

Dealing with Teachers' Technophobia in Classroom

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Abstract – This paper addresses the phenomenon of technophobia which is a discouraging factor that obstructs the successful application of technology among the teachers. In doing so, it tries to look into the factors causing this sort of anxiety by considering some teachers' experiences. It, then, analyzing these factors wants to provide some preferred solutions. Mostly, it seems that society's expectations from educational systems and instructors to use computer in class with minimal anxiety has caused such critical situations for some instructors. It is observed that the use of technology is determined by a wide range of factors, ranging from external factors such as access to appropriate materials and professional development opportunities to more internal factors such as awareness of the benefits of technology and personal attitudes towards technological innovations, and the persistence of traditional education in some educational settings due to the absence of professional training leads the researcher to the conclusion that it is necessary to train teachers about new technologies, so that the contents to be produced can be used letting instructors to relieve from computer anxiety.

Keywords: technophobia; teachers; professional development; anxiety.

1. Introduction

I have recently been working on language anxiety among learners in English classes, and there were explored some sources of it that could be dealt with by teachers in order to lessen the negative effect of it on students. Having in mind this learner specific anxiety, I have hardly thought of teacher specific anxiety that could exist in teaching environment among teachers. So, it was interesting for me to face up this topic in CALT class. As the issue was being introduced in the class, I was thinking of the contribution of technology and computer to this sort of anxiety and was convinced that teacher anxiety could be mainly formed by facing up with technology. Nowadays, changes in society's expectations from educational systems mean that instructors need to be able to use computers in education with minimal anxiety. It is an expectation expressed by parents of the students and students themselves.

Defined generally as the fear of technology, technophobia can be the discouraging factor that obstructs the successful application of technology in any field. Brosnan (1998) defines technophobia as a negative affective and attitudinal response to technology which the technophobe acknowledges to be irrational.

In this paper the writer tries by taking into account the previous literature on teacher technophobia explore the issue by considering the ideas and suggestions of teachers themselves in order to come up with some practical

solutions as to the problem of fear of technology among teachers.

2. Background

The majority of reviewed studies indicate the effectiveness of individual technologies used in the language classroom, instructors' and students' use of computer technology in their teaching and learning, and their overall attitudes about integrating technology into instruction.

According to Weir (as cited by Bollentin, 1995), one of the reasons for people suffering from technophobia is that they found technology intimidating. Another reason given is that people suffer from technophobia because they are anxious of the change in environment in which they live and work. According to Gupta (2001), although "the idea of technophobia....sounds almost alien and unnatural" to the present generation, however; it is affecting many people and worse yet, they are not even aware that they are experiencing it.

Some studies have cited a positive correlation between the amount of computer knowledge, whether from personal computer use or from training, and positive attitudes towards computers (Bradford, 1984; Burke, 1986; Taylor, 1986 cited in Lam (2000). However, Sofranova (1993 cited in Lam, 2000) found that in spite of a positive attitude among teachers towards the use of computers (68%), they were used regularly by less than

8% of the teachers in the three Russian schools she studied.

In some other studies again the researchers have attempted to relate teachers' negative affect about computers with a variety of variables. Issa and Lorentz (1989) found that computer experience and computer exposure were negatively related to computer anxiety and positively related to computer attitudes. A study of vocational agriculture teachers by Kotrlík & Smith (1989) revealed that five variables were needed to predict computer anxiety including teacher's level of computer skills, principal's support of computer use, computer availability at school, perceived mathematical ability, and formal computer training.

In several other investigations into the technophobia of teachers, the general conclusion was that those preservice teachers with more computer experience showed less computer anxiety. As in one of those cases, Summers (1988) noted that many preservice teachers were highly apprehensive about computers and technology. On the other hand, many teachers claim that they have never worked in an environment where trying something genuinely innovative and giving real responsibility to learners is acceptable. According to Lam (2000), it's more like 'risk-phobia' - and teachers need a completely different experience of training themselves, to learn to be able to work in new ways with their students.

Overall, these studies have shown that the use of technology is determined by a wide range of factors, ranging from external factors such as access to appropriate materials and professional development opportunities to more internal factors such as awareness of the benefits of technology and personal attitudes towards technological innovations.

