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Digital Culture As A Necessity For Training Foreign Language Teachers In Albania

Dr. Elona Toro[a], Dr. Anida Kisi[b]

[a] Lecturer, Department of French Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Tirana.
[b] Lecturer, Department of French Language, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Tirana.

Abstract

The use of digital tools and content is becoming one of the skills that the teacher must possess continuously while practicing his profession. Efficient integration of ICT in teaching requires on the one hand a good level of digitalization of services and infrastructure and on the other hand skilled teachers for their use. In this article we aim to analyze the need of French language teachers to be trained in the field of ICT. The methodology of our work is descriptive and analytical. We will first describe the digital skills that a teacher should have in general and that of a foreign language in particular, based on the ICT skills reference frameworks developed by UNESCO and the European Commission. Furthermore, we will address the level of digitalization in the Albanian school system, based on European standards and official data of the Albanian state. Finally, we will review and analyze the results of a questionnaire on the digital knowledge and skills of French language teachers. This will be useful to know objectively the experiences and perceptions, as well as to highlight the needs of teachers for continuing education in the field of ICT.

Keywords: Digital culture, teaching, foreign language, French, education.

1. Introduction

The term educational culture is often used during scientific research in the field of foreign language didactics. Educational culture is related to the mode of transmission and is heterogeneous (**Morfaux, 1980**). The environment, institutions and society influence it. In language didactics, this influence is manifested through classroom practices. The language class has its routines and rituals (**Beaço, Chiss, Cicurel & Véronique, 2005**). They set some limits, which can condition the teaching and learning of the student or teacher. So in language, all the constituent elements of the classroom, such as interaction, lecturing, methods, teaching models, activities, relationship with the teacher, relationship with the student, assessment or even speaking can vary based on the educational culture (**Beaço, Chiss, Cicurel & Véronique**).

Digital culture relates to all forms of expression or works created through digital technologies and in particular to information and communication technologies. **(Glister, 1997)** The spread of the Internet

and laptops made possible the emergence of new forms of digital culture in the 1990s to the 2000s, but it was precisely the massive spread of high-speed Internet and smartphones that further reinforced the development of digital culture. To achieve the introduction of digital elements in all walks of life, it is necessary for each of us to be able to acquire a set of digital skills and knowledge in order to participate effectively in all dimensions of current society.

"With the 2006 European Recommendation on Key Competences, Digital Competence has been acknowledged as one of the 8 key competences for Lifelong Learning by the European Union. Digital Competence can be broadly defined as the confident, critical and creative use of ICT to achieve goals related to work, employability, learning, leisure, inclusion and/or participation in society. Digital Competence is a transversal key competence which enables acquiring other key competences (e.g. language, mathematics, learning to learn, cultural awareness). It is related to many of the so-called 21st Century skills which should be acquired by all citizens, to ensure their active participation in society and the economy." (**Ferrari, 2012**)

According to several frameworks, Digital Competence requires in all its cases and uses the acquisition of different knowledge, skills and attitudes. (**Ferrari)** First, it requires very good knowledge of the nature, role and opportunities that digital technologies offer in daily life, in private, social or professional life. Second, it is necessary to develop the skills to search, collect and process digital information as well as the ability to analyze and use it critically. An individual must have the ability to use a variety of techniques to produce, present or understand complex information as well as the ability to connect and use the services provided by the Internet. Finally, critical and reflective behavior regarding the information found, as well as responsible use of digital tools.

