Benefits and Challenges to Integrate ICT in EFL Teaching and Learning Activities

LE THI MAI
BA RIA – VUNG TAU UNIVERSITY

Abstract: *ICT as a medium for teaching is becoming more and more acknowledged. This paper takes a closer look at the benefits, as well as the barriers faced by teachers and students in integrating ICT tools in teaching and learning the English language in the classrooms. The integration of ICT will enable teachers to vary teaching and learning activities, to gradually change the teaching style to be more student-centred, to train students to have more active role in learning, and to access a huge range of authentic learning materials. Hence, some recommedations for action are proposed at the end.*
Keywords: *English LTL, Vietnamese ELT, ICT, benefits, challenges, EFL*

I. Introduction

Today's world is knowledgeable-based. It totally depends on exchanging information rapidly. Most countries that are equipped with the technology and knowledge to participate in the new electronic world are major players in its socio- cultural and economic developments. Especially, technology's ability and relevance can support the process of teaching and learning English.

Language teaching has been extensively influenced by the innovations made in the field of science and technology. We can observe various changes in the forms and modes of education. The present-day language pedagogy is leaning towards the integrated pedagogy with the use of ICTs. It is a form of learning that is supported by the use of highly deliberate tools. ICT integrated instruction is a way of learning in an interactive way with the excessive use of ICT (Davies, 2013, p.14). It typically includes the learning interactively with an online support and use of techno-based tools between the teachers and the learners, and the peers.

In Vietnam, English has taught as a foreign language. It is used for variety of purposes such as for the purpose of international communication, getting international degree in English and as a medium of instruction. The recent approaches to ELT are based on technologies. It is often said that the 21st century is an era of science and technology (Lightbown &Spada, 2013). In one sense, we can view that the entire world is encroached by technology and we are unable to run even our daily activities in the absence of these means. Teachers can integrate technologies or use e-devices to develop and tailor instructional materials to better meet individual students' needs. At present, e-devices have impact in all aspects of life; so in the modern world of computer, the internet and other e-forms become integral part in ELT (Gide, 2014, p.29).

Also, English is an important language for many Vietnamese in addition to the official language. One of the most prominent roles of English is found in the education system. The significance of acquiring English language competency for school students is emphasized by its presence in the entrance or the graduation examination. In addition, currently many public universities require the Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) certificate or IELTS for completion of undergraduate study regardless of their major. At the post graduate level, a TOEFL or IELTS certificate have even been used as one of the entry requirements.

Despite its critical importance, English language teachers noted that English Language Teaching (ELT) in Vietnam is problematic and very complex. The major issue of concern is the unsatisfactory level of student learning outcomes. Even though students achieve good marks in the English language at school or in the national examination, the majority of these high school graduates are not able to use their English knowledge for intelligible communication. Similarly, having spent six years learning English through junior and senior secondary schools, there are many students who can hardly read the English texts required in university classes.

ICT is considered to be as an important means which is promising to improve Vietnamese ELT. In the field of language teaching and learning (LTL), ICT is believed to have contexts that facilitate the development of second language abilities. ICTs can bring benefits on learner interaction and motivation.

The term ICT in general refers to all forms of technological tools and resources used to communicate, create, store or manage information including computers, the Internet, broadcasting technologies, high-tech devices such as computers and software. It also covers a wide range of devices from radios, televisions, mobile phones, all computer applications, network hardware and software to satellite systems. Due to the limitation of

discussion, in this paper, the term ICT refers only to the use of computer technology and the internet in the language classroom.

ICT FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING LANGUAGE

Although the use of technology in LTL is not something new, the implications that ICT has on learning and teaching are significant. ICT brings new possibilities to the classroom due to the very nature of it being innovative. For UNESCO1, ICTs has "great potential for knowledge dissemination, effective learning and the development of more efficient education services" (Semenov, 2005, p. 4). It is their belief that the challenge for the education systems that exists lies in "how to transform the curriculum and teaching-learning process to provide students with skills to function effectively in this dynamic, information rich, continuously changing environment" (Finger et al., 2007, p. 34).

Learning activities were based on communicative approach principles characterized by a reduced emphasis on grammar, an increased focus on using rather than studying language forms, and maximum encouragement of language production without direct judgement of the accuracy of the utterances produced. Despite some involvement of the learners, the computer remained the sole source of knowledge, holding the key answers. Learning activities involve the use of internet, more complex computer applications and less emphasis on performing the in-built computer exercises. Learners are trained to search and use information to perform tasks in various ways.

