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Research Article

TECHNOLOGY IN LANGUAGE TEACHLNG

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ABSTRACT

This article outlines to consider the causes of technophobia and suggested ways of overcoming it, to examine specific teacher doubts about using technology in the classroom and suggested some solutions, to look at a variety of EFL teaching contexts and teachers' access to computers, to discuss the types of computer-based activities you can do with your learners and to conclude the basic skills and equipment that teachers need in order to start using technology in their teaching.

KEYWORDS

Call, Internet, websites, TELL, Internet café, digital immigrants, technophobes or technogeek, key pal, blog, concordance, web browser;

INTRODUCTION

Technology in language teaching is not new. Indeed, technology has been around in language teaching for decades – one might argue for centuries, if we classify the blackboard as a form of technology. Tape

recorders, language laboratories and video have been in use since the 1960s and 1970s, and are still used in classrooms around the world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Computer-based materials for language teaching, often referred to as CALI (Computer Assisted Language Learning), appeared in the early 1980s. Early CALL programs typically required learners to respond to stimuli on the computer screen and to carry out tasks such as filling in gapped texts, matching sentence halves and doing multiple-choice activities. Probably one of the best-known early CALL activities is that of text reconstruction, where an entire text is blanked out and the learner recreates it by typing in words. For all of these activities the computer then offers the learner feedback, ranging from simply pointing out whether the answer is correct or incorrect to providing more sophisticated feedback, such as showing why the learner is mistaken and offering remedial activities. The CALL approach is one that is still found on many published CD-ROMs for language teaching. As access to Information and Communications Technology (ICT) has become more widespread, so CALL has moved beyond the use of computer programs to embrace the use of the Internet and web-based tools. The term TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning) appeared in the 1990s, in response to the growing possibilities offered by the Internet and communications technology.

Although the use of ICT by language teachers is still not widespread, the use of technology in the classroom is becoming increasingly important, and it will become a normal part of ELT practice in the coming years. There are many reasons for this:

- Internet access - either in private homes or at Internet cafes- is becoming increasingly available to learners.
- Younger learners are growing up with technology, and it is a natural and integrated part of their lives. For these learners the use of technology is a way to bring the outside world into the classroom. And some of these younger learners will in turn become teachers themselves.
- English, as an international language, is being used in technologically mediated contexts.
- Technology, especially the Internet, presents us with new opportunities for authentic tasks and materials, as well as access to a wealth of ready-made ELT materials.
- The Internet offers excellent opportunities for teamwork and communication between learners who are geographically dispersed.
- Technology is offered with published materials such as course books and resource books for teachers.
- Learners increasingly expect language schools to integrate technology into teaching.

- Technology offers new ways for practicing language and assessing act.

- Technology is becoming increasingly mobile. It can be used not only in the classroom, lecture hall, computer room or self-access centre; it can also be used at home, on the way to school and in Internet cafes.

- Using a range of ICT tools can give learners exposure to and practice in all of the four main language skills: speaking, listening, writing and reading.

DISCUSSION AND RESULT

The contexts in which teachers are working with technology can vary widely and the access that teachers have to computers - the so-called digital divide - will affect what we can do with our classes in terms of implementing technology. A general lack of ICT training for teachers also means that we still have some way to go until the normalisation of technology in language teaching, where the use of technology in teaching becomes as natural as the use of books or pens and paper.

Attitudes to technology - Many people are afraid of new technology and, with the increasing presence of the Internet and computers, the term technophobe has appeared to refer to those of us who might be wary of these new developments. More recently, the term digital native has been coined to refer to someone who

grows up using technology, and who thus feels comfortable and confident with it - typically today's children. Their parents, on the other hand, tend to be digital immigrants, who have come late to the world of technology, if at all. In many cases, teachers are the digital immigrants and our younger students are the digital natives.

Think about yourself. Where do you stand? How confident do you feel about using the Internet and computers? Although there is a tendency to call computer users either technophobes or technogeeks (a term for a technology enthusiast), the truth is that most of us probably fall somewhere between the two extremes.