George Siemens in his article "Connectivism: a learning theory for the digital age", proposes the use of several technological tools and means to develop connectivist learning. The teacher is encouraged to create blogs and homework aggregators to pool the work of learners. Collaborative work should be favored through the use of collaboration software free access (videos, podcasts, games, etc.). The content to be taught is transmitted in the form of videos, online conferences or podcasts produced, if possible, by the professionals in the subject. The teacher also makes available to the learner in the class blog for other sources of information that would give the learner the opportunity to continue learning outside of the classroom. This is based on Knowing this learning model that George Siemens and Stephen Downes are starting to talk about MOOCs. **(Siemens, 2008)**

2. The UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers

The ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (**UNESCO, 2018**) aims to support the development of various policies and national norms related to teachers' ICT skills and should be considered as an important document when it comes to drafting a global integration plan of ICT in education. This document comes as a result of a very long collaboration between UNESCO and its partners: CISCO, Intel, SITE and Microsoft. Through this document UNESCO seeks to promote the development of an education reform, with a view to the continued development of nations.

The ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (ICT CFT) focuses on three keywords: ICT, education and economics. It is mainly dedicated to primary and secondary school teachers. However,

it can also be used for other levels of teaching: in-depth teaching, higher education, continuing education in the workplace, etc. This document can also be used by other education actors besides teachers such as students, school principals, ICT coordinators in charge of teaching programs, tutors, administrators, and trainers or program writers.

In the new curricular documents drafted in the framework of the current curriculum for Albanian education, a digital competency is one of the seven key competencies of the curriculum. The use of new technologies in education requires the teacher to play new roles, use new pedagogy, as well as new approaches to its formation. The integration of ICT in the classroom depends on the teacher's ability to structure learning in an innovative way, combining technologies with new pedagogies and creating an active classroom by stimulating collaboration, collaborative learning and group work. **(IZHA, 2015)**

Teachers need new skills for classroom management, they must be able to use technologies to improve the learning environment by promoting technological literacy, deepening knowledge and creation. Ongoing teacher training will be one of the essential elements for improving education. But in order to have such an impact, the professional training of teachers must emphasize a certain number of changes in teaching. It is from this perspective that the UNESCO ICT CFT seeks to bring here the skills that teachers need to have in all aspects of their professional activity.

The UNESCO ICT CFT combines three approaches to teaching based on human skills reinforcement (technological literacy, knowledge deepening and knowledge creation) with the six main aspects of teaching activity (ICT place in teaching, programs and assessment, pedagogy, ICT, organization and administration as well as professional training of teachers).Prospective teachers are at risk for making poor dietary choices that can cause significant health problems. They are unaware of the nutritional requirements to maintain a healthy body weight, they make poor nutritional decision, which can cause poor weight management and health problems. Prospective teachers select food according to convenience, taste, time, and price rather than nutritional values. Poor nutrition due to unhealthy eating habits may lead to delayed puberty, nutrient deficiencies and dehydration, menstrual irregularities, poor bone health, increased risk of injuries, poor academic performance and increased risk of eating disorders. The student teachers who are nutrition under eaters may be affected by anorexia or bulimia. Prospective teachers who do not eat breakfast, or eat an insufficient breakfast, are more likely to have behavioral, emotional and academic problems at college. Prospective teachers who consume unhealthy foods can have trouble concentrating, become easily fatigued, listless or irritable and are likely to face difficulties in learning, which can lead to behavioral and social problems. Teaching prospective teachers about the importance of good nutrition lay the foundation for a healthier and more fulfilling life. Poor eating habits and nutritional knowledge deficits may affect health of the youngsters. Healthy eating habits may help to eliminate carbonated soft drinks and unhealthy junk foods from their routine diets. The high intake of sugar rich and white flour foods such as cookies and cakes will increase the risk of obesity among college students. The significance of this research is to enlighten the prospective teachers about the importance of healthy dietary habits.

First level: technological literacy

The political objective related to technological literacy is precisely to prepare students, citizens and the active population to use ICT to develop society and improve the economy. For this reason this approach also requires a change in educational policies which require that there be some sort of change from the traditional disciplines to promote the use of technological tools.

Changing pedagogical practices requires the use of digital tools, technologies and materials when carrying out classroom activities in groups or individually. Changing classroom practices also requires knowledge about the place and how they should be used, activities needed to acquire knowledge as well as support for teacher training.

