Abstract

Information Communication Technology (ICT) breakthroughs have brought new opportunities to restructure the language learning/teaching settings. Nowadays, ICT has opened new avenues and brought new challenges to language learners as well as teachers. The responsibility of learning tasks has shifted towards the learners and this has dramatically changed the roles of teachers. However, it should be noted that modern language teachers determine the quality of learning process, and not ICT. This paper tries to highlight the potentialities of ICT as a powerful tool for foreign language teaching and the effects of this technology on second language learning.

Keywords: ICT; English Language Learning/Teaching

1. Introduction

From CALL (computer assisted language learning) to ICT (information and communication technology), teachers and researchers have long been interested in uses of new technologies in foreign/second language teaching and learning, and not without reason. ICT is often argued to increase motivation Grabe & Grabe. (2005), and is frequently linked with learner autonomy (Duda, 2005)—autonomy defined by Williams, J. (2003) as “the ability to take charge of one’s own learning”. In other words, learners should be able to take all the decisions concerning their learning: determining targets and objectives, choosing contents and materials, selecting methods and techniques, organizing their learning, and assessing their progress. ICT thus seems to befit autonomy because it is claimed to provide greater freedom and flexibility to learn at one’s own pace and convenience, whether within the context of a language course or beyond. It can contribute to lifelong learning, perhaps most apparent in use of the internet, which represents a worldwide library and resource centre where information can be accessed fast and efficiently: learners can thus benefit from a vast range of authentic language materials and resources which can be selected according to learning needs, aims, styles, strategies and preferences (Richards, 2005).

What are ICTs and what types of ICTs are commonly used in education?

ICTs (information and communication technologies) and are defined, for the purposes of this paper, as a “diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information.” These technologies include computers, the Internet, broadcasting technologies (radio and television), and telephony. In recent years there has been a groundswell of interest in how computers and the Internet can best be harnessed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of education at all levels and in both formal and non-formal
settings. But ICTs are more than just these technologies; older technologies such as the telephone, radio and television, although now given less attention, have a longer and richer history as instructional tools. The use of computers and the Internet is still in its infancy in developing countries, if these are used at all, due to limited infrastructure and the attendant high costs of access. Moreover, different technologies are typically used in combination rather than as the sole delivery mechanism.

The capabilities of ICT
Researchers done so far show that the most important achievements of ICT are as follows:
- Increase the quality of learning and taught students and students
- Ease of access to a very high volume of information and knowledge available in the world.
- Rapid and timely access to information in very little time.
- Reduction of some educational expenses
- Improve the quality, accuracy and scientific texts for academic disciplines
- Indirect creation of learning experiences
- Create an exact relationship
- Create an interest in learning
- Increase learning opportunities
- Educators can evaluate students, they have collected the necessary information and appropriate feedback to students are presented

ICT and language learning/teaching

Using ICT gives the learners real-life contact with, and exposure to, the cultures of the peoples and countries where the new language is spoken and enables children to access and research information worldwide. The opportunity for children to develop an interest in the culture of other nations through comparison with their own is an integral part of primary languages entitlement. Using ICT, particularly email, blogs and video conferencing, facilitates children’s interaction and communication with native speakers and other communities by enabling them to use language for real purposes and in real contexts. ICT both supports and integrates literacy skills. It enhances interactive teaching and learning styles and provides many opportunities for creativity. When used imaginatively it can stimulate curiosity about how languages work, raise the level of cognitive challenge, and extend children’s ability to be independent in their use of the new language. ICT offers a powerful way of enabling children to be fully engaged in their own language learning process. Tasks done at home, at school or on a trip abroad can be uploaded to a learning platform, enabling teachers, parents and children to make comments and celebrate achievement. There is an increasing range of effective software to support primary languages teaching and learning. Chosen carefully and used creatively, it enables teachers and children to engage with tasks in ways that are not possible with printed materials. ICT has the potential to support non-specialist teachers, through access to native speaker models of the new language which can be used to support acquisition of linguistic skills, or to extend the range of voices in the classroom. Through the use of a learning platform, ICT can supplement training programmes to help ensure that support is maintained over the coming years as increasing numbers of teachers are trained to teach a new language at primary level. Interactive whiteboards, DVDs and the use of digital projectors can provide stimulating visual aids as a valuable strategy to support understanding and recall in the new language. ICT has the potential to increase the percentage of learning that involves the traditionally more difficult literacy skills by maximising exposure to the written word.

