



# The Usefulness of Various Technological Tools in Enhancing Vocabulary Learning among FL Polish Learners of English

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## Abstract

The aim of this research is to examine whether various technological tools are useful in enhancing vocabulary learning among FL Polish learners of English. Additionally, the teachers' views on using new technologies in education are explored. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were utilized to collect the data. 101 primary and secondary school English language teachers completed the questionnaire, whereas four additional language teachers took part in the interview. The results of the study showed that teachers' perception towards implementing various technological tools in enhancing their learners' vocabulary retention is exclusively positive. Interestingly, many of the teachers in this study considered themselves as competent users of new technologies, even though the majority of them did not receive any appropriate training. The collected data also revealed that lack of necessary appliances appeared to be the biggest challenge of using new technologies in their classes. Nevertheless, the findings allowed us to conclude that various technological tools are useful in enhancing vocabulary learning among FL learners of English.

## Subject Areas

Linguistics

## Keywords

CALL, MALL, Technological Tools, Vocabulary

## 1. Introduction

The concept of vocabulary is so broad that it does not possess one, relevant defi-

dition. However, there is no doubt that the role of vocabulary in language learning is significant. Without the knowledge of words, mastering each of FL skills could not be possible. Therefore, teachers should bear in mind various ways of introducing new vocabulary in order to meet the needs of each learner. They should also keep their learners motivated and eager to deepen their understanding of the target language. All that can be achieved if only teachers take into consideration the types and sources of learners' motivation, as well as select appropriate methods and approaches to make the learning process pleasant and effective. Learners' age depending needs as well as teachers' own preferences have a key influence on choosing the most suitable teaching techniques. Nevertheless, as words are easily forgotten, one should remember about diverse practices of memorizing new vocabulary to place it in long-term memory as permanently remembered.

Due to the fact that vocabulary is essential in the process of learning a foreign language, it should be crucial to search for various ways of introducing new words in an interesting and engaging way. [1] claims that such a possibility can be found in the application of new technologies. Appropriate use of ICT enables many teachers to modify the existing methods and approaches to language teaching, and, as a consequence, helps them improve the quality of their instruction. Moreover, diverse technological tools have considerable potential themselves, e.g. they may contribute to increased motivation among FL learners. The process of mastering the target language takes into account their individual pace and high level of autonomy, which leads to attaining better learning results. Using new technology requires, predominantly, proper training and adequate computer skills. Only then well prepared teachers can be aware of all the pros and cons of implementing Information Communication Technology (ICT) into a language lesson.

It would appear that new technologies have become well established in Polish schools. Noticeably, many teachers of English use various technological tools during their lessons in order to improve their learners' language skills; thus, the purpose of this research is to find an answer to the main research question of this study, *i.e.* "Do Polish FL teachers believe ICT tools can be useful in enhancing their learners' retention of vocabulary?"

The main research question of this study has nine sub-questions as follows:

- 1) whether (and if yes, how often) FL teachers use ICT tools to enhance vocabulary learning among FL learners;
- 2) what reasons they accept for using ICT tools in school;
- 3) what technological tools are the most popular among them;
- 4) which ICT tools are believed to be most useful by them;
- 5) whether there are any differences in the use of vocabulary retention ICT tools in primary and secondary schools;
- 6) is a stage of professional promotion a factor determining the use of ICT;
- 7) how competent are FL teachers to apply various ICT tools;
- 8) what FL teachers think about the use of ICT tools;

9) what are the challenges of using ICT tools in enhancing vocabulary among foreign language (FL) teachers of English.