Teacher's ICT skills during the Technological Literacy phase are basic skills of digital culture and digital civilisation. At this stage teachers need to know how to use technologies to select and use educational tutorials, they need to know how to choose web materials for classrooms equipped with or less equipped with computer labs, as well as for all assessment activities, preparation activities and their professional development.

Second level: deepening knowledge

The objective of this approach is to develop the skills of students, citizens and the active population to solve urgent and complex problems, thanks to the disciplinary knowledge they have acquired. During this phase it is very important that the teacher can recognize and understand school policies and priorities by being able to conceive and use specific activities according to political objectives and priorities.

This approach attaches more importance to understanding than to knowledge. Assessment should be related to the application of problem-solving skills, integrated into learning activities. The pedagogy used is that of collaborative learning according to problem solving and realization of projects where students study the problem and use their knowledge to solve complex problems. The teacher is focused on the student and his role is to create structured tasks, guide students during the analysis and support during the implementation phase of the project that they develop during the collaborative work.

Learning at this stage is more dynamic and the teacher uses ICT programs and tools, which are adapted to the discipline to which he teaches, for example simulation programs in mathematics, role-playing exercises in the humanities, etc.

Teacher's skills at this stage relate to information management, task structuring as well as the integration of programs and applications in a given discipline. Given that at this stage students need to work together, the ICT tools used, need to be networked so that students have the opportunity to collaborate and access the same materials at the same time. Teachers should also use ICT to create projects and also be in contact with other teachers in support of their vocational training.

Third level : knowledge creation

The objective of the "Knowledge Creation" approach is to increase productivity by training students, citizens and the active population to engage in knowledge production, innovation and lifelong learning.

The teacher must be able to conceive activities that develop these objectives, he must know how to develop programs based on these objectives. At this stage disciplinary knowledge is no longer sufficient. It is necessary to use skills to create new knowledge, for example the ability to solve problems, the ability to communicate, to work in groups, to do experiments, to think critically and to show creativity.

The most important objective at this level is the student's ability to set his own personal objectives and to create a learning plan himself, he must know how to make a self-assessment of his knowledge on what he knows and needs to know by focusing on the task, tracking personal progress and evaluating the mistakes he makes. The role of the teacher is to model this process, to structure the situations where the student applies his skills or the help he must give to the student to acquire new skills. The classroom turns into a learning community, where the student is constantly encouraged to mutually develop his knowledge and skills.

In this way the school turns into an organization where all actors are involved in learning, teachers are considered as model learners and knowledge creators, who are constantly engaged in learning experiments and innovations in collaboration with colleagues and external experts in order to produce new teaching and learning practices. Digital resources and environments are used to create this community, thus promoting collaborative work.

At this level teachers should have skills related to the conception of ICT-based learning resources and environments, they should use ICT to simulate the creation of knowledge and critical spirit of students, the development of reflective and continuous practices on student learning. They should be able to play an active role next to their colleagues by trying to create the image of a community that works on the basis of innovation and continuous formation enriched by ICT.

3. Information and Communication Technologies in Albanian Pre-University Education

The development of ICT is part of the programs of the Albanian government since 2009 with the National Strategy for Education 2009 - 2013 and is one of the four objectives of the Strategy for Education 2021-2026. What is intended is the development of digital competence through better use of information and communication technology for teaching and learning. **(MASR, 2021).**

According to the national **Education Strategy 2021-2026**:

*"Information and communication technology (ICT) can have a positive impact on improving the quality of teaching, increasing motivation and improving student performance, ensuring that all students gain levels certain digital competence to adapt to the demands of 21st century knowledge societies. In case of unpredictable situations such as pandemics or natural disasters, ICT offers opportunities for organizing distance learning, while, in normal situations, technology can be used to advance the learning process in schools***."(MASR)**

During May 2020, **UNICEF Albania** conducted a survey through the U-Report platform that aimed to obtain information from young people and adults in Albania on some of the issues that are considered important to be addressed by the National Strategy of Education. According to the participants included in the survey, the main focus of the Strategy regarding the digitalization of education should be the training of teachers on the use of information technology - 49%, then the development of digital teaching materials - 28% and equipping schools with computers - 22 %.

