The use of ICT in teaching English as a foreign language

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Abstract

During the last two decades, the integration of ICT in language education has become a major interest of topic in language educational realm. Research findings over the past two decades provide some evidence as to the positive effects of the use of information and communications technology (ICT) on students. EFL teachers are expected to adopt a new view of their roles and professional development in the rapidly changing modern society. It is needed to explore particular skills required for ICT to enhance language learning. The use of ICT as a teaching tool emphasizes obtaining, analysing and organizing information, by this way giving chance students to get in touch with different kinds of media. Integration of ICT necessitates deciding on the use of different ICTs in each skill, the types of ICT applications to be used, planning the favourite activities, managing problems arising from the activities planned, and so on. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can be regarded as a new model of teaching and learning.. This review study is framed around to provide a deep and clear understanding about use of ICT in teaching English and examine ICT to meet the new educational demands of the current era. Namely, the aim of this paper is to present a comprehensive review as to advantages and disadvantages of using ICT as an instructive tool in EFL classrooms. Based on aforementioned considerations, this review study aims to shed light on how ICT contribute to English learning process and help identify the factors influencing the success implementation of ICT. Furthermore, the certain major suggestions will be made to maximize beneficial use of ICT in EFL classroom settings.

Key words: foreign language learning; CALL; information and communication technology.

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Introduction

Over the past few decades there has been an upsurge of interest in searching a contemporary instrument to promote language teaching. Based on the previous review of literature, there is widespread consensus that the technological changes paved the way for meeting the needs of ever changing world. In this shifting educational landscape, a considerable amount of research has agreed that Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a critical role in the field of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). With the blossoming of the ICT as a new tool in language teaching, EFL teachers and methodologist are expected to adopt a new view of integrating basic ICT skills in EFL classroom appropriately. It is prerequisite for equipping language learners with necessary technological skills. The application of ICT requires certain language skills and strategies. Introducing ICT into language classroom has great implications for curriculum reform, classroom teaching and student learning. It is believed that the increase of information and communication technologies (ICT) has dramatically reinforced and created powerful learning atmosphere. The implementation of ICT into real language context is more critical today than ever before since its growing power and capabilities are triggering a change in language learning environment. A great number of studies have been conducted to examine the advantages of integrating ICT into foreign language education. Therefore, the integration of new ICT tools such as laptop, interactive whiteboard, LCD projector, internet and social networks in education support will help learners to use English in a very natural, real, communicative and stress free language learning environment.

What does Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) mean?

Asabere and Enguah (2012) defined ICT as the tools, facilities, processes, and equipments that provide the required environment with the physical infrastructure and the services for the generation, transmission, processing, storing and disseminating of information in all forms including voice, text, data, graphics and video. Some examples of ICTs; IWBs, computers, computer assisted language learning (CALL) software, office applications (word, PowerPoint, drawing tools etc.), the Internet – websites and downloadable software, commercial course book CD-ROMs, DVD players, mobile phones, electronic dictionaries, digital cameras and videos, DAT recorders, document cameras, data projectors. Livingstone (2012, p. 13) states that ICT includes technologies specific to the school environment (e.g. interactive whiteboards) or applications used across formal or informal boundaries (e.g. education games) and networked technologies. In a similar vein, according to Hennessy, Ruthven and Brindley (2005, p. 2), the term ICT encompasses the range of hardware (desktop and portable computers, projection technology, calculators, data logging and digital recording equipment), software applications (generic software, multimedia resources), means of telecommunication and information systems (Intranet, Internet). ICTs refer to technological tools and resources which are employed to communicate, create, disseminate and manage information (Yunus, Nordin, Salehi, Sun and Embi, 2013). Furhermore, ICTs may be defined as information-handling tools- a varied set of goods, applications and services that are used to produce, store, process, distribute and exchange information. They include the 'old' ICTs of radio, television and telephone, and the 'new' ICTs of computers, satellite and wireless technology and the Internet. (UNDP, 2003).

