Telling ELT Tales out of School

Attitudes of L2 teachers towards Internet-based foreign language teaching

Sibel Hismanoğlu[a]*

[a]*European University of Lefke, Gemikonagi-Lefke, TRNC, Mersin 10, Turkey*

Abstract

This paper aims at finding out the attitudes of language teachers towards internet-based foreign language teaching. The study starts with a limited scope of the internet, then continues with the discussion of an experimental study, involving thirty L2 teachers at the English Preparatory School of the European University of Lefke and finishes with some recommendations made to overcome the challenges that the language teachers encounter in their language classroom.

© 2010 Published by Elsevier Ltd.

Keywords: the Internet; internet-based language teaching; web-based instruction; teacher attitudes; foreign language teaching

1. Introduction

In recent years, the internet has become one of the most prominent teaching tools and it has been amalgamated into educational settings to better engage students in learning. When adopted and integrated into learning and teaching properly, the internet may help to change the traditional teaching methods into more modern approach. An increasing number of teachers are involved in internet-integrated instruction in view of living in the digital era and teaching contemporary students (Fischer, 1999). Accordingly, it has attracted the attention of foreign language teachers, particularly in terms of integrating the internet into the curricula and courses since the web presents concurrent resources of cultural information and authentic materials in the target language (Lee, 2000).

Because the teachers are the key figures in the implementation of any innovation in education, it is important to assist them to successfully integrate the internet into their subject teaching. In doing so, the attitudes of L2 teachers toward internet- based language teaching should be explored in that attitudes are viewed as essential to the adaptation process of an innovation (Rogers, 1995). To put it differently, people will utilize an innovation like the internet if they believe that it will yield some relative benefit to the idea it supersedes. That is to state that teachers will be effective agents to be able to employ the web in the classroom when having the knowledge and attitude

* Tel.: +90-392-660-2000; fax: +90-392-660-2028
E-mail address: shismanoglu@eul.edu.tr

necessary to integrate it into the curriculum (Baylor and Ritchie, 2000). Thus, this body of research focused on the attitudes of L2 teachers toward internet-based language instruction through qualitative and quantitative research methodology.

2. The Internet in Language Teaching

Besides being a technological tool, the Internet can also be used as a pedagogical tool for enhancing language learning and teaching. As Wilson (1995) states, teachers are employing the Internet to access libraries throughout the world; to communicate with parents and students; to acquire instructional materials; to share lesson plans, curriculum ideas, and courseware; to connect students from different cultures to let them share their views and concerns about the world; and to download current information beneficial for classroom use.

Additionally, it becomes possible for the language teachers to teach the L2 culture via the web-based language activities, which allow the learners to be exposed to the target culture as well as the target language (Beltz, 2003; Thorne, 2003). Also, the Internet facilitates comprehension in listening and reading via audio and visual input and provides a vast range of authentic resources. Despite the potential of the internet, very few teachers are willing to incorporate it into their courses because of some internal and external factors, which partially forms the basis of this research.

3. Methodology

The aim of this study is to find out through qualitative and quantitative analysis of collected data about the attitudes of EFL teachers toward the use of the internet in language teaching and the factors stimulating or obstructing them to implement the web-based instruction.

3.1. Participants

As Best and Kahn (1998) states, numerical data is of great significance in quantitative research which is concerned with measuring and controlling numerically analyzable information. Thus, the strength of a quantitative research lies in its ability to quantify generalizable variables and measure factors in terms of amount, intensity, and frequency. About the population of this study, it is to be noted that 22 non-native, Turkish and Cypriot, and 8 native, English, American and Australian teachers working at the English Preparatory School at European University of Lefke participated in the study. Teachers' ages ranged from 23-45 -years-old with an average age of 34. The number of female teachers was greater than that of male teachers.

At the English Preparatory School (EPS) of the university, there are mainly two units, which are intensive English unit and faculty English unit. In the former unit, EPS instructors are required to teach minimum 20 hours per week which can sometimes exceed up to 22 hours. Two language teachers, called 'partners' share one class, the level of which can vary from A1 and A2 (breakthrough and way stage) to B1 and B2 (threshold and vantage). In the latter unit, the instructors teach English for Specific Purposes to a number of departments such as computer engineering, architecture, tourism, accounting, economics and finance, and so on. All instructors attend the regular meetings held by EPS administrators as to weekly announcements, schedules, materials, problems and solutions.

