International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences
September 2015, Vol. 5, No. 9`
ISSN: 2222-6990

Teachers and Foreign Language Learners' Perspectives on the Use of ICT

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DOI: 10.6007/IJARBSS/v5-i9/1795 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v5-i9/1795

Abstract

Significant efforts are exerted in the European Higher Education Area for the dissemination of information and communications technology in a way to address to motivation and cognitive domains. A number of students in higher education institutions learn a foreign language since universities and foreign language teaching are interwoven closely. This study is aimed at revealing which information and communication technologies foreign language learners prefer, how they make use of them, the prevalence of the technologies among students. For this purpose, a questionnaire concerning the use ICT was performed for 139 students. So as to develop a deeper understanding of the use of ICT and to shape the questionnaire before we apply, a focus group interview was administered to 8 students. The results of the study showed both teachers and students benefit from ICT in different ways. Translation and dictionary are found to be the most commonly utilized Web pages during foreign language learning. Students frequently consider the Web useful in their foreign language learning process, yet also regard it as a distraction and unreliable source of information. More than one-third of the participants also noted that ICT takes too much time.

Keywords: Foreign language, learning strategy, EFL, ICT, technology

1. Introduction

The last decades of the twentieth century witnessed unprecedented changes in the industrialized world. The increasingly wired World, with its new challenges for individuals and organizations, stimulated the globalization of commerce (Holmes 2002: 2). Because the digital

technologies have been adopted in every corner of life, potential contribution of ICT to education became compulsory (Hu and McGrath 2011; Yunus et al. 2013).

Romeo and Walker (2002) highlighted two perspectives on the use of ICT in education. The first perspective focuses on the computer as a mechanism by which to deliver information. This view is very much influenced by behaviourist learning theories. The other perspective focuses on the use of computers as a system to enhance teaching and learning. This view is influenced by the ideas of constructivism (p. 323). The use of ICT in education has affected the functioning of schools, pedagogies in use, curriculum content and students' learning achievements (Bliss and Bliss 2003; Karagiorgi and Charalambous 2006). Hu and McGrath (2011) suggested that if ICT was used for self-access learning, this would make it possible to decrease teacher in-class contact hours and thereby enable institutions to overcome the increase in student numbers and the shortage of EFL teachers (p. 42). In this context, this kind of teaching implies hiring people with at least a modicum of technological expertise so that they can come up to speed with new advances (Blake 2008: 14). Therefore, teachers' further experience on ICT-related professional development is therefore needed (Hu and McGrath 2011). Since the 1970s, when the use of computers for educational purposes began to become widespread, individualization and greater learner control have repeatedly been put forward as major advantages of ICT (Kenning 2007). To enable the learner-centred teaching, teachers should stay up-to-date not only in terms of technology use but also in preparing the course content as well (Hu and McGrath 2011; Kenning 2007). In fact, the changes involved in the implementation process create challenges for most teachers. In addition to the traditional teaching in classrooms, teachers also need to organize teaching activities in a computer-based environment and guide students in self-study (Hu and McGrath 2011).

All the roles a teacher must undertake relate closely to the definition of education. Dilts and DeLozier (2000) described education as involving the provision of four different kinds of support for learning: guiding, coaching/training, teaching and mentoring. Guiding is the process of directing another person along a path. Coaching and training are concerned with the improvement of behaviour based on some analysis of current performance. Teaching, on the other hand, focuses on the acquisition of general cognitive abilities, on learning and understanding, rather than on what the person can do. Lastly, mentoring involves drawing out and validating a person's unconscious competences (Dilts and DeLozier 2000; Kenning 2007).

Teachers who are inexperienced in using technology often harbour the belief that only transferring an activity into a web or CALL format will guarantee its success for students. The technology is neutral both in theory and methodology. Yet, how technology is used is not neutral, it responds to what the practitioners believe to be true about language learning. Any activity without adequate pedagogical planning will produce unsatisfactory results with students, even if it attracts the attention of learners (Blake 2008).

