IN THE NAME OF GOD

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THE PLACE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY IN SECOND LANGUAG TEACHING IN GIRL'S HIGH SCHOOLS AND PRIVATE ENGLISH INSTITUTES IN SHIRAZ

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DEDICATEDTOMYFAMILIY,
PARTICULARLYMY MOTHER
TO WHOM   I OWE A LOT

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ABSTRACT

THE PLACE OF INFORMATION IN SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING IN GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOLS AND PRIVATE INSTITUTES IN SHIRAZ

BY

FATEMEH SHAHAMAT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the use of educational technology in Iranian schools and language institutes to see how frequently different means of educational technology are used at both places and to see whether there are any significant differences across the three levels of proficiency at different language schools in this regard. The participants of the study comprised 700 EFL female students who were native speakers of Persian. Of all participants, 391 of them were 3rd grade students of eight public schools of the four main educational districts in Shiraz, Iran. From each school two classes were randomly selected. The other 309 participants were from private language institutes. From each language institute three classes of elementary, intermediate and advanced levels were randomly chosen. The age level of the participants ranged from 16-40 for language institutes and 17 for high schools. To gather the data, a questionnaire based on previous research was modified and used. The modified questionnaire had 24 items using a five-point Likert scale. The data were collected during March 2008. Crosstabs and ANOVA results showed the frequency of use of different means of technology both at schools and language institutes and differences among the three proficiency levels in items of using educational technology were calculated. The results revealed that use of educational technology at high schools is much lower than that of language institutes and it was figured out which means caused significant differences. It is hoped that teachers, students and language planners can benefit from the findings of this study.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0. Introduction

This chapter consists of three main sections. First, it provides a background on educational technology. Second, the objectives and significance of the study along with the research questions are presented. Thirdly, some key terms are presented and defined.

1.1. Background

The widespread nature of information communication technologies (ICTs) and the pervasive belief in the promise of technology have led to an obvious information technology environment in the 21st century, at least in developed countries and to an increasing extent in developing countries, especially in urban areas. These trends have dramatically reshaped educational setting in general. In addition, they, interwoven with other social, cultural, political and economic changes, have significantly affected the skills that learners use to construct knowledge (Dede, 2005).

In the field of language teaching and learning, the computer-assisted language learning (CALL) research foci have typically been on enhancing input through technology, using technology to affect proficiency and achievement, providing feedback through technology, and integrating technologies to create multimedia learning facilities.

Despite the high demand for integrating ICT into teaching English these days, its adoption seems still to be going slowly. Of various reasons that hinder the effective use of technology in teaching and learning, one notable reason is insufficient empirical research evidence about our students' competencies in ICT, which makes it difficult for teachers to know what students can actually do with new technologies (Kaminski, Seel, & Cullen, 2003). Kavik and Caruso (2005) exhort investigators to identify student fluency in both technology and

information, given that "technology skills or literacy are a necessary precursor to information literacy, and that the latter cannot be achieved without the former" (p.43). Given that published CALL research is still somewhat limited to desktop computers, Egbert (2005, p.4) also urges researchers to expand the scope of technologies to include "any form of electronic, chip-driven technology and software that makes it run". This would include personal digital assistants (PDAs), cell phones, laptops, digital cameras, scanners, printers, computerized piano keyboards and related software.

Every language teaching method has its own technologies to support it. Language teachers who followed the grammar-translation method relied on one of the most ubiquitous technologies, the blackboard--a perfect vehicle for the one-way transmission of information which the method implied. The blackboard was later supplemented by the overhead projector, another excellent medium for the teacher-dominated classroom, as well as by early computer software programs (Long, 1992).

Over the years, educational technology has played an important role in the innovation of education, providing both teachers and students with more options and flexibility in their teaching and learning practices. With the Internet and computer technology available to most teachers, educational technology has become increasingly indispensable in   education. In today's schools, multimedia software, content-based CD-ROMs, online resources and many other technologies provide students and teachers with many new research tools, limitless wealth of information, and shared professional practices. Moreover, availability of the Internet in schools enables teachers and students to have a variety of opportunities to expand the curriculum (Keane, 2002). Today's schools continue to be challenged by the increased visibility, roles and cost of educational technology. Considering current trends in education, a modern classroom would not be complete without computers, software, Internet connections, projectors and a variety of high-tech devices (Keane, 2002).