3.2. Research Instruments

3.2.1. Pre-Questionnaire

The teachers were invited to complete a pre-questionnaire before they started answering the post questionnaire section, which is of utmost importance in terms of preparing the participants for the rest of the survey (Munn & Drever, 2004). The questionnaire asked the subjects their age, gender, previous experience in the related field.

3.2.2. Post-Questionnaire

A post-questionnaire was administered to the teachers after their last English lesson in 2008- 2009 Academic Year. The purpose of the post-questionnaire was to find out English language teachers' attitudes towards the use of the internet in language teaching.

In such a qualitative research, it is essential to endure the reliability and validity of the research instrument, which corresponds to the criteria of truthfulness- credibility, internal validity, transferability, external validity, and conformability to objectivity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Accordingly, the content validity of this questionnaire was established through a review of three professors working in universities in North Cyprus, and then some slight changes were made based on their recommendations. After all revisions, to make sure of the reliability, the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient was used and the reliability was (0.91) for the questionnaire, which indicates a high level of reliability.

3.2.3. Interviews

As Long (2005) suggests, interviews are a direct way of figuring out what people consider or practice. Thus, during the research, the researchers interviewed with some of the teachers who participated in the study. The teachers were interviewed individually by the researchers in their offices in the faculty buildings. The purpose of the interviews was to cross-check teachers' responses to the post-questionnaire and find out more information on the factors that impede their efficient use of the internet in language instruction.

Hence, interview questions contained two items:
1. What are the factors that impede the effective use of the internet in language teaching?
2. What are your recommendations to overcome such barriers?

3.3. Data Analysis

Thirty copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the targeted sample at the end of 2008- 2009 Academic Year to choose the suitable statement given five point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD) and the return rate was 100% and the data was tabulated and analyzed by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 16.00 version) and Microsoft Office Excel to come up with, as Munn& Drever (2004) suggest, more accurate and systematic description of the data.

4. Results

4.1. Post-questionnaire

Table 1. Distribution of mean scores on the attitudes of L2 teachers

	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error Mean
Item 1	4,7667	4,7667	0,05253
Item 2	4,1000	1,28124	0,13505
Item 3	4,6667	0,70312	0,07412
Item 4	4,2000	1,25600	0,13239
Item 5	4,3000	0,82721	0,08720
Item 6	4,5667	0,76511	0,08065
Item 7	4,4000	0,80448	0,08480
Item 8	3,8000	1,14362	0,12055
Item 9	4,2333	0,76511	0,08065
Overall attitude	**4,2960**	**0,69118**	**0,07286**

As can be seen from table 1, for most of the statements, the majority of the responses are on the agree side, which implies that most of the teachers contend the positive effect of the internet in language teaching. In particular, teachers expressed that they like using the internet, never avoid implementing it into their teaching, feel very comfortable while using the web and want to learn more about it. In addition, they stressed that the internet improve

their teaching and does not take much time in the classroom. They also stated that the curriculum should be changed to integrate more internet use.

4.2. Interviews

4.1.1. What are the factors that impede the effective use of the internet in language teaching?

In response to Question 1 regarding the factors impeding the effective use of the internet in language teaching, the participants cited the following challenges:

- Some teachers are inexperienced in using the internet as a pedagogical tool also unable to use the computers (Teacher, 3, 7, 18)
- The instructors may become frustrated due to the problems in telecommunication and power supply as there has been too frequent power or internet cut-off in North Cyprus (Teacher, 5, 8, 21, 25).
- New teachers may feel rather anxious as they even fear to conduct a lesson in traditional ways (Teacher, 2, 11).
- There may be problems in maintaining control over the learners as the internet has a complex and disorganized nature (Teacher, 2, 6, 7).
- The insufficient integration of the internet in the recent curriculum hinders the effective employment of the web in language teaching (Teacher, 7,5)
- To be successful in teaching language via internet-based tasks, teachers will need more time and energy (Teacher, 4, 7, 8, 11, 21).

4.1.2. What are your recommendations to overcome such barriers?

In relation to Question 2 as to the recommendations cited by L2 teachers to overcome aforementioned challenges, they postulated several suggestions. To illustrate:

- Providing training facilities more based on educational technology (Teacher 2, 7).
- Encouraging teachers to be involved in blogs or read online journals and magazines (Teacher 5, 6, 11).
- Supplying private or government funding to the schools at all levels (Teacher, 4, 8, 21).
- Incorporating courses designed through the internet into the curriculum (Teacher, 8, 11, 23).