As mobile devices are becoming increasingly ubiquitous, many teachers have incorporated the technology into their teaching and learning environments. Mobile learning is related to the use of mobile or wireless devices for the purpose of learning while the users are on the move. The flexibility and practicality of mobile learning offer a great advantage for learners (Park 2011: 92). The major purpose of this study is to categorize and grade a variety of

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ISSN: 2222-6990

educational technologies by means of popularity and learning styles.

2. Methodology

Over recent decades, technological advances have introduced means of technology such as voice command and speech recognition which so many years before belonged to the realm of science fiction. It gradually involves the acquisition of new knowledge and skills by the people (Kenning 2007). This study will also serve as a baseline for future research on how language learners from different countries make use of ICT. Therefore, this study seeks to determine how foreign language learners use ICTs by posing the following research questions:

(1) What are the language learners' views on the use of ICT use?

(2) What are the teachers' views on the use of ICT use?

Mixed-Methods Research, which involves the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in a single study, was used in this study. This design combines statistical analysis with in-depth analysis often in narrative form (Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun 2012). A survey research was conducted to determine what technologies teachers and students most commonly make use of. So as to get in-depth information before creating the questionnaire items, student focus group interview was administered. Survey research seeks to obtain data to determine specific characteristics of a group. Fraenkel, Wallen and Hyun (2012) suggested that there are four basic ways to collect data in a survey: namely, by administering the survey 'live' to a group, mail surveys, telephone surveys and by means of personal interviews.

To answer the first research question, an ICT questionnaire was devised and distributed to 139 students from different state and private universities during 2013-2014 academic year. Before the student questionnaire was prepared, an item pool had been generated and final items were asked to 2 students to establish reliability. An expert in the faculty of Education at Mersin University was consulted to examine the final version of the questionnaires. In this study data was collected through live interaction with a group and by e-mails. Before the questionnaires, focus group interview was administered to 8 students. Semi-structured interview preferred in this study is most useful for obtaining information to test a specific hypothesis (Creswell 2007: 141; Fraenkel et al. 2012).

In an effort to answer the second research question a teacher questionnaire was applied to 14 academic members from 5 different universities. The participants are aged between 23 and 44 years. The range for work experience varies between 1 to 20 years.

To Ritchie and Lewis (2003), having decided which criteria will be used for purposive selection of the sample, some of the members of the population needs inclusions and exclusions (p. 97). We used purposive sampling to determine the state and private universities from all corners of the country. Purposive sampling allows us to choose a case because it illustrates some features in which researchers are interested (Silverman and Marvasti 2008: 129) and requires prior knowledge of the researchers (Fraenkel et al. 2012). The female participants of the questionnaire accounted for 63% of all the students.

A student questionnaire, a teacher questionnaire and a focus group interview towards students were used as data collection tools in the study. Creswell (2005) suggested that by using triangulation (greater validity), by using data from one resource to support the other by

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establishing completeness and elaboration (p. 512). All the questionnaires were distributed to the students at their own faculties between the first week of April and the end of May.

The interview lasted around 40 minutes and was recorded via a voice recorder and transcribed literally afterwards. Next, all the data which are compatible with the research aims were listed under determined themes (Fraenkel et al. 2012).

3. Findings

To answer the first research question, a questionnaire was distributed to 139 students from different state and private universities. Before the distribution of the questionnaires, a focus group interview was administered to 8 students. The following two tables show the categorization of responses according to the themes.

Table 1. Highlights of the some answers to interview questions.

Response (direct excerpt)	Coding	Themes
"The most useful technology is computer because I listen to songs. It is something which I really like actually. I pause, rewind and write down lyrics."	-studying songs and lyrics -creating study notes -studying language through videos	**A variety of language functions**
	-to reach images and videos for free -watching a TV series	**Inexpensive opportunities**
	-discussion with peers through a conference calling	**Indefinite time and place**

Interview data which is the basis for the questionnaires revealed that a variety of inexpensive opportunities offered by computers is a magnet attracting language learners. The efficient use of the Web enables a more sophisticated learning environment by fostering individual learning. The responses to the interview question "what technology do you consider the most useful in foreign language learning?" revealed some data.