## 2. Literature Review

Nowadays, there is a wide acceptance of technology as a necessary part of societies and that learners are in need of being exposed to technology from young ages. [2] argued that young learners' teachers need to integrate new technologies because of the fact that today's children live in a digital world and are familiar with various technical innovations. They reckoned that computer-assisted language learning (CALL) have a positive impact on students' autonomy, motivation for learning English and improve their both communication and computer skills. According to [3], technology and, in particular, online computer games, can be beneficial, especially for weaker students. The feeling of comfort offered by the mentioned means is reflected in visible improvement of their learning outcomes. The majority of teachers involved in the reviewed studies find computer-assisted language learning interesting and useful and consider technological tools worth incorporating into their lessons. Moreover, [4] argued that English lessons, in which teachers use new technologies, are vivid and interesting and his opinion was supported by [5] who also added that technological tools have an engaging and motivating impact on the learners. However, [2] also presented that many young learners' educators did not have satisfactory awareness about implementing technology into their teaching as they have not been properly trained during their studies and after that. Nevertheless, they were interested in enhancing their technological and pedagogical knowledge and thus schools and universities should be more supportive in this respect. In order to reduce the occurred obstacles, professional development should be provided to all willing teachers and all language classes should be fully equipped with the necessary technological tools. The findings of the study are totally convergent with the list of challenges of using new technologies, created by [1] and [4].

It is claimed that MALL (mobile assisted language learning) is also positively received by the teachers. EFL teachers found m-applications useful to learn and teach new lexical items. According to [6], such technological tools are, in most cases, easy to use, intuitive and helpful both inside and outside the classroom. Moreover, mobile applications are entertaining and state-of-the-art, thus rise students' interest and increase their motivation to learn. The research indicated that vocabulary m-applications provide a positive environment to collaborate. Students willingly exchange information via mobile phones, work together on assignments and shall assist one another during technical difficulties encountered. Furthermore, smartphones make the learning process effective and enjoyable by offering a lot of various applications designed to practice vocabulary. Such platforms as Google Play or Apple Store are a source of noteworthy mobile apps, for each English proficiency level. Finally, according to the EFL teachers, mobile-based vocabulary instructions are more effective than traditional methods. Well selected and well embraced m-applications can be of great benefit in

a language class. It is claimed that new technologies have a positive impact on the learners, break the routine in the classroom, encourage and motivate students.

[7] presents a contrary viewpoint and state that educational technology is not frequently used by the teachers in EFL teaching in Ecuador. The authors claim that it is caused by the lack of required facilities, as well as insufficient knowledge of various types of technological tools. Because of that, the teachers show little enthusiasm to implement technology into English lessons, even though they find such methods beneficial for students' language learning. Consequently, they prefer traditional methods of teaching, based on the students' coursebooks and printed materials. Nonetheless, the authors declare that technology should be integrated into English classes as it is motivating for students and positively influences their learning process. For this purpose, all the teachers should have access to useful trainings and workshops in order to reduce anxiety and boost their confidence while using technological tools in English lessons. It is, however, vital to equip the classrooms with all the necessary facilities to make the lesson based on technology feasible.

The literature presented above provides valuable information concerning the usefulness of diverse technological tools in language learning. The findings indicate that the implementation of technology into English classes have a positive impact not only on the rise of the students' vocabulary retention but also on the level of their motivation for learning and collaboration with their peers. Simultaneously, the usefulness of technology in learning English as a foreign language, to a large extent, depend on the willingness, adequate training of the teachers and necessary equipment provided by the authorities.

### 3. Methodology

The study was carried out in Poland in October 2020-June 2021. In order to find the answers to the research questions, the study employed a mixed method approach, both quantitative and qualitative. Stratified random sampling and convenient sampling were used to select the study subjects.

Two data collection instruments were employed in this study. For the quantitative research we used a self-designed questionnaire (modeled on [8]), whereas an interview allowed to gather data in a qualitative way. Such an approach was regarded as the most relevant and valuable combination of research instruments for this study. Sub-questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7 were an ideal base for creating a questionnaire; in order to answer sub-questions 8 and 9, four additional teachers were interviewed by us.

