INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY AS THE TEACHING AND LEARNING SPACE AMONG IRANIAN EFL TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT
It is widely noted that the new technology has brought a great relief to pedagogy and made learning processes easier, efficacious, relevant to life, and simplified. However, the benefits and versatility of technology are not as evident as it is with teaching and learning English. Accordingly, the current study is to examine the necessity of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and emphasize its importance as teaching and learning space in the contemporary digitalized day to day teaching of English language in language institutes. In practice, this study is a descriptive research of the survey type and an appraisal of the teaching of English language in some language institutes in Sirjan, Iran. To this end, 60 English language teachers were randomly selected from six language institutes. As for sampling, a simple random sampling technique was used. Regarding instruments, a validated questionnaire was used. To sum, the results revealed that information and communication technology has generally improved the teaching of English language in Iran. What is more, the majority of Iranian teachers preferred teaching with ICT tools. Nevertheless, according to the results, some teachers and students did not have enough access to ICT tools in some English language institutes.

Keywords: Communication Technology, Teaching English, Learning English

INTRODUCTION
Nowadays, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is one of the globally acknowledged learning and teaching space as well as one of the key propellants of globalization. Interestingly enough, it has offered the English language teachers the opportunity to leapfrog the archaic and parochial chalk and talk method to modern ways of teaching. On the other hand, the pragmatic approach of technology in teaching and learning problems has brought a great relief to pedagogy through the use of modern technology. In practice, teaching and learning processes are much easier, efficacious, real, applicable to practical situations, relevant to life, retentive, and simplified; however, it cannot replace the role played by teachers. According to (Njamanze, 2010) the technological innovations have gone hand in hand with the growth of language teaching especially English. As a matter of fact, with the aid of technological advancement, resounding improvement has been recorded in the manner in which teachers learn, communicate and discharge their duties.

Furthermore, the effect of technology has become huge in teaching and learning the language in addition to the instructor's role. In other words, the role of the instructor together with the role of the technology can undoubtedly lead to advanced learning results. It is explained that the use of ICT in language learning not only involves pedagogical changes for teachers, but also involves environmental and pedagogical changes for learners who are traditionally used to face-to-face teaching in classrooms (Korkut, 2012). It is widely noted that ICT has enhanced teachers’ professional knowledge, enabling planning and preparation for teaching to be more efficient and extending curriculum activities. Pedagogically, teachers’ exposure to ICT would improve the quality of teaching, cause drastic decline to students’ failure, develop and solidify students’ communicative competence.

What is more, it is widely said that teaching and learning opportunities can be expanded through appropriate application of technology. The recent upsurge of some technologies in teaching and learning has understandably salvaged learners from the quagmire of peremptory teachings; they can confirm whatever they were taught, practice repeatedly what they have learnt and determine the pace at which
they learn. Furthermore, ICT and new technologies can help development in learning of individual skills of learners that may seem more difficult with traditional and conventional method (Pour, 2013). Amazingly, one of the greatest breakthroughs of 21st century is growth of the internet. In fact, it has contributed to the growth of the English language and this has occurred at a time when computers are not no longer the exclusive domains of the dedicated few, but rather available to many. Roughly speaking, it is through English, as an international language, that most countries majorly spread and introduce their arts, culture, beliefs, sciences, findings, innovations, and expeditions. It is a language of wider communication used for several purposes and by different people. On the other hand, in teaching and learning process, learners are at the focal point. They are different entities with diverse backgrounds, learning experiences, perceptions, intellects and abilities, etc. That is to say, they are expected to be exposed to different patterns and methods of learning within and outside the classroom. It is in this sense that ICT becomes imperative as a companion in learning and teaching of English language.

On the whole, technology is constantly changing. In fact, change is the only constant thing in life. Thus, English teachers and learners should embrace the current trends of change in the educational system. That is, they should keep updated and learn how to use these technologies in their noble profession, for administrative and academic purposes. When these tools are introduced in classrooms, learning would definitely be facilitated, this can spur learners to make use of these tools individually, with this, learners can learn how to operate these tools and become better students. It is widely noted that the positive use of ICT makes students active participants rather than being passive in the class. Therefore, the main objectives of the current study are to examine the use of ICT as a changeable tool in the teaching and learning of English language in English language institutes, the appropriate application of these tools and address the inevitability of teachers to explore other ways of teaching alongside the traditional teaching and learning method.

**Research Questions**

Further to previous parts, this study is to provide answers to the following questions:

1. Does Information and Communication Technology (ICT) improve teaching of English language in Iran?
2. Do Iranian EFL teachers and students have enough access to the use of ICT tools in English language institutes?
3. Do Iranian EFL teachers prefer to teach with ICT tools?

**Literature Review**

Development in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has vastly transformed every sphere of life and permeated all human endeavors and actions. In fact, ICT includes the full range of computer hardware and software, telecommunication and cell phones, the internet and Web, wired and wireless networks, digital and video cameras, robotics, etc. which are used in storing, controlling, exchanging, transmitting, receiving of data or information. On the other hand, the fusion of technology and science makes English classes more interactive and collaborative. That is to say, teachers and students could keep in touch with the native speakers and authorities in the field. Additionally, they are given the opportunity to explore ideas and have knotty problems solved.