On the one hand, participants admit to using plenty of useful websites to support their language learning. On the other hand they developed some learning strategies. They also acknowledged that they share the names and features of the useful applications with other language learners. Most of the websites revealed in the interview are related to auditory and visual reading skills. In his book, Blake (2008) mentioned that these useful web pages can include sound files that harness a sensorial channel lacking in books. Sound files help build lasting mental images for words and phrases (p. 41). Learners can enhance the benefit of the

Web by seeking advice from others such as peers or native speakers (Kenning 2007). The answers to the interview question "what web pages do you benefit from in learning a language?" showed some data.

Table 2. Highlights of the some answers to interview questions.

Response (direct excerpt)	Coding	Themes
"…consider it useful in my language development but they cannot be enough by themselves. I use Google Translate but I translate it to target language and translate it again to establish reliability …In so doing, I can be sure but it sometimes takes too much time"	tureng.com seslisozluk.com ldoceonline.com dictionary.cambridge.org translate.google.com	Translation
	ted.com youtube.com facebook.com voscreen.com	Phonetic support in target language
	forvo.com busuu.com instagram.com twitter.com	Learning vocabulary

As students gain experience with peers and seniors, their way of using websites for improving their knowledge of foreign languages can differ from one institution to another. Interview data showed that foreign language learners mostly benefit from websites for audio-visual purposes and use translation websites to support their learning.

Different explanations were given by the interviewees in harnessing ICT. Table 3 presents a summary of response frequencies from the interview.

Table 3. The most frequent words of the interview

Word	Count
language	27
translation	20
film	17
Google	13
learning	12
word	12
friend	10
TV series	10
grammar	9
listening	9

The most frequent words were extracted from the interview. *Language* has by far the highest mode. It is also noticeable that the count of *translation* is also high. *Film* is slightly below *translation*. Google is the fourth most frequent word from the interview. Of the four major skills, only *listening* could find a place in the top 10 rankings.

The websites the students use differ widely. The responses to the question "what websites do you use when you learn a foreign language?" are presented below.

Table 4. Frequency distribution of intended purposes of students' ICT use.

	useless (%)	a little useful (%)	very useful (%)	completely useful (%)
Organizing and storing studies	0.7	16.5	50.4	32.4
Sharing information with my friends	0.7	5	50.4	43.9
Reaching the information sources (search engines and Wiki's)	-	6.5	37.4	56.1

speech recognition / voice recording	3.6	21.6	38.8	36
Words and phrases (definition, example sentence, pronunciation)	1.4	20.9	37.4	40.3
Watching videos in target language	0.7	12.2	39.6	47.5
Communication (synchronous and asynchronous chat)	1.4	18	43.9	36.7
Translation	7.2	23	38.8	30.9

The aim for which learners use ICT is as important as which technologies are preferred by them. Table 4 presents the intended purposes of students' ICT use. Although 10 participants (7%) noted that they do not regard e-dictionary and translation support as useful, the rest of the students (93%) consider it useful at different extents. The frequency distribution shows that the student considering reaching the information sources (56%) is very useful. In overall, a vast majority of respondents assessed intended purposes useful at different extents.

The growth of the World Wide Web in recent years has been staggering. From 2000 to 2012 the number of Internet users around the world has increased by 566 percent (Internet World Stats 2014). The open-ended question in the student questionnaire asking for the website learners make the most use of in language learning revealed the following data. From the Table 8, it can be seen that the webpage most students (15%) find useful is translate.google.com and it is followed by Instagram.com with a percentage of 12%. However, translation and dictionary pages were contextualized, the fact that 35 percent of the students utilize those pages brought to light. Web pages can include sound files that harness a sensorial channel which lacks in physical books. Sound files increase the prospects of building lasting mental images for words and phrases (Blake 2008).

