

Technology and Language Learning: Language Learners' Attitude

¹Taher Bahrani

^{*1}Department of English, Mahshahr Branch, Islamic Azad University, Mahshahr, Iran

Email: taherbahrani@yahoo.com

Abstract – Today, thanks to fast developments in audiovisual technologies, people can have easy access to various audiovisual programs even in remote areas where having access to teachers may be difficult. In the same line, the present research was set to investigate learners' attitudes toward the use of various audiovisual technologies which can provide authentic language input for language learning in both EFL and ESL contexts. As the matter of fact, the study focuses on different technologies as sources of language input in EFL contexts which lack social interaction as an established source of language input in ESL context. In this regard, a study was conducted with the help of twenty language learners in Iran. In fact, the research was based on a questionnaire which was given to twenty language learners to find out about the attitudes toward the use of different technologies. The results of the questionnaire showed that more than 82% of the participants had positive attitudes toward the use of various technologies. They believed that they have easy access to authentic language input which makes them familiar with the actual use of the language in the real world.

Keywords – Technology; Language learning; Attitude; Language input

1. Introduction

Based on the experience of many language learners in many EFL contexts, learning English is a very challenging issue. This is mainly because of the lack of social interaction in English outside the classroom setting which makes the situation difficult for language learners to practice what they learn in real world scenario. We also found many of our friends lacked motivation and they did not know how and where to advance their English skills except by waiting for teachers to feed them with an explicit instruction in the classroom. Some of my friends also had limited peer interaction in English at university. This was because students were not required to use English in meaningful ways outside the classroom. Later, when we were English teachers in different universities, we also found challenges with the English curriculum and teaching methodology.

Although the curriculum encouraged multiple English language skills, many teachers still based their teaching on grammar rules, rote learning, and textbook based lectures. Many teachers do not like to try new materials. In fact, what they do is to follow what has already been used for decades without changes. This is done regardless of the fact that some of these materials may not be suitable to enhance various language skills. Many English textbooks introduced by the teachers are dry, with a lot of grammar exercises and reading passages which do not relate to learners' lives and interests. As a result, learners find English classrooms very unpractical and boring. Yet, many language learners spend a lot of time watching movies in English and using the Internet. This can be used as an opportunity by the teachers to utilize these materials in their teaching. However, these English activities are usually overlooked and receive little support among teachers.

In this regard, the early use of different technologies such as computers in language learning constituted a natural extension and development of the work done in the audiovisual language labs. The pedagogical effectiveness of computer assisted language learning in formal and informal settings also began in direct proportion to the development of the capacities of computers.

Accordingly, the present study focuses on the effectiveness of different audiovisual technologies on language proficiency in EFL and ESL contexts. This is done based on the default assumption that EFL context lacks the social interaction in English which is considered to contribute to second language acquisition.

2. Review of the related literature

Most of the research which is related to the present study considers the use of technology and social interaction to enhance language learning based on the behaviorist and interactionist view of language learning.

The behaviorists consider learning the language through stimulus and response with the help of various technologies in informal or formal settings and the interactionists consider the interaction with the native speakers in the target language country or ESL context to enhance language learning.

In the same line, the early use of computers as a type of old technology in language learning both in informal and formal language environments constituted a natural extension and development of the work done in the audiovisual language labs. The pedagogical effectiveness of computer assisted language learning (CALL) in formal and informal settings also began in direct proportion to the development of the capacities of computers which can be traced back to 1960s.

In this regard, Adams, Morrison, and Reedy (1968) claim that CALL has the potential not only to supervise language learners' performance in informal settings but also to monitor, record, analyze, and summarize data about their learning. Considering the use of CALL in both formal and informal language settings, Keller (1987) also highlights the pedagogical values of the speed of electronic dictionaries because they are faster than paging manually through a conventional one. According to Keller, language learners can use computer dictionaries in their informal language learning based on the learner-centered approach. Decker (1976) also argues that most significantly, CALL provides instant feedback correcting drill exercises and tests.

It seems that Decker has based his arguments regarding the use of CALL in informal settings based on the behaviorist approach that emphasizes stimulus and response for habit formation. In other words, language learners use the computer which is a kind of technology in both formal and informal learning settings to do some repetition and drills which are believed by the behaviorists to boost language learning.

