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ICT in Foreign Language Teaching and Learning: Benefits and Challenges

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Abstract

The use of ICT in the Foreign Language Teaching and Learning is very important for providing opportunities for teachers and students to learn and operate in an information age. Education, particularly foreign language teaching has to adapt and renew itself to be compatible with the globalized society. This study aims to analyze the use of ICT in foreign language teaching and learning, which are the benefits, the main advantages of ICT and the challenges of ICT in foreign language. The recognition and implementation of ICT in teaching constitutes an integration challenges for our society. One of priorities of the Education in Albania is the integration of ICT in education, so the use of ICT in language teaching and learning seems to have become a prerequisite to the modernization of the education system and learning methods. Using authentic material provided by the internet helps students to be better in communication and to be in contact with the culture of the country and people whose language they study.

Keywords: ICT, foreign, language, teaching, learning.

Introduction

ICT (Information and Communication Technology) has penetrated into every sector of life, and the teaching of foreign languages is included in this renewal, benefiting from it but also facing new challenges in the learning process from the introduction of ICT. In this context, we emphasize that the teaching and learning of foreign languages is currently seeking an update of the pedagogical context of teaching, a new environment created by the use of ICT, and a revision of the roles of the main actors in this process: teachers and students. Graddol (1997, 16) states that ""technology lies at the heart of the globalization process; affecting work and culture…". Specifically, in the Albanian educational reality, the implementation of ICT

in the teaching of foreign languages poses an integration challenge, especially in semirural and underdeveloped rural areas. On the other hand, the international experience of developed countries shows successful results, which relate to an effective use of ICT in classrooms where a foreign language is being learned. Albanian teachers have training deficiencies and possess little technological competence, and therefore this study takes on special importance due to the specific data that will be analyzed in this case study. Today's society, defined as the knowledge society, has taken an irreversible path, that of the human communication revolution, which has its origin precisely in the massive use of the Internet and new technological devices. Teaching foreign languages continues to be part of dynamic changes and the application of modern strategies in view of the renewal of education, knowledge, and changes in the culture of learning.

Literature Review

The use of ICT in teaching and learning of foreign languages has brought a revolutionary by making knowledge more accessible to all students as those who live in the city and those who live in the village. Application of ICT in MGJH (TFL) provides benefits for students as ICT increases their conceptual and perceptive skills by facilitating learning. ICT brings dynamism and on the other hand puts the student in control allowing independent development progress (Mexhuani, 2014, 7). Use of ICT in the teaching of foreign languages in the classroom promotes cooperation and here we consider an important element of foreign language cultural element. A student can visit an important cultural link or he/she can communicate with a native speaker through chat, forums, e-mail, Skype messenger, etc, by practicing the important skills of speaking and writing without barriers. When a student reaches to connect spiritually with the information, he/she feels better, reinforces the existing knowledge, the memory and feels like it was in the situation with a real interlocutor. It can be said that the Internet itself and the use of ICT in teaching and learning a foreign language can really facilitate overcoming obstacles which a student may encounter while learning it.

The foreign language teacher is becoming more and more a kind of multimedia. He/she uses different technologies related to specific media as book (images, words / writing) images (iconic-flashcards), videocassette (video), DVD (images and sound, subtitles), Cassettes (voice), teaching files, games, simulations and interaction, and didactic games. ICT enabled the great opportunities for teaching and learning foreign languages and techniques experimenting with new engagement strategy by teachers and students for a more independent and interactive orientation towards learning. In teaching and learning of foreign languages educational software and the Internet are used more and more. Different typologies of software can facilitate the practice of linguistic skill through exercises, games and simulations. Multimedia software, except the fact that enables the delivery of foreign language in its

authenticity opportunity also offers the best exercise of pronunciation and intonation.

Internet remains a very important source to find the audio-visual materials by facilitating a transversal use of language in different contexts. In foreign language teaching, ICT is of an added value because we have a fast access without time limit to different types of texts (text, audio, video), which can be used directly or indirectly through the learning process. We can manipulate digital data in whichever text (text, image, video) and so we can create new recourses; Another option could be "placed" virtually in another country, far away, in a small locality or leading major city; we create possible interaction with people on synchronously or asynchronously (chat, email, forum) way as well as immediate feedback type "soft".