3. Factors Contributing to Teachers' Fear of Technology

3.1 Lack of knowledge about teaching L2 with computers

Some teachers talk about the lack of knowledge about applying computers to language teaching as their main reason for not using computers. In research about the perceptions of instructional materials, classroom teachers generally demonstrated little knowledge of the technologies (Odabasi & Namlu, 1997 cited in Asan, 2003). This problem is partly because many currently working teachers received their teaching certificates prior to the time when computer education was not available to them. Teachers felt a need for computer training, which most of them did not get.

3.2 Lack of access to computers

Access to computers at home and at schools is seen as important by many teachers. In some cases, a lack of access to computers discourages the instructors from integrating them into their teaching. Some teachers have computers in their workplace, but they are not available for class use, only for student word processing. Some do not have access to the software programs used by the

students, who are expected to go on their own to the lab; therefore, these teachers are not **aware** of what benefits using computers could bring to their students.

3.3 Lack of confidence in computer skills

Some teachers are uncomfortable with using computers in front of a class because they have no experience with computers. One teacher says:

If you're a teacher, you don't want to step into a classroom with something you don't know how it works, because you look like an idiot. It's already stressful to use something in a classroom, but if you don't know [how to use it], that's adding more stress.

According to Swain (1999) this lack of confidence in their computer skills suggests that these teachers do not see their students as a resource. They seemed to prefer the traditional role of the teacher as expert, which could imply that their discomfort was perhaps not so much with the lack of computer skills, as they claimed, but rather with the idea of relinquishing their expert role (see Warschauer, Turbee, & Roberts, 1996).

3.4 Inadequacy for students' needs

Another reason for not using computers is the perception that computers cannot meet the students' needs. Some of the instructors have seen some computer programs, but they think that they are pretty stupid and too mechanical, and that computers are not fast enough or language-rich enough. When the teachers who do not use computers are asked whether they would use computers if circumstances were different, they say no again. Some teachers express reluctance to use computers because they do not feel comfortable with the computer, yet some others who still have reservations admit seeing some benefits to using the computer, such as giving students access to other students or practicing writing skills, but they are not yet convinced of any other advantages.

3.5 The attitude of computer introducer

Some teachers do not hold a positive attitude and do not feel comfortable with computers because they have not been introduced properly to computers. Weil et al. (1990), stressing the important role played by the "introducer" of technology in the eventual development of technophobia, found that the likelihood of technophobic reactions could be reduced if the "introducer" of technology held a positive attitude about technology and felt skilled and comfortable with computers.

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) study (Martinez & Mead, 1988 as cited in Rosen & Weft, 1995) indicated that even the computer coordinators who were surveyed did not feel that they have the skills and preparation to teach computing. If the coordinators do not feel prepared, then the classroom teacher, who the ETS study showed was the most likely "introducer" of technology, must feel even less competent. This places the students at a severe disadvantage. They are going to learn about computers and technology from role models who are themselves

uncomfortable around computers and who may be hesitant to teach them in the first place.

4. How to Overcome the Fear of Technology

If I want to have a look back at my own period of teaching experience, I could remember some instructors at my around whether at university or language institutes who have once experienced a period of hatred and extreme dislike towards computer application in class, and now are in favor of it and among the extreme supporters of it. I remember I asked them about the reasons of their change in attitude, and there were some interesting points and tips in their answers that are helpful for the instructors who are experiencing such fears and want to get rid of it in order to feel at home with the idea of technology application in class. A typical comment was:

"The thing that changed my mind about computer was someone who led me through the process letting me do it rather than telling me what to do...an instructor who put my hands on a computer and let me play."