In addition, it is obvious from both perspectives that the computer and its related applications have varied potentials. Naturally, the purpose of technological advancement is to invent tools which help people to perform their activities more efficiently. Their potentials, however, is determined by how they are implemented. In other words, successful integration of ICT in LTL is not without cost. Indeed, the advantages that ICT offers do not occur automatically but are achievable only under certain precursor conditions (Murray, 2005).

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF LTL WITH ICT

Many studies have reported that the contribution of ICT to the enhancement LTL has been invaluable. However, efforts in adopting it into the classroom and maximizing its potentials also have encountered not a few constraints.

THE BENEFITS

There are many advantages that ICT can bring to teaching and learning in schools. For example, various learning styles and abilities can be facilitated with the help of ICT. This enables those who are socially, mentally and physically disadvantaged to become more active in the learning process (Semenov, 2005). Learning can become more effective with ICT as it involves more senses in a multimedia context. There is also evidence to suggest that ICT increases the level of engagement with students creating a positive impact on all student groups (Triggs & Sutherland, 2009). In addition, Semenov (2005): 61 believed that ICT can provide a "broader international context for approaching problems as well as being more sensitive response to local needs". Moreover, ICT can empower teachers and students to build rich multisensory and interactive environments (Semenov, 2005).

Most Vietnamese teachers agreed that the use of ICT enables the students to be more active and engaged in the lesson. This shows that the use of ICT provides the chances for students to be active and take more parts or roles for their best learning experience. The use of ICT also helps to broaden student's knowledge paradigm where students are able to integrate their prior knowledge into the current learning systems as well as sharing and exchanging point of view with the teachers and classmates. ICT helps to provide latest and current issues where students can obtain it very easily and integrate it into their learning process.

Besides, ICT helps students to learn more effectively as well as it helps students to find related knowledge and information for learning. The technology always acts as a medium for students to find related knowledge and information for their learning. It is best when the students are able to gather information, relate it back with what they have learnt and have a discussion on the information with teachers and their classmates so that they can see the relation of what is new and what the latest issues they need to catch up for effective learning.

Other than that, there are a lot of educational videos provided for students online which helps to improve student's ability in language learning skills such as reading, writing, listening and speaking. It is good for students to watch videos and learn from them, so they can gather the confidence needed when it comes to argumentative issues in the classroom where they are able to provide clear clarification and their judgments on certain issues. The use of ICT also allows students to be more creative and imaginative. This shows that the use of ICT enhances students thinking and enables them to think out of the box and make the best use of their learning process.

The other effectiveness of ICT for students in learning are it encourages students to communicate more with their classmates as well as it increases the student's confidence to participate actively in the class. It is effective in a sense that students are occupied with adequate knowledge that enables them to be more confident in sharing and exchanging their opinion with their classmates. It shows that students are more behaved and under control with the use of ICT in learning but it is also considered as fewer acceptances by teachers. This might give the ideas to teachers that students are a little bit out of control when ICT is used in teaching as teachers are not the main focus of learning process.

By employing ICT, teachers could vary their teaching and learning activities. It could assist them to gradually change their teaching style from teacher-centred to learner-centred, giving the learners the chance to have an active role in the learning process. In addition, the rich multimedia facilities of ICT could offer a huge range of authentic materials as well as opportunities to have direct contact with either native speakers of English or English language learners from different regions or countries, enabling teachers to be more confident with CLT.

Learners use ICT tools to find, explore, analyze, exchange and present information creatively. Also, learners know how to employ ICT to access to ideas and experiences from a wide range of people, communities, and cultures

ICT provides opportunities for communication in two different ways: interaction with the computer via a specific program such as speech recognition and speech synthesis program; and interaction with other learners or tutors via teleconferencing technologies. ICT services network allows learners and teachers to share resources with others, and encourage them to involve in classroom activities. More current application technologies enable more contextualized and pedagogically relevant feedback including grammar checker, spell checker, pronunciation corrector through automatic speech recognition and behavior and error tracking by analyzing students' responses stored in the computer.

