TECHNOLOGY USE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING: THE CASE OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING IN TÖMER

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ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted by the researchers conducting studies in the field of CALL (Computer Aided Language Learning) in Turkey that technology is not being used in the majority of the classrooms all over the country. Due to its highly innovative nature, the use of technology in the case of foreign language teaching in private sector has not been widely focused on to generalize findings on this specific aspect. Further, research on teachers' beliefs has established that stereotypes of teachers can be one of the most effective influences on their practices. This case study, therefore, intends to determine use of and beliefs about computers of teachers in a private educational institution in Turkey which is namely TÖMER. Interviews were held with 8 teachers affiliated with TÖMER. The semi structured interview guide includes questions related with teachers' administrative use of computers, their pedagogic use of computers, their beliefs about the pedagogical potential of computers, their beliefs about computers and their beliefs about the integration of computers in the classroom. Findings of the study is compared with the results of similar studies in the literature to provide TÖMER with suggestions for the betterment of technology use if necessary.

Keywords: Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL)

INTRODUCTION

Despite numerous efforts in the field, as well as generous expenditures and research, major questions remain about the use of technology in education. Till now, the actual practices in the classroom have not been studied enough to obtain in depth information on the quality of technology use by the teachers. The same goes for the studies on teachers' beliefs about technology (Borg, 2003). In fact, it can be concluded that currently the teachers both, as Heafner (2003) cites, worldwide, and in Turkey, although equipped with the facilities in most cases, are not using much computer technology. For example, in the United States, despite 98% accessibility in schools, teachers are not using the technology. In the case of the United States, policy leaders, technology initiatives and school administrators are said to be encouraging more technology use, however, according to some studies as many as 50% of teachers report that they are not using technology in their classrooms (Smerdon et. al., 2000). This initial focus sheds light on the importance of understanding teachers' perspectives on using or not using technology all over the world.

Technology and the Foreign Language Classroom

The introduction of technology in the form of language laboratories in the 1950s and 1960s to improve language learning took place after World War II and the launching of Sputnik (Stern, 1983). At this time, technology included filmstrips, television, radio and language laboratories. Schools and teachers adopted the technology with the hope of transforming language learning and teaching but they did not know how to optimally use the so called language laboratories (Roby, 2004). There is little evidence in the literature confirming that language laboratories had improved language learning. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) was introduced after the failure of the language laboratories. The thirty-year long history of CALL can be grouped into three stages: behavioristic, communicative and integrative (Warschauser and Healey, 1998). It should also be noted that later these stages have been criticized for being vague and non-specific (Bax, 2003).

Dasher, an example for CALL software programs in the first stage, was a foreign language authoring system and also a stand-alone prepackaged language program. Exercise types included substitutions, multiple choice, scrambled sentences, transformations, fill in the blank and translations. There was support for digital audio, videodisc and graphics. Dasher used to allow the teachers to create their own exercises.

Communicative CALL emerged in the early 1980s. Like other stages, this was also driven by both pedagogical changes and technological innovation. As behaviorist objectives were challenged and cognitive theories became popular, the use of technology in the classroom focused more on communication. Videodisc players offered users the ability to access chapters on disk, pause and frame by frame advancing (Beatty, 2003). Two such communicative CALL software programs were Montevidisco and Integrative Digame. Both software programs, developed by Brigham Young University, provided greater learner control when compared to software programs developed in the first stage of CALL.

By the early 1990s, the Internet and local and wide area networks were providing new opportunities to teachers and learners, which launched the third stage, integrative CALL. The technology used was termed integrative (Warschauer, 1996) because it addressed computers as a tool within a life-long process of language learning. Integrative CALL relies on multimedia computers that are networked with communicative, informational and publishing tools (Warschauer and Healey, 1998).

Foreign Language Teachers' Use of Technology

Two concerns have arisen from the studies in the literature on use of technology by the foreign language teachers. First, it is observed that the teachers may effectively use computers in their daily lives however they face difficulties in adapting their computer knowledge to their teaching work. Secondly, in many research studies, it is reported that the teachers do not even use email and the Internet effectively which are the tools necessary for good use of integrative CALL.

