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Hazards of Teaching with Technology in SLA Classroom

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Abstract

Within the last few decades the education sector worldwide has experienced steady technological progress. Modern Information Communication Technology (ICT) has led to new visions for student-teacher classroom interaction [1].
Students feel more independent in undertaking tasks and because of innovative technology, mainly computer facilities, they have become less reliant on the teacher's instructions. Nevertheless, such instructions remain an essential part of teaching [2] because it is the teacher's responsibility to create a reliable and safe learning environment in the class so that the students feel comfortable [1].
It is clear that a computer is not a ready alternative to a teacher and therefore it is important not to unrealistically raise expectations about educational achievements possible when using computers [3]. Any overuse of technology will obviously lead to students taking less responsibility for tasks [4].
To gain a better insight into the problem of striking a balance between the usage of technology and teaching instructions, a survey has been conducted. The participants were 30 foreign language instructors from Kazakhstan who integrate ICT into their classes. The results will assist ESL/EFL teachers in establishing common ground with their students, and creating an appropriate learning environment.

1. Introduction

Recent advances in technology require some revision of teacher-student interaction in the modern second language acquisition (SLA) classroom. Through mastering information communication technology (ICT), students could possibly gain more independence from their instructors. For this reason, the appropriate amount of teaching instruction could be brought into question.
Another issue is whether the instructor is ready to adjust to the students' needs and delegate some authority to a student. This presents tremendous challenges for striking the right balance between students completing tasks independently, mediated by ICT; and teacher to student face-to face classroom interaction. Sometimes a teacher is guided by their desire to keep up with modern developments in ICT and may endeavour to use many or all of them in a single lesson. This could lead to an unintentional loss of the primary educational objectives and confuse students. A teacher could also fear to use such innovations because of a lack of ICT training or a corresponding lack of desire to incorporate any changes into the curriculum, as well as the reasonable concern that they will lose face in front of more computer literate students.
In any case there is an obvious conflict between teachers' desire for modernisation and the opportunities it presents. Thus, the goal of this research is to gain a better insight into the problem of striking a balance between the use of technology and teaching instruction in the EFL classroom.
The results of the research will assist in seeing the vital obstacles experienced by ESL/EFL teachers while attempting to integrate ICT into their lessons. These findings will show the further prospects for establishing common ground and creating the appropriate learning environment in the teacher-student SLA technology mediated classroom. The study goes slightly beyond an examination of EFL teachers' attitudes towards the implementation of ICT through having also questioned the teachers' as to their awareness of the students' computer literacy, and about their attempts to relate their lessons to the students' real life needs, taking advantage of students' ICT skills.

2. Research Background

Progress in ICT challenges many educators to revisit their vision of teacher-student classroom interaction [1]. Since students are often more computer literate [5] than teachers, the instructors usually question how to approach the subject so that students could gain the most benefit from the use of ICT while achieving the objectives of the lesson [1]. When a student is more familiar with a computer than a teacher, it could be that the student gains more knowledge from this technology while the teacher becomes undervalued. However computer cannot completely substitute a teacher [3] because it is the teacher who is responsible for the reliable and safe environment in the class [2]. For that reason it is better to regard ICT as an educational tool rather than a teaching method. As with any other teaching tool the implementation of ICT should be balanced with other tools and not interfere

with them. One of the possible drawbacks of technology overuse is the loss of student focus on the task leading to a lack of involvement [4]. The danger may be that students do not set specific learning objectives and use ICT mainly for entertainment [5]. Simultaneously a teacher can relate certain activities with the desired outcomes and thus a student would continue enjoying the activity and together with it achieve certain educational goals.

3. Research Method and Design

The survey engaged 30 foreign language instructors from the pedagogical university in Kazakhstan who integrate ICT into their classes. The contributors were divided into three age groups: 12 participants aged 24-30 (Group A), ten participants aged 31-45 (Group B), and eight participants aged 50-75 (Group C). Among the respondents were two males (M) and 28 females (F). The reported teaching experience of the respondents was from two to 45 years with two to ten years of using ICT. The survey consisted of demographic questions, seven multiple-choice questions and a ten-grid rating scale, with one standing for the strongest improvement from using ICT in EFL classroom and ten standing for no improvement at all. After each multiple-choice question a space was provided for the participant's own answers. All the surveys were e-mailed to the participants after the prior oral agreement and returned to the researcher within two weeks. By receiving all the completed surveys the data was sorted according to the respondents age and analysed further.