ICT and English Language Learners

ICT helps English language learners by enabling them to communicate, edit, annotate and arrange text quickly and flexibly. Moreover, by using ICT learners can:

- access, select and interpret information
• recognize patterns, relationships and behaviors
• model, predict and hypothesis
• test reliability and accuracy
• review and modify their work to improve the quality
• communicate with others and present information
• evaluate their work
• improve efficiency
• be creative and take risks
• gain confidence and independence.

ICT can be used to integrate speaking, listening, reading and writing. It enhances interactive teaching and learning styles. It also extends pupils' ability to exercise choice, work independently and make connections between their work in English and in other subjects. ICT helps learners:

• use a wide range of strategies to explore contrasts, comparisons and connections dynamically
• annotate text in innovative ways
• enrich or broaden the context of literary study
• see texts in alternative versions
• use a wide range of analytical and critical techniques
• sort and process text and data quickly and efficiently
• order and arrange text and data experimentally, using combinations of word, image, sound and hypertext
• save, record, edit and adapt their work quickly and efficiently
• retain evidence of the editing process so that it can be examined
• change the organizational structure and qualities of texts to suit different audiences and purposes
• compose multi-authored texts
• select from a wider range of audiences, throughout the world
• exercise choice of medium and design while composing.

The changing methodology: the new roles of language teachers
In traditional language teaching methodologies, teachers teach facts from books. The teachers are seen as the main source of knowledge to the students. On the other hand, the new teaching methodologies focus on the teaching of strategies of deciding what information is needed. The teachers’ roles are as guides or facilitators to help learners to be skilled in selecting, accessing, evaluating, organizing and storing information. These strategies are important to manage vast amounts of information. The teachers also need to manage the time and courses and to construct knowledge autonomously in virtual learning communities. Besides performing this new role, the teacher is also the motivator of the whole learning process, and can facilitate intellectual group discussion. The teacher must reflect critically on the context of learning (mediated by technology), the methods (different than those used in the classroom), the students, the teacher’s own computer literacy (hardware, software and technical support needed), and other matters pertaining to digital literature. Learning via technology has many advantages. The Internet provides current and up-to-date data. It stores vast amount of information that can be retrieved quickly and easily. For language learning purposes, it provides text in authentic language, unlike the contrived language usually found in books. Technology enables the teacher to transmit more information to a larger number of students in a shorter time. Teachers have to play their part to facilitate a learning environment that will open learners’ minds to new possibilities. As Zepp (2005) points out, teachers should relate the goals of education with effective use of ICT. In other words, teachers must be aware of the impact of technology on education and the required changes to enhance their teaching. They need to adjustment their teaching process to suit this new ICT environment. The teacher’s role in an ICT environment is that of a facilitator instead of being a purveyor of knowledge. This transformation from the old to the new method of delivering knowledge is a global phenomenon. The modern teacher in the ICT era is no longer described as ‘a sage on the stage’ but a ‘guide by the side’. Teaching then can be a transforming experience as it opens new windows to the world and creates a lifetime of opportunities. With ICT it implies the changes in the teacher’s role not just as a teacher but as a monitor of participation and a practitioner of research, all of which
possibilities are accelerated by the technological resources. Queiroz (2003) insists lecturers or teachers need to go through a continuous process of competency improvements to meet the demands of lifelong learning for their professional development. Without this, teachers may be complacent and merely duplicate their practices electronically. If this happens, learners would not benefit from the technological advancements happening around them. Therefore, ICT training for teachers should not be merely to use technology per se. Berge (1996) and Warschauer, M. & Healey, D. (1998) listed several recommendations for teachers: pedagogical (use of discursive resources as to facilitate learning), social (incentive of human relations among members of the group), managerial (establishment of general procedures for discussion and development of activities) and technical (transparency of technology for an adequate relation between the system, the software and the interface selected). As for teachers’ roles, Holec, H. (1981) listed a few considerations that teachers and lecturers have to make to optimize the use of IT. Tools such as chat rooms, e-mail and web forums need to be designed to enhance interpersonal and social skills. As the teachers’ roles change, they must ensure that a good learning environment exists at all times. A good learning environment should not neglect human needs to socialize and interact with one another. A good learning environment needs to co-exist with a good teaching environment. This can be achieved if the teachers have a positive attitude towards ICT. Instructors, teaching using the electronic mode must have a positive attitude to motivate, facilitate and guide learners (Pramela 2006). Loveless & Ellis (2001) explains that the impact of technology on pedagogy has created major differences in terms of teacher roles, teaching activities, learning activities and learner roles. The changes have led to a redefinition of learning and the learning environment. Naidoo (2003) suggests that ICT can also be used to support teachers who lack adequate skills and content knowledge, thus contributing to improving the quality of learning. Teachers who are hesitant to sit in classrooms or feel they are too old for the formal education system would find the interactive and asynchronous nature of ICT helpful for their professional development. This article continues to discuss important issues concerning ICT and pedagogic implications. Lee (2000) lists some reasons why ICT is not used in classrooms. According to him, the limitations of using ICT as an educational tool are: financial barriers, availability of computer hardware and software, lack of technical and theoretical knowledge and reluctance to accept the technology. A closer look at research shows that technology is most effective when teachers receive more training in its instructional applications. When used to supplement a carefully thought-out program of classroom instruction, it should include appropriate amount of learner control, helpful feedback and sound pedagogical design. Pramela (2006) emphasizes on the importance of feedback in teaching and learning in the electronic media because helpful feedback given to learners means creating social presence which is crucial in the virtual mode of learning. Teachers must also be prepared to go through a continuous learning process to improve teaching efficiency. This is because ‘technology cannot replace good teaching but it can enhance it’. In the online process, teaching concerns the relationship between the teacher-student and student-knowledge. The student is guided to learn to be more autonomous for his or her own learning. This mode of learning leads the teacher to find educational practices that stimulate this type of online learning.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Using ICT in language classes

