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ICT in EFL: The global effect of new technologies in the language classroom

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Abstract. Research studies conducted around the globe have shown that Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) can lead to increased student learning and improved teaching methods. ICT's growth has brought about numerous changes to the education world, making the technological revolution that is happening around us impossible to disregard. Although the revolution in language education is here to stay, language professionals seem reluctant to embrace ICT in their classrooms. The purpose of this paper is 1) to present the field with an overview of how far the integration of ICT in language education and the development of language teacher education regarding the use of ICT have come, and 2) to contribute suggestions on how the situation can improve. The overview in question entails literature from around the globe.

Keywords: new technologies, EFL, professional development, language classrooms.

1. Introduction

The evolution of new technologies witnessed during the last two decades has prompted a great deal of debate in education. More specifically, technology has added new dimensions to the nature of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). However, the issue of its integration in the language classroom is still a topic of great discussion in the field of language education. The development of ICT has

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brought a number of changes to the modern world and their education systems, which have made it impossible to ignore the change that is occurring around us. Students of all ages have become frequent technology users, starting from a very early age, which makes the integration of new technologies in language education all the more crucial and thought provoking.

Though professional evolution seems to be near, many language practitioners around the globe are reluctant to apply ICT in their classes (Albirini, 2006; Goldstein, 1997; Stylianou, 2012). This fact intrigued the researchers to look into a global scope of the situation. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to present 1) an overview of how far the integration of new technologies has come in language education, and 2) to contribute suggestions on how the situation can improve.

2.   Method

The aim of this study was to carry out a literature review, in a 2001-2013 timeframe, of similar studies conducted in various parts of the world in order to explore what the situation is globally. A first small scale examination of a global body of literature included a review of recent publications of *CALL*, *ReCALL*, *CALL-EJ*, *Computers & Education* and *CALICO*, among others, with a focus on ICT in the language classroom, the integration of new technologies, language teachers' attitudes towards the integration of ICT and professional development. This literature review gave the researchers the opportunity to evaluate the situation in a broader capacity, and suggest ways for improvement.

3.   Results and discussion

In recent years, education systems around the world have gradually been raising their interest towards new technologies and their use in language classrooms. The potential of ICT has become an important and debated issue, since even though the value of ICT is not questioned, complexities occur among practitioners when applying these technologies (Balanskat, Blamire, & Kefala, 2006).

Current governmental policies from around the world aim to inspire educators of all subject areas to implement ICT in their practice. Ramanair and Uyu Sagat (2007) have stated that the Malaysian Ministry of Education has invested in a number of programs in order to provide schools with new technologies in the hope to facilitate the development of language learning skills. EACEA (2009) reports that even though the impact of new technologies continues to develop within the continent

of Europe, the informants question whether this possibility has been acknowledged and understood by teachers.

Albeit Ministries of Education worldwide are spending immense amounts of capital to support and encourage new technologies in education, for instance, the US spent $5.7 billion in the year 2000 alone (Doherty & Orlofsky, 2001), practitioners are hesitant to incorporate new technologies in their language classes (Buabeng-Andoh, 2012; Eugene, 2006). Substantial research has been conducted on teachers' attitudes towards technology in education in general. However, this review revealed that only some research has been specifically conducted on language teachers' attitudes towards the use of ICT in language teaching and learning. According to studies conducted during 2001-2013 and published in *CALL*, *ReCALL*, *CALL-EJ*, *Computers & Education* and *CALICO* journals, language practitioners are hesitant to integrate new technologies in their teaching.

Mueller, Wood, Willoughby, Ross, and Specht's (2008) have argued that Canadian primary and secondary school teachers' views towards technology can be seen as a barrier and encourage researchers to focus on teachers' attitudes and perceptions as important influences in order to raise awareness and help improve the situation. Şahin-Kizil's (2011) findings suggest "that EFL teachers hold positive attitudes towards the use of ICT for educational purposes [..., h]owever, the responses indicate that insufficient class time and inadequate training opportunities are the major obstacles in the process of ICT integration" (p. 1). Aydin's (2013) study "indicated that Turkish EFL teachers have little knowledge about certain software and experience difficulties using the software programs and that they suffer from a lack of technical and instructional support, although they have positive perceptions of computer integration and attitudes toward computer use" (p. 218).

Research was also carried out in the teacher Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) preparation. Kessler (2007) findings suggest that "there is a general lack of CALL preparation in teacher preparation programmes and that there is evidence that teachers obtain a majority of their CALL knowledge from informal sources and personal experience rather than through formalized preparation" (p. 173). He further points out that there is a need for more insight into the role of CALL within teacher preparation (Kessler, 2007). Kessler and Plakans (2008) also claim that "CALL teacher preparation may benefit from a focus on developing contextualized confidence within certain teaching domains or types of technology rather than expecting teachers to develop a high level of confidence with technology across domains" (p. 269). The study in general revealed the need for more research in that area.

4.   Conclusions

The purpose of this paper was 1) to present the field with an overview of how far the integration of ICT in language education and the development of language teacher education regarding the use of ICT have come, and 2) to contribute suggestions on how the situation can be improved. The overview in question entails literature from around the globe, including that of the research project conducted in Cyprus by the authors of this paper.

The first finding was that more research is required in examining the effect of new technologies in the language classroom, and particularly the extent to which new technologies are accepted and embraced by language teachers. The present literature review indicates that there is an interest on behalf of policy-makers, and an effort to train language teachers has been made in many countries. Nonetheless, teachers have been recorded to still be hesitant to apply ICT in their classes, a situation which should be modified so that language practitioners can appreciate the benefits of technology, progress within their occupation, and offer their learners language classes equal to that of the technological era they are in. This cannot transpire if conscious efforts are not made to review the training situation and the process of ICT implementation.

The second finding suggests that in order for the situation to change, the approach of introducing and integrating ICT has to be modified. Teachers must be suitably exposed to new technologies, which would be the initial stage of regaining their self-assurance; therefore, language teachers must undertake in- and pre-service training that will include the use of new technologies for language educational purposes. If language teachers' training needs are not met, funds amounting to millions will be wasted, since practitioners will not make the optimum use of the equipment and resources available to them.

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