In the **UNESCO'**s report "Albania: education policy review; issues and recommendations, extended report " **(2017)**, it is stated that, although not enough, Albanian schools are equipped with computers and accessories, local computer networks are installed, and it is possible to connect them to the Internet. In 2017, in pre-university level schools the computer-student ratio was 1:27 which is far from the standards of EU countries where 1 computer is available for 3-7 students. On the other hand, the number of non-functional computers reaches 25% of their total number which speaks of their lack of maintenance, while the internet speed, for the most part, does not meet the requirements of the users. In addition, access to ICT and Internet equipment is largely limited to dedicated computer labs, while opportunities to use equipment within classrooms are very limited, as projectors, wireless networking, and other dedicated accessories are lacking. All these factors constitute to the main obstacle for the use of ICT in schools.

Another obstacle to the use of ICT in schools is the lack of coordination at national level. There is no central authority in Albania that deals with the provision of ICT and internet services for schools, but this is done by private companies, which do not always provide sufficient internet speeds to meet the needs of schools. Schools do not have access to online resources in the Albanian language, nor to services that could advance the integration of ICT in the learning process, such as platforms dedicated to online learning.

However, in the period March-June 2020 when, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, learning took place remotely, Albanian Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports took over the obligation to create online resources in the form of video recordings, while Albanian Agency for Quality Assurance of Pre-University Education issued guidelines for organization of distance learning in conditions of global emergency. With the support of UNICEF and MASR, the akademi.al platform was developed https://www.akademi.al/, which creates opportunities for online learning, as well as combined classroom and online learning, while the Vodafone Albania campaign brought the donation of over 15 thousand tablets and Phones for Children in Need. **(MASR, 2021)**

The National Education Strategy 2021-2026 states the need for better preparation of teachers for the use of technology in the teaching process, although some of them are well trained in this area. During the distance learning that was organized in the period March-June 2020, the teachers demonstrated that they can quickly adapt to the circumstances, using communication platforms and software that serve the best integration of ICT in the learning process, therefore it is necessary to takes a step forward by providing training, advice and clear job guidance.

Based on this issue, it was thought that a more specific survey would be conducted to see what the level and perception of French language teachers regarding their digital culture was. Below we will bring the results of the test and the survey related to this issue.

4. Test and survey related to the digital culture of French language teachers

- **Questionnaire**

The following survey was divided into two parts, the first part was organized in the form of a test, while the second part in the form of a questionnaire on the same topic, the digital culture of French language teachers.

The first part of the questionnaire consisted of 27 questions in the form of a quiz with three alternatives each. Some questions consisted on different usages of computers or other ICT tools over network or over internet. Some other questions consisted of on information related of searching over Internet, for example what is a URL or what is an IP.

Other questions consisted on computer communication, such as usage of social networks or blogs. Another element tested, was the e-learning relationship, ie how much knowledge the professors part of the questionnaire had about online learning, for example they were asked to find out what Moodle was, a webinar or a MOOC.

Questions regarding to network security, such as knowledge of spam, POOPs or Open-Source documents, were also part of the questionnaire as well.

The second part of the questionnaire was built in the form of a survey, where respondents had to give their opinion and make a kind of self-assessment regarding the different forms of ICT usage.

The asked questions consisted on the six elements of computer usage and other IT tools. First part had 7 questions related to the usage of technologies as tools for information and communication, the second part consisted of 4 questions related to our ability to help others using these tools, then as a third part we had 4 questions, regarding the ability to use hardware devices in technology, for example, the ability to connect a computer or a printer.

