

**THE ROLE OF INFORMATION-COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN FOREIGN
LANGUAGE TEACHING**

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ANNOTATION: In today's global world with the help of modern technology, English language has become the most common and dominant language spoken and used both at the national and international levels. It has been playing a major role in many sectors as medicine, engineering, politics, economics, international relations and of course higher education, the most important area where English is needed. It has also become a medium of instruction at universities in a large number of countries, a basic means of second language learning and teaching, an accessing source of modern knowledge and scientific research and a means of global communication and earning living.

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Technology has become an expected literacy in higher education and in our society, a universal language spoken worldwide, regardless of the profession. Trying to keep up with the requirements of current society and to take advantage of the advances in technology, teachers all over the world implement information communication technologies in the classroom in order to deliver content effectively and address students' needs. Computer based instruction already occupies an increasing role in teaching foreign languages. We are not a big fan of technology nor are we very skilled in using it, but we have to admit that technology greatly enhances teaching and learning foreign languages. However, we should not forget that teaching and learning are social processes and require communication between teacher and learners; therefore technology facilitates but does not replace these social processes.

ICT stands for information communication technologies and comprises a set of technological tools and resources used to communicate and also to create, disseminate, store and manage information. In the classroom, technologies can include all kinds of tools from computers and internet to broadcasting technologies and telephony. Therefore under the big umbrella of ICT there are many tools that we can include such as the projector, presentation software, videos, conference tools, blogs, wiki, online dictionaries, interactive books, interactive whiteboard, learn English websites, Google, YouTube and even video games.

Originally it was all about how teachers presented the information using the copy machine, tape recorder and others, but now it is about the way teachers and students access information and transforms via technology active learning into interactive learning by sharing ideas, collaborating with colleagues or even creating videos. The textbook is not sufficient anymore, teachers need to bring it alive by adapting it and provide supplemental resources. We can achieve this by modifying the content, simplifying the content, reviewing the content and supplementing the content with online games, flashcards, songs and videos, etc.. "Since nowadays' society requires

students to be able to confront a multitude of complex situations, the traditional education based solely on the transmission of knowledge is no longer sufficient” .

However, introducing technology is an overwhelming task for anyone trying to select the best tools while considering the goals for student learning too. Yet, technology is integrated in almost every aspect of our life and every job, so educators must find a balance between technology usage and offline socializing and interpersonal skills.

It takes a lot of time and work to master a language and obviously there is not enough time in class for that, so language educators should motivate students and teach them how to access knowledge and data from around the world in order to become independent learners. We can do that by letting them know what is available and good on the internet, providing online access to our teaching materials and also by sharing with students in an online environment and communicate with native speakers.

There are certain widely agreed features of ICT with big impact in teaching and learning, such as speed, capacity, communicability, interactivity, non-linearity and multi-modality. ICT enables actions and interactions to be undertaken remarkably quickly, for instance messages can be sent and the replies can come back in minutes or even seconds. The capacity of internet is enormous providing access to an incredible large amount of information.

It also provides means of communicating both within the classroom and beyond. Interactivity is a key feature and also a big advantage of ICT, considering the interactive computer applications and the mediated communication. Clearly, the vast amount of information available on the internet can be explored in many ways according to one's own interests. Multimodality implies sounds, pictures and texts and it is well known that we learn better if there are more senses involved in the process of learning.

There is a growing number of students who are less motivated, less interested and less engaged in the process of learning. He also mentions that the left-brain dominant students, those who work better with words, are clearly advantaged compared to the right-brain dominant students who respond better to pictures. The left-brain dominant are advantaged by our educational system because they respond well to the verbal, linear styles of teaching. However, technology, through multimodality, would also support the right-brain dominant students. Thus, “a whole-brain, Digital Age model of education” is proposed. Teachers “empowered with technology” could make the classes as interesting and as attractive as what happens in the world beyond the walls of the classroom. Now that we know the meaning and certain characteristics of ICT, I would like to highlight some of the benefits and challenges of using technologies in the foreign language class.

When integrated effectively technologies provide substantial benefits in teaching and learning foreign languages. Technologies enrich the content; make the delivery of the content more interactive by using interactive whiteboards for example; and enable repetition and adaptability of the content. With the aid of technologies teachers provide students authentic audio and video of the target culture and up to date materials in order to engage students. In addition to engage students in class, the adequate use of technologies enhances classroom communication and interconnectivity and offer students the opportunity to communicate, collaborate and interact with course material in different ways.

Other challenges refer to the lack of resources such as interactive whiteboards, computers connected to internet for every student, video projectors and screens. Nevertheless, technology itself is not as important as the way we exploit it. If there aren't computers for every student in the classroom, the teacher can record a video with her or him explaining and presenting certain topics and share it with the students, who can watch it at home. Students can also share their assignments, projects or presentation with the teacher and the other colleagues and they can

even peer review each other's work. We can all watch the videos and discuss good aspects or the less satisfactory aspects of their presentations. Thus, we extend the teaching and learning environment outside the class and make it more interactive.

No doubt interactivity can also be achieved simply by using the blackboard, the chalk and some paper. Sometimes less is more. Class discussions and debates can get very lively, the same as an activity of matching badges with cards of military ranks and then creating a mobile diagram and discussing it and trying to find equivalents with ranks from other countries can engage students in the process of learning. Also, role plays and word competitions have a positive impact on students. Therefore, we should not use technology only for the sake of using it. We have to make sure technology remains only a tool in achieving our educational purposes and does not take over the class.