II. The Challenges

➢ **Lack of training**

Official training regarding ICT integration in teaching and learning language is seldom conducted to the Vietnamese teachers. It makes them feel clueless about how to integrate ICT in proper ways. It means that teachers have insufficient sources to get information and knowledge about how ICT is used in teaching. Whereas training could be a way that the teachers can improve their knowledge in using ICT in teaching. Meanwhile, they do not receive any training or workshop on how to integrate ICT in English language teaching. They are not even provided by the government. Studies also have well explored that lack of training is a significant problem for the teacher to use pedagogical ICT in teaching (Anderson et al., 1984: 13). It may be a signal that teachers' incompetence to use various modern ICTs in teaching is caused by the insufficient training that the teachers receive.

➢ **Lack of appropriate software**

Lack of appropriate software discourage the integration of ICT in learning. In Goktas and Yildrim's research (2009), they claimed lack of software is one of the barriers' lists in integrating ICT in teaching and learning process. Insufficient proper and practical software in terms of application cannot enrich the teachers' learning using technology. They will tend to use the basic software of application. One of the main barriers of integrating ICT into teaching and learning process is lack of appropriate software (Bullock, 2004; Muantaz 2000).

➢ **Lack of Competence**

A high percentage of teachers in Vietnam do not know how to integrate educational technology into their teaching. Newhouse (2002) found that many teachers lack the knowledge and skills to use computers and were not enthusiastic about the changes and integration of supplementary learning associated with bringing computers into their teaching practices. Teachers' lack of knowledge and skills is a serious obstacle to using ICT in primary and secondary schools. (Pelgrum 2001). Balanskat et al. (2006) have shown that in Vietnam many teachers still chose not to use ICT and media in teaching situations because of their lack of ICT skills rather than for pedagogical reasons"

➢ **Lack of appropriate material and time**

One of the factors that hinders the teachers' decision to integrate ICT was the availability of time. Most of the teachers stated that lack of time was a barrier to integrate ICT in the classrooms. They felt that there was no time given for them to plan and to integrate ICT into the lessons since they were extremely busy in achieving the goals of syllabus.

Recent studies show that lack of time is an important factor affecting the application of new technologies in science education (Al-Alwani, 2005).Several recent studies indicate that many teachers have competence and confidence in using computers in the classroom, but they still make little use of technologies because they do not have enough time. According to Sicilia (2005), the most common challenge reported by all the teachers was the lack of time they had to plan technology lessons, explore the different Internet sites, or look

at various aspects of educational software. Teachers take much more time to design projects that include the use of new ICT than to prepare traditional lessons.

The lesson preparation using ICT is time consuming because as the rule of thumb, one hour of ICT-enhanced lesson would require about 3 to 4 hours of preparation. Thus, the teachers faced problem either in preparing the lessons or in conducting the lessons within the limited time. Moreover, the teachers need additional time to set up all the ICT tools in the classrooms. So, the teachers felt that they could accomplish the required tasks during their lesson hours instead of setting up the ICT tools. Kozma et al. (2004) also claimed that the biggest barriers to the use of computers by teachers were the lack of time available in classes and in their own schedules for planning. It means there is no unhurried times provides for teachers so that teachers can at least use ICT for effective teaching and learning process. It is good if teachers are given more time to teach so that ICT integration in teaching can be a success. Most teachers agreed that all ICT tools provided for their school goes to waste due to teachers lack of knowledge and skills in using it. Sometimes, ICT facilities are completely provided but little access to ICT prevents teachers from using it in teaching.

➢ **Others**

Some teachers feel the urge and motivated to use ICT in teaching but there is lack of supports from the school top management that hinder and discourage them from using ICT. The school top management must provide an encouragement for teachers to use ICT in teaching and convince them that ICT can benefits both teaching and learning process. Besides, teachers are not given the freedom they need to design their own teaching with the helps they received from ICT. Some schools are not provided with at least computer laboratory in which students will get the chances to integrate the use of ICT in their learning process.

III. Conclusion

This study has shown teachers' benefits and challenges of integrating ICT in teaching and learning English in Vietnam. Vietnamese ELT can benefit from ICT integration under the appropriate conditions. It is hoped that this study will contribute to the development of a better understanding of the concept of ICT in LTL in general and ICT adoption for Vietnamese ELT in particular, as well as assist in decision-making for the preparation of learners and teachers facing the digital era of learning.

IV. Recommendations

Considering the specific ELT situation in Vietnam, some actions that can be taken to improve ELT practices through integrating ICT are as follow. Firstly, the Vietnamese government and school authorities need to ensure that there are adequate ICT facilities in public schools throughout Vietnam. As suggested throughout the study, the successful integration of ICT in ETL depends both on availability and the successful incorporation of the principles of second language learning theory and CLT approaches in teaching and learning activities. Therefore, there must be an adequate supply of and access for teachers to ICT hardware and software in schools and teaching classrooms.

