

TECHNOLOGY IN LANGUAGE LEARNING: AN EFFECTIVE INNOVATION BUT NOT WITHOUT ITS CHALLENGES.

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Abstract

This paper reviews some of the significant issues pertinent to the use of technology in the learning and teaching of language. It discusses definition of technology, the use of technology in language classroom, the paper further explore the discussion of necessity of a application of multimedia technologies to language teaching and previous studies on using technologies in improving language learning skills, the paper also highlights some challenges of using technology in the language class and finally, gives recommendations for using technologies in the language class.

Keywords: language learning, language teaching, Information and Communication Technology, language instruction, computer- based language instruction.

Introduction

According to Tomlison (2009) computer-based activities provide learners rapid information and appropriate materials. He continues that internet materials motivate learners to learn more. In addition, Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) supported the view that technology provides teaching resources and brings learning experience to the learners' world. Through using technology, many authentic materials can be provided to learners and they can be motivated in learning language. Technology has always been an important part of teaching and learning environment. It is an essential part of the teachers' profession through which they can use it to facilitate learners' learning. When we talk about technology in teaching and learning, the word 'integration' is used. With technology being part of our everyday lives, it is time to rethink about the idea of integrating technology into the curriculum and aim to embed technology into teaching to support the learning process. That is to say, technology becomes an integral part of the learning experience and a significant issue for teachers, from

the beginning of preparing learning experiences through to teaching and learning process (Eady & Lockyer, 2013).

Solanki and Shyamlee¹ (2012) and Pourhosein (2017) supported the view that language teaching method has been changed due to technology. The researchers continued that the application of technology helps learners learn on the basis of their interests. It also satisfies both visual and auditory senses of the learners. According to Lam and Lawrence (2002) and Pourhosein (2017), technology assists learners in adjusting their own learning process and they can have access to a lot of information that their teachers are not able to provide. According to Pourhosein (2013), the use of technologies has the great potential to change the existing language teaching methods. Pourhosein and Sabouri (2014) emphasized that through using technology, learners can control their own learning process and have access to many information over which their teachers cannot control. Technology has an important role in promoting activities for learners and has a significant effect on teachers' teaching methods. If teachers do not use technologies in their teaching they will never be able to keep up with these technologies. Thus, it is very important for teachers to have a full knowledge of these technologies in teaching language skills (Solanki and Shyamlee¹, 2012). Developing learners' knowledge and skills pertinent to computer technology provides equity of opportunity, regardless of learners' background. Although, learners have been born into a technologically rich world, they may not be skilful users of technology (Bennett, Maton and Kervin, 2008). In addition, just providing access to technology is not adequate. Meaningful development of technology-based knowledge is significant for all learners in order to maximize their learning? (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2010).

Necessity of Application of Multimedia Technologies to Language Teaching

a) To Cultivate Students' Interest in Study

Nowadays, the stereotyped traditional teaching methods and environment are unpopular while multimedia technology featuring audio, visual animation effects naturally and humanely makes us more access to information. Besides, with such characteristics as abundant-information and crossing time and space, multimedia technology offers a sense of reality and functions very well, which greatly cultivates students' interest and motivation in study and their involvement in class activities.

b) To Promote Students' Communication Capacity

Traditional teaching has hampered students' capacity to comprehend certain language and also understanding to structure, meaning and function of the language, and makes the students passive recipients of knowledge, so, it is hard to achieve the target of communication. With teachers' instructions leading students' thought patterns and motivating students' emotions, the multimedia technology seeks integration of teaching and learning and provides the students greater incentives, The Microsoft Power Point (PPT) courseware activate students' thinking; the visual and vivid courseware rand help them to transforms English learning into capacity cultivation. And such in-class activities as group discussion, subject discussion, and debates can also offer more opportunities for communication among students and between teachers and students. So, multimedia technology teaching has uniquely inspired students' positive thinking and communication skills in social practice.

c) To Widen Students' Knowledge to Gain an Insightful Understanding to Western Culture. The multimedia courseware can offer the students abundant information; more plentiful than textbooks, and help them to get off displays vivid cultural background, rich content and true-to-life language materials, which are much natural and closer to life. Not only could learners improve their listening ability, but also learn the western culture. Grasping information through various channels can equip the students with knowledge and bring about information-sharing among students and make them actively participate in class discussion and communication.

