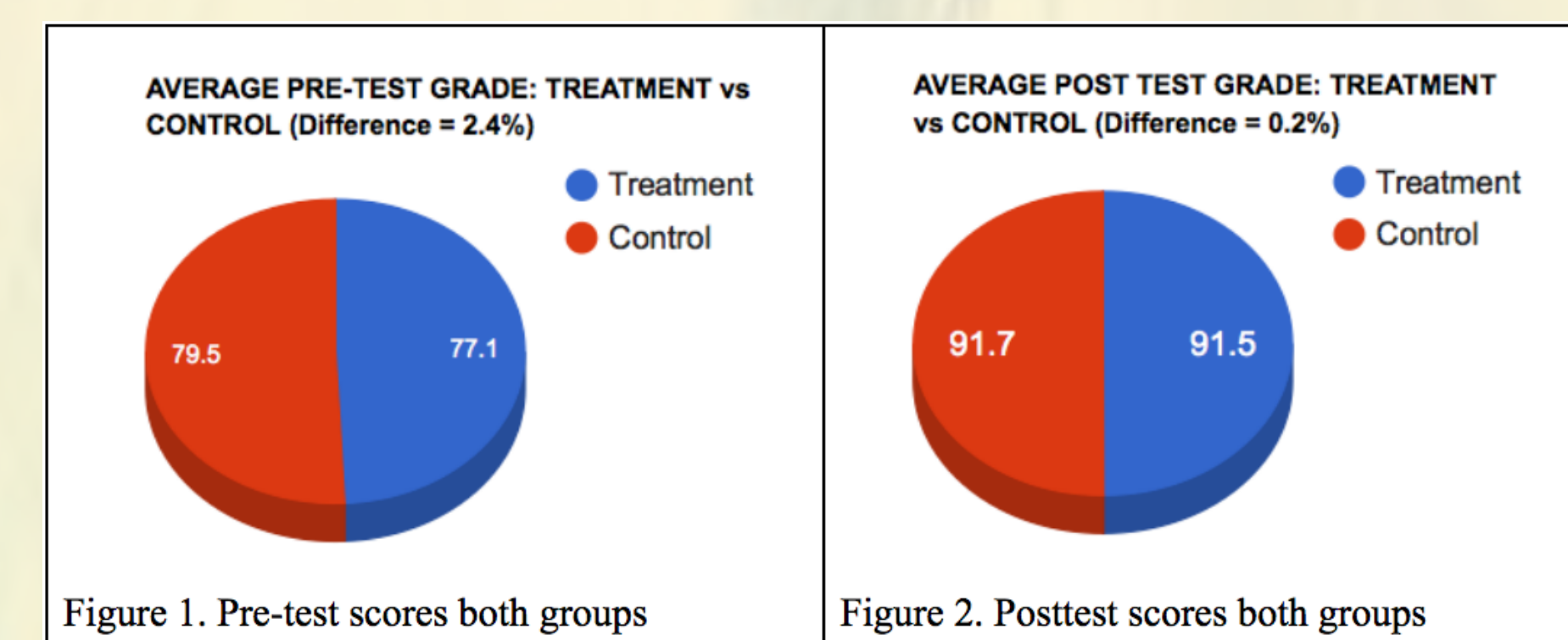


Figure 1. Pre-test scores both groups

Figure 2. Posttest scores both groups

Table 3 shows the descriptive statistics of the five items regarding their perceived benefits of using digital tools vs. traditional paper tools. Figure 3 shows a summary of student responses per item.

#	Item Description (4=completely agree; 3=agree; 2=disagree; 1=completely disagree)	M
Q1	I like studying the vocabulary using tools like Quizlet	3.61
Q2	Studying the vocabulary with Quizlet and/or Conjuguemos is easier than using traditional tools such as the vocabulary lists, cards or books.	3.54
Q3	I can study the words for a longer period of time (without getting side tracked) if I use digital tools.	3.21
Q4	I can get more repetition out of each of the word when I use Quizlet and/or Conjuguemos.	3.46
Q5	I would choose the computer based activities over the traditional “paper based” activities to better learn the Spanish vocabulary.	3.54