Fourth part of the questionnaire consisted on the ability to use different software, installation of them, or to create different applications. The fifth part was about the usage of ICT as a tool for organization purpose such as the usage of online agendas, the organization of videoconferencing, etc., and finally, the last part was consisted on network security.

- **Participants**

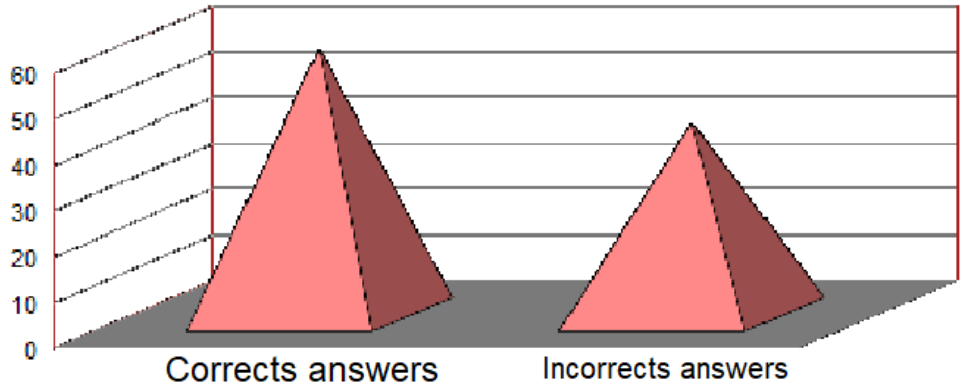
In the survey took part 34 French language teachers throughout Albania. 50% of the teachers surveyed belong to higher education, 31% to secondary education and 19% of them to 9-year education. 87% of the teachers work in a public educational institution and 13% of them in a private educational institution. The average work experience of the interviewed teachers is 18 years of work, of which the respondent with less experience has 5 years of work, while the respondent with more experience has 35 years of work.

The average age of teachers is 43 years old, of which the youngest respondent is 30 years old and the oldest is 67 years old. 81% of them are female, while 19% are male.

- **Discussion**

Below we have presented in graphic form the overall test results. As we can see from the graph, 58% of the answers are correct and 42% of them are incorrect.

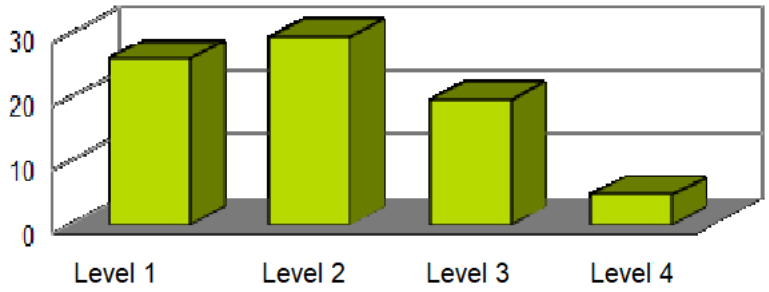
Figure.1 Test results on digital culture



Interpretation of figure-1.

Teachers possess a relative knowledge of internet tools and their capacity to carry out language activities. The most popular tools in use are websites (100% of users), reference sources (80%) and email, which, although technically known to all interviewees, is used very rarely or not at all as well as by a very limited number of teachers (8%) for linguistic purposes in favor of teaching work. Meanwhile, there are significant shortcomings in recognizing the pedagogical values of some other tools such as blog, wiki, podcast, videoconferencing, which are generally known remotely or not known at all, while their use in the teaching of foreign language is not used at all.