Secondly, Teachers of English must be trained in English language mastery, the use of ICT, and the integration of ICT in LTL. It is important that teachers are ready to work with ICT. For this reason, teachers do not only need good competency in using ICT tools but also appropriate English language skills and sound pedagogical knowledge. Training for teachers is obviously necessary and should be in the integration of technology into the pedagogical content and knowledge (Harris, et al., 2009). Some ways for Vietnamese ELT to achieve this are by including ICT in teacher training courses and teacher education programs.

Finally, there needs to be some changes made in the curriculum and assessment system. While the teaching of English through integrating ICT with the communicative approach and the constructivist theory of learning can be assessed through standardized tests, alternative assessment practices need to be developed to adequately to address the integrated nature of students" English language and ICT learning. Learners must be assessed by various forms of assessment covering both knowledge and performance of skills that are authentic and simulate the real situations of language uses (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010).

References

[1]. Brown, H. D., & Abeywickrama, P. (2010). *Language assessment; Principles and classroom practices*. White Plains, New York: Pearson Education, Inc.
[2]. Bullock, D. (2004). *Moving from theory to practice: An examination of the factors that preservice teachers encounter as they attempt to gain experience teaching with technology during field placement experiences,* Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, 12(2), 211-237.
[3]. Chapelle, C. A. (2003). *The potentials of technology for language learning* (Vol. I). Amsterdam: Johs Benjamins.
[4]. Dang, X.T. (2011). *Factors Influencing Teacher's Use of ICT in Language Teaching*: A Case Study of Hanoi University Vietnam, International Conference "ICT for Language Learning".
[5]. Davies, G., & Rendall, H. (2011). *Using word-processing and presentation software in the modern foreign language classroom.* Module 1.3.

[6]. Davies, G., Walker, R., Rendall, H., & Hewer, S. (2011). *Introduction to Computer Asissted Language Learning* (CALL). Module 1.4.
[7]. G. Davies (Ed.), *Information and Communication Technology for Language Teachers (ICT4LT)*. Slough: Thames Valley University.
[8]. G. Davies (Ed.), *Information and Communications Technology for Language Teachers (ICT4LT)* Slough: Thames Valley University.
[9]. Ghavifekr, S. & Rosdy, W.A.W. (2015). *Teaching and learning with technology: Effectiveness of ICT integration in schools*. International Journal of Research in Education and Science (IJRES), 1(2), 175-191.
[10]. Goktas, Y., Yildirim, S., & Yildirim, Z. (2009). *Main barriers and possible enablers of ICTs integration into pre- service teacher education programs.* Journal of Educational Technology & Society, 12(1), 193-204.
[11]. Harris, J., Mishra, P., & Koehler, M. (2009). *Teachers' technological pedagogical content knowledge and learning activity types: Curriculum-based technology integration reframed.* Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 41(4), 393-416.
[12]. In D. R. Hall & A. Hewings (Eds.), *Innovations in English language teaching: A reader* (pp. 149-166). London and New York: Routledge.
[13]. Kirkpatrick, A. (2006). *Teaching English across cultures. What do English language teachers need to know to know how to teach English?* Paper presented at the 19th Annual EA education conference, Australia.
[14]. Li, D. (2001). *Teachers' perceived difficulties in introducing the communicative approach in South Korea*.
[15]. Mullama, K. (2010). *ICT in language learning: benefits and methodological implications*. International Education Studies, 3(1), 38-44.
[16]. Murray, D. E. (2005). *Technologies for second language literacy.* Annual review of applied linguistic, 25, 188-201.
[17]. Murray, D. E. (2008). *From marginalisation to transformation: How ICT is being used in ESL learning today*. International Journal of pedagogies and learning, 4(5), 20-35.
[18]. Newhouse, C. P. (2002). *The impact of ICT on learning and teaching: a literature review*. Perth: Specialist Educational Services.
[19]. Newhouse, P. (2002). Literature review: *The impact of ICT on learning and teaching*, Perth, Western Australia: Department of Education.
[20]. Sicilia, C. (2005). *The Challenges and Benefits to Teachers' Practices in Constructivist Learning Environments Supported by Technology.* Unpublished master's thesis, McGill University, Montreal