

INK

ENGLISH
MAGAZINE



Andry Sofia Sarria Saab
FIGRI STUDENT
AND MONITOR

How technology has impacted my life as a student



I was eight years old when I first used a computer. A lot of things have changed since that moment, in particular technology. I have seen a lot of changes, for example, from the floppy disk to the CD, and then the USB and from telephone to the mobile phone and now smartphones. Technology was uncommon in those days, but now it seems to be everywhere, and almost everyone I know has a laptop, a tablet, and of course a smartphone - even my mom is posting on Instagram!

Technology has profoundly changed our lives and more precisely, education has been part of that change. I grew up in a town and I moved to Bogota when I was a teenager. It was a surprise for me that every classroom at the new school had a video beam because in my old school, we only had three in total. So since that moment, I started to use my computer for presentations, and other things different from just looking for information. After that, I had to edit videos, and use Excel and other applications.

Then, when my parents gave me my first smartphone, I left my computer aside. I frequently started using this device as a tool

for learning, and it was like having all the information right in my hand. I have to admit that I wasted a lot of time on my phone in my adolescence; the only thing I wanted to do was text my friends, but that changed before starting university.

I went to England to study English for a few months and technology not only allowed me to be in touch with my family, but it also helped me so much in the process of learning a new language. When I first arrived, my English wasn't that good, so I had communication difficulties with my host family. Eventually, I downloaded a translator app on my smartphone and that was my salvation.

Furthermore, I started to study on my own, particularly when I wanted to know more about a specific topic or even if I just wanted to practice. I had my class book but I started to check for things on the Internet. I looked for videos, exercises and films to improve my English. That was the first time I realized the importance of technology for learning.

However, technological tools at University were more present and essential. In my case, my laptop became my best friend but also, I

bought a tablet and I brought it to class every day. I spent plenty of hours in the library reading on it. Once, I purchased an e-book for a French class and that was a relief because I didn't have to carry any books in my bag: a big issue when you already have your computer and other stuff! Of course, it made things easier for me, like having my material all in one place. For example, I didn't have to use a CD because I had all the audio, readings and explanations in the e-book. Also, I found an app with all the French verb conjugations and that was an opportunity to spend less time searching and more time investing that time in actually learning.

Being in touch with technology for such a long time and going through all those changes has helped me in many ways. I really appreciate the possibilities that technology has given me to learn and improve my languages. Nevertheless, I believe that we have to take advantage of this useful tool, but we also have to be careful because it's really easy to waste our time on things that aren't worth it, and that's when technology becomes a double-edged sword.

The special technology Ink issue: what's in store



Phil Stoneman
INK EDITOR AND FIGRI ENGLISH TEACHER

Phil has a keen interest in technology and its use in English-language teaching. He has published and presented widely on the subject and enjoys sharing his love of this aspect of modern life. Originally from Sheffield in the UK, he holds a BA in Film and Media Studies and an MPhil in Publishing Studies from the University of Stirling, and the DELTA in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. He has been teaching English at Externado University since 2006.



Technology: as much as it's all around us, the question remains as to the best way to use it. There are more and more options every day, with new devices and new applications appearing to find solutions to the new challenges in our daily lives. Technology is in a constant state of flux, and if we do not evolve with it, we risk being left behind in this brave new world of electronic marvels.

For many years, I've been a great fan of sci-fi literature, and as a child it was incredible to think that sophisticated handheld devices could connect to people and knowledge bases around the world. What was once wild fantasy has now become part of day-to-day existence, and we have so many opportunities if we're willing to try these things out. So what do we need to do? If we're going to do more than chat with our friends, then we need to be open to exploring a variety of options.