d) To Improve Teaching Effect

Multimedia teachings enrich teaching content and make the best of class time and break the "teacher-centered" teaching pattern and fundamentally improve class efficiency. Due to large classes, it is difficult for the students to have speaking communication. The utilization of multimedia sound laboratory materializes the individualized and cooperative teaching. The traditional teaching model mainly emphasized on teachers' instruction, and the information provided is limited due to traditional classes. On the contrary, multimedia technology goes beyond time and space, creates more vivid, visual, authentic environment for language learning, stimulates students' initiatives and economizes class time meanwhile increases class information.

e) To Improve Interaction between Teacher and Student

Multimedia teaching stresses the role of students, and enhances the importance of "interaction" between teachers and students. A major feature of multimedia teaching is to train and improve students' ability to listen and speak, and to develop their communicative competence. During this process, the teacher's role as a facilitator is particularly prominent. Using multimedia in context creation creates a good platform for the exchange between teachers and students, while at the same time providing a language environment that improves on the traditional classroom teaching model. In this way, teachers in the classroom no longer blindly input information and force students to receive it in a passive way.

f) Creates a Context for Language Teaching

Multimedia teaching creates a context for language teaching. This method makes the class lively and interesting, as well as optimizing the organization of the class. Multimedia has its own features such as visibility and liveliness. During the process of multimedia language teaching, sounds and pictures can be set together, which enhances the initiative of both teachers and students. When using multimedia software, teachers can use pictures and images to enrich the content of classes, and also imagine different contexts in the process of producing teaching courseware. Students in the class can use multimedia to understand the class in a clear way. Through the whole interactive process, it is apparent that using multimedia in Language Teaching (LT) is effective in nurturing students' interest in learning language, as well as enhancing teachers' interest in language teaching. As Eady and Lockyer (2006) point out through multimedia and network technology, we can offer students not only rich, sources of authentic learning materials, but also an attractive and a friendly interface, vivid pictures and pleasant sounds, which to a large extent overcomes the lack of authentic language environment and arouses students' interest in learning language.

g) To Provide Flexibility to Course Content

In addition, multimedia teaching is also flexible. It is obvious that the context can be created not only in the classroom, but also after class. Multimedia language teaching can also create a multimedia language environment for the purpose of conducting language teaching. Language teaching itself must focus on the guidance of teachers and be student-centered which we believe is one of the principles for language teaching. Students are bound to have some problems in classroom teaching, which can be addressed under the guidance of teachers. In such circumstances, students can use the new technology to their advantage, such as manipulating the network to contact teachers, and receiving answers by email.

Previous Studies on the Benefits of Technology in Improving Language Skills

Some studies have been done on the advantages of using technology in language teaching and learning. Hennessy (2005) stated that the use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) acts as a catalyst in motivating teachers and learners to work in new ways. The researcher understood that as learners become more autonomous, teachers feel that they should urge and support their learners to act and think independently. The application of Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) changes learners' learning attitudes and enhances their self-confidence (Lam and Lawrence, 2002).

ICTs have some benefits for teaching and learning. First, learners play an active role, which can help them retain more information. Next, follow-up discussions involve more information where learners can become more independent. Finally, learners can process new learner-based educational materials and their language learning skills can increase (Costley, 2014).

The use of technology has changed the methods from teacher-centered to learner-centered ones. Teachers should be facilitators and guide their learners' learning and this change is very useful for learners to increase their learning (Riasati, Allahyar, and Tan, 2012). Gillespie (2006) said that the use of technology increases learners' cooperation in learning tasks. It assists them in gathering information and interacting with resources such as videos. Warschauer (2000) described two different views about how to integrate technology into the class. First, in the cognitive approach, learners get the opportunity to increase their exposure to language meaningfully and make their own knowledge. Second, in the social approach, learners must be given opportunities for authentic social interactions to practice real life skills. This objective can be obtained through the collaboration of learners in real activities. Eaton (2010) explained that computer-based communication is a useful feature for language learning. Computer-assisted discussion features more equal participation than face to-face discussion. Zhao (2013) supported the above view and said that access to authentic materials in the target language is critical for successful language learning.