Moore, Morales and Carel (1998), when investigating how teachers used the Internet in teaching of culture in the foreign language classroom, found that those teachers with a higher education level tend to use more video, CD-ROMs and the Internet to teach culture. Teachers with less experience in the classroom use CD-ROMs more than other more experienced teachers; however they use the other technologies much less. The authors conclude that teachers use technology in the classroom minimally. Lack of facilities and suitable cultural materials were the two barriers mentioned for this lack of use.

Administrative Use of Technology

A frequently overlooked use of technology is for managerial purposes such as calculating grades, taking attendance, making handouts, and corresponding with parents. Chiero (1999) investigated the professional use of computers by 142 secondary public school teachers in the United States. She found that almost %75 of teachers used a computer two to three times a week and almost %50 used it daily (p. 380). Creating instructional materials was the primary use of the computer followed by administrative tasks (p.380). Lemmon (2002) also reported that elementary teachers were using technology for professional productivity. This included emailing colleagues, preparing parent newsletters, creating presentations for parents, grading and professional research but not much for pedagogical use.

Barriers to Using Technology

One of the most popular barriers is lack of time. Teachers may not have time in their curriculum, in their daily lives or in the lesson preparation time to include technology. Secondly, lack of funding is always and an important issue (Egbert et. al., 2002). Without up-to-date software, hardware and facilities, it is difficult to use technology. Thirdly, lack of teacher training is a barrier. Teachers may simply not know how to use technology. Fourthly, lack of reward and recognition has been found to be a technology barrier (Strudler et. al., 1995). Finally, lack of resources is another barrier. Resources may refer to instructional manuals, lesson plans, CDROMs, etc. Many other factors could influence technology use such as: Age, gender, and experience; however, findings are inconclusive as to the impact of these variables on technology integration (Cuban, 2001). Variables investigated and reported not to be barriers to technology integration are fear (Lam, 2000), lack of confidence (Egbert et. al., 2002) and lack of interest (Egbert et. al., 2002).

METHOD

The purpose of this qualitative study is to find out the opinions of the language teachers at Foreign Language Teaching Center of Ankara University (TÖMER) on computer aided language learning (CALL). While studying computer aided language learning there are two main dimensions that have been emphasized. On the one hand, the use of computers in foreign language teaching for the administrative purposes and on the other hand, use of computers for teaching / pedagogical purposes. Eight teachers have been interviewed on the above two dimensions and the outcomes have been analyzed to conduct this case study. The aim was to provide an understanding and an evaluation of the use of computers in language teaching in TÖMER with a broader perspective.

Sample

Eight teachers at TÖMER constitute the sample for this research. While identifying the sample a special emphasis has been paid to maintain the multiplicity of interviewees and great sensitivity has been shown with regard to the gender, experience and the language that they teach. Four of the teachers were male and the others were female and each one of them teaches one of the following languages; English, French, German, Turkish, Italia and Greek.

Data Collection

A semi structured interview guide has been used as a data collection tool in this research study. A literature review on CALL has been conducted and the instrument has been identified based on reliability and validity analysis of the tools found in the literature. Semi structured interview guide has been developed based on those instruments. Expert opinion was taken for reliability purposes; the interview guide has been evaluated by a foreign language teaching specialist and an educational technologist. The purpose of the interview guide was to analyze the opinions of the teachers on use of computers for administrative and teaching purposes in foreign language teaching, how often they use computers, and learn their positive and negative thoughts for future practices.

Data Analysis

Content analysis have been conducted as a strategy in reaching the findings of this research. This is the method where researchers start their research study from a specific conceptual framework and problematize research through a main problem and sub problems associated with it (Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2005: 229). In this research main categories of data collection have been identified beforehand. The outcomes of the interviews have been grouped under those categories and analyzed accordingly.

FINDINGS

In this research study, eight teachers from TÖMER have been interviewed and questions asked were on what they think about computer use in language teaching. The findings are as follows:

I. Findings on the purposes of computer use in TÖMER – an educational institution

All of the teachers state that they have been using computers mainly for administrative purposes. They provide that the main reason behind this non practice of computer use for educational purposes is because there are no computers in classes at TÖMER. Furthermore they state that the administration has no expectations of computer use in language teaching where use of the DVD room is based on willingness of individual teachers.

II. Findings on the Use of Computers for Administrative Purposes

a) For what administrative purposes are computers used for?