The first instrument was created in an online form, with the help of Google Forms. The survey was safely distributed on the Internet, without the need for direct contact. The link was disseminated on numerous Polish social groups dedicated for the teachers of English. The study also used communicating platforms to reach the respondents. The survey consisted of 10 points of different type, along with general additional information about the teachers. They re-

ferred to the first seven sub-questions and concerned the use of technology in teaching vocabulary to FL learners of English, the most useful technological tools for this purpose, the level of teachers' competence in using technology in the classroom, the differences between primary and secondary school in using technology and, finally, the impact of teachers' professional promotion in using technological tools in teaching English to FL learners.

The second instrument, an interview, was chosen to get in-depth answers to the research questions. The interview contained 6 open-ended questions that are associated with the last two sub-questions. The study attempted to get teachers' opinion on their most preferable technological tools together with the explanation, the obstacle they face with regard to using technology at school, the benefits they note in this regard, and their general view on using technological tools in the class.

The research was conducted with 101 teachers of English, 68 from primary school and 33 from secondary school. They were asked to respond to an online questionnaire.

Regarding second research instrument, we randomly selected two primary school and two secondary school teachers were randomly selected to be interviewed by us.

As far as the questionnaire is concerned, we used Microsoft Excel to analyze the collected data statistically. The percentage, mean, median and standard deviation were calculated. Moreover, a t-test and a one-way ANOVA were applied in order to check statistical significance between the results concerning two research questions. Meanwhile, the findings of the interview were identified and analyzed quantitatively.

#### 4. Findings

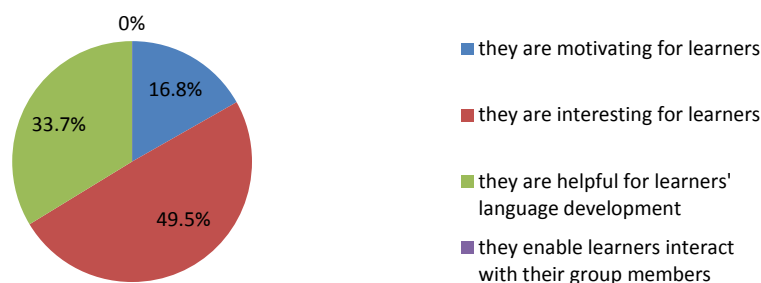
The data collected from the questionnaire and the interview answered the nine sub-questions created for the study. Therefore, majority of teachers of English as a foreign language, both from primary and secondary schools very often use various technological tools in order to teach vocabulary to their students.

The results in **Table 1** indicate that almost a half (41.6%) of the teachers very often use technological tools to teach vocabulary to FL learners of English and a little bit lesser amount (39.6%) declares to often use them when at work. It is only 16.8% of teachers who state they use technological tools sometimes, with the remaining 2% indicating to use them rarely. It is worth noticing that none of the teachers reported to never use technological tools to teach vocabulary to their learners (**Figure 1**).

**Table 1.** The frequency of using technological tools to teach vocabulary to EFL learners.

The frequency of using technological tools to teach vocabulary to EFL learners (in %)				
never	rarely	sometimes	often	very often
-	2.0	16.8	39.6	41.6

Source: own research.



**Figure 1.** Reasons for using technological tools to teach vocabulary to EFL learners. Source: own research.

At the same time **Figure 2** informs about the main reasons of integrating new technologies to teach vocabulary to EFL learners; the principal one is that such tools *are interesting for learners*, as this was the conviction of almost a half (49.5%) of all the researched teachers. It is also worth noting that nobody has found the ICT tools as suitable to help the learners interact with their peers. Taking into consideration all the participants of the research, the most popular technological tools, from all 13 provided by us, turned out to be YouTube ( $M = 4.05$ ), Wordwall ( $M = 3.98$ ), Quizlet ( $M = 3.49$ ), Live worksheets ( $M = 3.48$ ) and the Interactive whiteboard ( $M = 3.31$ ). In contrast, the least popular tools turned to be Podcasts ( $M = 2.61$ ) and QR codes ( $M = 2.20$ ). All the results can be found in **Figure 3**.