For this reason, we've created this very special edition of Ink magazine to look at the technology that surrounds us in today's world, and more specifically here at Externado University. Here's what you can find in this issue:

- What is English X? And what does this mean for Externado students? Find out in Jill Fortune's article all about the new programme.
- An important part of the English X programme is the use of virtual classes: the AVAs. Check the best way to use this powerful resource with Astrid Wilches.
- Technology isn't just for learning English, of course! It's also a vital part of the FIGRI programme, particularly focused on the use of Bloomberg, as Juan Pablo Mejía Calle explains.
- There are many ways to use technology for learning, and one very interesting option is to learn through a video conference. Ezana Habte-Gabr tells us more.
- As I mentioned, the way we think about and use technology has changed over the years. Andry Sofia Sarria Saab describes her experiences.
- Finally, how could we talk about technology, and forget about video games? Gaming expert Sandra Castro talks about how these challenges have shaped her experiences.

We hope you enjoy this special issue, and it inspires and entertains you!

We are very excited to have the following people involved in this special issue of Ink magazine:

- Sandra Castro
- Jill Fortune
- Ezana Habte-Gabr
- Juan Pablo Mejía Calle
- Andry Sofia Sarria Saab
- Phil Stoneman
- Astrid Wilches

Many thanks for your help in putting together this important publication.

The idea of Ink is to display pieces of writing, in English, by members of the Externado community. As we try to maintain authors' originality as far as possible, you may find some minor mistakes in the articles. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect those of the Externado University.

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Jill Fortune
FIGRI LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT COORDINATOR

Jill Fortune is one of the FIGRI Language Department's Coordinators, and has led on the design, piloting and implementation of the English X programme. She holds a BA in Hispanic Studies and an MA in TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), and has worked in the field of English Language teaching and training since 2001, in both Europe and Latin America. Originally from the UK, Jill has been living and working in Colombia for 16 years, many of which have been within the FIGRI Languages Department at Externado, as teacher and department head. She has a special interest in teaching for intercultural competences and in language assessment.

English X

English X is the exciting new English language programme that has been designed within the FIGRI Languages Department, and after extensive piloting, is going live with all undergraduate students in the faculties of FIGRI, Comunicación Social y Periodismo, Administración de Empresas Turísticas y Hoteleras, Economía, Administración de Empresas and Contaduría in the second semester of 2019.

English X is an innovative programme that, as opposed to following an internationally-published textbook, guides students in learning about topics relevant to them, as they study at Externado and prepare for their academic and professional life in the future. The course is based on competences, meaning that while grammar is still present (sorry, but you can't escape it, if you want to speak well!), it is no longer the focus of classes; students will practice the language through different skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking), and will be evaluated in terms of what they can actually do with the language. These competences are based on the internationally-recognised Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Bearing this in mind, each level places a strong focus on project work, with 30% of students' semester grade coming from the integrated skills work carried out to produce a project related to students' academic or personal interests. Such projects range from writing and recording a basic recipe, to designing a brand and giving TED-style presentations. We hope that these projects will help students not only improve their English language skills, but also other skills that will be useful in other areas of life, such as public speaking or thinking about basic marketing concepts.

Another innovative feature of English X is its blended modality. Students in our programme will now attend Face-to-Face (F2F) class at the university just twice a week, and the third class of the week will be carried out online, via the university's online platform, or AVA (ambiente virtual de aprendizaje). Each class has its own AVA, which includes different kinds of information and activities, such as audiovisual material, language exercises, quizzes for students to test their knowledge, discussion forums and much, much more! While it is of course students' own responsibility to access the AVA regularly, there are some grades that come from these activities, and the work and evaluations done in the F2F class are also strongly integrated with the AVA content, so don't forget to log on!

The blended form of English X provides a lot more flexibility for students in when, where and how they study. It allows each student to go at their own pace, watching videos as many times as they need to in order to understand fully, or to move on to the next activity, without having to wait for others in the class to catch up. In short, it provides students with the opportunity to become more autonomous in their studies: a life skill that will be invaluable after graduation!