Teachers use computers frequently for the purposes of preparing grades, developing lesson plans, preparing work sheets for students and finding additional materials from the Internet. Although not frequently, they do use computers for calculating student grades, preparing the student attendance lists, and for sharing files with their colleagues.

b) How often computers are used for administrative purposes?

The teachers state that they use computers at least 5 hours and at most 10 hours a week. They provide that they use CD-ROMs, word processing software and power point software of the Microsoft Office Package and email frequently. They emphasize that they use spell check of word processing software; preparing presentations by using power point software program is the most frequent activities they use.

III. Findings on the use of computers for educational purposes.

a) What are the impact of the use of computers on developing language skills?

All the teachers interviewed in TÖMER stated that the computers do not have an effect on developing oral skills.

There are different ideas and opinions regarding the effect of computers on developing speaking and grammar skills. 3 teachers provided that computers may have an effect on developing the writing skills. It was also asserted that the students find it more attractive to write (type) on a PC rather than on a book or a note book. The spell check facility of the computer software programs is another important aspect which develops writing skills of the students. The other 5 teachers, on the other hand, provided that the students have a tendency to write (type) faster but with more spelling mistakes which eventually hinders learning.

Nearly all of the teachers (N=7) think that the computers have a positive effect on reading skills of the students. They acknowledge that through using the technology, the reading texts are sent to the students in a very short time and this is very economical. The remaining one teacher asserted that it is difficult to take notes on the reading texts if reading on the screen and computers distance students from the books.

According to the pro-computer 7 teachers, the Internet is said to be a good tool to develop vocabulary of the students and the same goes for the scrabble games.

The teachers had a consensus that the computers have a positive effect on the listening skills of the students. The listening skills shall be developed through using CDs, videos and other audio-visual materials that the native speakers take part in. Visual screens on the computers is an important advantage in that sense. According to all the teachers, computer supported listening exercises increase participation and students enjoy more in case of good use of the software programs.

b) What are the opinions of the language teachers on using computers to support learning?

Teachers at TÖMER have both positive and negative opinions on using computers in their courses. It is important that the teachers seek best ways of using computers in their courses to increase the effectiveness. They assert that the teachers should be aware of the negative aspects of using computers in language teaching and work hard to get rid of them.

Positive opinions of the teachers on using computers in foreign language teaching:

- Provides an environment for individualistic teaching

- Increases motivation

- Provides alternatives for drill and practice

- Assessment becomes easier

- The Internet is an important tool / resource in foreign language teaching

Negative opinions of the teachers on using computers in foreign language teaching:

- Computers are acknowledged as if they are replacing the teachers. However computers shall be used as tools to increase learning

- It is easier to manage a classroom in which computers are not used when compared with a classroom in which computers are used.

- Students may use the Internet to cheat whilst doing homework

- The sufficiency of the teachers in using the computers is an important of aspect.

- The maintenance of the computers, purchasing quality software and staff like that may have negative affects on teaching.

RESULTS and CONCLUSION

In this study, 8 teachers at TÖMER language school have been interviewed to gather in-depth information on their use of computers for teaching and administrative purposes. Teachers emphasized the importance of using the computers as tools while teaching foreign languages. They said, "Computers should be available in the classrooms at TÖMER and everyone should be capable of using computers in the 21. century".

The 8 teachers that we held interviews provided that they have a computer at home and at the office however they mainly use them for administrative purposes. As Alyaz (2003) puts in his article, "Literacy and Internet Literacy in Computer Aided Language Learning", computers have positive effects in foreign language teaching especially in administrative aspects. It should be noted that although the foreign language teachers have been so speedy, it takes a lot of time to prepare, write, duplicate and distribute the materials to the students with traditional methods. Then, these are collected by the teachers to conduct assessment procedures which again takes too much time. Above all, every year all these procedures are repeated in a new classroom and a teacher needs to review the materials and include new information which eventually results in doing these things repeatedly every year. This is because for each single item included in the materials, the teacher needs to reproduce and reduplicate the whole material. Preparing the materials through using computers partially resolves this issue since the materials are in a digital format and when compared to the traditional ways of doing things it is much easier and practical to backup and duplicate those materials whenever needed.

