

The Use of Technology in English Language

Teaching: Myanmar Context

Ni Ni Hlaing¹

¹Professor, Head of English Department, Dean of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Mandalay

University of Distance Education, Ministry of Education, Myanmar

E-mail: ninihlaing59@gmail.com

Abstract

With the rapid growth of science and technology, the use of technology in language teaching has created a favorable context for reforming and exploring English language teaching models in the new age. This trend features the use of audio, visual, and animation effects in the English language teaching classrooms. In Myanmar and elsewhere in the non-native speaking countries, English is used as a second or foreign language. With the spread and development of English around the world, it has become an important means of communication among the people of different cultures and languages. This talk aims to present how different technology and internet help to teach language and the benefits as well as the limitations of technologically advanced classrooms. Moreover, teacher training has great impact on teaching. So, the researcher also finds out whether the teachers have any training on the use of technology or not. This talk aims to present the use of technology to English language teaching, some of the important advantages of the use of technology and to bring out the problems faced by both teachers and learners of English in the context of Myanmar. Despite some disadvantages of using technology in teaching, technology can be used effectively in the English language teaching classrooms. Overall, the non-native speakers of English as language teachers can teach English more efficiently if they use technology.

Keywords: English language teaching, technology, Myanmar context

Introduction

At present, the role and status of English in Myanmar is higher than ever as it is a medium of instruction and core curriculum in higher education institutions. As a number of English learners are growing up, different teaching methods have been used to see the effectiveness of English language teaching. The use of technology in the form of radio, TV and tape recording has been there for a long time. Since there are more and more English learners in Myanmar, the language teachers use a variety of teaching methods for effectiveness of their teaching. One method involves the use of technology in English language teaching in order to create English contexts. So it helps the students to get involved and learn according to their interests. It has been tested effective and has been widely accepted as a tool for English language teaching around the world.

As the popularity of English is expanding day by day and worldwide, the teachers of English feel the need of change in their language teaching methods. There are teachers who use the leading edge of technological and scientific development (Graddol, 1997), but the majority of teachers in Myanmar still teach in the traditional manner. However, this talk does not claim that none of these traditional manners are bad or damaging the students. In principle, they are proving to be useful even today. Here, technology refers to computer-based interactive applications that use both the hardware and software, allowing people to share their ideas and information. It is a combination of text, graphics, animation, video and sound.

Technology plays a positive role in improving activities and initiatives of students and teaching effect in the classrooms. Elaborating on the scope of technology, Higher Education institutions in Myanmar have already started implementing technology in education, and we also need to understand that there's no way to stop the evolution of technology; and rather than working on ways to separate technology from education, we rather need ways to combine them. Thus, technological innovations should go hand in hand with the growth of English and change the way in which we communicate.

Here, according to the survey, 78% of the participants who are university teachers (81% female) ranging in age from 35-59, state that teachers need to stop following the same old ways of teaching and they also admit that the world is changing and we need education that enhances that change. For this reason, it is important for language teachers to be aware of the latest and best equipment and to have all information of what is available in any given situations. They also mentioned that only 32% of the university teachers in Myanmar can use technology to create more colorful and stimulating language classes. According to 64% of the participants, there are many techniques applicable in various forms to English language teaching situations that now threaten to undermine the classroom completely as a place of study. There are various reasons why all language teachers and learners must know how to make use of the new technology. Most importantly, the new technologies have been discovered and disseminated so quickly that we cannot avoid their attraction and influence on all of us: both teachers and learners, even both native and non-native speakers of English.

The benefits of using technology in language learning

As the technology becomes more readily available to all of us, it seems appropriate that the language teachers should integrate it into their lesson and assessment planning in the same way they have been doing with video, film and computer-assisted learning strategies. The students are surrounded by technology and this technology can provide interesting and new approaches to language teaching because the use of technology for teaching and learning is moving their institution in the right direction (Healey et. al., 2008). In this way, the teachers of English can take full advantage of technology to teach English in the non-native speaking countries. The following are some of the important advantages of the use of technology in the context of Myanmar:

1. Technology motivates students to learn English

The traditional teaching methods are unpopular and less effective in the English language classrooms. Now technology, with the help of audio, visual and animation effects, motivates the students to learn English quickly and effectively. In this connection, 75% of the participants says,

"We also need to take into account that as human beings, we're very visual beings, that what we see tends to affect our judgment more, and technology helps in bringing that visual aspect to education. It makes an easy access to information regarding the culture of the target language. With such features as abundant-information and crossing time and space, technology creates a real-life or native speaking country context for English language teaching, which greatly cultivates students' interest and motivation in learning the language.