ICTs in teaching foreign language / Pros and cons

Without a doubt, ICT is a valuable and an innovative teaching tool enhancing EFL learning. The rapid growth of ICT has naturally influenced the every aspects of language teaching process. Using technology has positive effects on teaching and learning English. Technology can be applied to teaching practices to enhance and facilitate foreign language learning. Computer, internet, smart boards, cell phones, video games, music players etc. are used in the target language learning process to raise students'motivation and language awareness (Altun, 2015). The implementation of ICT will lead to variety in English content, contexts and pedagogical methods in teaching environment. ICT makes English language environment interactive, flexible and innovative. (Qin and Shuo, 2011). The application of computer technologies in language instruction provides a student-centred learning environment. It enables course administrators and teachers to vary lesson presentation styles to motivate students of varying interests, provides learning opportunities outside the classroom, and is perceived to cater more for individual differences. Integrating technology into language instruction reduces teacher-centred understanding and students' language learning anxiety, but encourages them to be risk takers to practice target language as they are digital natives (Al-Mahrooqi and Troudi, 2014). Jayanthi and Kumar (2016) explain the positive impacts of ICT on ELT under the basic headings such as: availability of materials, students' attitudes, learner autonomy, authenticity, helping teachers, student-centred, and self-assessment. The availability of large body of authentic materials such as images, animation, audio and video clips facilitate presenting and practicing language. As for students' attitudes, ICTs increase motivation. The students feel highly motivated to learn a language as they displayed positive attitudes towards language learning as they use computer and learn in stress-free learning environment. In addition, ICT fosters learner autonomy as ICT tools provide learners to take responsibilities for their own learning. Students are free to choose the material convenient for their learning styles. Furthermore, ICT provides authentic situations and real life learning environment. As ICTs offer different types of facilities and availability of teaching materials, EFL teachers only suggest and design these tools as complementary teaching materials. Contrary to traditional learning environment, ICT supports student-centred learning together with teacher-student interaction. As for assessment, with the ICTs both receptive and productive skills are easily and effectively assessed. The teacher may decide and design relevant materials to test students' achievement in all skills. Additionally, the following impacts seem to be the most obvious ones when using ICT to support foreign language teaching:

- 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 (Houcine, 2011).

The advantages of ICT usage in foreign language teaching can be listed as: 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 may 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 (Padurean and Margan, 2009). 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: 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 (Haucine, 2011).

On the other hand, the integration of ICT in classrooms can also bring certain disadvantages. Teachers may have difficulty in relation to the integration and implementatin of technological tools into course syllabus and curriculum. There are necessities to bear in mind before to use ICTs in EFL classrooms. Therefore, .Livingstone (2012, p. 12) asserts that ICT "is not suitable for all learners in all situations and for all purposes, and may require some considerable learner training for effective use.". The problems in classroom management, the lack of experienced teachers, choosing the best technological tool matching with course content, finding reliable and acceptable activities for students' learning styles, the costs of new technological tools, and devices, insufficient physical capacity of classrooms etc. are only certain remarkable issues to be taken into consideration before employment of ICTs in language classrooms.

Cox, Preston and Cox (1999) state the drawbacks of using ICTs in classrooms as follows: difficulties in using software/hardware, need more technical support, not enough time to use ICT, too expensive to use regularly, insufficient access to the resources, restrictions the content of the lessons, counter-productive due to insufficient technical resources. In addition, EFL teachers felt it difficult to fully integrate computers into lessons and the teachers had to give up too much time to instructional and not being able to allow students enough time to practise and gain experience with skills being taught. Lack of technical support meant that teachers lost confidence in the equipment and software due to frequent failures and failure to complete lessons in the allocated time. School have found that it is vital to effectively integrate technology into the classroom that an on-site technical assistant be recruited to assist teachers when needed Blackmore, Hardcastle, Bamblett and Ownens, 2003 p. 203).

To conclude, it is strongly believed that the implementation of educational technology and communication into EFL context provides flexible and diverse set of technological tools, promotes problem solving skills of students, gives chance learners to use higher order skills, develop critical thinking and effective information processing skills, encourages active independent, autonomous and collaborative language learning, motivates and facilitates language learning, enhances teacher training. On the contrary, it is clearly evident that the integration of ICT into language teaching practices has its own limits. ICTs should be integrated to foreign language teaching as an effective supplementary and a valuable complementary teaching tool.

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