Using computer technology (both online and offline software tools) in language teaching, as stated by Cembalo (2001), experienced the teachers both positive and negative feelings. Teachers at TÖMER think that using computers in foreign language teaching and in other aspects of education is a revolutionary change in education. But as Lancien (1998) puts it, most of the software programs in the market are useless and even deceptive and the teachers should be very careful in selecting the right software. According to Lancien (1998), especially in language teaching, the role of the computers is overemphasized and in some countries the courses are all conducted through computers. The foreign language teachers prefer to use computers even in some cases that they can easily deal with without such a tool. It is sometimes forgotten that computers are just tools helping the teachers and some people tend to act as if computers have replaced the teachers. In such cases, the interaction between the teacher and the student and among the students themselves cannot be actualized.

Teachers at TÖMER have emphasized the fact that the computers are effective in teaching foreign language when the pedagogical perspective is considered. One example for good use of computers for pedagogical purposes is when audio and visual materials are used to model the expected outcomes during the courses. Computers help teachers in transmitting materials in which the native speakers take part to students and this increases the quality of active learning processes that the students are engaged. Coste (1996) states that learning a foreign language includes exploring the behaviors, way of living and shortly the culture of the native speakers of that language. For instance, making use of CDs to learn more about the pronunciation of native speakers is a good alternative in that sense.

The teachers have also provided that the language education practitioners should be careful on developing writing skills of the students. According to them, the chat programs on the Internet have created a new language, there are some abbreviations that have been used by the students, the grammar mistakes are never been corrected and this results in false acquisitions by

the students. On the other hand, they value those programs in case they are used for right purposes. Warschauer (1995) explains that the students may get involved in some real and natural environments through computer technology. For example, the students may fill in some application forms for real life purposes and through sending and receiving emails get the chance to analyze legal / real life documents. They meet some new friends through the Internet and may develop their foreign language skills through communication with some native speakers in their daily lives. The students may get bored in a classroom environment while developing their writing skills since they know that only their teachers would read what they wrote. But when they got involved in real interaction through email and through other alternatives on the Internet, they know that there would be a real individual looking forward to reading their posts which eventually increases the motivation of the students.

There are research studies conducted in Turkey providing evidence that computers have positive effects on foreign language teaching. One of those articles is on reading skills. Akpinar (2002), in his article, "Computer usage of 8th graders in big provinces primary education schools and their level of understanding of what they read", compared level of understanding of what the students read of those who have internet access and those who do not have an internet access. The sample of the study was 1150 8th grade students enrolled to private and state schools in big provinces. The results of the study showed that those who have an internet access have a better level of understanding ($p<.05$). Similarly, the level of understanding of those who have a computer is better than those who do not have a computer. Another article is on acquisition of grammar skills. Gömleksiz and Sertdemir (2005) compared the traditional methods with the computer aided learning methods in the case of teaching "relative clauses" concept in English. 8th grader students in Elazığ Private Bilgem College constituted the sample of the experimental study in which there was a control and an experiment group. In the experiment group, computers were used and it was found that teaching the relative clauses subject in English language teaching shall be more effective through computer aided language learning methods. Based on such results, it is suggested that computers are involved in language teaching environments in addition to text books and white boards which are the main tools in such educational environments.

Alyaz and Gursoy (2002) state, in their article, "Computer Based Instruction and Computer Assisted Language Learning in Schools in Bursa", that despite the efforts of the Ministry of National Education in Turkey to provide computers to schools and provide in-service trainings to the teachers, the computers have not been used effectively at schools. In fact, the teachers that we interviewed at TÖMER provided that they mostly use the computers for administrative purposes such as writing, recording notes, preparing lesson plans and preparing work sheets. Other than financial barriers, the most important barrier in front of integrating computers to the teaching environments is lack of a pedagogical perspective and missing the pedagogical advantages by the teachers and the school administrators. This results in the fact that the teachers may state the importance of using computers in their classrooms but unfortunately it is observed that they are not ambitious of doing this so.

It is vital that the practical ways of making good use of computers in foreign language learning environments are put in the agenda of foreign language teachers. TÖMER and the teachers at TÖMER shall take the lead in that sense to become a good model to increase effective usage of computers both for administrative and pedagogical purposes in foreign language teaching institutions.

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