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Technology Supported Language Classroom

M. Ambikavathy

Assistant Professor of English
Department of Science & Humanities
M. Kumarasamy College of Engineering (Autonomous)
Karur.
INDIA.

Abstract

Foreign language teachers have a specific niche. Their job is to teach students a whole new language, including the nuanced rules of grammar and cultural norms. Technology offers foreign language teachers a chance to supplement their instruction by making learning visible, differentiating, engaging students, applying and broadening language skills. Technology supported language classroom incorporates various forms of technology to support their teaching, engage students in the learning process, provide authentic examples of the target culture, and connect their classrooms to classrooms in other countries where the target language is spoken. E-publishing and digital storytelling, Blogging, Podcasting, Video and video conferencing are some technology tools that enable teachers to differentiate instruction and adapt classroom activities and homework assignments, thus enhancing the language learning experience. Audio listening exercises can be good for testing what students can distinguish on their own. After your students have been getting good input from authentic sources, have them try some guided practice activities provided by useful websites like Quizlet, FluentU and so on.

"Language development is around four skills – reading, writing, speaking and listening – and all of those are facilitated by technology. There's a very strong link between the affordances of technology and the type of things we're trying to do as teachers." Times have changed, teachers have evolved, and we now have a new breed of learning technologists. The first changes began in the classroom itself – new technologies such as overhead projectors, interactive whiteboards, laptop computers and wireless internet have opened up the classroom to the outside world. Teachers who spent their lives managing with a textbook, a tape recorder and a blackboard are now adept at using PowerPoint to present grammar, playing podcasts to practise listening skills, pulling texts off the world wide web to introduce reading skills and perhaps most ground-breaking of all – empowering students by giving them access to a wide range of web-based tools that allow them to publish work and engage with live audiences in real contexts.

And that is just the beginning – because just as technologies have begun to change the way that English is learned in the classroom, even bigger changes seem to be taking place outside it. A meaningful integration of technology in the foreign language classroom...

- Engages and motivates students to learn.
- Helps student relate what has been taught to life outside the classroom.
- Gives students opportunities to use their language abilities for interactional and real purpose activities
- Helps teachers reach all students in different ways and effectively differentiate instruction and allows students to work at their own pace

Technology contributes to student motivation, higher order thinking, and mastery of basic skills. Students respond more to real communication as opposed to the more structured kind in a classroom, feeling more relaxed and engaged, and being more willing to take risks with their new language.

The internet can be a rich source of authentic oral models via recorded songs, talking electronic books, podcasts and video clips that help learners with pronunciation as well as acquisition and reinforcement of new vocabulary.

Video-conferencing (Phillips, 2010) and face-to-face interaction through online virtual worlds (Hew and Cheung, 2010; Zheng et al., 2009) are becoming increasingly popular as vehicles to promote language learning. Video conferencing is being used to bring learners together over distance so that they can communicate in a common language and share cultural experiences. Virtual worlds like

Second Life, Active Worlds and Open Sim afford learners the possibility of ‘living’ within a 3D space, collaboratively developing content and interacting with peers through virtual experiences: debates, role play, exhibitions, performances and the like.

Clearly, because ‘learning and literacy are changing radically in the internet age’ (Richardson, 2012: 15), a place must be found for digital literacy in education, but what does being *digital literate* entail? The more recent definition expands it to ‘a person’s ability to perform tasks effectively in a digital environment... Literacy includes the ability to read and interpret media, to reproduce data and images through digital manipulation, and to evaluate and apply new knowledge gained from digital environments.’

In recent years, technology has been used to both assist and enhance language learning. Teachers have incorporated various forms of technology to support their teaching, engage students in the learning process, provide authentic examples of the target culture, and connect their classrooms to classrooms in other countries where the target language is spoken.

Further, some technology tools enable teachers to differentiate instruction and adapt classroom activities and homework assignments, thus enhancing the language learning experience. Distance learning programs can enable language educators to expand language-learning opportunities to all students, regardless of where they live, the human and material resources available to them, or their language background and needs. In sum, technology continues to grow in importance as a tool to assist teachers of foreign languages in facilitating and mediating language learning for their students.

While technology can play an important role in supporting and enhancing language learning, the effectiveness of any technological tool depends on the knowledge and expertise of the qualified language teacher who manages and facilitates the language learning environment.

In fact, the digital revolution in learning now threatens to undermine the classroom completely as a place of study. Learning English through mobile devices gains credibility every day and the increasing popularity and rapidly diminishing cost of tablet devices reinforce this by providing a format that really is capable of delivering courseware. The interest is growing in Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), providing large-scale (and free) learning interventions, and it is clear that technology still has much to offer ELT.

Some Ideas on How to Use Technology:

Audio and Video Programs: Whether we realize it or not, looking at a teacher's face and body language can provide students with clues that help them with listening comprehension. This increases the interest among the learners to participate actively in the learning activities. Audio and Video Programs provide excellent opportunity for your students to hear native speakers. These programs are a great way to introduce the topics and themes of the day or week, showing the language in use in different contexts. This can be used as a warm up or as a closing activity.

Online Activities: These are great activities to differentiate instruction. Students can be working at different activities within the same topic without feeling embarrassed. For struggling students, this is a great resource for reinforcement and remediation. Students who have a higher ability will be able to work with a variety of activities that will challenge them. This could be a review on a weekly basis or a something you have students do for a few minutes at the end of a class period.

eBooks: eBooks can be pretty wonderful things: especially for the classroom. eBooks are interactive. Students have a glossary, or the definition or read aloud of a word at their finger tips. Most eBooks also integrate audios and videos, enriching the language learning experience.

Wordle (www.wordle.net) is a good example of a web-based tool that can help cement the interface between reading, writing and the significance of visual literacy in a 21st century world. The tool produces word clusters based on the frequency of words occurring in a sample of writing. Practitioners can use Wordle to help older children compare texts from different genres and ages, analyse the formality in writing or simply focus on key vocabulary from a particular topic. Children producing their own Wordles can also play around with shape, colour and styling in order to consider the impact of their work on different audiences.

Using technology means that students can now turn to Twitter to use the language, without having to pack the class off on a school trip. "Use of technology has moved towards the internet and social networks, rather than concentrating on pieces of purposely-designed technology that you would have in language labs. They increase exposure to the target language and allow you to join groups that share interests in the language."

"They are great for adding variety to lessons, which is good when you're catering for a range of learning styles. They also allow for a greater level of independence in the classroom as the children have the resources to look things up for themselves."

"There's lots of evidence that giving students extra chances to communicate in the language are very motivating," says Warschauer. "Use of Twitter, email, discussion forums, Skype, and other tools can provide authentic communication opportunities that are too often lacking in language class." Teachers do need to learn to use new technology, but the driving force should always be the pedagogy behind it.

Using technology to enhance language learning, as Jewell mentions 'allows for increased learner autonomy and control, providing a more student-centred pedagogy' with learners at the centre of the learning process and 'more actively engaged in their learning than in traditional direct instruction methods' (Jewell, 2006: 178).

Many teachers are self-directing their own learning when it comes to using technology, and are increasingly turning to online communities of practice, taking courses and building their own skills and personal learning networks to act as a support system to help with the implementation of learning technology.

Finally, encouraging the use of educational technology in secondary language education has wider implications. As Dooly (2008: 23) mentions, '[i]f we are truly interested in preparing our students to be responsible citizens in an increasingly technologically advanced society, then our way of teaching our students must reflect this.'

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