The use of ICT and technology in language teaching and learning

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Abstract: The use of technology in language teaching and learning is an interesting issue for all teachers and practitioners in the field. The importance of this issue is reflected in the large amount of the literature concerned with technology in language classrooms.In this paper, we are going to highlight some of the basic ideas discussed in relation to technology and its implementations in language learning and teaching. Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg (2003), Schwartz and Beichner (1999), Warschauer and Meskill (2000) among others are the most informative references about the use of ICT in language teaching and learning.

Introduction

The development of theories and practices of second language learning and the evolution in technology have paralleled and completed each other. In other words,the development of technology has a direct influence on education. In this respect, the international Society for Technology in Education (ISTE)issued a set of fundamental standards concerning what teachers need to know and be able to dowith technology:

A. Basic computer technology operations and concepts.

B. Personal and professional use of technology.

C.Application of technology in instructions. (Thomas, et-al. 1997)

More than that, Schwartz and Beinchner (1999) reported that curriculum improvement projects in the USA are favored and get more funds when they include technology elements. Namely, since technology promotes autonomous learning, a student-centered approach to language teaching is better applied by implementing ICT in the classroom.

Now that we have an idea about what makes the use of technology in language classroom worth investigation. In the first section, we are going to briefly state some historical background of technology in language classroom.

Some history of ICT in language learning and teaching:

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning is no novelty. To begin with, Warschauer and Meskill (2000) asserts that advocates of grammar translation method "relied on one of the most ubiquitous technologies in U.S. education "including the blackboard, the overhead projector, and software programs which supported the " drill-and-practice" also referred to as "drill-and-kill ". In this period, technology was not yet appointed its relevant function as a means to enhance communicative competence of learners. Again according to Warschauer and Meskill (2000), in the era of audio lingualism "students were believed to learn best through constant repetition in the target language"; thus, audio labs were 'the best way' to use technology in teaching languages.The 1980s and 1990s introduced a radical change in language teaching practicesand theories. The shift to communicative language teaching changed the role of technology in the field. Warschauer and Meskill (2000) describe four major forms of technology as a tool to enhance communication in the classroom:

1. Text-reconstruction softwares: these softwares allow teachers set up a number of texts where students are supposed to fill-in gaps or reorganize mixed uptexts.

2.Concordancing software: they are primary softwares as they help learners locate the usage of words, rather than just defining them.

3. Telecommunications and multimedia simulation softwares: simulate an immersion or a "linguistic bath" environment; that is, learners live an experience with the target language and culture first hand.

4. The Internet: this is the most important form of technology which can be used ina myriad of ways. It is also important for it keeps learners busy even outside thewalls of the classroom.

Benefits of technology for learners

In the past, teachers used to complain about the difficulties of setting up an atmosphere which caters for the needs of learners with their various learning styles. Nowadays, it is due to technology that some learners no longer feel marginalized in the classroom. In this respect Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg (2003) assert that "multimedia provides the multiple modalities needed to meet the needs of students with different learning styles and strategies" (p. 7).

Simply put, the integration of technology in language classes triggered learners' satisfaction and autonomy. In most second language learning contexts, learners' exposure to L2 was limited to the classroom; this problem has been successfully solved with ICT for this latter provides longer exposure to L2. In the realm of ICT, learners are set into two categories.

Techno-pros (students who have a good mastery of technology and cause it in their learning), and techno-pals (students with very limited skills in using technology as a learning tool). The two categories cooperate with each other in sharing knowledge about technology and language which in fact promotes students-students interaction. Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg (2003) devoted a part of their work to the description of twelve attributes of a successful. Technology Enhanced Language Learning Environment (TELLE) .It is important to mention the most interesting attributes since they are overlapping. A successful use of technology "(1) provides interaction, communicative activities, and real audience". A good technology generates learners' interaction not only among themselves but also with the material used for teaching. It also introduces authentic audience which creates communication and develops learners' communicative competence. It also "(2) supplies comprehensible input".

