THE IMPORTANCE OF ICT IN MODERN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract

ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has become a significant domain of learning in the field of teaching and learning. Recently, educators have shown overwhelming interest in incorporating computers and Internet to improve the effectiveness of education at informal and formal levels of Education. ICT with its numerous tools has immense potential in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) in terms of facilitating the teaching and learning of listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The article summarizes some of the merits and the demerits of the use of ICT tools, and the concept of using ICT in ELT based on the researcher`s review of recent studies. It also highlights the findings from the researcher`s own study on the effectiveness of the application of ICT tools on the EFL (English as Foreign Language) writing performance of Uzbekistan EFL learners.

Keywords: ICT, internet, traditional, method, effective approach, authentic language, learner`s competence.

Many EFL studies (So, Choi, Lim, & Xiong.,2012; Mama-Temotheou & Hennessy, 2013) revealed that use of ICT tools in language learning has positive outcomes such as better access to information, providing efficient resources, and increased learning and motivation. Researchers therefore have shown an overwhelming interest in using different ICT tools in facilitating ELL (English Language Learning). Kizil (2011) in her study on the use of ICT in ELL, for instance, found that commonly used ICT tools are the internet, presentation tools, software for processing texts and structure drilling, and communicative language tasks; the participants of the study had positive attitude towards using ICT in EFL teaching and learning, and they regarded ICT integration in education was more advantageous than traditional methods of instructions. Many other studies (Table 1) examined the effectiveness of ICT tools that range from email (Evans, 2012; Liu, 2011), Wikis, blogs to Chats (Alshumeimeri, 2011; Miyazoea, & Anderson, 2012; Alwi, Adams, & Newton., 2012; Chen, 2012). Podcasting (Rahmi & Katal, 2012), tablets – ipads/ipods and mobile phones (Martin & Ertzberger, 2013; Hu, Hwang, & Chang.,2013) are other latest ICT tools for mobile learning. Moreover, social media such as Facebook and Youtube (Ghasemi, 2011; Lairea, Casteleyn, & Mottart., 2012; Alias, Manan, Yusof, & Pandian., 2012) are also used in ELT. The study (Gitsaki & Alabbad, 2012) on mediated learning revealed how the use of ICT tools positively impacted EFL students" attitude towards ELL (English Language Learning) through technology, and its impact on their language skills. All these studies demonstrate the significance of different ICT tools in facilitating learning and practice of language skills.

Table 1. ICT tools

ICT Tools	Author
Internet, Software – text processing, Presentation tools	So, Choi &Xiong, 2012; MamaTemotheou& Hennessy, 2013
E-mail	Liu, 2011; Evans, 2012
Chat, Forums, Blogs and Wikis	Alwi, et al., 2012; Miyazoea, & Anderson, 2012; Chen, 2012; Alshumeimeri, 2011

Mobile-phones and Tabletsipads/ipods	Hu, et al. 2013; Martin &Ertzberger, 2013
Podcasting	Rahmi&Katal, 2012
Youtube and Facebook	Ghasemi, 2011; Alias, et al., 2012; Laire, et al., 2012

Advantages of ICT Following points highlight some of the advantages of ICT with reference to EFL/ESL teaching and learning.

➢ ICT can be used for pleasure, study and work purposes. EFL/ESL learners can use it for pleasure in terms of enhancing language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing to supplement their classroom language use.

➢ The use of ICT motivates the learners enabling them do better in their pursuit of knowledge and skill (Punie, 2007) in a new learning environment and experience. This helps learners engage in using authentic language and linguistic resources.

➢ The language learning through ICT not only enhances the linguistic skills, but also the learner`s competence in using technology, which is essential for future employment, higher education, personal development and their role in the modern society (Markovac and Rogulja, 2009). English language proficiency with technical skills increases employability of the graduates.

➢ ICT eliminates geographical barriers to learning. Students can access information and resources from all parts of the world resulting in increased learning. ICT tools such as Chats, Online Forum Discussions (OFDs), etc. would open opportunities for crosscultural and continental interaction in the target language.

➢ ICT facilitates student centered autonomous learning in the absence of face-to-face teaching and learning. Students can study anytime and anywhere according to their needs. This facilitates independent use of EFL/ESL.

Disadvantages of Using ICT Following points summarize some of the disadvantages of ICT usage in general and ICT in ELT in particular.

➢ Some scholars (Kirkorian, Wartella and Anderson, 2009) believe that children study better from real-life experiences than from the learning through ICT. The use of ICT limits the learners only to a virtual learning platform away from classroom learning with their peers.

➢ Young learners are vulnerable and they might be negatively influenced by the numerous contents that they are exposed through ICT. The matured adults or parents have no control over the vast amount of information available to the learners through ICT (Roberts, et al., 1999). ELT practitioners should exercise discretion in involving learners in ICT mediated language learning.

➢ ICT often encourages passive learning without being actively involved with others in the learning process. The learners spend most of the time in a virtual learning environment resulting in limited personal socio-cultural interaction. This limits the learners‟ interpersonal relationships and interactions (Bushati, et al, 2012).

➢ ICT can cause „digital gap‟ among the learners. The learners who have more accessibility to ICT would out-do other learners who have less exposure to ICT. Similarly, the learners‟ familiarity with the ICT tools also affects their learning that the learners who are more skilled in the use of ICT tools tend to take better advantage of learning target language than the learners who are not equally skilled.

➢ Learners may focus more on technical skills than the learning that is the primary goal of ICT usage especially in ELT. EFL/ESL learners therefore may not be able to utilize the language learning time and effort as they might be distracted by the technical elements in the ICT usage.

➢ Teachers may not be well equipped and updated with the use of ICT tools resulting in slow teaching

and learning process. This will also cause communication gap between the learners and teachers. EFL/ESL professionals especially the teachers should be trained and updated regularly in using ICT tools that could effectively be used in EFL/ESL teaching and learning.

Based on the literature review and the researcher‟s own exposure to ICT in EFL teaching and learning in Sultanate of Oman (as the researcher is a resident in Oman) an empirical study was undertaken using Moodle as an ICT platform with special focus on Writing. The need for the study is evident from the lack of literature in the field of ICT focusing on writing in EFL. AlAufi and Al-Azri (2013) found that less study has been done to find the effectiveness of ICT in language teaching and learning with a special emphasize on writing; and they also observed that the ICT integration into language learning could increase the information literacy of learners in Oman. Moreover, the learners are found exposed to ICT in their daily social life and academic life in the region. The lack of relevant studies on using these ICT tools in developing writing skills therefore may deprive language teachers in Oman to comprehend possible areas and causes of ICT that may impact their learners‟ EFL skills in general and writing performance in particular.

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