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TECHNOLOGY AS A METHOD OF TEACHING AND LEARNING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Abstract

Technology is by far an inseparable tool to foreign language learning. Computer assistance language learning, (CALL) presented in the sixties was only the beginning of a new era in foreign language learning, to be ensued by information and communication technology (ICT) in the form of e-learning and the Internet in the recent decades. This paper aims at investigating how commonly is technology used in the foreign language classes in Albanian education system and what English language teachers (ELT) state about digitalisation effect in the learning environment and the students` performance according to personal experience. By using " Eight Questions to Ask Yourself", (Hockly N., 2011b) questionnaire adopted into test mode, comprising eight items to respond in a Likert scale, coded from 1-6, it resulted that the vast majority of ELT (91-95%) state that digitalization is time and effort effective and it facilitates the lesson presentation and is a crucial tool to enhance the foreign language environment. 42 % of ELT have a range of tools and repertoire of techniques to draw on and only 33 % design effective task types for the tool. They rely on internet application as a resource in foreign language classes. However they consider that technology is both stimulating and distracting to students, who are reportedly digital natives.

KEYWORDS: *English language teachers, digitalisation effect, foreign language environment, students` performance in foreign languages, digital natives, foreign language classes*

INTRODUCTION

The computer can be used by students for various data, information that they need in a certain task, thus enabling the enrichment of the language and its acquisition. Various websites provide us with numerous materials in English in all four of its competencies; their proper use both in school computer rooms and at home undoubtedly brings a high level to our students. Among the most important auditory tools in the foreign language class are the tape recorders or CDs prepared with native speakers, which should never be overlooked, as they give students the opportunity to develop one of the basic foreign language skills. While from the audiovisual means can be mentioned the film parts, the use of which has many advantages compared to other means as it develops at the same time the skills of listening and speaking in English. Films which can be TV shows, documentaries, feature films, or instructional videos serve as tools for informing, reinforcing, and supplementing acquired knowledge where students are encouraged to discuss as well as develop critical thinking about what they have seen and heard. Although it is difficult to use film materials in a lesson as they may be longer than the lesson time, it is up to us as teachers to determine the key parts to discuss.

Foreign languages teachers, instructors, methodologists, and researchers especially the ones who have taught in public and non public foreign language schools in principal cities of Albania, state that they have used technology in English classes more often since the nineties, and more excessively from 2000 and onward. However even in earlier decades like seventies or eighties, some foreign languages professional schools teachers used to apply technology in language classes due to a more enhanced infrastructure in these type of schools that were typical in those days, like the language labs, audio materials in tape recorders, CD`s, videos etc. This is also evidenced in the recent researches conducted in Albania with focus the use of technology in foreign language classes to find that students are quite motivated by high technology equipments at class such as CD ROMs, computers, DVD movies at the English class, CD players for listening skills, on line communication etc., have indicated that the students are highly motivated by high technology equipments

and students have claimed that high technology use in the English class will improve their language skills (Softa V., 2011).

Computers were introduced to the language learning field in the 1960s as CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), (O'Neill, Singh, & O'Donoghue, 2004, p. 320). Modern technology enables us with auditory and audiovisual teaching tools. These tools are part of the highest level of use of teaching technique and technology. In today's conditions of use of modern technology in teaching, computers are also widely used, the introduction of which has brought changes in both the organization of teaching activity and the teaching information system. Information and communication technology (ICT) in the form of e-learning and the Internet have presented additional benefits to the learning environment and distance education where there is a computer, mobile phone or tablet device with Internet access, (Alsunbul A., 2002).

In a multi-method exploratory study Rahma Al-Mahrooqi and Samia Naqvi (2014) investigate how a student-created digital video project enhanced language learning opportunities, collaboration and social skills among Omani college students. The results showed that the students enjoyed the experience and improved their language proficiency as a result of learning new vocabulary and engaging in reading and writing activities while doing the project. Student autonomy also improved as well as their critical thinking skills. School courses now emphasize participatory rather than supervisory experimentation, visual demonstration, and active teaching techniques; classrooms are conceived with a social format of organizing banks in a round shape, the possibility of non-cable internet connections for laptops, equipping with demonstration screens and note boards along the perimeter of the classroom is considered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers' attitudes towards technology use in the language classroom have also been found a main determiner of the degree of technology integration in the curriculum and of its success (Albirini, 2006; Al-Senaidi, Lin, & Poirot, 2009; cited in Rahma Al-Mahrooqi and Samia Naqvi (2014, p.2). Because technology use reduces teacher-centeredness, it is capable of reducing student