New Cultural Context of Teaching and the Theoretical Framework

New context of foreign language teaching of enabled by the implementation and application of ICT in order to promote co-operation and communication, requires the adaptation of teachers and students with new educational reality. Essentially foreign language teaching through the use of ICT aims at promoting linguistic skill of reading, writing, speaking and listening but also the improvement of intercultural competence. Recent studies have shown that the application of ICT and particularly the use of the Internet for educational purposes, has improved rapidly the acquisition of foreign languages, has facilitated the teaching and learning process namely through the implementation of a new dimension of tools, such as Internet world (Erben, Ban, Castaneda, 2009, 81). Steve Thorne supports the idea that although Internet technologies have the same function in different countries, there are changes in the "culture of use" of them. References in this case have to do with the way technology is perceived in different social contexts. In the case of foreign language, teaching international experiences offer a wide variety of electronic communication are sometimes put in difficulties concerning the intercultural communication mediated by the Internet. We should point out the fact that teachers and students should have technical and non-technical skills to use technological tools, culture use. It may happen that the students are more capable than the teacher in the use of internet and computers and in this case the teacher should consider the students a benefit to the learning process.

Referring to Mark Prensky (2001) "*Our students have changed radically. Today's students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach"* it can say that the teachers have to change their methods, and the best thing to do is to combine the traditional methods with the alternative ones.

Materials and Methods

The research is being developed on the assumption of use, the implementation of ICT and finding the benefits and challenges faced by teachers and students during the teaching and learning of a foreign language. In this case study the instruments

used are questionnaires, surveys during school hours and occasional interviews with teachers. It was made possible the realization of a questionnaire addressed to students about the use of ICT in teaching and learning of foreign languages. Also observations were conducted during school classes as well as interviews with teachers to collect data and then to interpret them. They consulted materials addressing the problem of application of ICT in foreign language teaching

Sample: Samples taken in this study were 60 students 30 (or 50%) girls and 30 boys (or 50%) age 12-15 years randomly selected from two elementary schools of Elbasan, and one in the rural area, Pajovë. Selection of adolescents was made because they are more exposed to technology and spend hours surfing the web. A questionnaire with 10 questions was completed by students and data on the use of ICT in teaching and learning of foreign languages in the analysis were obtained and expressed in percentages. There were made also observations in foreign languages classes. We asked permission from DAR (Regional Education Directorate) Elbasan and school principals to realize the questionnaire in the first hour of the day on Wednesday, May 21, 2015. Participants were informed that students will fill out a questionnaire regarding learning a foreign language, participation it was not mandatory. For some of them it was the first time they were filling a questionnaire and were curious. They were informed that their anonymity and confidentiality will be protected.

Findings and Results

Students interviewed answered all the questions. The age of respondents was 12-15 years old. In this case study participated 30 boys (or 50%) and 30 girls (or 50%).

Questions Yes No

1 Does the ICT offer a support in teaching process? Yes No

2 Do you have a computer at school? Home? Yes No

3 Have you used audio-visual tools in class TV, DVD, projector? Yes No

4 Do you have a positive perception of integrating ICT in learning at foreign language? Yes No

5 Do you use the social webs to communicate with native speakers? Yes No

6 Do you prefer using ICT at class, do you feel more interested, motivated? Yes No

7 Do you use ICT on teachers' advice to do research or homework? Yes No

8 Do you use the ICT to learn new linguistic expressions? Yes No

9 Do you use the internet often? Yes No

10 Do you face challenges like integrating the ICT in teaching and learning process? Yes No

The sample's characteristics

Tabela 1. Age of respondents

Age (Years Old) Number Percentage

12 15 25%

13 15 25%

14 15 25%

15 15 25%

> *Total 60 100 %*

Figure 1. Age of respondents

Questions and Answers

To the first question of the questionnaire if ICT offers a support in teaching process, 80% of them answered yes and only 20% of them, the ones living in the rural area, answered no.

