The Positive Effects of Integrating ICT in Foreign Language Teaching

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Abstract

There has been much debate over the use of computers and the internet in foreign language teaching for more than two decades. Thus, the Information Communications Technology (ICT) in foreign language teaching has been the researchers' focus of attention. Education, especially foreign language teaching, has to adapt and renew itself to be compatible with the globalized world. The purpose of this study is to examine the necessity of ICT and highlight the positive effects of it in order to keep up with the modernized communities in the current digital world. To meet this end, the enormous advantages of integrating ICT in foreign language teaching will be presented. With the enhancement of ICT, teachers and students will be able to communicate and collaborate with native and non-native speakers around the globe. The application of ICT is also beneficial in that they provide a wealth of resources for the students to become active learners by creating content for a worldwide audience. When students write or speak for a broader and more international audience, they become more enthusiastic about learning and be active participants in the information age. Furthermore, by using the authentic material provided by the internet, the students will have a better insight into the culture of the country and people whose language they study. In the later parts of the study, reasons for using technology in foreign language teaching and some strategies and techniques for integrating ICT in foreign language teaching will be presented. Therefore, it is stated that integrating ICT in foreign language teaching will have positive effects on both the teachers and students to help them be aware of the modernized world and meet the current demands of the new era.
Keywords: Information Communications Technology (ICT), integration, foreign language teaching

1. Introduction

There has been much debate over the use of computers and the internet in foreign language teaching over the past few years. The techniques offered, the activities and the degree of application in the language teaching syllabus have undergone a number of serious changes alongside the evolution of technology [12]. The technology has become a fixture in many homes around the world, and its influence has permeated into all facets of our lives, including educational settings. This phenomenon has been hailed by many as the wave of the future in which language instruction will be driven by new advances in computers, the internet, and mobile technologies [1].

The introduction of this new process has serious implications for the nature and purpose of educational institutions. The knowledge and skills acquired make learning possible continuously throughout the lifetime. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) as well as newer digital technologies such as computers and internet are more powerful tools for educational change and reform. They can best be harnessed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of education at all levels and in both formal and non-formal settings as it enables access to information exponentially [7].

The process of learning a second language may be structured in different ways – in a classroom or at home, with or without a teacher, emphasizing or minimizing grammar, gradually exposing the student to native speakers or prompt immersion [5].

With the advancements in ICT, Web 2.0 tools are becoming more and more commonplace in schools. With the change of a "read" Web to a "read/write" Web, teachers are discovering new ways in which to engage technologically savvy students in computer-based educational activities. Publishing student work to the World Wide Web is a means of providing an authentic global audience for classroom productions. When students write or speak for a broader and more international audience, they pay more attention to polishing their work, think more deeply about the content they produce, and consider cultural norms more thoughtfully [13]. Thus, the rapid advances in technology has led the development of ICT which is thought to offer new opportunities to promote the quality and effectiveness of foreign language teaching.

2. The advantages of ICT in foreign language teaching

There is no more doubt that the use of ICT has positive effects on foreign language teaching/learning. Its impact is highly dependent on the way it is used, the teachers' motivation and his "savoir-faire". The following impacts seem to be the most obvious ones when using ICT to support foreign language teaching [4]:

- The possibility to adapt easily the teaching materials according to circumstances, learner's needs and response;
- ICT allows to react upon and enables the use of recent/daily news, it offers access to authentic materials on the web;
- Possibility to combine/use alternately (basic) skills (text and images, audio and video clip...);
- Lectures become more interesting and less ordinary which boosts learners' engagement;
- ICT enables to focus on one specific aspect of the lesson (pronunciation, vocabulary...).

The advantages of ICT usage in foreign language teaching can be listed as [12]:

1. Capacity to control presentation. This capacity marks the difference between computers and books. Books have a fixed presentation, unlike computers, which can combine visual with listening materials, text with graphics and pictures.

2. Novelty and creativity. A teacher can use different materials for each lesson, not like in teaching with textbooks, where all classes presenting a certain topic are the same.

3. Feedback. Computers provide a fast feedback to students` answers through error correction. It not only spots the mistake but also corrects it, sometimes even giving the appropriate advice.

4. Adaptability. Computer programmes can be adapted by teachers to suit their students` needs and level of language knowledge. Unlike books, which are produced in a single uniform format and need to be taught irrespectively of students` problems, computer programmes are more learner- friendly.

First and foremost, ICT–and the internet in particular–provides language learners with the opportunity to use the language that they are learning in meaningful ways in authentic contexts. A second important benefit derived from the use of ICT in a language classroom is based on the opportunities it affords for cooperation and collaboration with one's peers. A third major benefit of the use of ICT in blended language learning classrooms is the opportunity that ICT-based tools give to language teachers so that they can tutor their learners more effectively. With the help of ICT-based tools and the constantly growing number of available educational resources language teachers are able to give individual and personalized guidance to the learners [9].

3. The internet and language learning

The internet offers the best way to learn language other than immersion in an English speaking milieu. The advantages of online learning, can be summarized under the following headings [10]:

1) Access – the internet offers the possibility to experience English without the need of travel. Even without the need of leaving home or bedroom.