A large part of the negative attitudes teacher shave towards technology is usually the result of a lack of confidence, a lack of facilities or a lack of training, resulting in an inability to see the benefit of using technologies in the classroom. It is also often the case that teachers may not be fully in control of their work situations. A teacher may want to use more technology in their teaching, but the school may not have the facilities, or, on the other hand, a teacher may be instructed to start using technology for which they feel unprepared or untrained.

Implementing ICT in the classroom - As we know teachers have varying levels of access to computers and technology, and teach in all sorts of contexts to all

sorts of learners. Here are some of the questions you may be asking yourself about using technology in the classroom.

How can I use ICT with my class if there is only one computer in the school? Introducing a rota or booking system for the computer with your colleagues will ensure equal use for all the teachers in the school. You will need to use the Internet mainly as a resource with your learners, accessing the Internet to download and print out materials to use offline with classes. Technology-based activities you can do by printing off materials include:

- Using websites.
- Internet-based project work - especially web quests offline.
- Email keypal projects using the teacher's email account.
- Using online reference tools such as concordancers on paper.
- Electronically produced materials printed out for learners.

What can I do if my learners have very low Information Technology (IT) experience and skills? - You need to first find out about your learners' IT skills and degrees of experience, for example by means of a questionnaire, and then start off by using the simplest technologies in the classroom. For learners with zero or very low IT skills, or literacy issues, a good place to

start is with simple word processing tasks. Once learners are comfortable with this, basic email or searching the Internet can be introduced. Try to pair up more technically experienced learners with the absolute novices for any ICT-based class work, so that the more experienced users help the less experienced ones.

I teach classes of 30 + students. How can I use computers with such large groups? - You will need to have access to a minimum number of computers, with no more than four learners per computer doing small-group work online. Large classes, with more than 30 students, can be divided into two groups - while one group is doing online computer room work, the other group is doing paper-based work. The two groups then change over. You will be able to implement most of the tools and activities described in this book.

Skills and equipment for getting started - What does a teacher need to know to be able to use technology in the classroom? Well, you don't need to have any specialist technical knowledge or skills, much as you don't need to be a mechanic to know how to drive a car!

The basic skills you do need to have in place before you start reading this book are how to use a simple word processing program (e.g. Microsoft Word), how to use email and how to access and use the Internet. By reading this book, and trying out the activities

suggested with your learners, you should be able to greatly increase your ICT skills set, and to feel more confident about using technology in the classroom.

You will also need some essential equipment in order to get the most out of this book, and to start to implement technology with your learners:

- At least one computer (preferably one per two students).
- An Internet connection.
- A Printer.
- An audio card in the computer, and a headset (audio and microphone) for every computer.
- Basic software (a word processing program, a web browser like Internet Explorer, Firefox, Safari or Mozilla, and an email program).

As we saw above, teaching contexts and teachers' access to computers and technology can vary widely. While reading this book, you'll find plenty of activities which can be done if only one computer is available in class. However, access to a computer room to which you can take your class will provide more opportunities for implementing technology, for both you and your learners.

It is worth bearing in mind that the layout of your computer room will directly affect the types of activities you are able to do with your learners, and how they interact with one another and with you. A layout which has computers at desks around the walls, facing the walls, with a large table in the centre of the room, allows the teacher to walk around and easily see what the learners are working on and what they're looking at on the computer monitors (screens). The central area provides an easily accessible space where learners can go when they don't need the computers, and for when we might want to do more communicative group work. If the central space is reasonably large, more movement and activity is possible in the centre of the room; this will offer up more opportunities for kinaesthetic learners, and the chance to use games and physical activities with younger learners away from the computer monitors.

CONCLUSION

Of course, few of us are lucky enough to be able to choose how our computer facilities look, but it may be possible for you to make some small changes in the work environment so that it's more comfortable to work in the room, and easier to teaching. It's well worth considering how your institution's computer room could be made more user-friendly for you and your classes.

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