ICT in Language Teacher Education: The Role of Teacher Educators

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Abstract

Today, rapid advances in ICT have influenced the world of education considerably. As technology becomes readily available for use in or outside the classrooms, it is undoubtedly shaping the way we teach and changing our profession as educators. It can be stated that adoption of technology in language teaching and learning environments has been so quick when we consider the history of language teaching. However, quality training for language teachers is critical for bringing success when they are using ICT in their own teaching environments. Thus, it is increasingly important to equip teachers with the knowledge, skills and expertise, necessary to integrate technology for their students. At this point, the quality of language teacher education programs comes to the fore. However, in their formal training, language teachers are mostly not well informed about the integration of ICT into language teaching and are graduated from their programs without having the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise. This study seeks to gain insights from the literature about the teacher educators' role as a model in educating the prospective language teachers in terms of ICT integration into the language teaching process.

Introduction

The advances in ICT in recent years have provided a wide variety of opportunities for the educational settings and language teaching is no exception. The role of language teachers is undeniably crucial in bringing success to language teaching environments. American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) stressed the importance of this role in its position statement related with the *Role of Technology in Language Learning as* "while technology can play an important role in supporting and enhancing language learning, the effectiveness of any technological tool depends on the knowledge and expertise of the qualified language teacher who manages and facilitates the language learning environment" [1]. To put it another way, "… the key to successful use of technology in language teaching lies not in hardware or software but in "humanware" – our human capacity as teachers to plan, design and implement effective educational activity" [2].

Inadequacy of Language Teacher Education Programs

It can be stated that the competency level of teachers to use ICT in their teaching environment is related with various factors including their education in teacher education programs. However, there are many studies stressing the inadequacy of language teacher education programs in terms of developing this competency:

- "... most preservice language teaching methods courses for graduate student TAs or undergraduate students working toward language teaching certification now include some introduction to CALL, but when they are taught by language program directors who have not themselves been trained in CALL or worked intensively in this area, such courses are not likely to deal with more than the tip of the iceberg" [3].

- "… teachers are experiencing little technology integration in their teacher preparation programs" [4].

-"… there is evidence that language teachers are leaving their certification and degree programs with little or nothing in the way of formal training in the use of technology in language teaching" [5].

- Language teacher education programs mostly do not provide the necessary knowledge and skills related to uses of technology in language teaching and learning to their graduates and they generally gain this knowledge and skills informally [6].

The main reason is the inadequacy of teacher training in terms of equipping students with the necessary knowledge and skills to enhance their instruction with the use of technology [7]. In fact, language teacher education programs include some courses related to the theory and practice of using ICT in language teaching. However, these are mostly short courses to provide student teachers with basic computer skills. It is accepted that pedagogical beliefs of teachers are mostly formed in their pre-service teacher education programs [8] but "…the majority of teacher training students are graduating in an information age without proper guidance on how to use technology in the classroom" [9] and "there is currently no definitive research to indicate that students will acquire a second language effectively through technology without interaction with and guidance from a qualified language teacher" [1]. Thus, language teachers should be well-informed about the integration of technology during their pre-service training, that is, before their graduation. At this point, it is clear that teacher educator has a crucial role.

Teacher Educators as a Role Model

It is fact that for being a teacher, one must acquire the related knowledge and skills by having related education through teacher education programs. A competent teacher knows that while teaching they have to wear a wide range of hats to achieve the learning objectives of the lesson, allowing students to learn better. However, "teachers who complete university- based programs do not leave with the appropriate knowledge and practices to be effective in contemporary classrooms" [10]. Undoubtedly, teacher educators have a significant role in equipping prospective teachers with the necessary knowledge and skills required for them to be better teachers in the future. In other words, teacher educators, among other variables, have a big impact on whether a teacher is effective in their teaching environments. This impact is expressed by many scholars in the literature and when it comes to technology, the role of teacher educators' on the prospective teachers is again a subject emphasized much in the literature;

-"Regardless of the amount of technology and its sophistication, technology will not be used unless faculty members have the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to infuse it into the curriculum" [11].

-"The way that students will learn to do applied linguistics with technology is by learning applied linguistics through technology" [12].

-"…integrate technology applications into preservice teacher assignments and field activities so that new teachers have opportunities to acquire technical skills and practice instructional strategies" (CEO Forum, 1999; Goldberg & Sherwood, 1983) [13].

- If teachers see the use of technology in their pre-service teacher education programs, they will use it more often when they become real teachers [14].

-"teachers learn best how to use technologies for educational purposes if their own learning takes place through such technologies" (Erben 1999, p.230) [15].

-"…teacher educators need to place instructional technology education within the context of teachers' work in the classroom" [16].

- It is difficult for student teachers to integrate technology into their own teaching environments without their educators being role models for them [17].

From the statements listed above, the importance of teacher educators' role in shaping the way students teachers teach in their own teaching environments is clear. Generally, student teachers complain about the gap between the theory and practice, especially when they become real teachers after their graduation. It can be stated that the issue of the integration of technology pedagogically appropriate to the teaching environments by the student teacher after they become real teachers is to some extent related with the theory-practice gap. Teacher educators' role in here is seeking ways to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Unless they implement what they are recommending to the student teacher, they contribute to the quality of future teachers less.

Conclusion

This study seeks to gain insights from the literature about the teacher educators' role as a model in educating the prospective language teachers in terms of ICT integration into the language teaching process. Today, technology has the power to shape teaching profession. Teachers all around the world, including language teachers, feel *the pressure* of using technology in their classroom practices. However, as language teachers, we should be aware of the fact that technology cannot bring success to the language teaching and learning process without guidance of qualified language teachers who knows how to integrate technology in their classrooms. At this point, equipping language teachers with the expertise and skills necessary to integrate technology into their classrooms becomes an important issue. Formal teacher education is the most appropriate time for prospective language teachers to have necessary knowledge and skills. "Unless technology is *an integral part of teacher education*, student teachers will less likely be successful in exploiting its potential to the full to improve learning in their own classroom" [18].

Teacher educators have a significant role in the education of language teachers. It is therefore necessary for teacher educators a being a role model for their students who will become real teachers after graduating from the teacher education programs. In a technologically advanced world of education, teacher educators should integrate technology appropriately in their curriculums where necessary and allow student teachers to see a model of teaching that demonstrates how technology can be integrated into teaching environment. In teacher preparation programs, instruction related to technology use should not be limited to short computer courses and few other courses that includes information about using technology in the teaching process, but should be an integral part of the whole curriculum in the teaching preparation programs. In other words, rather than adopting the approach *teaching about technology* to teacher candidates, an approach *teaching with technology* should be achieved. Awareness of teacher educators for adopting the latter approach is crucial and they should take the responsibility for putting it into practice. The role of teacher educators today is to focus on producing quality teachers.

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