Finally, English X also offers a wide range of Complementary Activities, which are optional for students, and allow them to practice their English in a non-threatening, relaxed and dynamic context. These activities include online events such as webinars or synchronous 1-to-1 workshops, as well as F2F academic conferences, sports activities and even karaoke sessions! There will also be field trips organized, so that students have the chance to practice their English in spaces off-campus too. Interaction with members of other cultural groups and communities will also be encouraged through these activities. We recommend students join in as many of these activities as they can, to have some fun and learn English at the same time!

We look forward to seeing you all enjoying English X!



Juan Pablo Mejía Calle
FIGRI COORDINATOR
AND PROFESSOR

Tech and the learning of finance

Professional in Finance and International Relations with 8 years of experience in the financial sector and twelve years as a university professor. Postgraduate in Corporate Management Control of the Externado University of Colombia. My field of expertise is the analysis of financial statements focused on the analysis of financial indicators. I am interested in studying how managerial strategic decisions have an impact on a company's financial results.

It is not possible to talk about finance without talking about technology, as it is not possible to talk about education without talking about technology. This means that talking about teaching finance has to, mandatorily, be related to talking about technology. Financial markets are getting faster by the minute thanks to technological advances and all the people that sit in front of computers programming strings of code, analyzing enormous bulks of data, or anything in between. Externado's School of Finance is one of the most relevant in Colombia,

and this is why we have not only incorporated great technological tools in our classes, but also a great team of professors that are well acquainted with them. The benefits of integrating technological tools into our classes are evident, and we may divide them into three: to gain experience with tools used across the financial services industry, to contrast knowledge with real-time data, and to understand decision-making processes backed with data.

For more than nine years, we have been working with Bloomberg – the world's most re-

nowned financial information platform – in market analysis classes due to its features and relevance. As Professor Villacris says, "In financial markets it's key to have access to real-time information. Most professionals have access to tools like Bloomberg, in order to enhance analysis, performance and booking. The use of the terminal in the classroom lets the student focus on the strengthening of analysis capabilities, since the software makes structured information on market prices, rates and economic indicators available." In this sense, the first benefit of integrating technological

tools into our classes is that students gain experience with a technological platform – like Bloomberg – which is used throughout the financial services industry around the world. This allows them to enter the labor market already acquainted with it, and so giving them an advantage. The platform features certain tools that, as Daniela Alarcón says "...helped me to understand market concepts and information. It is an important tool I use to do research for my finance courses." Knowing what they can get from Bloomberg allows students to advance on their learning curve, increasing the interest of their future employers in their capabilities and the students' chances of landing a job in the field of finance.

Another benefit is that students may add together the market's performance to their own knowledge, and their teachers', by taking class in front of a Bloomberg terminal. This allows students to put into practice what they are seeing in class with real-time information. In the words of professor Villacris, "The development of the conceptual framework is reinforced by approaching it through interaction with Bloomberg where the concept is evident, which replicates the work that a practitioner performs on a daily basis. Performing this type of analysis is an advantage for students, because finance is partly a science but also a science of art, and in market analysis, experience is a valuable asset."

Students also regard this in a very positive way as, according to Sebastián Bolívar – ninth semester student – "Bloomberg is a useful tool for financial or economic research. It provides not only accurate information, but also operates in real time in line with any market worldwide. Thus, you will get a full range of functions to follow the markets all together." Or as Nubia Buenahora – sixth semester student – says, "Bloomberg helps me to apply all the theory I learn in my courses to a particular subject

and have a better understanding of it. In this way, I can actually turn knowledge into action on a daily basis before starting my professional life." Another view comes from Wanda Cuevas – VIII semester student – "The use of this platform is the best way to show how the topics seen in the classroom have a real application and above all why it's useful to apply them."

Finally, as professor Diana Pulido states, "Bloomberg is a tool that allows me to interact with students. We access information simultaneously, for example, when I explain the correlation of assets with a function and, at the same time, you look for news that may affect that correlation. Within my experience I highlight the use of Bloomberg tools to explain concepts of economy, capital markets and processes carried out by professionals in the market". By contrasting knowledge with real-time data, students turn knowledge into action, as Buenahora says, which provides them with tools for their professional careers, which gives them a head start in the labor market.