According to Rodinadze and Zarbazoia (2012), technology helps learners and teachers in studying the course materials owing to its fast access. Advancements in technology have a key role in preparing learners to use what they learn in any subject matter to finding their place in the world labor-force. Technology facilitates learners' learning and serves as a real educational tool that allows learning to occur. Baytak, Tarman, and Ayas (2011) carried out a research on the role of technology in language learning. The results revealed learners' learning was improved by integrating technology into the classroom. Learners stated that the

use of technology in school makes learning enjoyable and helps them learn more. Learners also said that technology makes learning interesting, enjoyable, and interactive. The other outcome of this research was that the use of technology increases learners' motivation, social interactions, learning and engagement. Mouza (2008) and Sabzian, Pourhossein, and Sodouri (2013) asserted that one of the impacts of using technology in the language classes is the increase in cooperation among teachers and learners. When teachers allow learners to become assistants in the teaching process, this can increase learners' confidence. Learners are granted the chance to reinforce opinions and abilities already learnt. Learners can help teachers in technology integration because learners have had abundant time to master technology while teachers work on directing the instruction. Drayton, Falk, Hobbs, Hammerman, and Stroud (2010) also emphasized that the use of computer- based classroom shows a real learning experience that increases learners' responsibility. Teachers said that the use of Internet and e-mail urges learner-centered learning. Warschauer (2000) and Parvin and Salam (2015) carried out a study and declared that by using technology, learners get the chance to increase their exposure to language in a meaningful context and make their own knowledge. Learners should have opportunities for social interactions to practice real life skills.

This is achieved through learners' cooperation in real activities. Baytak, Tarman, and Ayas (2011) performed a research towards the effect of technology on learning. The findings obtained from this study revealed that learners increased their learning through incorporating technology into their classes. The researchers emphasized that technology made learners' learning interesting and interactive and increased their motivation, social interactions, and engagement. Peregoy and Boyle (2012) carried a study on using technology in improving learners' reading and writing skills. The results of this study indicated that technology tools enhanced learners' reading and writing skills because they are user-friendly, and learners can learn at a faster and more effective way. The other finding of this study was that learners learn more effectively when they use technology tools instead of traditional teaching method because the internet provided a favorable learning environment for learners' learning, facilitated a new platform for learners who can have a convenient access to learning lessons. The other study was done by Alsaleem (2014) on using WhatsApp applications in English dialogue journals to improve learners' writing, vocabulary, word choice, and speaking ability. Based on the results of this study, it was concluded that WhatsApp showed improvement in learners' writing skills, speaking skill, vocabulary, and word choice. Godzicki, Godzicki, Krofel, and Michaels (2013) performed a study on examining students' motivation and engagement in the classroom. The findings obtained from this study revealed that students were more likely to engage in classroom when technology is used as an educational tool inside the class. Technology tools show an improvement when it comes down to accessibility and motivation. Lin and Yang (2011) performed a study to investigate whether Wiki technology would improve learners' writing skills. Learners were invited to join a Wiki page where they would write passages and then read and answer the passages of their fellow classmates. Learners indicated that the immediate feedback they received was a benefit of using this kind of technology. Another finding was that learners learned vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structure by reading the work of their classmates

Possible Negative Outcomes of Using Multimedia Technology in Language Classroom

In spite of advantages of application of multimedia technology to language class teaching, there are many problems existing in practical teaching, such as:

a) Major Means Replaced by the Assisting One

Application of multimedia technology is an assisting instrument to achieve the projected teaching effect. While if totally dependent on, multimedia devices during teaching, the teachers may be turned into slaves to the multimedia and cannot play the leading role in teaching. It is observed in practice that a lot of teachers are active in multimedia technology application but not proficient enough to handle it confidently. In class, they are standing by the computer and students are fixing their attention only on the screen, and therefore, there is no eye contact between teachers and students. The trend of modern information and technology teaching appears to the extremity regardless of the essence of the traditional teaching. And hence, the notion of Creative Education is to be fully comprehended that modern educational techniques serve as an assisting instrument rather than a target: and that should not dominate class. They are substitutes to effective teaching and learning.

b) Loss of Speaking Communication

Language and language analysis by the teachers are effective in conveying knowledge to the students from language pronunciation to comprehension, improving students' English thought patterns and oral expression. Whereas, the introduction of multimedia technology featuring audio, visual, textual effect fully meets audio and visual requirements of the students and enhances their interest, but it also results in lack of communication between teachers and students, replacement of teachers' voice by computer sound, and teachers' analysis by visual image and students have few chances for speaking communication. With the favorable atmosphere by the mutual communication between teachers and students fading away, and sound and image of multimedia affecting students' initiative to think and speak, English class turns to courseware show and students are made viewers rather than the participants of class activities.

