



Using E-Books as Language Teaching Materials: an Initial Teacher Education Model

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Abstract

The recent studies have emphasized that e-books support literacy learning, interdependence and motivation in language teaching [1, 2, 3, 4]. Since the e-books offer a lot of pedagogical benefits both to learners and to teachers, student teachers' awareness on the use of e-books must be raised in Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in order to enhance the integration of their ICT literacy into their teaching skills. The model presented in this paper has been developed for the student teachers at the ELT Department of Mersin University. The Literature and Language Teaching Course given to third year students has focused on planning lessons based on e-books. After the whole-class discussion on the use of e-books in language classrooms, the student teachers have been grouped and asked to choose and download an e-story suitable for the age and level of their target group. The groups, next, have developed activities for the e-story and exchanged their views and experiences with their classmates and instructor. As the further step, they have presented sample lessons depicting the way they have followed while using e-stories as teaching resources. They have reflected on their performance and given feedback to the others. At the end, they have had a valuable teaching experience and a resource based on the end products of the course.

1. Introduction

The revolutionary developments and achievements in ICT have led to radical changes in educational settings. The policy makers, curriculum designers, material developers, teacher educators, teachers, teacher candidates have been under the impact of ICT. It is widely accepted that ICT has already taken its place in today's classrooms, particularly in language teaching classrooms.

In foreign and second language teaching history, the first step to ICT was the emergence of CALL, Computer Assisted Language Learning, which was welcomed about three decades ago. Since CALL has been highly successful as a practical methodology for the enhancement of traditional teaching methods [5] the language teaching specialists and teacher educators have updated their knowledge on this new technology and developed the skills essential for the performance based on the use of computers.

Along with the arrival of computer at the educational settings, the internet use has come to the ground, offering numerous advantages for both teachers and learners. This has been the digital revolution, which has converted the way learning, and teaching is presented in classrooms to educate world citizens for the 21st century [6]. As Wang [1] states, computer technologies, and the internet have become powerful tools for assisting language teaching in a relatively short time, and offered teachers a lot of alternatives for planning activities and tasks and designing and adapting materials. Anderson & Dron [7] points out that technology has become a necessity in classrooms and a growing number of teachers strive to create learner-centered environments where learners take more responsibility of their learning. Arroylo [6] also underlines the importance of readjusting teaching methods to a new learning situation, which often promotes autonomy and a learner-centered approach. Among numerous instructional alternatives offered by ICT, e-books have appeared as remarkable type of digital resources, which attract the attention of teachers who look for the ways of presenting more effective classroom activities.

The literature on the use of e-books in the language classrooms and other educational settings presents a lot of useful ideas and research findings to the teacher educators and teachers. Anderson & Dron [7] emphasizes the advantages of e-books, particularly the content-rich ones, as they support the improvement of literacy and fluency skills, the development of 21st century skills such as media and information literacy, and the ability to adapt to new technology. According to Larson [8], online e-book resources can offer audio and read-aloud features, authentic illustrations, a large collection of authentic literature and printable activities. With the arrival of the e-books, the teachers, particularly the ones who integrate literature into foreign language teaching have had new ways of presenting and practicing their target content.

Using literature in language teaching has gained a new dimension with the discussions initiated by Communicative Approach, which sees literature as an opportunity for better communication in language teaching and literature reading a communicative activity. The language used in literary texts has a high concentration of linguistic features like metaphors, similes, poetic lexis and unusual syntactic patterns [9] [10]. According to Duff and Maley [11], three main criteria justify the use of literature in language teaching: linguistic criterion, methodological criterion and motivational criterion. With the linguistic features of literary texts, language learners are provided with real examples of different styles and genres. In addition to linguistic contribution, literary texts generate different opinions among the learners and a real, motivated interaction with the text, with the other learners and with the teacher [12]. Such an interaction enhances methodological and motivational dimension of teaching-learning process. Learners in such a setting become active and autonomous.

Another contribution of literature is seen in developing reading skills. Brumfit and Carter [9] emphasize that learners both acquire lexical competence and develop syntactic knowledge through reading done consciously or unconsciously. What literary reading contributes is the development of further reading skills such as deducing the meaning and understanding the communicative value of sentences [13]. Therefore, literature in language teaching may create an atmosphere in which learners are given opportunities to express their real opinions and feelings. Bearing the facilitating effect of ICT in mind, today's language teachers are expected to include literature in their teaching repertoire.

The national program for initial teacher education in Turkey has several compulsory and selective courses, which integrate education with technology, such as Computer Science and Computer Assisted Language Teaching. Beside them, almost all the other courses in ICT programs include ICT based components. Taking the powerful impact of ICT and the central role played by the teacher in ICT use and its integration into classroom practices into consideration, the teacher educators in ITE have been designing their courses to address the needs of student teachers. Literature and Language Teaching Course taught in ELT Department at Mersin University is not an exception. The course is given to the third year students of English Language Teaching Department in two semesters and introduces the ways of how literature and language teaching are integrated. It also explores the theoretical and practical dimensions of this integration. The selected short stories, novels, poems, and plays are read and several approaches to using them in the classrooms while teaching the learners at age groups and different proficiency levels are presented. Making ICT a required component of such a course enhances learner-centeredness and creates a vivid sharing atmosphere.