One other benefit is that students put into action their decision-making processes backed

up by data. This is very important because financial markets in Colombia used to be very jealous about providing information. Times have changed, and now any financial industry practitioner must know how to apply information to decision-making processes, especially in the investment and lending industries. Using Bloomberg allows students to gather large quantities of data, but this is not enough. Students must sharpen their senses in order to make keen decisions out of big bulks of data. "Once you have some basic insight into how to use Bloomberg, looking up information on the

platform will become easier. Therefore, you will be capable of doing a much deeper financial analysis when valuing a company, or setting up trading strategies," says Bolívar.

The Equity professor, Jorge Cruz, provides more detail about this. "Bloomberg is a financial platform that provides support throughout analytical tools and databases to teach the most relevant topics in finance and portfolio management. As Bloomberg is a user-friendly platform, it becomes an essential and very intuitive tool that helps students to review different asset classes and instruments." As Santiago Castrillón – VIII semester student – says, "The use of graphs helps a lot. I find the TAS PRO indicator for technical analysis useful because it helps me to understand how certain equities perform and may predict their future behavior." Although they are not investing in the real world, students are exposed to real-life situations in which they must put their knowledge into action and support their decisions with evidence. This is very important because when they graduate they will become practitioners that apply this kind of reasoning into their jobs, which will increase the market's professionalism and the quality of the companies in this industry.

The importance of bringing technology into finance classrooms is evident. Professors and students alike enjoy the benefits and the School of Finance at

Externado is proud to encourage and champion this blended learning and welcome the fruits that this may bring. We must continue encouraging this and the road is clear. We need more classes with not only Bloomberg or other software or platforms. We need to continue increasing the hours dedicated to teaching financial theory while complementing them with other technological tools that deepen the students' knowledge of the financial profession, while allowing them to continue their professional paths with this and other differentiators.

Science fiction and Orwellian fantasies are notions that Artificial Intelligence (AI) triggered in my mind until just a few years ago, when a student selected a scientific article on the topic in an elective course I was teaching on academic writing. Having discussed the article in the seminar, students would contact the author for a video conference, which of course was a question of sheer luck since it depended on the author's accepting the invitation. One of the articles selected was written by Robin Hanson of George Mason University in the United States, titled "When the Economy Transcends Humanity" in the January- February 2014 issue of *The Futurist* magazine. <http://mason.gmu.edu/~rhanson/Futurist.pdf>

Based on the history of global economics, Hanson looks at the scenario of a human-managed industrial society shifting into a "robot-based society", whereby AI will be in command as it emulates human activity with efficiency and productivity and eventually free of human control. While subject to debate, the topic has proven to be of interest to the academic community and will continue to be so, as different faculties look into how public policy and legal administration interact with AI. From the perspective of language learning, this conference along with another conference given by Professor Petros Gheresus of Kettering University

in the US, were opportunities for students to interact with scholars in English to discuss a technical and social issue.

Setting up video conferences with scholars generally requires lots of logistics and can be frustrating. First, they need to be convinced that volunteering their precious time is worthwhile in their social and community outreach. Often, they are unfamiliar with Colombia and its academic community, requiring the need to contextualize the students' cultural and learning environment. Issues such as the differences in time zone and scholars wanting to interact only with people in their specific area of research result in invitations not being accepted for the sort of academically diverse groups found in English classes. Generally, one out of ten video conference invitations are accepted by scholars in Europe and North America. Once accepted, they would actually take place a month or so later given the availability of the speaker.

Organizing conferences with Professor Hanson were not that difficult given his enthusiasm to share his ideas with students despite being very busy. Professor Hanson generally answers emails inviting him to speak or replies to student questions about AI within a matter of hours. I was drawn towards his world-renowned scholarship and humility when he offered to squeeze in a video conference for Externado students

right before a TED Talk in April 2017. Along with his conferences, a group of level 6 students also interacted with him and Professor Petros Gheresus, an Eritrean-American professor of Robotics, who is involved in research and engaging disadvantaged communities in science and technology. In addition to addressing how robotics enhances efficiency in production and shipping, Professor Gheresus talked about his life as an immigrant scholar in the United States, generating lots of questions from students as was the case with Professor Hanson.