However, in many other cases computers as a kind of technology can offer access to authentic language input resources that can be used to engage language learners in formal as well as informal language learning settings in listening, reading, repetitions, sending emails, participating in different chatrooms, communicating in the language via the web, and filling in blanks but not in producing oral language (Egan, 1999). In this regard, the use of computer-assisted language learning programs to improve speaking proficiency through developing a software which require language learners produce the language orally has been studied by Egan (1999).

Most commercial computer programs designed for language learning require language learners to do some exercises such as filling blanks, choosing the correct answers, practicing in reading and listening to authentic written and spoken language, producing language by repeating words or sentences, recording their responses, and comparing them to native models (Egan, 1999). However, having language learners produce spoken language is more than doing the above-mentioned activities or just recording one's voice and comparing it to native models by the means of computers. Accordingly, improving speaking proficiency and the acquisition of communicative language skills make it necessary to develop a software that is speech-enabled. Moreover, it should engage learners in interactive speaking activities both in formal and informal settings of language learning by computers.

Although Egan's software leads language learners to produce speech through interaction with computer, it mainly does so base on stimulus and response which reflect the behaviorist approach. Language learners seem to be in charge of their learning but the authentic language input and what the learners can gain is limited to what the software offers. This limitation may break the

interaction when the software lacks the necessary stimulus or response. In other words, the critical point is that this interaction can be limited at times. Actually, if one stimulus is not recognized by the software, the interaction may fail or may be directed to something rather than what the language learner intends.

In recent years, the use of "non-desktop" technologies such as audio/visual mass media, for example, TV is also attracting increasing interest amongst researchers in informal, adult and lifelong learning and second language acquisition (Milton, 2002; Evans, 2006; Mackenzie, 1997; Pemberton et al., 2004). According to Milton (2002), mass media technologies can give the teachers as well as the learners a wide variety of activities and experiences that can support language learning in informal settings as well as the formal settings of the school.

Another study regarding the use of technology rather than computer in informal language learning was conducted by Pemberton *et al* (2004) which focused on learning the language in informal setting through interactive television. The main purpose of the study is to focus on the learning potential of iTV in informal settings, currently available in the UK and some other countries via cable and satellite technologies. According to the study, unlike conventional television, iTV allows some level of user interactivity, providing new facilities for information retrieval, and communication.

In order to support the great potentiality of iTV for language learning in informal settings, the study was based on a sound pedagogical framework that was derived from learners' interests, motivations, and learning styles. Moreover, the study considered the possibility of using iTV in informal settings based on different language learning theories.

Considering the above-mentioned researches, the existing gap related to the literature review which the present research tries to fill is that none of the reviewed researches considered EFL context which has no social context similar to that of the ESL context. However, the question to be answered by the present research is that in EFL context in which no social interaction with the native speakers exist in informal setting and language learners can access and exposure to authentic language input through different technologies help to improve EFL learner's language proficiency. This will be answered based the students' attitudes toward the use of various technologies.

3. Methodology

To obtain more empirical evidence on learners' attitudes and motivation toward the application of different technologies such as computers to have access to authentic language input, a survey was conducted.

Participants

The participants in this survey were 75 language learners including both males and females majoring in TEFL. The participants were selected randomly from different proficiency levels.

Instruments

This research utilizes qualitative research methodology. In this relation, a sample questionnaire (see appendix I) which was verified prior to the main study was used as the instrument to collect the necessary data. The questionnaire included 10 questions regarding language learners ideas about utilizing various audiovisual technologies to have easy access to authentic language input for language learning. It should be mentioned that 4 of the items are related to the improvement of different language skills via the application of different technologies such as computers

Procedure

The qualitative method of data collection was utilized through the use of a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to investigate language learner' attitudes and motivation towards the use of different technologies such as computers in language learning. Before the actual data collection was conducted, a pilot study was carried out to assure the validity of the questionnaire. To this end, the questionnaire was given to 17 trial language learners majoring in TEFL. Then, the questionnaire was modified in order to achieve better results.

After the pilot study and the modification of the questionnaire, it was distributed to 75 language learners including both males and females at 2 different universities in an EFL context collect the necessary data.

4. Results

The results obtained from the questionnaire can be summarized as follow:

- 82% of the participants in the study employed various technologies such as computers, CD and DVD players along with computer based technologies such as the internet, face book, and twitter for language learning. Accordingly, the participants had a positive attitude towards the use of computer and computer based technologies.
- 76% of the participants acknowledged that they utilize computer for the improvement of speaking proficiency and listening comprehension more than the other language skills.
- 18% of the participants had a negative attitude toward the use of different technologies. Based on their comments, they preferred traditional print material accompanied with audio or video rather than new technologies. However, those

who said no to the use of technologies in language learning had no specific reason for that to be reported here.