The integration of technology expends learners' experience with language as opposed to the limited experience offered in traditional classrooms. Moreover,

It "(3) supports development of cognitive abilities". Using technology, learners develop research skills, critical thinking, and inquiry-based learning in a way that they become responsible for their own learning and check the validity of information they receive in or outside class.

"(4) facilitates focused development of English language skills".

Since language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing) are the basis for language learning, learners are supposed to have enough room for a balanced practice of the four skills in order to be competent in L2. Technology as a personalized tool for learning allows learners to have enough practice of the four skills. "(5) meets affective needs of students". This is the most striking aspect about technology in language classes. It is taken for granted that computers can never replace teachers' affective support for learners. Yet, " the self-esteem of second language learners is enhanced when […] they produce accurate, attractive work using word processing and desktop publishing" (p18).

Benefits of technology for teachers:

The integration of ICT in language teaching and learning is also beneficial for teachers. According to Connelly and Clanandin (1988) technology helps teachers become developers of their own curriculum; thus, they can tailor assignments and instructions to sustain a positive interaction to increase learners' interest and motivation. Ranging from tape-recorders to websites, technology helps teachers develop a highly interactive class which is a value according to advocates of communicative language learning (CLT). Moreover, with the emergence of CLT (1960s), language teachers needed to adapt their teaching styles and adopt new techniques to enhance learners' communicative competence. Consequently, through the use of technology teachers gained access to communicative tasks that "(1) utilize information gap […]; (2) allow speaker autonomy […]; and (3) provide feedback from the interlocutor" (p29). In addition to this, an effective exploitation of ICT allows teachers to create real-world settings in the classroom which is a primordial component for the development of communicative competence. In chapters 4 and 5, Butler-Pascoe and Wiburg (2003) highlight the effectiveness of technology to support the acquisition of language skills. While using

technology, it becomes easier for teachers to design listening passages, reading texts, pronunciation activities, and writing tasks. Assessment is a basic step in language learning and teaching. Sometimes it is described as a learning and teaching map via which learners get to know where they stand and teachers also become aware of their teaching achievements. Wilson and Davis (1994), Darling (1997), Chao (1999) and others suggest that traditional assessment in its standardized form is unfair as it limits students' performances to small units of behaviors.

In general, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the extent to which technology has a deep influence on language teaching and learning practices. As far as assessment is concerned, it is important to point out that technology helps teachers set up environments for assessment that "support project-based and product-based learning. That is, a learning that demonstrates "what students have learned and then to develop related rubrics, checklists, or other forms of alternative assessments for evaluating student learning" (pp 219-220).

Limitations of ICT in language teaching and learning:

The computerized classroom is not the utopian environment for language learning to take place. Skeele (1999), Harrington (1993), and Sharma (2009) see that there are restrictions concerning the implementation of technology in the classroom. Herbert and Nobel assured that "for the computer to bring about a revolution in higher education, its introduction must be accompanied by improvements in our understanding of learning and teaching". A number of teachers and students are resistant to change; thus, using technology in teaching and learning creates gaps among practitioners of language teaching and language learners. Harrington (1993) in his turn supports the same idea by assuming that the use of technology in the classroom puts techno-pals at a disadvantage. Among the restrictions of using technology in the classroom is the need for the technical know-how; in a different way, teacher's limited knowledge

about technology affects the effectiveness of their teaching when they choose to use technology. Other than that, for a good learning to take place, the affective support for learnersis highly essential. It is agreed that technology in all its forms can never replace theteacher, that is to say, no one can deny the truth that the immediate mechanical feedback offered in word processing does not satisfy learners' curiosity as it mayhappen with teacher's explanations and humanized feedback.

Conclusions:

As a conclusion, there are controversies about the use of technology in language teaching and learning. Thusly, the aim of this paper is to shed light on the different arguments that exist against and for the implementation of ICT as a component of the learning and teaching processes. In crude terms, using technology offers learners with the opportunity to enjoy their learning as it also worsens the situation of techno-pals who feel unwilling to catch up with their classmates. As a result, controversies in this issue prompt a number of scholars to investigate it from different perspectives.

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2/6/2013