It is always interesting and rewarding to see students interact with speakers during video conferences. Generally, by the end of the conference, most students have either asked a question or made a comment, generating a sense of confidence and satisfaction with their language level. These video conferences generated a need for students to brush up on grammar and vocabulary skills and was evident when some would ask me to help formulate questions or solicit vocabulary given their enthusiasm to participate. Finally, the fact is that when we talk about robotics and AI, there is always an indispensable human factor – the generosity of others to contribute their knowledge and share their time with fellow humans.



Astrid Wilches
FIGRI ENGLISH TEACHER
AND EDUCATIONAL
TECHNOLOGY EXPERT

Astrid Wilches was born in Bogotá and has been working as an EFL teacher for the last twelve years in language centers and universities. She holds a B.A. degree from the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional and an M.A. degree in Educational Technology and TESOL from the University of Manchester. Her main professional interests are e-learning, m-learning, gamification, flipped learning, blended learning and research.

Get the most out of the AVA learning experience!



Technology has a huge impact on people's lives and it has certainly changed the way we learn. Gone are the classes where students would passively receive information; education nowadays is an active process where the learner interacts with authentic multimedia input, edits, creates and shares content, and is in charge of his/her own learning process.

Being aware of this, the Externado University has started implementing AVAs (Ambientes Virtuales de Aprendizaje) which are online platforms that have multiple benefits for learning. For one thing, they integrate the work done in the face-to-face classes with the online component of the course; they also provide plenty of resources for reference and for extra practice; they facilitate meaningful communication and interaction among classmates and with the teacher; they create a space to share content, to work cooperatively and to showcase production using technological tools; and, most importantly, they empower students to be responsible for their learning.

Although using the platform is quite easy and brings lots of benefits, there are some considerations to keep in mind in order to get the most out of this new learning experience:

- 1. Organize your time:** when working online, it's important to have a schedule and devote time to work on the AVA on a regular basis. It's also a good idea to use a reminder in your agenda or cell phone about deadlines, or simply check the calendar and announcements created for that purpose on the platform. Do not wait until the last minute to submit: try to get some feedback with enough time to make the necessary corrections.
- 2. Know your AVA:** get familiar with the platform as soon as possible. Start by creating a password you won't forget and then explore and check every link and tool you find. Learn how and where to submit or check your grades. Know all the units and resources, check the kind of exercises and tasks and notice which ones are mandatory submissions, quizzes, documents, online exercises, extra practice, reflections, surveys, etc.
- 3. Follow instructions carefully:** take the time to read and understand the instructions and know what is expected from you. When you follow instructions, try to do every part as indicated, with the necessary requirements and within the time limit. Before submitting, always make sure your work includes all aspects mentioned in the instructions.

4. Have a backup: sometimes when working online, some information gets deleted. For this reason, it's not such a good idea to write directly on the platform. Instead, always try to write everything in *Word* first. In this way, you not only avoid losing information, but you can also check for spelling and grammar mistakes and have the chance to correct before submitting.

5. Go the extra mile! Don't just do the bare minimum - the AVA offers lots of resources for you to use: there are links to external sites, exercises to be done on the platform, documents to check for reference, and sometimes there are videos, audio or presentations for you to review or reinforce your understanding. Do the extra practice activities and try to be prepared for every class.

6. Try to learn, not just to pass: make the effort to use all your language knowledge plus the resources on the platform to learn and practice your English. Follow the instructions, use the language you've learned and try to do your best for every assignment. Don't use translators, because the important thing here is not to submit, it's to actually learn and improve your English skills.

So, the AVAs will bring a new learning experience for you and you only need to be prepared and embrace an active role in this learning process. Go for it!