Figure.2. The computer as a communication and information tool



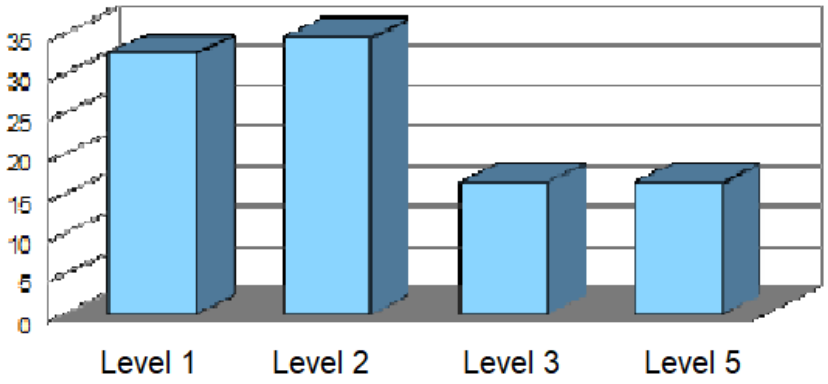
Interpretation of figure-2.

The graph above relates to questions dedicated to information and communication through ICT tools. The level from one to four is related to the type of answers given. Level 1 (I do not know), level 2 (I did it with someone's help), level 3 (I manage, but I do not feel completely safe) and level 4 (I know how to do it and I feel safe).

According to these answers, we notice that most of the respondents think that, in terms of using ICT as a tool for information and communication, they have done it before with the help of someone.

Respondents think that they feel safer in using office software (word, excel, power point, etc.), while in terms of using technological tools to create or putting online various materials, they are almost completely insecure and do not have much experience in this field.

Figure.3. Helping others use ICT

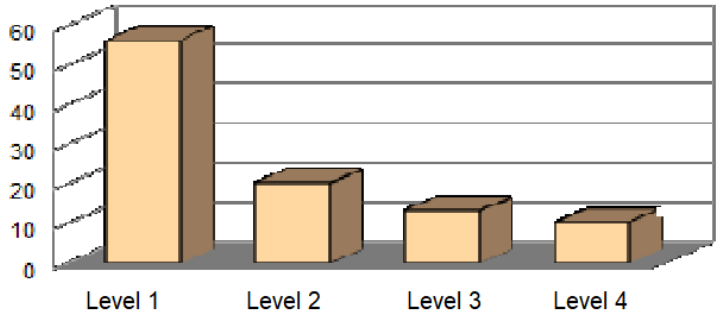


Interpretation of figure-3.

The graph above presents the results of the questions related to online tutoring, to the ability of the respondents regarding the help and assistance they can give to others. According to the results it is noticed that most of the participants have had previous experiences of this kind.

They have had the opportunity to help others create accounts on social networks, play video games, use the internet, tablet, or mobile phone. 68% of respondents can play a game online, but 68% of them have never played a serious game or attended a MOOC.

Figure.4. Use of hardware

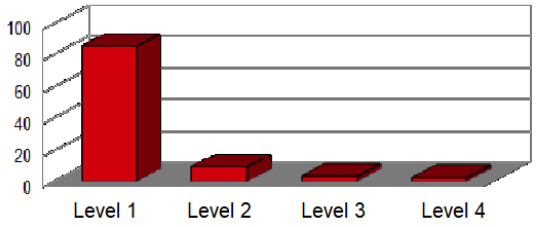


Interpretation of figure-4.

In terms of experience in the field of hardware, in the ability to connect IT devices, respondents have no experience in this field. Most of them do not know how to use tools or equipment that serve to produce digital tools, which is normal, as this job requires certain professional skills.

However, even in terms of connecting computers or installing peripherals (printers, scanners, etc.), respondents feel that they do not have good experience in this field. Most of them have never done such a thing, but about 30% of them have seen it done by someone else and think they might be able to do it themselves.

Figure.5. Ability to install software

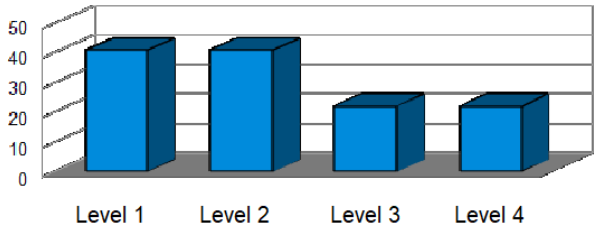


Interpretation of figure-5.