First of all, the computer is a machine, not a method. The world of online communication is a vast new medium, comparable in some ways to books, print, or libraries. To our knowledge, no one has ever attempted to conduct research on whether the book or the library is beneficial for language learning. Seeking similar sweeping conclusions on the effects of the computer or the Internet is equally futile. Secondly, and even more importantly, new communications technologies are part of the broader ecology of life at the turn of the century. Much of our reading, writing, and communicating is migrating from other environments (print, telephone, etc.) to the screen. In such a context, we can no longer think only about how we use technologies to teach language. We also must think about what types of language students need to learn in order to communicate effectively via computer. Whereas a generation ago, we taught foreign language students to write essays and read magazine articles, we now must (also) teach them to write e-mail messages and conduct research on the Web. This realization has sparked an approach which emphasizes the importance of new information technologies as a legitimate medium of communication in their own right rather than simply as teaching tools. In summary, then, the advantages of using new technologies in the language classroom can only be interpreted in light of the changing goals of language education and the changing conditions in postindustrial society. Language educators now seek not only (or even principally) to teach students the rules of grammar, but rather to help them gain apprenticeship into new discourse communities. This is accomplished through creating opportunities for authentic and meaningful interaction both within and outside the
classroom, and providing students the tools for their own social, cultural, and linguistic exploration. The computer is a powerful tool for this process as it allows students access to online environments of international communication. By using new technologies in the language classroom, we can better prepare students for the kinds of international cross-cultural interactions which are increasingly required for success in academic, vocational, or personal life.

2. Conclusion
A vast amount of literature explored the potentialities of ICT with regards to teaching and learning languages. Dunkel (1990), for example, asserted that the possibilities of computer technology as a tool could include increasing language learners’ (1) self esteem, (2) vocational preparedness, (3) language proficiency and (4) overall academic skills. Furthermore, the benefits of multimedia, the Internet, and various forms of distance education were explored by many others. Educators were particularly interested in technology’s interactive capabilities, such as providing immediate feedback and increasing learner autonomy. Schools and colleges reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of current day society and therefore have a duty to ensure that all students are able to access the curriculum, achieving to the best of their own abilities. Students within the educational system for whom English is an additional language have very special needs which need to be addressed by teachers all educators. Using ICT to support English language learners pose challenges for teachers of how to exploit new and emerging such technologies. We as language teachers should consider new strategies in teaching but ICT without correct strategies can not help us in classroom.

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