Ezana Habte-Gabr
FIGRI ENGLISH
TEACHER AND VIDEO
CONFERENCING GURU

Ezana has been teaching courses in English at Externado since 2009 in addition to an occasional elective and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) graduate course. His formation in geography and social sciences has instilled an interest in teaching English through other subjects or content. Having completed secondary school in Ethiopia, where he was born and raised, Ezana undertook his BA and MA degrees in geography in Iowa, USA. He has taken British Council courses in teaching English and teaching methodology courses through the University of Alabama.

Video conferences on AI and Robotics the Human Factor



Sandra Castro
SOCIAL COMMUNICATION GRADUATE, JOURNALIST AND VLOGGER

Sandra Castro is a social communicator graduated in journalism from the Universidad Externado in 2013. She is the founder of *Tan Grande y Jugando* (Grown up and Playing), where she works as a journalist, vlogger, gamer and researcher. She writes in English for the Bogotá Post about the local video game industry. Sandra is currently working towards her Master's thesis in Political Communication from the Externado, with a plan to support the video game developers in the country.

Once upon a time

THERE WAS A GAME IN ENGLISH

That day of the week and at that time, the living room TV was all mine. Nothing could move me from that couch at 5am on a Saturday, at least not until 9am when I willingly resigned to watch the weekend cartoons with my younger brother.

I'd slipped out of the blankets without an alarm, and came to the console while everything was still dark and the birds were just waking up. It was the year 2004, and the Xbox had arrived at my house a year before, thousands of hours of gameplay already being completed.

That day, I was focused on passing that FABLE mission, a story in which you are a small orphan that becomes a hero worthy of the Guild of Heroes, or even a villain, depending on how you progressed. I had only played it for a few hours, and already understood the mechanics. Video games have that special ability to explain themselves so you can advance step by step.

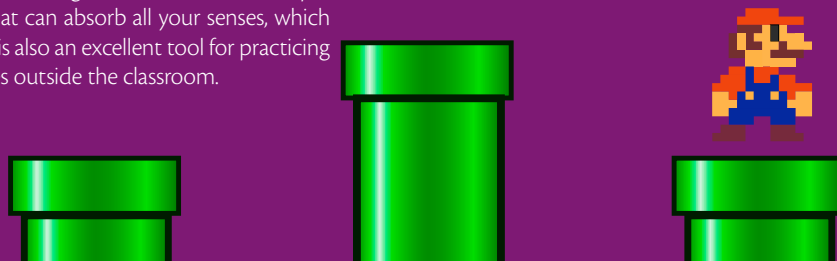
I wish classes were like that, with a tutorial to understand them. You did not think of con-

jugating verbs, understanding the present perfect, or of looking in dictionaries for sentences arranged in strange stories from the lesson book. You were the hero of this story, you could repeat again and again the dialogue with the people you wanted, pass the missions at ease and if you failed, resume the mission from the beginning and start over again, this time paying more attention to those details that could be hidden among the phrases of the villagers, without ever feeling the pressure of a qualification and obtaining the reward of an excellent story.

At the time I started, not all video games came with dubbing. Looking back, I think it was a blessing rather than a curse: you immerse yourself in another language without thinking that you are practicing or opening your ears up to those different accents. Unlike a book, a video game is an interactive experience that can absorb all your senses, which is why it is also an excellent tool for practicing languages outside the classroom.

Video games have taken me through fantastic worlds and historical passages: I had incredible adventures in Hyrule, I recreated the family history of Desmond Miles, I rescued invaluable precious works with Drake, I beat Orochi as a wolf in Nippon, I climbed huge metallic giraffes in the skin of the redhead Aloy, I attacked zombies in the body of the teenager Ellie and now I'm looking forward to doing it with her as an adult in the sequel which is coming next year.

Imagine waiting for a class with so much desire, to never stop learning and practice without feeling that it is part of the study. This is the class I have not left since I graduated from university. I don't intend to conjugate verbs, understand the present perfect or to look for dictionaries, but I'm doing it and won't stop!



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