c) The Restriction of Students' Thinking Potential

It is clear that language teaching is different from science subjects, for language teaching does not require demonstration by various steps; rather, the tense and orderly atmosphere is formed through questions and answer between teachers and students. Teachers raise impromptu and real-time questions and guide the students to think, cultivate their capacity to discover and solve problems. However, due to over-demonstration and pre-arranged order, the courseware lacks real-time effect and cannot give feedback. It ignores emphasis and importance in teaching; it also neglects instruction in students' thinking, inspiring their paths of thinking, strengthening their capacity contemplating and solving problems. In this way, it should be noted that cultivation of students' thinking capacity should be the major objective in teaching and using of multimedia technology and it should not take up the students' time for thinking, analyzing and exploring questions.

d) Abstract Thinking Replaced by Imaginable Thinking

The Process of cognition goes through perceptual stage and rational stage. It also applies to studying process. It is our hope that teaching makes students adopt the outlook cognition from perceptual recognition to rational apprehension, and greatly leap from perceptual thinking to rational thinking; therefore, it is the major objective in teaching. To enhance the students' abstract thinking, the multimedia technology makes content easier, and with its unique advantages, it can clarify the emphasis in teaching. If the image and imagination in

students' minds were merely showed on the screen, their abstract thinking would be restricted and logical thinking would waste away. At present, the decreased students' reading competence has become a major concern for reason that, textual words are replaced by sound and image, handwriting by keyboard input. All in all, the multimedia as an assisting instrument, cannot replace the dominant role of teachers and it is part of a complete teaching process. Besides, it is not a mechanic imitation of teaching; rather it integrates the visual, textual demonstration with teachers' experience to contribute to the programmed, automatic and continuous teaching project so as to enhance the overall improvement of students' listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Suggestions and Strategies to the Existing Problems

In practical teaching, it is improper to duplicate the textual material simply to the screen so that the teacher's position is ignored in order to ensure the function of multimedia in teaching. It should be noted that:

a) The Beauty of Courseware Is not the Sole Pursuit

It is proved through practice that adequate application of multimedia technology to teaching can make breakthroughs in class teaching. That is to say, during multimedia assisting teaching, teachers still play the leading role that their position could never be replaced by the computer. For instance, the introduction to each lesson and speaking communication are good way to improve students' listening and speaking which the computer cannot fulfill, therefore, teachers' interpretation shall not be overlooked. Meanwhile, as a practical linguistic science, English should be used very often in class to cultivate the students' communicative competence. Multimedia, as an instrument for assisting teaching, serves the teachers despite its extraordinary effect, so teacher determines whether to adopt multimedia technology. Otherwise, the teachers were acting as the projectionist, clicking the screen.

b) The Computer Screen can't Substitute the Blackboard

Some teachers take the computer screen as the blackboard, they have input exercises, questions, answers and teaching plans into the computer and display them piece by piece, without taking down anything on the blackboard or even the title of a lesson. It is known that teachers are supposed to simulate situations based on teaching and guide the students to communicate in language teaching. Besides, traditional writing on blackboard is concise and teachers can make adjustment and amendment to it if necessary. Furthermore, experienced teachers know well that a perfect courseware is an ideal project in mind, and that in practice, they need to enrich the content on the blackboard with emerging of new question raised by the students.

c) Power Point cannot Take the Place of Student's Thinking and Practices

At present, most multimedia courseware mainly feature on image and animation of teaching materials in order to cause audio and visual effect, which lively displays the content of textual materials and helps the student deeply understand the texts. A problem remains that displaying of the content of texts in the PPT courseware cannot take the place of students' thinking or language communication in simulated circumstance, When working on and utilizing the courseware, we need to encourage the students to use their own mind and speak more, actively join in class practice, we should not overuse the courseware merely in the hope of adding the modernized feature to class teaching

d) Traditional Teaching Instruments and Devices should not be Overlooked

The function of multimedia assisting in teaching cannot be replaced by many other instruments, which does not mean that multimedia can replace any other form of instrument; some teachers tend to entirely depend on multimedia teaching. While, it should be noticed that although multimedia has its unique advantages in teaching, the characteristics functions of other forms of teaching instruments are still incomparable. For example, the recorder still plays a role in broadcasting listening material. So, teachers are supposed to choose appropriate media and instrument based on the requirements of teaching and integrate multimedia instrument with traditional one and fully perform their merits, rather than merely in pursuit of trendy method.