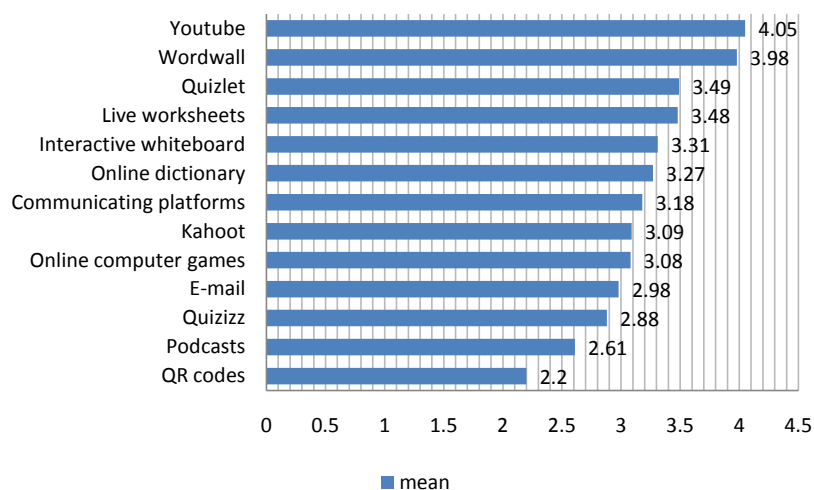
As far as their usefulness is concerned, the results obtained by us have not changed at all when compared with these presented in **Figure 3**. Also here (**Figure 3**) the respondents have recognized YouTube ( $M = 4.32$ ), Wordwall ( $M = 4.14$ ), Quizlet ( $M = 3.97$ ) and Live worksheets ( $M = 3.92$ ) as the tools most useful for their learners, what would confirm the frequency of their use. As for the observed ranking changes, Kahoot ( $M = 3.77$ ) replaced Interactive whiteboard ( $M = 3.70$ ) when it comes to the level of its usefulness, whereas QR codes ( $M = 2.94$ ) and E-mails ( $M = 2.81$ ) were ranked as the least useful technological tools to teach vocabulary to FL learners of English.

The data gathered from the research indicated evident differences in the use of ICT tools among primary and secondary school teachers. To verify the significance of the categories, we applied a one sample t-test. Nevertheless, it revealed that the differences were not statistically significant since the t-value was 1.107, the p-value was 0.279267 which means that the result was not significant at  $p < 0.05$ . The differences in use showed only teachers' preferences on the choice of particular technological tool.

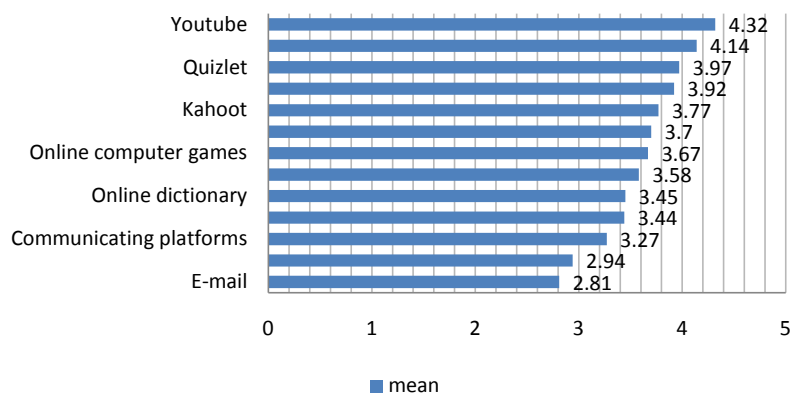
What is more, the differences in the use of provided technological tools among teachers with distinct stages of professional development were also calculated. Likewise, in this case the differences were noticeable. Nevertheless, the one-way ANOVA test showed that they were not significant statistically since the f-ratio value was 0.55593, the p-value was 0.646681, thus the result was not

significant at  $p < 0.05$ .

Regarding the seventh research question, most of the teachers claimed that their level of competence in using technological tools is high (46.5%), average (35.6%) and very high (14.9%) despite the fact that the majority of them (65%) did not participate in any training to improve their skills in using new technologies while teaching vocabulary to their EFL learners. As they did not have any workshops provided by their authorities, hence they had to obtain all the knowledge in this field by themselves (Table 2).