The above stated barriers and recommendations will be discussed in the light of current literature in section 5.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the research reveal that most of the teachers have positive attitudes toward using the internet and that they are aware of the potential of the internet implementation in language education by going far beyond the traditional concepts and methodologies. As Handal (2004) states, positive beliefs and attitudes largely contribute to teachers' implementing a new innovation. If teachers'attitudes are not considered as an essential cognitive and affective phenemona in the way of innovation-adoptation process, some unsuccessful outcomes become inevitable (Fullan, 1993; Begg, 2000) since the teachers would feel uncomfortable with technology due to high anxiety and lack of confidence (Snoeyink and Ertmer, 2001).

However, a great number of factors affect the successful integration of this innovation in language teaching process. In reviewing the literature, the impediments posted by language teachers are analyzed in previous studies. Barriers regarding the institution involve funding (Fabry and Higgs, 1997), technical support, accessibility (Fabry and Higgs, 1997), sufficient knowledge and experience (Pelgrum, 2001), training (Fabry and Higgs, 1997) and so forth.

In accordance with the proposed remedies, the most striking one is training, that is, continuous professional development, which would promote the achievement in the implementation of internet use in language instruction. To improve language teachers' internet literacy and competency, training programs should be organized based on the needs of L2 teachers.

References

Baylor, A.L & D. Ritchie. (2002). What factors facilitate teacher skill, teacher morale, and perceived student learning in technology-using classrooms?. *Computers & Education,* 39, 395–414.

Beggs, T.A. (2000). Influences and barriers to the adoption of instructional technology. In *Proceedings of the mid-south instructional technology conference*. ERIC Document Reproduction Service no. ED446764.

Belz, J.A. (2003). Linguistic perspectives on the development of intercultural competence in telecollaboration. *Language Learning & Technology,* **7**(2), 68–117 Retrieved September 17, 2004, from http://llt.msu.edu/vol7num2/belz/default.html.

Best, J., & Kahn, J. (1998). Research in education. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (Eds.). (2000). Handbook of qualitative research (2nd edition). Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications.

Fabry, D., & Higgs, J. (1997). Barriers to the effective use of technology in education. *Journal of Educational Computing,* 17(4), 385–395.

Fischer, R. (1999). Computer applications and research agendas: Another dimension in professional advancement. *CALICO Journal,* 16(4), 559–571.

Fullan, M. (1993). *Changing forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London: Falmer Press.

Handal, B. (2004). Teachers' instructional beliefs about integrating educational technology. *E-Journal of Instructional Science and Technology,* 17. Retrieved May 20, 2007, from http://www.usq.edu.au/electpub/e jist/docs/Vol7_No1/Commentary/.Teachers_ins_beliefs.htm.

Lee, L. (2000). Using Internet to enhance foreign language teaching and learning. Retrieved June 15, 2007, from http://www.unh.edu/spanish/lina/internet1.html.

Munn, P & Drever, E. (2004). Using questionnaires in small scale research. Beginners' guide. Edinburgh: SCRE.

Rogers, M.E. (1995). Diffusion of Innovations (4th ed.). New York: The Free Press.

Snoeyink, R., & Ertmer, P. (2001). Thrust into technology: How veteran teachers respond. *Journal of Educational Technology Systems,* 30(1), 85–111.

Thorne, S.L. (2003). Artifacts and cultures-of-use in intercultural communication. *Language Learning & Technology,* **7**(2), 38–67 Retrieved September 17, 2004, from http://llt.msu.edu/vol7num2/thorne/default.html.

Wilson, T. F. (1995). The Internet at Eagan High School. T.H.E. Journal, 22(9), 75-79.

Appendix A. Questionnaire for Students of English Language Teaching Department

With this survey, we hope to collect data about the attitudes of prospective EFL teachers at both formal and distance higher education context toward ICT integration. The questionnaire consists of two parts. In the first part, you are asked to fill in your personal details. In the second part, you are requested to read nine statements below and then rank the items between 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

(1=totally disagree   2= disagree   3= no strong opinion   4= agree   5= strongly agree)

Attitudes to the internet use in language teaching	1	2	3	4	5
1. I enjoy using the internet.					
2. I think using the internet saves time in class.					
3. I know that the internet can help me to learn many new things.					
4. Using the internet does not intimidate or threaten me.					
5. I feel very confident when it comes to working with the internet in class.					
6. I want to learn more about using the internet in class.					
7. I believe that the internet can really improve my teaching practice.					
8. Changing the curriculum to integrate the internet is possible.					
9. The internet does not break down too often to be of very much use.					

Thank you very much for your collaboration.

Sibel Hismanoglu