2. Technology develops students' communicative competence

It is hard to achieve the goal of learning English language through the traditional teaching because it hampers the students' capacity to understand the structure, meaning and function of the language. Such teaching method makes the students passive recipients of knowledge. But, now, technology has been a great help to integrate teaching and learning and provides the students greater incentives, carrying for students' future competitiveness at the workplace (Healey et. al., 2008). The teachers' instructions lead to the students' thought patterns and motivate the students' emotions. To 71% of the participants, the utilization of technology breaks the monotony of traditional class teaching and is enjoyable and stimulating. For example, the use of PowerPoint slides activates students' thinking and the capacity to comprehend the language. Its audio and visual effects help them to transform English learning into capacity cultivation. It creates a positive environment for the classroom activities such as group discussion, subject discussion and presentations, which can offer more opportunities for communication among students and between teachers and students. Thus, technology encourages students' positive thinking and communication skills in learning the language.

3. Technology widens students' knowledge about the culture of English

The use of technology, connected to the target culture (Graddol, 1997), offers the students with more information than textbooks, and helps them to be familiar with cultural backgrounds and real-life language materials, which can attract the students to learning. 67% of the participants said that the learners not only improve their language ability, but also learn the culture of the target language. Having the abundant information through the use of technology, the students can be

equipped with knowledge about the culture of the target language. This brings about an information sharing opportunity among students and makes them actively participate in the class activities that help the students to learn the language more quickly and effectively.

4. Technology improves teaching efficiency

Using technology in the language classrooms improves teaching contents and makes the best of class time. It breaks the teacher-centered traditional teaching method and fundamentally improves the teachers' teaching efficiency and has become central to language practice (Motteram, 2013). Over 70% of the participants said that for large classes, it is difficult for the students to have speaking communication, but the utilization of multi-media materializes the face-to-face teaching. The traditional teaching techniques only emphasize on teachers' instruction and provide limited information to the students. But technology goes beyond time and space, and creates more real-life environment for English teaching. It stimulates students' initiatives and economizes class time, providing more information to the students.

Disadvantages of the Use of Technology

There are many disadvantages of using multimedia technology in English language teaching despite it has facilitated the language teachers to improve their efficiency in teaching. The following are some of the disadvantages that this study has found in the context of Myanmar:

1. Lack of Communication between Teachers and Students

It is important that there should be a lot of communicative activities in the language classrooms. The teachers usually teach the students on how to pronounce certain words, to comprehend the sentences, to improve thought patterns and to express what they have learned. Though the use of technology in the language classrooms enhances the interest of the students through audio, visual and textual effects upon the students, it lacks interaction among the students and between teachers and students. The sound and image of multimedia technology affect the students' initiative to think and speak. Nearly 70% of the participants responded that the English

language class turns into a show case and the students are considered only as viewers rather than the active participants in the classrooms.

2. Lack of Real-Time Teaching

Language teaching requires lots of discussion formed through questions and answers between teachers and students. The teachers ask real-time questions and guide the students to think and to build up their capacity to give the answers. For example, "students need to be given maximum opportunity for authentic social interactions" (England, 2007). However, the teachers, with the help of technology, prepare the pre-arranged courseware for the language teaching that lacks real-time effect in the classrooms and the students become unable to give feedback to their teachers. 71% of the participants mentioned that it ignores the spontaneity in the students' mind that includes students' thinking, strengthening their learning capacity and solving problems. Thus, the cultivation of students' thinking capacity should be the major objective in teaching and using of multimedia technology. The students should be given opportunities for thinking, analyzing and exploring their own world.

3. Loss of Students' Logical Thinking

Because of technology in teaching makes the students understand the content easily, but their abstract thinking would be restricted and thereby their logical thinking would be faded away. In fact, the process of acquiring knowledge goes through perceptual stage and then rational stage, "developing critical thinking and autonomous learning while maximizing beneficial interactions" (Healey et. al., 2008). So the teachers should understand that knowledge of something from perceptual recognition to rational apprehension is very important in the students' learning process. Thus, 70% of the participants said that if the students only perceive the images and imagination shown on the screen, their abstract thinking would be restricted and logical thinking would fade away.