To the second question if they had computers at school and home, students respond 75% yes and 25% answered not.

Is there a positive perception for the integration of ICT in the teaching of foreign languages?

To the third question using audio-visual tools at learning a foreign language as TV, DVD, and projector, 67% of the city students answered yes and about 33% of students in the village answered no.

> *95% answered positively, and 5% negatively.*

Do you prefer learning with ICT; do you feel more motivated and interested?

Do you use social networks to communicate with native speakers?

100% of them prefer to use ICT during the learning and were more motivated and interested in the foreign language class.

About 91% of students had a Facebook account, 9% Twitter account and were regular users of social networks.

Do you use ICT according to the teachers' instructions to do research and homework on the internet?

Do you use ICT to develop language expressions?

Students answered about 65% positively and 35% negatively.

46% of them expressed yes 54% no.

Tenth question: do you daily face challenges in integrating ICT in teaching / learning a foreign language 58% yes and 42% not.

Ninth question: do you use the Internet frequently? 88% said yes and 12% not very often.

Discussion

The results of the questionnaire filled in by the students of the two schools of Elbasan one in the city and the other in the village show preference for technology and particularly Internet use and computer. In foreign language classes, teaching technology motivates students and increases their interest in what they learn. Digital technology also has brought a real revolution, where the introduction of new technologies has proved a new approach to teaching foreign languages. Referring Salaberry (1996, 5-34) "new technologies promote a new approach in which the student takes an important role; he turns in an active participant in the construction of knowledge". Technology offers the advantages and benefits in the theoretical framework of the teaching and learning of foreign languages. Researchers Byron Reeves and Clifford Nass (1996, 5) have supported the idea that "*the interactivity of people with computers, television, the Internet and other media are the foundations of natural and social interactions of everyday life* ". The Internet is an important tool in the process of teaching and learning a foreign language and in the context of foreign language a very important embodied element is the culture. (Kern & Warschauer, 2000, 1-19) "At the core of sociocultural approaches and socio-cognitive ones, the research done on the learning of a foreign language through the computer, lays the potential of ICT as a functional facilitator tool of the interaction and communication between people".

Conclusions

Throughout the Internet, students can communicate through different social networks, share or write messages on Facebook, Twitter, e-mails, read daily newspaper, and consult new words in online electronic dictionaries, read books, ebook, or writing and reading programs. Students can improve their language skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. Benefits of using ICT in foreign language learning are numerous and there are many reasons to support their use in teaching and learning of a foreign language. Technology increases the dimensions of foreign language learning, involve students in interactive activities, the use of ICT helps teachers reach all students comprehensions in different ways. Students have to work in cooperation with one another and use their receptive and productive skills as a publishing newsletter, writing journals etc. Besides the benefits in using ICT in foreign language, teaching is full of challenging aspects. ICT being part of all the country's schools is a reform that stands as a crucial teaching helper and student support.

The ICT Challenges: The teacher may sometimes feel uncomfortable, when the Internet is slow, when he is not qualified and trained, when there is no institution or a network maintenance person when the lines are heavily loaded and there is no immediate access to the material. When computers are very old and do not offer many programs, lack of electricity or when a student has more technological competence than the teacher.

Recommendations

As the teacher and student too, should know the technology and use it for educational purposes, they should not abuse with the technology, without forgetting to combine the materials of the book with materials obtained from the Internet, or listen to the files from the CD room but also listen to file from the Internet, to exchange messages with native speaker, write essays and real-time communication. I will suggest for Albanian students teleconferencing and chat-line services, to improve reading habits by simply reading authentic materials on the web. Foreign language teachers should encourage students to use personal devices laptop, Ipod, MP3, and Smartphone as support in learning foreign language learning. Foreign language teachers need to renew teaching methods and to watch the students as active participants in the teaching process. According to prof. Kraja (2008, 312) "Teachers should be open to the inclusion of their students at all levels of the educational process, the student must be evolved actively in the learning process."

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