language learning anxiety as it gives them the chance to practice language comfortably without being embarrassed of making mistakes, which would reduce their "affective filter" (Krashen, 1982; Krashen & Terrell, 1983; McLaughlin, 1990). Research has found technology use in language instruction appealing to students as they are digital natives.

In the world of education, three definitions of BL (blended learning) are especially relevant. Definition 1: a combination of face-to-face and online teaching. The integrated combination of traditional learning with web based on-line approaches (Oliver and Trigwell 2005: 17). This is usually performed with parameter typically F2F (face to face) and CALL, (Computer assistance language learning). Definition 2: a combination of technologies. 'The combination of media and tools employed in an e-learning environment' (ibid. 17). Definition 3: a combination of methodologies. (ibid. 17; cited at Pete Sharma, 2010, p.456). Technology implications for English language teachers[I] aims to effect curriculum change to support broad creativity and innovation research, greater information, fluency in speaking, communication and collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, and digital citizenship and decision making technology operation and concepts (Brooks-Young, S. 2010). Younger users of technology are also effective users who have fewer affective barriers than older users. A general definition of blended learning is a combination of face-to-face and computer mediated instruction (Graham, 2006; cited at Grgurovic, Maja, 2010). Sharma P. and Barrett B., (2007) stress that integration is the key and that there is "a close correlation between the content of the lesson and the online materials" and "Use technology to complement and enhance F2F (Face to face teaching)", (Sharma and Barrett, 2007, pp. 13-14).Neumeier's framework, (2005) presents individual descriptors like: focus on mode, distribution of modes and choice of modes. Pedagogical factors are related to mass media, reality, textbooks, supplementary materials, contemporary literature, etc., greatly influence language learning. Yaverbaum, Kulkarni and Wood (1997) found that the use of technology is cost and time effective, reduces the need to commute, an alternate methodology in the learning environment, offers a variety of lesson presentation, enhances motivation, provides learning

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[I] National Educational Technology Standards for Students, (ISTE 2007)

opportunities outside the classroom, integrating multimedia into the traditional learning environment not only enriches the styles of presentation, but also has the advantage of increasing language retention.

INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY INTO FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSES "APPLICATION OF 8 EIGHT QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF", BY HOCKLY N., (2011B)

Hockly N., (2011b) in: "8 Eight Questions to Ask Yourself" suggests the use of free online posters which enables students to add multimedia such as videos, audio and digital photos, the outcome of which can be shared with a wider audience. Also it is recommended the class blog for students to practise writing skills as part of a long term project. The digital environment is crucial as well, for example the computer classroom for specific activities with additional tech home work. Other means of technology suggested are interesting developments in web 2.0, pod casts, online posters, videos that students can easily produce and share with a wide audience online. All of these options should be carefully monitored in terms of efficacy, time, outcome, balance and technical skill and digital literacy, by both teachers and students (setting up the system, adding multimedia to posting, enabling comments, writing for an online audience, appropriate use of hyper linking, balancing videos/images and text on the page, copyright). It is strongly recommended in this questionnaire that the use of technology across the syllabus balances consumption with production. The attendance of trainings with fellow teachers on line or through social or personal learning networks or chatting in the online groups targeted for work reason communication such as workshops, courses, etc., is another positive feedback of technology use. In this paper the application of "Eight Questions to Ask Yourself", (Hockly N., 2011b) is adopted into a test with eight items to respond by ELT, based on a Likert scale of item assessment from "Absolutely disagree" to "Absolutely agree", coded (1-6).

METHODOLOGY

Research Question

In the era of immense technological development, does Albania formal pre –university education system provide digital sources and capacities for foreign language e-learning? What do English Language Teachers (ELT) state about the use of technology in the English classes?