**Figure 2.** The technological tools used by the teachers along with the frequency of use. Source: own research.



**Figure 3.** The usefulness of technological tools used by the teachers. Source: own research.

**Table 2.** Declared teachers' competence in using technological tools (in %).

Declared teachers' competence in using technological tools (in %)			
Low	Average	High	Very high
-	46.5	35.6	14.9

Source: own research.

The research results from the interviews allowed us to find out whether the teachers' perception on using new technologies in enhancing vocabulary learning is exclusively positive. The interviewees outlined several challenges preventing them from using technological tools in their lessons, which were as follows: lack of necessary appliances, lack of provided training, lack of time and students' weariness, and reluctance caused by overusing new technologies in language teaching. However, the teachers we talked to concluded that, despite the obstacles, specified by them they willingly implement various technological tools into the curriculum.

## 5. Discussion

The results based on the research conducted for the aim of this study and the literature review along with the theoretical framework underlying the area of presented research allowed to lead to some valuable information necessary to provide conclusions concerning this study. 100% of teachers participating in the questionnaire claimed that they use various technological tools to teach vocabulary to their learners. As far as the frequency of use is concerned, the respondents declared that they use new technologies very often (41.6%) and often (39.6%) and only few teachers confessed that they rarely choose this form of teaching. It means that new technologies are extremely popular in Polish realities. Interestingly, [2] argues that teachers in Iran do and even ought to implement new technologies into their lessons from the fact that children are immersed in a digital world and are active users of new technologies. At this point, it is necessary to mention that the findings do not coincide with the data gathered by [7] who reached the conclusion that EFL teachers from Ecuador, because of lack of required facilities and insufficient knowledge about ICT show little enthusiasm to implement new technologies as only 33% of them integrate technological tools into their classes.

The teachers claimed that they use technological tools because they are interesting for learners (49.5%). Moreover, the study indicated that new technologies are also helpful for the learners' language development (33.7%) and that they are motivating (16.8%). The results correspond to the data gathered from the interviews, as all the respondents implement new technologies into their lessons for identical reasons. Additionally, [4] argued that English lessons, in which teachers use new technologies, are vivid and interesting and his opinion was supported by [5] who also added that technological tools have an engaging and motivating impact on the learners. Nevertheless, the gathered data brought an intriguing information. None of the respondents indicated that new technologies enable learners interact with their group members. Such a stance may let us conclude that various technological tools contribute to individual work of each learner instead of strengthening the bond in the group.

The findings also show that the most frequently used technological tool among the teachers is Youtube ( $M = 4.05$ ). Wordwall ( $M = 3.98$ ), Quizlet ( $M =$



3.49), Live worksheets ( $M = 3.48$ ) and Interactive whiteboard ( $M = 3.31$ ) are also very popular. The results are coherent with the findings of [7] who indicated Youtube as the most popular tool used during the English lesson in Ecuador. Moreover, the data gathered from the interviews allowed us to refer to the findings from the questionnaire and showed that Youtube, Wordwall, Interactive whiteboard are three the most preferable tools to teach vocabulary to FL learners of English. Nevertheless, the teachers also pointed out Kahoot as one of their favorite technological tools, and which was, by comparison, eighth on the list the most frequently use tools according to the respondents of the survey. The research of this study also revealed that the least frequently used technological tools are Podcasts ( $M = 2.61$ ) and QR codes ( $M = 2.2$ ), what is, again, consistent with the findings of [7], who investigated that Podcasts had only few adherents as far as EFL teaching is concerned.