Table 1. Age-based distribution of participants into groups

Group A		Group B		Group C	
Age	**Number of participants**	**Age**	**Number of participants**	**Age**	**Number of participants**
24	1	31	1	50	1
25	2	32	1	54	3
26	2	36	2	58	2
27	1	37	1	60	1
28	3	40	2	75	1
29	2	43	2		
30	1	45	1		
Total: 12		**Total: 10**		**Total: 8**	

4. Results and Analyses

The first question of the survey is targeted at finding out what ICT technologies are most popular with the EFL teachers in different age groups. The results have shown that among interactive ICT the teachers in all three groups give preference to e-presentations. The second most popular in Groups A and B is the podcast. In Group B the second place is given to webinars while podcasts take third place together with the whiteboard. In Group A the third most popular form of ICT is the blog and the least popular is the webinar. Concerning the reflective ICT e-portfolio, this reported as the most popular type of ICT in all three groups. The respondents in Groups A and B use blogs not only as an interactive but also as a reflexive technique.

Table 2. Interactive and reflective ICT popular with the EFL teachers

ICT	Group A		Group B		Group C	
	Interactive	**Reflective**	**Interactive**	**Reflective**	**Interactive**	**Reflective**
e-presentation	12		10		8	
podcast	8		2		2	
blog	3	3	3	4		
webinar	2					
whiteboard			2			
e-portfolio		7		8		2

The survey also showed that the most active ICT users are the respondents from Group B with six out of ten reporting that they often use ICT in their lessons, and the ratio of technology-mediated activities comprises 15-25 % of the lesson. Only one male respondent from Group A stated that he often used technology in the lesson. The majority of all survey takers indicated that they sometimes used ICT but that technology took only 5-10% of their lesson time. The least active ICT users are respondents from Group C with half of the participants seldom using ICT.

Half of the respondents in Group A reported that they sometimes base lesson aims around students' knowledge of ICT while the other half indicated that their lesson goals never took this into consideration. However, eight respondents replied that their students should know ICT to some extent to be successful in their lessons. In Group B seven out of ten respondents built their lesson goals on students' knowledge of ICT and three respondents did not consider students' knowledge of ICT when doing so. In addition 50% believe that their students need to know ICT to prosper in the class and 50% think their students do not need to be proficient technology users. In Group C all bar one participant stated that their students do not need to know ICT. Three out of eight participants sometimes plan their lessons considering students' knowledge of ICT while the rest of the group does not.

Three respondents in Group A and four respondents in Group B answer that they try to use ICT to connect their lessons with the outside world. Half of the respondents in these groups try to reach this goal to some extent, with three respondents in Group A and only one respondent in Group B not connecting their lessons with the world outside the classroom by means of ICT. In Group C only two participants are trying to implement technology to connect their lessons to the real world to some extent, and the rest of the group is not.

Two participants from Groups A and B reported that their students are better ICT users than them and six participants from Group C believe that their students know technology better. Only male respondents answered that they do not have any technology gap with their students. Seven respondents from Group A and five participants from Group B stated that they always learn something new from their students with only two respondents from Group C learning from their students.

The teachers from Group B allow most for the learning autonomy of their users, however there are two respondents in this group who do not encourage students' ICT mediated self-study. In Group A four respondents totally support students' technology mediated self-study and the rest of the group supports self-study to some extent. In Group C half of the respondents reject students' autonomy and the other half supports it to some extent.

The attitudes scale has shown that in general teachers do not feel much improvement in their teaching due to the implementation of ICT. Only four out of all 30 contributors evaluated the improvements with five points on the ten-grid scale with ten standing for no improvement. The answers of other respondents are progressively moving to ten.

5. Conclusions

The survey results suggest that at the time of doing the research the majority of the EFL teachers do not feel confident using ICT and allow little time for technology-mediated activities during the lesson. There is also a tendency for male and female teachers aged 31-45 to give more credit to ICT than the teachers in other age groups, and to use technology to relate their lessons to real life. It was also revealed that often teachers do not expect their students to be proficient in using technology and their teaching does not take advantage of the opportunities offered by the ICT integration into the lessons. As regards the teachers' attitudes towards learning autonomy that students can gain from using ICT, only the respondents aged 24-45 are positive about it while the teachers aged 50 and above do not allow it. Among the limitations of the study is the small amount of respondents, restricted to one educational establishment and possibly the rough division of the participants into age groups. Further research is needed to learn about teachers' attitudes towards ICT use in other universities and geographical locations. In addition more data is needed to study the difference in male and female teachers' attitudes in the EFL classroom.

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