2) Flexibility – the internet allows for users to learn language when they want, where they want.

3) Response – the internet offers the possibility of instant feedback to learners. This greatly enhances the learning experience.

4) Repeatability – the learner can encounter the language in a repetitive fashion until mastery is achieved.

5) Durability – the internet is 24/7. It never tires. It does not take coffee breaks.

6) Modality – the internet is a multi modal learning tool. It stimulates in a rich sensory and cognitive and thus fertilizes language acquisition successfully.

7) Specificity – the internet allows the language learner choice and variety in both what and with who will be learned. Learning can be tailored to the language learner s precise makeup and needs.

8) Cost – the internet is a business model which due to economies of scale, can offer services for pennies. It also offers to widen access through a pay as you can dynamic.

The internet-mediated communication allows users to share not only brief messages, but also create lengthy documents - thus facilitating collaborative writing (learning). Furthermore, learners can share graphics, sounds and video. Thus, the internet helps create an environment where authentic and creative communication is integrated into all aspects of the course [15].

4. The application of ICT in foreign language teaching

The integration of information and communications technology in teaching and learning is considered as a medium in which a variety of approaches and pedagogical philosophies may be implemented. However, ICT as a teaching aid is more complicated in that it demands more specific skills from the teachers [16]. The development of ICT – electronic mail, internet, multi media, possibilities to use collaborative platforms, undoubtedly, influences the process of using them in everyday classroom teaching and learning. ICT no longer serves to be a simple additional means but ICT is an indispensable part of the modern and contemporary learning environment [6].

The application of ICT gives more opportunities for communication between peer learners: they can exchange information in real time, they can participate in blog discussions, work in teams on different projects, exchange emails, search for information, etc. By using the authentic material provided by the internet, we will have a better insight into the culture of the country and people whose language we study [12,15].

There is significant evidence of the benefits and advantages that the use of ICT can have on learners. The effective use of ICT impacts on learners and various aspects of the learning process can be summarized as follows [4]:
- ICT increases learners' motivation and thus enhances personal commitment and engagement;
- ICT improves independent learning;
- Learners' collaboration and communication are more important;
- Learners' attainment and outcomes are improved.

As for the learners perceptions of ICT, students work independently with technologies with the goal of arriving at a specified level of mastery of a given knowledge set. At the same time, it provides flexibility to learners which are a must for mastery of learning and quality of learning [7]. The use of ICT in language learning not only involves pedagogical changes for teachers but also involves environmental and pedagogical changes for learners who are traditionally used to face-to-face teaching in classrooms. Although an increasing number of learners have access to online technologies and use ICT for personal interactions, they find it challenging to use ICT in an educational context [9].

Apart from curricular changes that come officially- usually from the Ministry of Education in each country workshops and short trainings introduce new techniques and activities or promote new materials. Accordingly, ELT teachers are accustomed to frequent subject innovations, but not necessarily more resourceful or open to new ideas. There was evidence of many problems in terms of technical skills in the beginning, and it took about a generation for the technical skills and the technical problems to be ignored out [16]. Helping students find value in learning through the implementation of various instructional strategies and multiple alternative and authentic forms of assessments, while maintaining high standards of student performance in an environment which encourages students to do their best work by effective, nurturing teachers, will help increase the motivational levels of all students [11]. Web 2.0 tools can provide students with extra opportunities to do meaningful language-learning tasks from the comforts of their own homes or local libraries. However, Web 2.0 tools work best when students are asked to develop, create, and share their work online. It is in this way that they are active learners, negotiating meaning and creating media for a worldwide audience [14].

5. Conclusion

ICT presents a powerful learning environment for learners in the classroom. Many countries make investments in ICT integration as ICT is viewed as an effective tool for renewing educational practice in any field. Because teachers are the main characters to employ ICT in educational contexts, they should be trained in how ICT can be integrated into the teaching process [3]. The use of information technology maintaining contact, that bond between us that let our students know that support was only a click away, and at the same time giving them a sense of freedom to work on the areas of their learning that they considered important. These tools also promote authentic communication in an environment where this input is scarce and at the same time helps prepare them for the technological work place of the future [2]. The teacher needs to see the real effect ICT materials have on the learning process. Furthermore, there should be an appropriate balance between hands-on and other work and the motivational aspects of using ICT will be effective only with appropriate planning and guidance from the teacher [8].

In brief, ICT cannot itself resolve educational problems in the developing world. If used prudently, ICTs will enable developing countries to expand access to and raise the quality of education. Today's technologically competitive world needs integration of ICT in education. If ICT is aptly adapted, then it will be lifelong learning process for the learners. The quality of learning with accountability can be

improved to enhance the learners to learn things quickly and successfully [7]. Without a doubt, technology has revolutionized society in many places around the globe, including how language instruction is taught and delivered. In particular, the Internet has become a conduit where people can learn, share, and collaborate in ways not possible years before. However, a great deal of the success comes from preparing students to interact and learn in this online environment [1]. Therefore, if we try to integrate technology in our teaching, our new, refocused approach to teaching will propel us a long way to making technology and the internet a more rewarding partner in the teaching and learning process.

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