In terms of software, we note that most participants think they do not know how to install or create a software. Unlike other answers, we note that almost more than 80% of respondents are of this opinion. Most of them are more familiar when it comes to different programming languages related to creating web pages, such as HTML or JavaScript languages.

They have less knowledge about creating mobile applications. There is no doubt that creating software or applications also requires specialized skills in this area. However, about 35% of respondents say they have knowledge in this area.

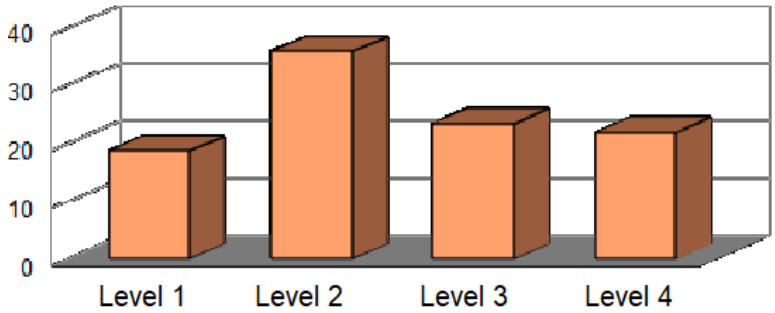
Figure.6. Organization through ICT



Interpretation of figure-6.

Another element to note is the fact that in terms of organizing meetings or online video conferencing, respondents have a better experience than creating software. They have more knowledge about using ICT tools to organize time, exchanges with each other, etc. Most of them have had the opportunity to assist someone who has done this, but about 30% of them do not know why. While in terms of using the Internet as an element to create various events, respondents have had almost no such previous experience.

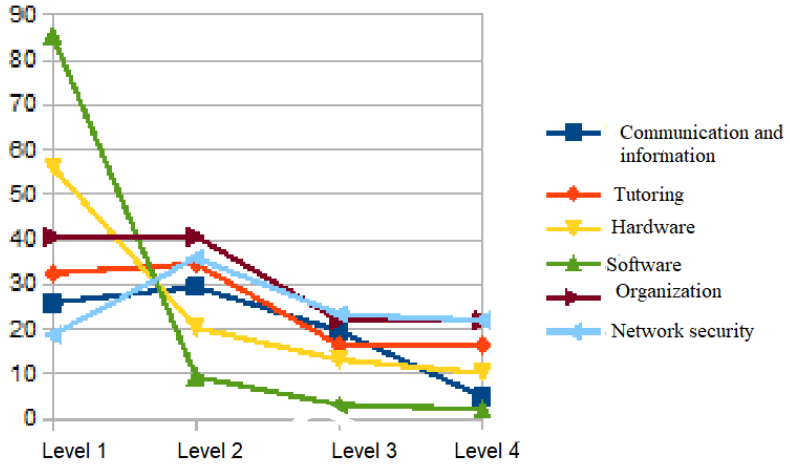
Figure.7. Information on network security



Interpretation of figure-7.
Regarding network security, the answers are almost equal for each of the levels. We note that most respondents have heard of network security, however they do not have much information about this element of ICT use.

When it comes to knowledge about the rights to use information and above all about the evaluation of information found online, most respondents have not heard of this element before or are little informed about it.

Figure.8. General trend curve of the questionnaire results



Interpretation of figure-8.
The graph above presents all the answers to the questionnaire, broken down by questionnaire categories and helps us look at the overall trend of answers by comparing them with each other. As noted, the curves with the largest variations are those of using hardware, software, and organizing information or events online. As we see, for these elements, most respondents have no knowledge, while in terms of information, communication, tutoring or even information on network security, the answers are almost equal for all levels.

According to the ICT reference framework developed by UNESCO, the ICT skills and competencies of teachers go through three phases as well as all the elements of this framework. First, the use of basic tools in the technological literacy phase.