According to Hasselbring (2000), schools will be equipped with the best hardware and software in the near future, but it is unlikely that teachers and students will use them effectively, if teachers are not trained. The success of

technology infusion in schools depends on training both in-service and pre-service teacher programs. In the digital age, public schools will require teachers to have competent technology skills and be able to effectively implement educational technology in classrooms. Therefore, it is logical to require pre-service teachers to incorporate technology into the lessons they prepare to teach (Johns, 1991). Given the above points, it seemed necessary to conduct this study in Iranian EFL context to find out to what extent our EFL programs benefit from new technologies. It was this motive which led the present study to be conducted.

1.2. Objectives and significance of the study

The objectives of this research are to study educational technology usage by the English language teachers in high schools and private institutes in the city of Shiraz. It is hoped that in the light of the findings of this study teachers working in educational systems may achieve the recognition of educational technology and gain more knowledge about its condition in teaching English in Iran. Moreover, the findings of this research can be used for further studies to elaborate on the importance of technology use in relation to learning skills.

1.2.1. Research questions

Based on the general objectives, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What type of information technology is currently used by teachers in teaching English language in high schools and in what way?

2. What type of information technology is currently used by teachers in teaching English language in private language institutes and in what way?

3. Are there any differences between public schools and private institutes in terms of using educational technology?

4. Are there any differences in using information and/or educational technology for different grades in private language institutes?

1.3. Definition of key terms

Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL): the use of a computer in the teaching or learning of a second or foreign language. Activities which parallel learning through other media but which uses the facilities of the computer (e.g. using the computer to present a reading text). (Longman Dictionary).

Digital Divide: The term is used to address the gap between those with regular, effective access to digital technologies and those without such access (Dickard & Schneider, 2005).

Globalization: A complex process which results from social interaction on a world scale. It is useful to distinguish economic, political, cultural, and technological aspects of globalization, although all four aspects are closely intertwined (Mok & Welch, 2003).

Information and Communication Technology (ICT): It is defined as a range of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information (Tinio, 2003). The previously dominant generic term for interactive electronic media, Information Technology (or simply IT), is now increasingly being replaced by Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) (Richards, 2000).

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

Undoubtedly, technology can be employed in education to assist and enhance language learning process. Many researchers have highlighted the fundamental role of technology and literacies it can provide for both teachers and learners.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive review and to synthesize the related literature. The chapter consists of two main sections with the pertinent sub-categories. The theoretical part provides the reader with some general background of the use of technology in education and the empirical studies shed more light on the use of information technology in EFL and ESL environments.

2.1. The importance of technology in education

Tapscott (1998) brought the term digital divide to the attention of educators by focusing on the distinct social division between those who had access and were involved with technology and those who were not. Since that time, educators have made solid attempts to integrate technology in education; yet, the digital divide still remains an educational barrier for some students. Today, the digital divide is perhaps one of the greatest inequities and it deserves further attention. Also, results from some research studies suggest the value of incorporating technology into EFL instruction (Carey & Gregory, 2002; Cheng, 2003; Godwin-Jones, 2002; Gonzalez-Bueno & Perez, 2000; Leloup & Ponterio, 2003). Liu, Graham, and Lee (2002) investigated the literature relating to how computer-based technology had been used in language instruction during the past decade (1990-2002) and found a shift in research focus. They stated that current research, unlike that conducted in the early 1990s, when the value of technology was still questioned, is now centered on how to integrate technology into language instruction to make teaching and learning more effective.