e) Multimedia Technology should not be Overused

Some teachers may possess the improper concept that they would totally apply multimedia technology in their teaching. It is also believed that the more utilization of multimedia technology, the better class atmosphere may grow, the more actively the students get involved in class participation, the more easily the material access to the students. Apparently, the students show some interest in leaning, but actually, they feel like looking on. In practice, the more unconscious attention the students pay. The more interference of teaching information during transmission, the less the students take from the language materials. It is impossible to effectively train the students' language expression in class time. It is clear that in spite of advantages of application of multimedia technology, it assists in teaching. During practical teaching, it is part of a complete teaching procedure. In practice, if multimedia technology would be properly implemented in language teaching, the students could make full use of language speaking and listening materials and develop their overall capacities, which is the objective for us to introduce multimedia technology to modern teaching. Thus, this leads to systematic training on students' listening, speaking, reading and writing which makes teachers' instructions come into great play, help the student gain basic knowledge as well as language training at classes which improves their expressions ability in language and lays a fundamental basis for their language communication.

Conclusion

"Ideally, the purpose of both the traditional and computer-assisted cooperative language leaning classrooms is to provide a space in which the facilitation of learning, and learning itself, can take place" (Dockstader, 2008, p. 76). It is true that one of the ultimate goals of multimedia language teaching is to promote students' motivation and learning interest, which can be a practical way to get them involved in the language learning. Context creation of ELT should be based on the openness and accessibility of the teaching materials and information. During the process of optimizing the multimedia language teaching, students are not too dependent on their mother tongue, but will be motivated and guided to communicate with each other. The process of language learning will be more student-centered but less time-consuming. Therefore, it promises that the teaching quality will be improved and students applied language skill scan is effectively cultivated, meaning that students' communicative competence will be further developed. In conclusion, this process can fully improve students' ideation and practical language skills, which is helpful and useful to ensure and fulfill an effective result of teaching and learning. Barring a few problem areas multimedia technology can be used effectively in classrooms of ELT with proper computer

knowledge on the part of teachers, overcoming the finance problems in setting up the infrastructure and not allowing the teachers to become technophobes.

Recommendations for the Successful Utilization of Technology in the Language Class

Some recommendations for to improve their language skills through using technology:

1. Teachers should implement a technology plan that considers integration strategies along with purchasing decisions (Pourhossein, Leong, and Hairul, 2013).
2. Professional development should be specifically considered in order to assure learners' learning and to change the attitudes of teachers unfamiliar with the advantages that technology provides (Pourhossein, Leong, and Hairul, 2013).
3. The technology plan must be closely aligned with the curriculum standards. Teachers should know what educational approach is the most effective one when integrating technologies in the classroom (Pourhossein, Leong, and Hairul, 2013).
4. The computer technology is an integral part of the learning activity through which skills are transferred to learners.
5. Language teachers should urge their learners to use technology in developing their language skills.
6. Technology experts should provide extra assistance for teachers who use it in teaching their language courses (Pourhossein, and Sabouri, 2014).
7. Teachers should be a pattern for their learners in using computer technology (Pourhossein, and Sabouri, 2017).
8. Teacher should concentrate on teaching and learning, not just on technology issues.
9. Teachers should find the ways that technology can help them towards learner-centered instruction as opposed to teacher-centered instruction.
10. Teachers should be aware of their roles as guides and facilitators of their learners' learning (Pourhossein, and Sabouri, 2017).
11. In order to facilitate the integration of technology, enough support and technical assistance should be provided for teachers.
12. Training should be provided for teachers to learn how to use and teach it effectively.
13. Teachers should seek the guidance from their colleagues who can help them teach better through using technology (Pourhossein, and Sabouri, 2014).
14. Technology is one of the important tools of language learning activity; it helps learners to improve their language learning skills.
15. Teachers should encourage their learners to use technology in increasing their language abilities.

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