4. Expensive Way of Conducting Language Classes

Using technology in English language teaching is an expensive way of conducting language classes, which may not be fulfilled (Healey et. al., 2008). Keeping this fact in mind, the

administrators and policy makers should not only help language teachers realize "the potential benefits of technology, and prompt them to learn to use technology in their teaching," but they should understand the significant role of technology so they foster the learning process by providing the necessary structure, support, and infrastructure (Healey et. al., 2008). Over time, it tends to result in higher expenses though it will help create more effective education. The language learning programs start with expenses that are related to implementing new technologies in education. Therefore, 89% of the participants mentioned that the expenses usually entail hardware, software, maintenance and training for at least teachers and students. It is often the case in poorly-funded language classes that the hardware itself comes in through a one-time grant, with little funding leftover for software, training and maintenance.

Recommendations

Technology and language teaching have gone hand to hand for a long time and contributed as teaching tools in the language classrooms. However, technology is still a source of fears and insecurity for many teachers everywhere in Myanmar despite the latest developments applicable to language teaching such as websites, online journals, teaching methodology and so on. In this connection, Healey et. al.(2008) say, "The pace and extent of change in technology for teaching, however, have made it difficult for many teachers, teacher educators, and administrators to know how best to employ computers, other forms of digital technology, and the global interaction enabled by the Internet in language teaching". Myanmar Universities have tried to modernize their equipment, have spent large amount in technology and have proved the positive effects of integrating technology to language teaching. Still, there are many teachers in Myanmar who still have no interest to teach the language with technologies. Here, Motteram (2013) suggests, "There are many different aspects of technology that hamper education but there are resources that help learning, too". In order to improve the overall situations and make the language teachers aware of the function of technology in teaching, the following recommendations have been made.

1. Teachers should use all possible teaching aids and techniques

Some language teachers tend to depend on entirely on technology in teaching. But the reality in our context is that technology cannot be replaced by many other teaching methods. According to the data, in the similar way, it cannot also replace any other forms of teaching methods. The functions of other traditional forms of teaching instruments are equally important in English language teaching though technology has its unique advantages in teaching. For example, at our universities, the tape recorder still plays an important role in playing the listening materials. Thus, the language teachers are supposed to choose from the appropriate teaching instruments according to the requirements of the teaching contexts. However, "In the absence of teachers training to use technological tools in the classroom, EFL students will be unable to learn English as fast and effectively as they could with technology or as fast and effectively as their fellow students across the globe" (England, 2007). So, in the non-native English speaking countries, the teachers should integrate technology with the traditional teaching tools as they can play an important part in the successful English language teaching.

2. Teachers should not overuse technology

Many teachers believe that the more use of technology may give the better performance in language teaching. They think that technology may create better class environment, may motivate the students to participate in the class, and may help students access to the language materials. Though there are many advantages of using technology in teaching, it should be used as a supplementary instrument for the language teachers. It is essential to apply traditional teaching tools to effectively train the students' communicative competence in the classrooms. England (2007) suggests that teachers should avoid the temptation to use technologies without understanding the pedagogical implications of using them. If technology is utilized properly in teaching, without being overused, the students can be able to make full use of listening and speaking materials and develop their overall language skills. According to the responses of the Myanmar participants, the language teachers should introduce both traditional teaching instruments and technology to English language

teaching so that the students can have the overall training on their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Conclusion

The main purpose of using technology in language teaching is to promote students' motivation and learning interest in the English language. In the non-native English speaking context, this can be a practical way to get them involved in the language learning. To achieve this goal, the language teachers should create a favorable environment for English language teaching, which should be based on the availability of information and teaching materials. While using technology in teaching if students are not too dependent on their mother tongue, they should be motivated to communicate with each other in English. The process of English learning should be more student-centered and less time-consuming. The language teachers should maintain the students' communicative competence through technology. In conclusion, the utilization of technology can fully improve the students' thinking and practical language skills. This will ensure and fulfill an effective result of English language teaching. Despite some disadvantages of using technology in teaching, technology can be used effectively in the English language teaching classrooms. Overall, the non-native speakers of English as language teachers can teach English more efficiently if they use technology.

References

- England, L. (2007) Technology applications in English language teaching in Egyptian Universities: A developing relationship. *CALICO Journal*, 24.2 .
- Graddol, D. (1997) *The future of English: A guide to forecasting the popularity of the English language in the 21st century*. London: The British Council.
- Healey, D. et al. (2008) *TESOL technology standards framework*. Virginia: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Language, Inc.

Motteram, G. (2013). *Introduction innovations in learning technologies for English language teaching*. Ed. Gary Motteram. London: The British Council.

Author

Professor Ni Ni Hlaing

Head of English Department, Dean of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,

Mandalay University of Distance Education, Ministry of Education, Myanmar

E-mail: ninilaing59@gmail.com

มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏสุราษฎร์ธานี
Buriram Rajabhat University