Lam (2000) contends that some teachers lack perceived legitimacy of technology as an effective educational tool and consequently they reject the

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technological changes in the curriculum. He argues that teachers are not technophobes, but rather, he attributes this fault to the institutions and programs for a lack of dedication to teacher training. In the same vein, Leu (2000) reflects on the rapidly changing nature of what it means to be a "literate" person in the 21st century. He asserts that many teachers literate in older technologies quickly become illiterate as newer technologies of information and communication replace previous technologies. He contends that we must begin to develop strategies to help each of us keep up with the continually changing definitions of literacy that will exist in our world.

Not long ago, Kamil and Lane (1998) stated that the issues involved in technology and literacy need to become part of mainstream L1 research. Moreover, they believed that the need to examine literacy "through the lens of technology" is an area that deserves much attention in L2 reading as well, especially given the enthusiastic support of informed instructors. Moreover, Kellner (2000, p.176) claimed that "new technologies and cultural forms require new skills and competencies, and if education is to be relevant to the problems and challenges of contemporary life it must expand the concept of literacy and develop new curricular and pedagogies". In fact, we can no longer afford to view literacy as a set of context-neutral, value-free skills, nor limit literacy to the ability to read and write. Instead, we must become aware that literacies are socially constructed and multifaceted. Thus, the process of becoming literate can be understood as acquiring a variety of skills one needs to fully participate in all aspects of modern society.

Pennington (1989) points out that computers can both provide training in the production and perception of speech and create environments that facilitate interaction. Furthermore, he stressed the need for language learning software to move to skill-based and task-based learning activities that not only offer users practice in listening comprehension but also elicit and encourage practice of specific types of interactions, language forms, sound contrasts, or nuances of meaning signaled by intonation. It is safe to say that technology can facilitate learning skills and sub-skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, speaking, vocabulary, structure and pronunciation).

Corea (2000) asserts that the concept of autonomy must be extended to apply not only to self-directed use of language and today's technology but also to the ability to develop, explore, evaluate, and adapt new technology as it evolves. He holds that this requires the development of meta-skills of critique and innovation beyond the skills of deploying any particular technology. He believes that students should be able to use not only today's search engines, but should also have the right analytic framework to select and make use of new search engines as they emerge. Likewise, Crystal (1997) argues that one important alternative is to take advantage of the continuing advances in multimedia technology and to make an effort to integrate this technology with in-class instruction. It is well documented that multimedia technology can help with some difficulties associated with the EFL situation, such as large class sizes and mixed-ability classrooms. And where multimedia technology has been used for EFL instruction, better results have been achieved with training students to be autonomous learners.

Warschauer (1991) suggested considering " electronic literacies ", which refer to the reading and writing, and the knowledge, skills and practices involved with the electronic medium (e.g., information literacy, computer-mediated literacy and multimedia literacy) since we are going through a fourth revolution in human communication following the first three revolutions, language, writing and print. In other words, just as the invention of printing revolutionized reading and writing practices in Renaissance Europe, so are today's desktop and electronic publishing accelerating changes in our notion of literacy, apparently, in a much faster way. Consequently, reading is now seen as a dynamic process of locating, interpreting, and criticizing information reflecting particular sociocultural contexts, as well as creating knowledge from various resources, not merely an activity of decoding information.

2.1.1. Research on vocabulary and reading

Regarding Programmed Reading Instruction, Barker and Torgeson (1995) believed that various types of software programs, computer-assisted instruction, and integrated learning systems offer programmed reading instruction for students. This skills-based instruction ranges from letter recognition to phonics instruction and vocabulary building. They also indicate that computer-assisted instruction is valuable in improving the phonological awareness of 6-year-olds

Mayer and Rose (2000) holded that computers should play a major role in the reading classroom but will almost certainly not replace books or teachers. Moreover, they believe that computers will influence and perhaps even redefine traditional books, literacy, and the role of teachers, but all three will survive and thrive. Furthermore, they maintain that developing a clear-sighted, open-minded understanding of both old and new technologies will help develop a complementary relationship between them.