Thanks to the rapid developments in computer technology, language learners can also utilize various CALL-based programs in informal language learning setting without always having to wait for the teachers to feed the with language learning ingredients.

To sum up, the study tried to add more light on the current pedagogic rationale of incorporating different technologies into language learning. However, the study could be expanded to find out the possible problems associated to the use of different technologies in language learning.

5. Conclusion

With the ever-lasting development in various audiovisual technologies, having access to different audiovisual material has become possible even in remote areas where having access to teachers may be difficult. In the same line, various programs from different technologies can be utilized as sources of authentic language input for the very purpose of language learning at different proficiency levels. In fact, various authentic materials can be utilized as appropriate language input source in EFL context which lacks social interaction in English as a source of authentic language input.

In view of the above, the present study aimed at investigating language learners' attitudes towards the use of different technologies as authentic sources of language input. Actually, the study examined a broad concept that whether technology could be an alternative source of language input rather than social interaction which does not exist in EFL context or not. According to the results obtained from a survey, 82% of the language learners had a positive attitude towards the use of technology for language learning. They believed that the use of technology can optimize language learning.

References

- Adams, E., Morrison, H., & Reddy, J. (1968). Conversation with a computer as a technique of language instruction. *MLJ*, 52, 3-16.
- Bell, D. M. (2003). TV news in the EFL/ESL Classroom: Criteria for Selection. *TESL-EJ*, 7 (3). pp. 1-17. Available at: <http://www-writing.berkeley.edu/TESL-EJ/ej27/a2.html>. Accessed, February 23, 2007.
- Brinton, D., & Gaskill, W. (1978). Using News Broadcast in EFL/ESL classroom. *TESOL Quarterly*, 12 (2), 403-415.
- Cauldwell, R. M. (1996). Direct encounters with fast speech on CD-Audio to teach listening. *System*, 24(4), 521-528.
- Decker, H. (1976). Computer-aided instruction in French syntax. *MLJ*, 60, 263-273.
- Evans, C. (2006). Using TV News to Integrate the Four Skills: A Guide for EFL Teachers.
- Keller, H. (1987). Pedagogical wishes for a machine dictionary: an example from Russia. *MLJ*, 71, 12-17.
- Krashen, S. (1981). *Language Acquisition and Language Education*, Prentice Hall International, New York.
- Mackenzie, A. S. (1997). Using CNN News Video in the EFL Classroom. *The Internet TESL Journal*, 3 (2). Available at: <http://www.aitwech.ac.jp/~iteslj/>. Accessed February 21, 2006.

- Milton, J. (2002). Literature Review in Languages, Technology and Learning. *Nesta Future Lab Series: Report1*.
- Pemberton, L., & Fallahkhair, S., & Masthoff, G. (2004). Toward a theoretical framework for informal language learning via interactive television. *In proceeding of CELDA journal.2004*.
- Asher, J. J. *Learning Another Language Through Actions*. San José, California: AccuPrint, 1979.
- Bowen, T. *Methodology Challenge. What is Audiolingualism?* Onestopenglish. Macmillan. accessed 20 July 2010 <www.onestopenglish.com/Teacher_Support/Methodology/Archive/teachingapproaches/audiolingualism.htm>.
- Harmer, J. *The Practice of English Language Teaching*. Harlow: Longman House, 1995.
- Lozanov, G. *Suggestology and Outlines of Suggestopedy*. New York: Gordon and Breach, 1978.
- Nunan, D. *Language Teaching Methodology. A textbook for teachers*. London: Pearson Education Ltd, 2000.
- Stern, H. H. *Fundamental Concepts of Language Teaching*. England: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- Widdowson, H. G. *Aspects of Language Teaching*. Eng;and: Oxford University Press, 1990.

Appendix I

Please, mark agree (A) or disagree (D) for each question.

N	Question	A	D
1	I like the use of different technologies because it motivates me		
2	Various technologies provide different exercises for language learning		
3	Different technologies provides authentic input in formal and informal language learning settings		
4	I can learn better by the use of different technologies		
5	I use computer technology for error correction		
6	I do not need to carry lots of materials		
7	I have access to English easily		
8	I can improve language learners' speaking proficiency		
9	I can improve language learners' listening comprehension		
10	I can improve language learners' reading ability		