2. How the model works in the ITE program

Since the literature on ICT and the role of literature in language teaching briefly mentioned above suggests inspiring ways to be taken, the following model has been developed in order to raise awareness among the student teachers.

First of all, the student teachers have been asked to find the articles focusing on the function of literature in language teaching by using ICT. The following sessions have been devoted to the whole class discussions on why literature can be a part of language teaching. In addition to the discussions on the value of literature in language teaching, the student teachers have been encouraged to express their opinions, feelings, and experiences on literature.

As the second step in the course, the groups of 3 or 4 have been formed and each group have searched and downloaded suitable tales or stories for their tasks. After they have chosen their stories or tales, they have shared them with their classmates not to focus on the same tales or stories. Also, they have exchanged ideas whether the text they have selected has been suitable for the age and proficiency level of their target group. This stage before designing the activities has been quite useful for the student teachers, as they have had the chance of being informed on their classmates' choices and views.

In the next step, they have started to make two different plans for two groups of learners at different age and proficiency level. The plans have been based on the literary texts chosen and included different tasks and activities and internet-based research. Meanwhile, the interaction with the other groups and the instructor has continued and provided more insight and ideas for the preparation stage.

After they have completed their lesson designs, the microteaching sessions have started and the groups have presented their lessons including e-stories as teaching resources. When the presentation has been over, the student teachers have given feedback to the group members focusing on the strengths and weaknesses of the sample lesson. The activities and tasks developed around the story have been analyzed and the materials, both the ICT based ones and the traditional ones, have been evaluated. The instructor has also been the part of the feedback stage, particularly playing the role of initiator in the cases where the student teachers have been reluctant to make comments and contributions.

Since the presentations of all the groups have been video-recorded, the model followed has given the opportunity of reflection on their lessons, and the group members have expressed their views on the shared experience by writing evaluation sheets. At the end of the course, all the third year students taking Literature and Language Teaching Course have had a resource pack of e-stories and tales with the relevant activities and tasks as the end-product. Consequently, the whole process has been the experience of learning to teach through literature and underlined the importance of following ideas:

- 1- While selecting literary texts, the basic principle is taking the age and the proficiency level of the learners into consideration.
- 2- Making accurate guesses about the learners' interest areas plays a crucial role for the success of the lesson. For instance, a fable or a short story with the non-human characters may not be appealing enough for the adult learners.
- 3- Using stories and tales in language classrooms and designing related activities and tasks foster learners' language use since reading is crucial in language development.
- 4- The use of literature in language teaching does not merely focus on reading skills; it also provides opportunities to develop other language skills with the help of ICT.
- 5- ICT offers numerous sample lesson experiences and the chance of finding suitable texts to teachers.
- 6- ICT develops digital literacy, which is regarded as a must for both teachers and learners.
- 7- The teacher plays the central role while using ICT as a tool and designing a lesson based on a literary product.
- 8- ICT in teacher education is an essential component for the preparation, plan, performance, and evaluation.

3. Conclusion

The model summarized above has described the ways for how the student teachers have become responsible for their own learning to teach and professional development. The key components of the model have been ICT as a remarkable tool, the use of literature as a real language variety and student teachers 'working in collaboration. The student teachers have learned from a lot from various sources in order make themselves ready for the tasks. Firstly, their skills of ICT literacy have developed as

they have searched a lot and used the suitable technology while selecting, planning, designing, presenting, and evaluating.

The second fruitful outcome has been the experience of teaching technology and literary text-oriented lessons, which enhance their teaching skills. In accordance with the nature of literature, they have mostly focused on teaching reading skills; however, they have successfully integrated the other teaching skills, particularly in pre-reading and post-reading stages of their lessons. They have witnessed how a lesson can captivate the learners' interests with the audio, visual and self-study effects of ICT and the authentic language of the stories selected for the target groups. In addition, the preparation and the teaching experience has not been an individual risk taking or a performance assessed by the instructor only. Instead, they have worked in collaboration in a non-threatening and sharing atmosphere. They have learned from the peers who have the same teaching and learning objectives.

The feedback sessions and the recordings of their joint performances have made contributions to the development of their critical thinking skills, which is an essential feature for the 21st century citizen. All the activities, tasks, and even mechanical exercises designed related to the selected e-stories have been collected as a digital resource and every student teacher has had it ready for teaching sessions in the future. Finally, they have raised awareness on the impact of ICT in teaching and learning, and the learner-centeredness of the lessons, which integrates literature into language teaching. As for the instructor, the model has pinpointed the role of ICT in teacher education once more. She has facilitated and guided the student teachers' learning by being part of the collaborative process.

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