Wood (2000) noted that software programs for the teaching of vocabulary may not be instructionally sound if they focus on having students merely match words and definitions: He holds that Without presenting words in multiple contexts, students' understanding of those words is limited to the narrow context suggested by the software-preventing students from truly 'owning' a word in all its multiple nuances and meanings, which vocabulary experts say is necessary if students are to actually feel comfortable using new words.

Beers (1998) highlighted audio books, sometimes known as *books on tape*, are professionally recorded, unabridged versions of fiction or nonfiction books. They are available on regular audiocassettes or four-track cassettes that require a special cassette player, and they promote students' interest in reading and improve their comprehension of text. Also, McKenna (1998) notes that electronic talking books increase motivation to read as well as promote basic word recognition. He maintains that the use of talking books has shown positive results as an aid to help children improve their comprehension of texts.

Becker and Dwyer (1994) believed that use of hypermedia to improve student comprehension of text is related to its ability to respond to the needs of an

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individual learner for information, which results in an increased sense of control over the learning environment and higher levels of intrinsic motivation.

Electronic books, also known as *e-books,* are electronic texts that are presented visually. Whether available on CD-ROM, the Internet, or special disks, electronic books always provide the text in a visual component.

Anderson-Inman and Horney (1999) noted that electronic books are searchable, modifiable (for example, font sizes can be increased to meet the needs of the reader), and enhanceable with embedded resources (for example, definitions and details). Electronic books and online texts often are equipped with *hypermedia*—links to text, data, graphics, audio, or video. The term *electronic talking books* have been coined by some researchers to refer to electronic texts that also provide embedded speech. The speech component offers a digitized reading of general sections as well as pronunciations of specific words within the text.

2.1.2. Research on project-based learning

Moss (1998) described project-based learning as an instructional approach that contextualizes learning by presenting students with products to develop or problems to solve. Projects are complex tasks that involve students in design, problem-solving, investigative activities, or decision-making tasks. Furthermore, he believes that such approaches give students the opportunity to work relatively autonomously over longer periods of time and result in realistic products or presentation. He maintains that project-based learning relies on the embedded combination of complex communication skills ranging from receptive skills (listening and reading) and productive skills (speaking and writing), to processing skills (critical and creative thinking), usually in authentic or simulated situations.

Thomas (2000) conducted a study on project-based learning and the application of technology to instruction and learning and he revealed that technology is often used as a cognitive tool. He believed that incorporating computer hardware and programs into project-based learning can be used as extensions of, and models for, student capabilities. Furthermore, he contends using technology with project-based learning may help learners become aware of

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the knowledge construction process and that using technology as a cognitive tool to develop students' critical thinking may benefit all students.

Barber (1985) examined the role of technology in education as rapidly expanding technology alters the ways in which people communicate. English educators face the increasingly insistent question of how to keep the teaching of secondary English responsive to these changes. While commentary from social critics, scientists, and futurists abounds, there has been no consensus among expert English educators. The availability of such a consensus would be of value to those concerned with the appropriateness of today's curriculum for tomorrow's world. Employing a modified Delphi technique, this study attempted to develop that consensus. A panel of 77 distinguished English educators from the United States, Britain, and Canada addressed specific ways English teaching might change by the year 2000 as a result of technology's impact on society or schools. They generated lists of potential changes from which 42 of the most commonly cited were selected for scrutiny. Through two additional rounds of questionnaire, they estimated the probability of occurrence for each change by 1990, 1995, and 2000, rated its desirability, and produced extensive commentary. Consensus was measured using medians and interquartile ranges. Among those developments on which the experts achieved consensus are the following. They identify four technological developments as having greatest impact on English teaching: widespread use of microcomputers, highly sophisticated forthcoming software, capabilities of telematic (telecommunications plus computers) interface, and cultural subordination of print to screen media. Although they foresee little change before the year 2000, panelists concur that by the end of the century English teaching will be based on a new definition of literacy--expanded to include all message systems. They believe basic reading, grammar, and mechanics skills will be taught by computer; that word processing will promote emphasis on text revision; that competence in networking and information handling will be viewed as basics; that media analysis will be emphasized; that literature will be taught via video as well as print, and that attention to more