Table 5. The distribution of Web pages that foreign language learners periodically benefit from

	Freq.	%
wikipedia.com	11	7,9
ceviri.com.tr	3	2,2
translate.google.com	**21**	**15,1**
tureng.com	13	9,4
instagram.com	**17**	**12,2**
twitter.com	5	3,6

forvo.com	10	7,2
voxy.com	5	3,6
duolingo.com	1	0,7
seslisozluk.com	2	1,4
busuu.com	8	5,8
voscreen.com	8	5,8
ted.com	14	10,1
ldoceonline.com	6	4,3
dictionary.cambridge.org	2	1,4
zargan.com	2	1,4
voanews.com	4	2,9
theguardian.com	7	5

Table 5 shows the websites used by the participants during their process of learning a foreign language. As it can be seen, websites for translation, social networking, Wikis and podcasting are the most popular pages visited. According to Liu et al. (2015), educators are excited about the potential of social network sites for language learning, however there is still a lack of understanding of how these sites can be used to facilitate teaching and learning for ESL instructors and students.

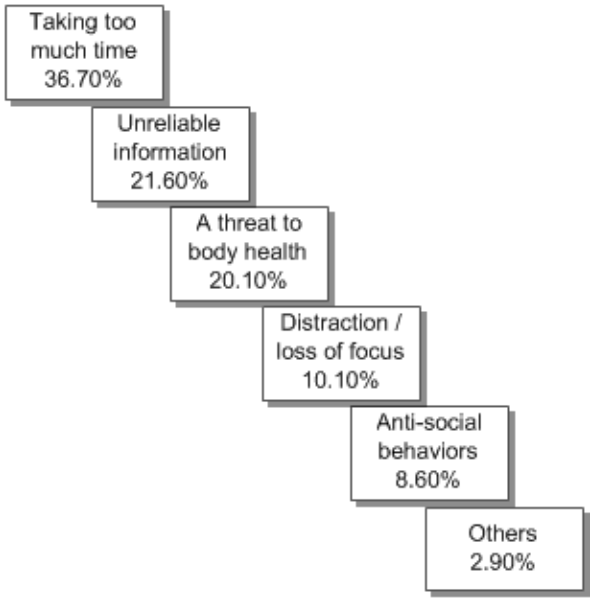

Fig. 1. The distribution of the students' perceptions with regard to side effects of ICT use.

In addition to multiple choice questions and interview, participants were also asked for their opinion in two open-ended questions. Table 6 and Table 7 show the responses to the open-ended questions in the teacher questionnaire. The answers were marked by the researchers to best correspond to the answer of the respondents and all the answers were codified under relevant themes. Table 6 shows the frequency and percentage distribution of the occupation of a total number of 139 participants. 37 percent think technology takes too much time and almost 22 per cent believe that technology can be a source of unreliable information.

Table 6. Frequency distribution of the contribution of ICT as an organizational tool regarding teachers' perceptions.

	useless (%)	a little useful (%)	very useful (%)	completely useful (%)
Organizing works, preparing the content of a course and storing them	-	-	71.4	28.6
Presenting course content	-	-	28.6	71.4
Finding information sources on the Web	-	-	50	50
Designing personal teaching resources	-	7.1	42.9	50
Indefiniteness of time and place	-	14.3	35.7	50
Supporting individual learning and different learning strategies	-	35.7	50	14.3
Communicating with colleagues and students	-	28.6	14.3	57.1

In Table 6, it is seen that organizing works, preparing the content of a course and storing them is regarded as very useful by most of the teachers (71,4%). All the teachers participated in the study regard reaching information sources through ICT either completely useful (50%) or very useful (50%). Today's students are quite familiar with performing web searches via a search engine such as Google or Yahoo!Search. By using these tools or similar ones, students can retrieve primary source information in the target language. Without a pedagogy wrapped around it, reading a web page presents learners with a comparatively static activity (Blake 2008). None of the respondents said useless for any functions.

Throughout the study, the perceptions of students in regard to ICT differed partially from the perceptions of teachers. Table 7 presents the frequency distribution of the teachers' perception regarding side-effects of students' ICT use.

Table 7. The distribution of the perceptions of teachers concerning the side effects of students' ICT use.