As far as the usefulness is concerned, the results show that the most useful technological tools in teaching vocabulary to FL learners of English are YouTube ( $M = 4.32$ ), Wordwall ( $M = 4.14$ ), Quizlet ( $M = 3.97$ ), Live worksheets ( $M = 3.92$ ) and Kahoot ( $M = 3.77$ ). The findings are very similar to the ones related to the use of various technological tools. The only difference is the tool ranked fifth. Kahoot revealed to be more useful than Interactive whiteboard. Such situation may be caused by the lack of adequate training. Teachers, even though use various tools during their lessons, may find other tools significantly better in teaching their learners. Unfortunately, they are not able to integrate them into their lessons due to the poor knowledge about them. Simultaneously, a stance that various technological tools may be frequently used because of the reason that teachers participated in appropriate training or workshop, may be considered.

The results of the research presented some visible differences in the use of provided technological tools between the various groups of teachers. Primary school teachers chose Wordwall ( $M = 4.39$ ), YouTube ( $M = 4.07$ ), Live worksheets ( $M = 3.7$ ) as the tools they mostly use, whereas secondary school teachers turned out to be YouTube ( $M = 4.03$ ), Online dictionary ( $M = 3.69$ ), Quizlet ( $M = 3.39$ ) fans. As far as the stage of professional promotion is concerned, the mostly used technological tools in the four groups were: Wordwall ( $M = 4.33$ ), YouTube ( $M = 4.16$ ) and Quizlet ( $M = 3.45$ ) (trainee teachers), YouTube ( $M = 3.96$ ), Wordwall ( $M = 3.88$ ) and Communicating platforms and Interactive whiteboard, both with  $M = 3.4$  (contractual teachers), YouTube ( $M = 4.37$ ), Wordwall ( $M = 4.08$ ) and Live worksheets ( $M = 3.91$ ) (appointed teachers) and YouTube ( $M = 3.78$ ), Wordwall ( $M = 3.67$ ) and Quizlet ( $M = 3.57$ ) (chartered teachers). However, despite the fact the results slightly differed, it was hard to conclude whether the findings are statistically significant. Therefore, we decided to do statistical tests. In relation to the differences between primary and secondary school teachers, a t-test was made whereas One-way ANOVA test was made concerning the results of four groups with different stage of professional development. In both cases, the tests revealed that the differences among the groups

are not significant statistically. The results allowed us to conclude that teachers' choices of particular technological tools derive mostly from their personal preferences and trends in education rather than the groups to which they belong.

Interestingly, the majority of teachers claimed that they viewed themselves as competent users of the new technologies, since 46.5% of the respondents stated that their level of competence is high, 35.6% described it as average and 14.9% as very high. The results are surprisingly satisfactory, considering the fact that 65% of the teachers were not provided with any training or workshop from their employers. The findings correspond with the answers received from the interviews. All four teachers were of the opinion that they are not afraid of using new technologies to teach their learners thus they continuously develop their knowledge of new, interesting technological tools. The most important thing for them while dealing with new technologies was open-mindedness and willingness to innovations. They claimed that tools used today will be outdated tomorrow hence they need and want to be up to date to this issue. Such attitude allows them to perceive themselves as competent users of new technologies. Nevertheless, the results presented above, are not in line with the results gathered by [2]. Their research confirmed that only 6.3% of Iranian teachers of English believed to be confident and competent in technology use. Such a state of affairs was dictated by a lack of support from the authorities, associated with lack of facilities and no training provided to the teachers. Taking this situation into account it turns out that Polish teachers of English are much more determined and even hungry for the knowledge. Even though they, similarly, may not have appropriate support from the authorities, they take matters into their own hands.

The data gathered via qualitative research showed that teachers perceive technological tools in enhancing learners' vocabulary learning very positively by unanimity. All of them appeared to be enthusiasts of new technologies and find the technological tools interesting and effective in vocabulary teaching. They argued that new technologies offer many more possibilities than traditional teaching. Due to various technological tools their lessons have been declared to be vivid, appealing and attractive. Therefore, their students eagerly participate in activities based on technology. The scholars mentioned in the literature review were of the same opinion regarding their views on using new technologies in teaching vocabulary to FL learners of English. They considered inclusion of various technological tools into classes positively. [6] added that appropriately selected applications can be nothing but beneficial in a language class; therefore, teachers should bear in mind choosing adequate and verified technological tools for their learners. Moreover, even though [4] came to the conclusion that the teachers in Ecuador reluctantly integrated technological tools into language classes, they considered new technologies essential and beneficial in teaching vocabulary to their learners.