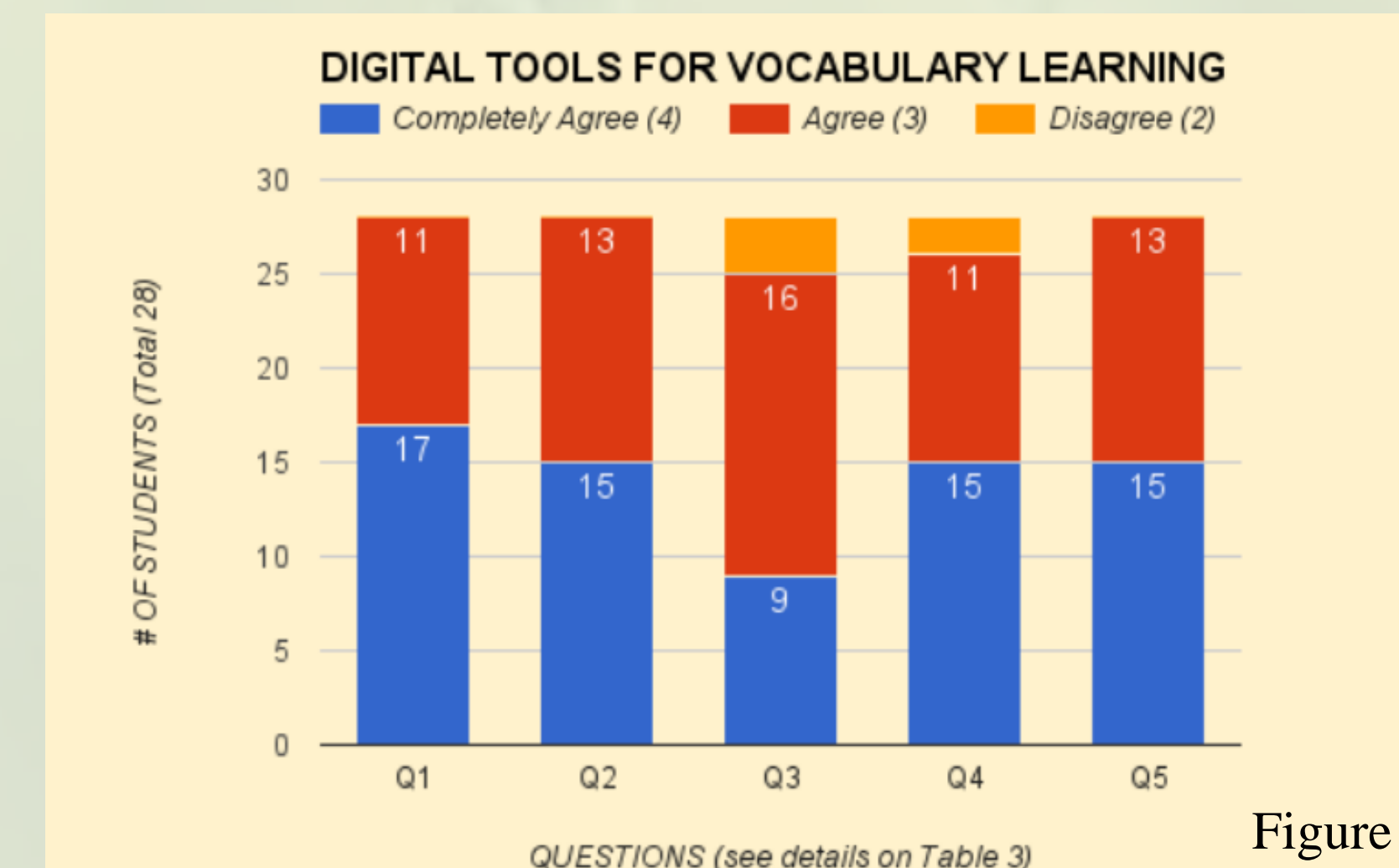


Figure 3

The overall results of the responses reveal the learners’ positive evaluation of the use of digital tools for vocabulary learning. Every single participant found the use of digital tools to be more beneficial than the traditional paper based tools.

Conclusions

My research confirmed the benefits of technology in vocabulary learning. However, the ultimate goal is not just to learn but to acquire the language. Yet, for acquisition to take place, the language must be in context. This is where TPACK and mindful integration of a broad spectrum of technologies takes place.

The next steps will be to collaborate with other educators and find ways to “interweave” the four skills of language within our teaching to fully prepare our students to communicate with native speakers.



Literature cited

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For further information

- Please contact gasconflorencia@gmail.com for questions or comments.
- To read more about my capstone project: www.learninginnovationlab.com (search Gascon-Amyx)
- To learn about my innovative learning journey: <http://innovativejourney.weebly.com>

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