Descriptor	%
Distraction / loss of focus	57.10
Detrimental to note-taking skills	28.60
Addictive	14.30

In the table above, 57 per cent said ICT use can be distracting and cause loss of focus in students. 28 percent conveyed that ICT use can hinder students' note-taking skills. Fried's study (2006) reports on the fact that in addition to disadvantage in note-taking skills, the use of laptops was negatively related to several aspects. Laptop use interfered with students' abilities to pay attention to and understand the lecture material, which in turn resulted in lower test scores (p. 911).

4. Discussion

When the spectrum of the recent ICTs considered, language learners have a wide variety of technological choices. Today, language learners find out new uses of certain ICTs, share their experience with their peers and adopt new learning strategies with the help of their peers.

Glancing at the data in parallel with the first research question, most students regard ICT really useful and necessary in their language learning environment. Of our five senses, the two most commonly resorted to communication are hearing and sight. By using different ICTs, learners can get involved in more nature-like communication as human communication is generally multichannel (Kenning 2007). A substantial number of students (37%) stated ICT took too much time; 21% stated that ICT is a threat to body health. In his book, Technology and Foreign Language Learning, Blake (2008) reports on the fact that all learning environments afford certain benefits as well as incur disadvantages for language learning and the web-based environment is not an exception (p. 41). Most of the participants voiced beneficial sides of ICT rather than it detrimental sides and this finding is consistent with the finding of Şahin (2014).

Almost all the interviewees in the focus group sessions referred to ICTs' supportive aspect in building vocabulary and the significance of constructive exchange of experience among learners. Today, a language learner may easily have a chance to listen to a word in different accents read by native speakers, whereas a learner had to learn phonetic alphabet and have different dictionaries according to target accent. Frequent words from the interview also revealed that translation, grammar, listening and building vocabulary are the areas of language students may have benefitted. The finding is consistent with the previous study by Çelik, Arkın

and Sabriler (2012). In their study, they found that the learners mostly use ICT to practice listening, vocabulary and writing skills.

Looking at the data regarding the second research question, it is seen that teachers mostly use ICT to present course content and lecture. However, teachers also believe that they can help disabled students by overcoming their limitations with the help of ICT since ICT can be a tool for indefiniteness of time and distance. Baloch (2014) also noted that ICT can minimize the need of physical classrooms (p. 79). Notwithstanding enriching learning environment and promoting individual learning, teachers also believe technologies can be too distracting. In the study of Fried's (2006), students admit to spending considerable time during lectures using their laptops for things other than taking notes. Data from the interview also show that students spent a lot of time to socialize. The fact that socialization may prevent students from studying was disclosed during the interview.

Teachers admitted that ICTs are a key to success in language learning, yet without proper control in the classrooms they may create distracted students or those distracting other students. Golonka et al. (2014) also noted that the use of ICT in language classrooms can result in distraction from the learning task. In this study, all the teacher participants regarded, one way or another, regard ICT useful as long as students are properly guided. Furthermore, there is also a great risk which should not be overlooked by teachers. Students' ICT use, without preliminary preparation, may cause inefficient note-taking skills. Nakayama, Mutsuura and Yamamoto (2014) also concluded that with the use of ICT, the efficacy of note-taking skill is not distinctly apparent.

As a result, ICT seems to have a major impact on the process of language learning by offering new possibilities for learners and teachers. These possibilities can have an impact on student performance and achievement. However; ICT is immature by nature, a long process of appropriation and exploration of their possibilities by universities is needed before witnessing any significant change (Ben Youssef and Dahmani 2008).

The findings of this research have overall supported the effectiveness and prevalence of ICT use among teachers and language learners. In order to get involved and monitor language users using web pages to learn, a deeper analysis is needed to determine the common learning styles among learners and potential side effects to develop preventive measures.

As already mentioned, this study encountered some limitations. One limitation to this study is the sample size, which might not be enough to make generalizations to the entire study population. Hence research from different institutions should be carried out. As previously discussed another limitation in this study is the repetition of websites students use. In each institutions senior and peer students influence each other on a large scale. For this reason, the websites found in this study cannot be suitable to be generalized to a wider population.

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