

USING ICT AS AN EFL CLASSROOM TOOL: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

There have been a number of research studies regarding information and communication technologies in EFL classrooms and their new methods. While new implementations are suggested to support ICT-based teaching, EFL teachers must be trained on how to use them properly in teaching English. To identify the perceptions of EFL teachers and their awareness of ICT in teaching, a number of studies showed that most teachers were highly motivated to utilize ICT as it helps teachers to make their lessons more enjoyable and effective (Warshaw, 1989), which supports English learners to learn English communicatively without stress. Although ICT-based teaching is regarded as useful to improve learners' language skills and inspire them to be active, creative and passion, it leads to lots of difficulties and barriers which most EFL teachers experience in incorporating ICT in their language classroom. Growing concerns without concrete objectives, plans and lack of ICT awareness will cause teachers and professors to use them improperly and waste of effort and time.

Keywords: EFL teachers, ICT-based teaching, benefits, challenges.

1. Introduction

One of the innovative and valuable teaching tools is considered ICT which enhances the process of teaching and learning English. All gadgets we use in language teaching process help to sustain students' motivation and language

acquisition. (Altun, 2015). ICT implementation in the process of teaching is supported by many developed countries with training to enhance the quality of teaching, pedagogical methods and to make the class innovative and interactive. Following this innovative development, education systems in developing countries have implemented new plans to improve ICT into curriculum at secondary and tertiary education. As there have been challenging to implement rapid educational changes, pre-service and in-service courses are started to empower teachers (Paraskeva,Bouta, 2008). Involving technological devices including computer, internet, cell phones and projectors in language teaching will lead to change the ways of teacher-centred to a student-centred environment of learning. It motivates language learners and teachers to acquire the language through presenting slides to sustain students' interests. Although Hew and Brush (2007, p. 225), said "computing devices such as desktop computers, laptops, handheld computers, software, or Internet in K-12 schools for instructional purposes", teachers need technology devices for preparing to teaching as a learning tool for learners (Inan andLowther, 2010)

The advantages of using ICT as a classroom tool

The sheer availability of computer devices in instruction and language acquisition has led to state-of –the- art researches and studies in the field of effective teaching and learning. The common result of investigations shows how technological tools are powerful to improve students' motivation, critical thinking and autonomy (Cancannon, Flynn and Campbell, 2005). Language learners are expected to show their interests when teachers use them during EFL classes. Using computer-based activities in the classroom displays students' active participation and positive attitude to the environment of the lesson.

The use of internet resources, valuable authentic learning materials and online videos inspire learners to improve language skills. According to McMinn (2008), using technology as podcasting and video files which give students chances to improve their listening skill by internet showed positive effect on classroom time with using authentic materials and students' simulation in learning foreign language curriculum. Similarly, Rank (2011) said that using ICT in teaching English improved students' interaction and communication skills who met challenges on time and money to learn English by travelling.

Teaching English as a foreign language in the context of Uzbekistan has changed from teacher-centered to student-centered learning by communicative language

learning (CLT) approach. Similarly, Lee, C. (2005) has found that “The more a teacher employs instructional technology, the less teacher-oriented and the more student-centered a classroom will become” (p.81). In terms of teachers in rural areas of Uzbekistan also started to use communicative language teaching approach instead of Grammar Translation method. According to Hasanova (2007) “CLT in Uzbekistan is perceived more as a topic of discussion for teaching conferences rather than being an approach to be implemented in classroom teaching”. Although most EFL teachers have experience as traditional language teaching, they think that the method of CLT is more successful in teaching English. However, the majority of EFL teachers face challenges to enhance students’ interaction and communication skills in the classroom. For that reason, most Uzbek teachers and students need computer literacy skills to develop their language acquisition spirits and environment. In this case, appropriate combination of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) programs including the internet are integrated with the curriculum of language which examines successful use ICT in foreign language learning and teaching in Uzbekistan.

EFL teachers’ challenges in using ICT

In line with the most advantages of implementing ICT in teaching English, there are also some challenges which a number of researchers showed. To inspire teachers’ positive attitude to use ICT, most of them should be trained to reduce the feeling of nervousness, lack of awareness and skills regarding computers. Therefore, teachers face difficulties to combine ICT into curriculum. Moreover, ICT “is not suitable for all learners in all situations and for all purposes, and may require some considerable learner training for effective use.” (Livingstone, 2012, p. 12). Finding appropriate internet-based reliable resources and making them suitable to the course objectives and students’ needs should be taken into account before implementing ICT in the EFL classrooms. Furthermore, there is a need for provision of technologies and internet access in utilizing software and hardware challenges, not adequate access to the technical resources. In these circumstances, lack of ICT support and knowledge about technology access can lead to lose teachers’ confidence and time management on classroom instructional tasks which is insufficient time for students’ practice.

Although most investigations showed ICT benefits as an autonomous learning (Kassim et al, 2007) teachers are recommended to take students’ different learning styles into consideration. In addition, utilizing ICT without exact

planning and clearly written goals can be effortless and a waste of time. According to Evans, “The vast availability of original, authentic texts.....can provide instant contact and stimulus for the language learners. Nonetheless, such material, produced for native speakers of the language, can , for many language learners and their teachers , be viewed as ‘difficult’and the subject matter may relate to a culture of which the learner has little or no experience” (2009,p. 3).

In conclusion, it is mostly believed that using ICT as a classroom tool is useful, effective and valuable to enhance students’ critical thinking skills and integrated skills. Generally, it is helpful tool to keep students’ interests and motivation to learn independently. In contrast, teachers are required to have computer literacy skills and a careful lesson planning to prevent from wasting of time and effort in teaching EFL classes. Finally, a use of ICT requires having an access to technology and reliable resources for activities which integrates to syllabus and curriculum. Teachers’ attitudes towards ICT-based teaching showed how it is more enjoyable, fascinating and effective due to a number of reforms and new implementations. However, there are still barriers and lack of computer literacy skill among EFL teachers. It is recommended that teachers should be trained how to combine ICT with the course objectives and curriculum to reduce teachers’ concerns in terms of planning the lesson.

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