Human beings have always learned hand in hand with other humans, it has always been this way and some believe that technology might compromise this magical connection created between teacher and learner, one of the best things in our educational system. Therefore, the role of the teacher is of "undeniable significance". Romano also argues that the traditional, fundamental role of the teacher should remain uncompromised, the same as surgeons and airline pilots continue to be central figures in their systems, where technology is fully integrated.

The use of various electronic devices and Internet resources will allow attracting a huge amount of additional information in the lesson, both by the teacher and by the students. In addition, the use of various programs allows teachers to significantly update their teaching methods and skills. The most frequently used ICT elements in teaching and learning a foreign language are a multimedia projector, an interactive whiteboard, electronic encyclopedias and reference books, educational Internet resources, video and audio equipment, simulators and testing programs, electronic textbooks, manuals and etc.

The ICT application system can be divided into the following stages:

Stage 1: Identifying educational material that requires a specific presentation, analyzing the educational program, analyzing thematic planning, choosing topics, choosing the type of lesson, identifying the features of this type of lesson material; Stage 2: Selection and creation of information products, selection of ready-made educational media resources, creation of your own product like presentation, training, coaching or supervising;

Stage 3: Application of information products, application in lessons of different types, application in extracurricular activities and application in the management of scientific research activities of students.

Stage 4: Analysis of the efficiency of using ICT, studying the dynamics of results, studying the ranking in the subject.

Currently, there is an active process of informatization in the field of education, which involves the intensive introduction and use of new information technologies, the use of all means of communication that can be useful in the formation of an intellectually developed personality who is well oriented in the information space.

The introduction of information and communication technologies creates the preconditions for the intensification of the educational process. They allow in practice to use psychological and pedagogical developments that ensure the transition from mechanical assimilation of knowledge to mastering the ability to independently acquire new knowledge. ICTs contribute to the disclosure, preservation and development of the personal qualities of students.

ICTs can expand access to language programmes and improve the quality of teaching and learning in general. The World Wide Web expands the classroom context and provides access to current, up-to-date materials from the country or countries of the target language, offering learners

and teachers a plethora of materials in different modes, bringing the foreign culture and language to life and making it more tangible.

In environments where teaching staff are not able to fulfill all requirements of the curriculum with regard to the skills and knowledge required, ready-made, high quality audio-visual and other programmes may provide sufficient backup for them to offer appropriate courses without having to engage in time-consuming and expensive training. Andreas Lund points out that there is a strong tradition of Computer Assisted Language Learning addressing materials, software packages and technologies that aid and promote cognitive development and linguistic performance, but emphasises that we must pay more attention to how technologies are embedded in larger social and cultural practices for them to be truly effective. The professional isolation of teachers may well be relegated to the history books, if they learn how to use the potential for networking, which ICTs offer.

Audio devices: The most popular and most widely used devices appropriated by modern language teachers remain the CD player and the audiocassette recorder. More recently, the Web has served as an additional source of authentic listening materials thanks to the possibility of fast downloads using MP3 software.

Video: The use of moving images linked to sound provides learners with exposure to all important elements of spoken communication: gestures, proxemics, pronunciation, intonation, all embedded in natural, cultural contexts. And devices like DVD players, videocassettes, web sources, the laserdisc and video cameras readily supply these. Thanks to modern technology, scenes can be located, isolated and replayed at random and there is an abundance of literature suggesting how to exploit film or video sequences meaningfully. Different forms of visual support can now be offered.

Television and radio broadcasts: Both satellite and terrestrial radio and television programmes offer cheap access to contemporary, authentic and potentially culturally rich programmes for the language learner. The immediacy of current affairs programmes ensures that learners' exposure to the language is up-to-date and embedded in the real world of native speakers. Linked to modern recording equipment, broadcast radio and television also offer the advantages of the audio and video devices mentioned above. A number of broadcasting companies still produce broadcasts, which are at their most effective when combined with face-to-face courses in educational institutions. Broadcasts are particularly useful for reaching sectors of the population who might not normally think of taking up language learning, but who might be amazed by attractive courses which highlight interesting or exciting elements in the target culture.

Telephone has gone a long way to overcoming the problem of the relatively poor quality of analogue transmissions, which has so far prevented this medium from being widely used for language teaching. Audio exchanges via the Internet now also provide possibilities for real time synchronous oral communication. The principal uses of the telephone to date have been limited to supplementary tutoring for those engaged in distance education. However, with the advent of digital quality and lower connection costs, there is now considerable potential for its extended use – including the possibility of conference calls.

Computers: With the introduction of the multimedia computer, the learner and teacher have at their disposal an instrument, which can combine all the advantages of the above-mentioned media in a compact and easily accessible form. The computer may be used as a local machine stand-alone or within a network. Computer Assisted Language Learning software, CD-ROMs and office software applications have become commonplace in many teaching and learning environments.

Teachers, learners, methods and technology should form a lasting meaningful alliance. Having identified the positive and the negative impacts of integrating information communication

technologies in teaching and learning foreign languages and also the importance of the teacher's role in educational process and the bond that creates between teacher and learner, I argue that we cannot forget the past and the years of research of good teaching practices developed by skilled teachers and researchers, but at the same time we cannot ignore the reality beyond the classroom walls. I agree with the view according to which the educational system needs no revolution, i.e. no sudden, radical or complete change, but a skillful evolution, that will assure a continuity and stability to the learning environment. We should carefully build and develop this "techno humanistic" system based on what already exists.

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