In the second level of knowledge deepening, teachers should use more complex tools, they should know different programs related to their field of study, they should be able to use these programs deftly to achieve projects. Teachers should also be able to use online resources in order to help students do collaborative work, access different resources and information, and be able to communicate with a variety of networking experts. field, to analyze and solve problems.

Regarding the third level, that of knowledge creation through ICT tools, teachers of this level should be able to create knowledge based on ICT or use ICT to stimulate knowledge creation and reflexive practices and continuous, to develop learning in students.

In conclusion, based on the testing and survey of French language teachers regarding their digital culture, as well as the knowledge they need to have regarding the use of ICT, we note that:

• Teachers feel that they do not have much knowledge in this area, however they are more confident in using ICT as a means of information and communication, or in relation to information devoted to network security. Teachers have more difficulty in using and especially creating different software or hardware.

• Almost more than 40% of the surveyed teachers answered the test incorrectly.
Based on these findings, we can say that the surveyed teachers have an initial level in terms of the use of information and communication technologies.

5.Conclusion

The integration of technologies in the life of the country is certainly reflected in their integration in school, learning and teaching. According to various studies conducted in our country regarding their integration, it has been noticed that there has been an effort in terms of digitalization of schools, in order to increase the quality of teaching and learning, as well as increase the ability of digital citizenship, introducing ICT in the curriculum, building computer labs, equipping schools with various digital devices (computers, tablets, TBI, etc.), however, it is noted that these laboratories are not always sufficient if we compare them with the number of students, often there is a lack of internet connection, there are difficulties in their management and maintenance, etc.

In addition to the logistical and technical difficulties encountered in the schools of our country, in terms of equipment with computer tools, there is also a low level of digital skills of teachers. The surveyed teachers themselves stated that they have difficulties in using technologies and need continuous training in this area.

For this reason, in order to help the training of teachers in the field of ICT, it is important to use reference frameworks, which come to the aid of curriculum builders and trainers for the construction of training modules for the development of use of teachers' digital skills. These frameworks give us the opportunity to build training modules based on the knowledge that teachers should have according to certain levels.

The UNESCO ICT Reference Framework can be used to build formations for all areas and subjects. It not only helps to unify the teaching curricula that serve to train foreign language teachers, but also helps us to assess the skills of teachers who are already working, in order to highlight their shortcomings and needs for continuing training.

The use of ICT is a transversal skill which is already inevitable and integrated into teaching and learning. Beginners should be able to compile materials through word processing programs, search for online resources, classify them into files, and download materials. In the second level, they have

to use different programs and devices, help students online and manipulate programs, which serve to modulate audio or video documents.

At the third level, the teacher has the ability to not only train his students through online teaching, but also his colleagues. At this level, he is also capable of creating distance formations. So, we note that the skills of the foreign language teacher in the use of ICT according to levels, are related firstly, the use, secondly the manipulation and thirdly, the creation of online materials.

In addition to the levels of ICT knowledge and skills that a foreign language teacher should have, this framework also determines the skills in the teacher's professional conduct. According to the framework, it is noticed that in the first level the teacher is informed mainly only, from the books or documents available, he seeks the help of colleagues even during class work. In the second level, he exchanges more with his colleagues and attends more continuous trainings, while in the third level he is the one who animates training sessions for others by creating training modules.

So the ability develops by going from the level of acquiring knowledge to that of creating and imparting knowledge to others. We note that according to this framework, the exchange of knowledge and experiences between teachers is promoted a lot, as well as group work for the continuous development of teachers.

To further develop teachers' skills in the use and integration of ICT in teaching, distance learning can be a way, which helps the professional development of teachers, having a dual objective, first, it helps in the development of ongoing training for a large number of teachers, but at the same time helps teachers to develop their ICT skills, based on the philosophy of learning and the theory of connectivity according to Siemens.

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