Studies of technophobia in teachers provide some indicators of preferred solutions. According to Rosen and Weil (1990) computerphobia exists and is fixable. The question that then arises is *how* this factor may be reduced in technophobic teachers. Some of the suggestions for reducing technophobia include the idea of training managerial level personnel first to provide positive role models (Davidson and Walley, 1984 cited in Russell & Bradley, 1997), and using psychotherapy (Rosen and Weil, 1990 cited in Russell & Bradley, 1997). Rosen and Weil (1995) urge the use of confident computer users as role models for cyberphobic teachers, and Bloom (1985) maintains that cyberphobia can be reduced in education trainees by the use of skill building, including relaxation, practice and provision of basic facts about computers. However, a perceived limitation of these studies was that teachers' experiences and preferences were given inadequate consideration as a basis for the courses of intervention suggested. In a review of the literature relevant to cyberphobia and school teachers indicated to the authors that it was necessary to ascertain not only the levels and nature of cyberphobia in teachers, but to allow teachers to suggest how it might be reduced. Of course, it is not necessary for everyone to adopt technology to the extreme of being a technophile. In most educational settings, though, it is impossible to ignore new developments, which change the way we communicate and complete necessary responsibilities.

So, the stories of people who have experienced the metamorphosis from technophobe to technophile can offer lessons for us all and also help the writer to find solutions to the problems mentioned above. After categorizing the reflection of teachers and finding the common points the following tips could be suggested:

4.1 Application of skill building strategies

One practical approach to get gradually rid of technophobia for teachers according to Bloom (1985) is to make use of the strategies including relaxation,

practice and provision of basic facts about computers that comprise the skill building strategies. It could include multisensory techniques, as mentioned in Gorjian, Alipour and Saffarian (2012) that help the teachers make students understand more easily the concepts. It can also involve considering technology as an artistic ability in which the arts, as mentioned in Dickinson (1999 cited in Gorjian et al, 2012), are taken seriously as modes of learning and methods of teaching.

4.2 Application of Role Models

Rosen and Weil (1995) urge the use of confident computer users as role models for technophobic teachers. These role models must themselves feel at home with technology because a technophobic instructor will pass these attitudes and feelings to the learner. They should also be calm, clear, and very open to questions. These role models should walk the technophobic teachers through the process of using a technological device first with them pushing the buttons. Then these trainers should supervise the teachers doing the steps by themselves. They should also consider immediacy in their training sessions as a valuable characteristic of successful training where they help teachers at the moment they are having problems.

4.3 Asking for help to avoid technophobia

There is always someone available in a school to offer technological help. Every school has several technology savvy teachers today. Some schools even have on-site technology integration specialists or coaches. Do not be afraid to ask for help, because this leads to a better understanding. Just like teachers tell their students every day, there is no such thing as a dumb question.

4.4 Learning technology from students

This does not lead to students thinking their teachers are not in control of the classroom. Students love it when they can share their knowledge with others, especially their teacher. Many a teacher has learned new strategies and techniques from students as the students, according to Bahrani (2012), are found to show mostly positive attitude to computer use in class.

4.5 Communicating through commonly used online means as the first application

According to Milton (2002 cited in Bahrani, 2012), 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. Communication especially through email as the first application is cited by teachers to cause further desire to have frequent and convenient communication with the others, such as family members and friends, as well. It seems that after using computer for this purpose, the transition to other applications gets much easier.

5. Conclusion

Overall, examining the instructors' experiences using technologies and their views of technology integration have shown that the use of technology is determined by a wide range of factors, ranging from external factors such as access to appropriate materials and professional development opportunities to more internal factors such as awareness of the benefits of technology and personal attitudes towards technological innovations. It is found that effective computer-based education requires teacher access to computers, together with their confident and competent usage.

It is observed that the integration of computers into existing subjects is proceeding slowly, and even the persistence of traditional education in some educational settings due to the absence of professional training leads the researcher to the conclusion that it is necessary to train teachers about new technologies, so that the infrastructures to be put into place and the contents to be produced can be used, and as Pelgrum and Plomp (1991) declare this gradual forward moving is due to lack of hardware, lack of software, insufficient time to learn about computers, and insufficient time to create lessons in which computers are used. To these problems, we would add a lack of confidence in teachers' use of computers in school, and insufficient data concerning teachers' views of relevant professional development programs. At the same time, it is witnessed that teachers' decisions regarding technology use could be based not on fear but on personal views, and not in all cases we can label such problem as technophobia.

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