In respect of the challenges, the respondents of the interview listed several, most commonly found, obstacles. The challenge preventing them from using new technologies during their lessons was lack of appropriate facilities. Polish

teachers of English complained mostly about poor Internet connection, as well as insufficient number of computers for their students. This statement is compatible with the Iranian research on the same topic done by the data collected by [2], who pointed out that the biggest obstacle in using new technologies in Iranian schools is the shortage of computer facilities. Another challenge mentioned by the participants of the interview was lack of training provided by the authorities. When compared, such an obstacle was also stated by [7] as one of most frequent in Ecuador. For this very reason, Ecuadorian teachers were found to be reluctant to implement new technologies into their lessons. In Polish realities, as previously mentioned in the quantitative part of the research, 65% of teachers did not have a chance to participate in a course or a workshop provided by the headmasters. Such high scope of the problem may be indicative of an indifference of the authorities or the other way round, a resourcefulness of Polish teachers, what make the authorities believe that the teachers do not need to take part in any training prepared for them, as they do well for themselves. Next, the interviewed teachers claimed that challenges of integrating new technologies into language lessons derive from their learners' reluctance caused by the excessive use of selected technological tools. Finally, lack of time was the one more mentioned obstacle to use technological tools in language learning. One teacher claimed that sometimes there are no ready-made online activities compatible with the particular lesson and creating their own activity can be time consuming. The findings of the study are totally convergent with the list of challenges of using new technologies, created by [1] and [4].

## 6. Conclusion and Implications of the Study

The results of the research suggest that teachers of English in Poland are interested in implementing various technological tools so as to be able to enhance their learners' vocabulary retention. Due to that they frequently use new technologies during their lessons as they believe that ICT tools are interesting and extremely useful for their learners' language development. With regard to the choice of particular technological tools, the significance is to be placed within the teachers' own preferences and a trend in a given school year instead of the stage of professional development or the type of school they work at. Polish teachers, even though they are not professionals at IT, are generally confident of their computer skills. Despite the fact that the majority of them did not receive adequate training from the authorities, connected with the proper use of various technological tools in language learning, they consider themselves competent users of new technologies. Nevertheless, despite the attitude of the teachers, they should, unquestionably, obtain professional support from the headmasters. They should not be worried about any facility shortages in their language classes or no access to appropriate training or workshops that would increase their knowledge to the use of the ICT tools in the education system. It is necessary to emphasize that teachers deserve dignified working conditions. Needless to say, the lack of

involvement from the authorities may slowly lead to the teachers' frustration and, as a consequence, result in their burnout.

## 7. Study Limitations

As usual, study limitations should be pinpointed. First of all, the groups of teachers responding to the questionnaire seem to be pretty incidental as we came to the conclusion any pilot study would be time-consuming and may influence the general idea of the research. It should be remembered that the collection of the data for the research took place in the period of COVID-19 restrictions as well as partial lockout instituted in the country, what obviously limited the number of respondents willing to participate in the research. Apart from that, mostly due to online connection applied during the research, many of the teachers who initially agreed to help us collect the data, finally gave up, explaining their decisions by the lack of time to have spent it on additional talks. We are obviously aware of the fact that the final results might have been different if the research had been carried out before the lockout situation, *i.e.* when the classes were delivered in a classical classroom-confined way. Also the distribution of teachers, *i.e.* limiting them to primary education only (or secondary education only) might influence the final results as well. All these aspects indicate a possibility to carry out further research in the area and find out whether the fact FL teachers, at some point of their professional careers, had been expected to think about different than frontal forms of foreign language teaching (and, in this way, requested to befriend themselves with many ICT tools) did result in the appearance of a fully new FL teaching perspective on the one hand and the development of blended education, on the other.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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