

The Use of Technology In-and-Outside of Second Language Classrooms: The Need for Teacher Training in Technology

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Research has shown that the use of technology can be a pioneering and innovative means of language learning and teaching. Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) provides learners with individualized instruction, naturalistic linguistic environment, and greater opportunities to actively engage in interaction with peers and teachers. A number of studies (see Bhatia & Ritchie, 2009 for more details) have reported that students in the CALL setting tend to show less negative affect but higher levels of interest, motivation, and participation in learning the target language. However, such encouraging findings were observed primarily with students who had positive attitudes toward technology, as pointed out by Bhatia and Ritchie (2009). This highlights the fact that the application of technology to language learning and/or teaching settings must be preceded by proper user education or training in materials and technology tools. In other words, both students and teachers need to be given sufficient opportunities to practice and become familiar with the technology in use in the first place; the absence of these prerequisites can render any argument for the effectiveness of CALL insufficient.

The abovementioned prerequisites need to be taken more seriously by teachers in this information era. The reality is: they are often expected to be experts in technology for the teaching and learning of the target language by their students. Even if they may not develop a learning program or software program themselves, language teachers still need to learn how to use technology in a variety of ways, because they are expected to not only teach certain linguistic skills but also conduct assessment, provide feedback, and manage the class, among other responsibilities. Bhatia and Ritchie (2009), on a related note, maintain that computers are able to make assessment and research “more objective, more accurate, and less labor-intensive” (p. 551) – provided that there is a sufficient amount of teacher training in technology. However, there is still an overwhelming need for teacher training and computer literacy, which is essential in reinforcing teachers’ competence in technology and promoting successful language teaching and assessment.

Furthermore, teachers need to be educated about the theoretical and methodological bases of using technology in language classrooms. Technology should not be the focus of learning; it should only be an aid that provides new options for testing and refining language learning theories and teaching methods. Bhatia and Ritchie (2009) argued that the choice of material for CALL should be determined by internal and external factors of language learning, rather than by the innovation of technology. According to them, using Praat for pronunciation instruction is one example in which technology is prioritized over learning. Praat is a phonetic analysis software program used to analyze acoustic features of speech sound such as waveforms and spectrograms, but it is not designed to filter out non-significant speech variation. A language teacher may have learners pronounce sounds that have precisely the same acoustic features as those found in the native speech, which is displayed on Praat, but such misuse of Praat may cause them to struggle with minor speech features that are of little linguistic significance. Eventually, it may hinder learning.

To conclude, the application of technology to language classrooms must be preceded by user (especially teacher(s)) education that reinforces users' competence in terms of materials, technology tools, and theoretical and/or methodological bases of technology use.

REFERENCES

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