Sample size

The sample size in this research was selected on the overall population of English language teachers (ELT) in pre-university education system, in the capital city of Albania, Tirana. From the total number of teachers, a by a random selection technique, a sample of (N= 85) ELT was selected.

Instrument

The instrument used in this research was the ELT questionnaire "8 questions to ask yourself" by Hockley N. (2011 b) adopted in a Likert scale with 6 responses. From absolutely disagree, coded with value (1) to absolutely agree (6). For reasons of ethics the teachers were introduced beforehand to the type of questionnaire they were selected to complete under confidentially rules of application.

Procedures

The research is based on quantitative analysis and a descriptive methodology is applied. The data gathered from the questionnaire was processed through Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPPS) for means values, standard deviations and frequencies in percentage of responses.

RESULTS

1. Outcome

70% of ELT (English language teachers) state that the use of a particular technology enhances the learning outcomes. The mean value of the responses for the first statement was M=5, 79 and SD =0, 69

2. Added value

91% of ELT say that digitalization facilitates the lesson presentation. The mean value of the responses for the second statement was M=5, 83 and SD =0, 80.

3. Time & effort effective

95% of ELT ensure that using a digital tool is not going to take up more time and energy than the language actually being produced. The mean value of the responses for the third statement was M=5, 93 and SD =0, 80.

4. Syllabus

55% of ELT affirm that they look at the syllabus and think what technology tool to fit in the syllabus. The mean value of the responses for the fourth statement was M=5, 03 and SD =0, 80.

5. Skills

60% of ELT think about the technical and digital skills both them and their students need to be able to successfully use the technology/tool. The mean value of the responses for the fifth statement was M=4, 13 and SD =0, 66.

6. Location

52% of ELT plan ahead where and when will the tool(s) be used. In the computer room, at home, if using mobile devices inside and/or outside the classroom) ELT affirm that they look at the syllabus and think what technology tool to fit in the syllabus. The mean value of the responses for the sixth statement was M=4, 52 and SD =0, 80.

7. Role

Only 55% of ELT state that students more produce than consume when technology is applied in foreign language learning environment. The mean value of the responses for the seventh statement was M=4, 1 and SD =0, 56. They only slightly agree and state that students will mostly be distracted.

8. Resources

Only 42 % of ELT have a range of tools and repertoire of techniques to draw on. And, **only 33** % design effective task types for the tool. The mean value of the responses for the eighth statement was M= 4, 3 SD =0.49. (See Table 1 for the results).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the scale: "Use of technology in the English class"

		N	Min	Max	Mean value	SD
1	Technology enhances foreign language learning outcome	80	3,00	6,00	5,7923	0,69213
2	Digitalization facilitates the lesson presentation	80	3,00	6,00	5,8389	0,80655
3	using a digital tool is time and effort effective	80	2,00	6,00	5,378	0,63775
4	Using technology randomly with no clear overall purpose is going to be frustrating and disorganizing	80	4,00	6,00	5,9372	0,83313
5	Both teachers and students have technical and digital skills	80	1,00	5,00	4,1394	0,66195
6	Plan ahead where and when will the tools be used	80	1,00	5,00	4,5289	0,60552
7	Students more produce than consume when technology is applied in foreign language learning environment.	80	1,00	6,00	4,1528	0,56621
8	Have a range of tools and repertoire of techniques to draw on	80	1,00	6,00	4,311	0,49107

Source:"Eight questions to ask yourself" in digital foreign language learning", (Hockley N., 2011)

CONCLUSIONS

Overall, a great majority of 95% of English language teachers (ELT) in Albania strongly believe that digitalization is time and effort effective. 70% of ELT are very confidential that technology enhances foreign language learning outcome. 91% of ELT totally agree that digitalization facilitates the lesson presentation and is a crucial tool to enhance the foreign language environment. 55% of ELT appreciate how to fit technology to foreign language syllabus. They fully confirm that technology without a clear purpose in the syllabus is frustrating and disorganising. 60% of ELT only slightly seriously consider the need for technical and digital skills in the foreign language class. 52% of ELT partly plan ahead where and when will the digital tools be used. Only 55% of ELT slightly believe that students more produce than consume. Only 42 % of ELT have a range of tools and repertoire of techniques to draw on. Only 33 % design effective task types for the tool.

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