The term new technology includes communication techniques for language teaching in which the personal computer plays a central role (Davies & Hewer, 2012). Nevertheless, there are other technological tools that can be utilized in language learning besides computers. Each technological tool has its specific benefit and application with one of the four language parts (speaking, listening, reading, and writing). Regarding the effective utilization of the internet (Pickersgill, 2003) finds out that the ease of the internet access allows teachers to help students to become experts in searching for information rather than receiving fact. In other words, through the internet, students can work in team, execute different projects, participate in blog discussions, converse with other students in different schools and exchange opinions.

Interestingly enough, with the current trend of ICT invasion on education, English language teachers should update themselves on how to teach appropriately and effectively with the various ICT tools, devise
novel methods and techniques of teaching, think up unprecedented ways of evaluating themselves, the students and the methods of teaching. In fact, the impact of teachers without the modern technology in the impartation of knowledge in the classroom is never complete. In English language class, where teacher teaches with ICT tools, the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator who makes learning possible and convenient while ICT tools make learning retentive. Teachers constitute the facilitators and entrepreneurs in classroom with ICT learning environment (Jegede, 2008). Therefore, the input of the teacher combined with the infusion of technology would definitely cause desirable pedagogical output.

ICTs are essential tools in any educational system (Kalnina and Kangro, 2007). It reveals that ICT helps to increase the quality of education and meet the requirements set by the contemporary knowledge society. Information communicative technology tools have capacity and capability of offering unlimited objective educational advantages to each student, providing quality learning materials, creating autonomy of learning, supplying computer based questions and answers(programmed learning), permitting students to learn at their own pace and at different locations, increasing English teachers’ knowledge and widening their scope of teaching.

Additionally, it is enunciated that teachers and learners use a word processor to enable correcting and redrafting of an essay; they use PPT, flash and other software to prepare lectures or presentations; they use BBS, blog and computer conference to develop cross-cultural understanding (Chang & Zhao, 2011). Teachers’ optimal cooperation and dedication are needed for successful execution of ICT integration in schools. The reasons, objectives and goals for integrating technologies into the teaching of English language, the mode of application, the suitability and relevance of ICT tools to the subject matter to be taught, the condition of usage of the tools in schools, etc. should be lucid to teachers for effective implementation in real class. It is said that teachers are aware of the benefits inherent in integrating ICT into teaching and learning activities; nevertheless, they are unable to use the ICT tools at times.

Besides, it is clarified that technology is all about methods and the way people apply them in order to get results, and the act of bringing in different approaches to tackle a problem (Busen, 2013). With the use of ICT devices, teachers and learners can send, store, process, share and receive educative information from one location to another. Teachers can carry out other administrative duties with ease and within shortest period of time. It is explained that ICT provides opportunities for schools to communicate with one another through e-mail, chat rooms, and so on (Yusuf, 2005). There are several information and communicative tools that can be harnessed for efficient, productive and dynamic teaching like TV, Radio, Computers, Electronic Dictionaries, Audio Cassettes, CDs, DVDs, VCDs, E-mail, the Internet, Voice call, Skype, etc. Teachers’ prior knowledge about these devices and familiarization with their applications would be of help whenever sudden technical hitch crops up. The following ICT teaching tools are viable for teaching English language skills effectively and efficiently.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

Design and Setting
The current study is a descriptive research of the survey type. The target population for this study is English language teachers. The population comprised the English language teachers in the 6 selected language institutes. As for sampling, simple random sampling has been implemented and a total of 60 participants were ultimately selected.

Subjects
The participants of the study were 60 Iranian EFL teachers (both male and female) who had taught English from 1 to 10 years in different language institutes. Strictly, they have been teaching in 6 different private language institutes in Sirjan, a city in South-east of Iran. Their age range was between 20 and 36. Regarding the degree, 14 of the participants had English diploma certifications, 35 held B.A. in English teaching, literature, and translation; furthermore, 11 held M.A. in English teaching and translation.

Instruments
For the purpose of this study, a questionnaire was adopted from another study (Folasade, 2013) and adapted to the current study. Three parts of questionnaires contained three questions requiring
respondents to pick questions. It was constructed on a four point scale ranging from Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, and Strongly Disagree used to enable respondents indicate their level of agreement. The instrument was originally validated by another researcher and an expert so as to ensure the face and content validity. The reliability of the tests was estimated by Cronbach’s Alpha which saw (r = .57)

**Procedures**

The research questionnaire was distributed among 60 Iranian English teachers. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire. In the end, the collected data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentage scores.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Results**

The collected data were analyzed using the descriptive statistics of frequency counts and percentage scores. They were classified in three tables as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: The results of items regarding the first research question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items</strong></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Computer, teleconferencing and the internet etc. improve English language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer improves student’s writing skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational programmes on radio and television are effective means of teaching English language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students learn faster and better when ICT tools are applied.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to table 1 nearly 52(86.6%) of the respondents opined that computer, teleconferencing and the internet, etc. improve the teaching of English language while 8(13.3%) rebutted this view. Furthermore, 35(58%) of the respondents upheld the view that computer improves students’ writing skill whereas 25(41%) were against this view. Regarding educational programmes on radio and television, it seems that radio and television are effective media for English language teaching as 49(81.6%) agreed on this item whereas 11 (18.3%) disagreed. Concerning the last item, 56(93.3%) affirmed that students learn faster and better when ICT tools are applied whereas 4(6.6%) disagreed. From this result, it can apparently be concluded that ICT can rather improve English language teaching.

<table>
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<th>Table 2: The results of items regarding the second research question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Items</strong></td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>English language teachers in Iran are computer literate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language institutes in ytc siht are equipped with ICT tools for effective teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational system/Proprietors have facilitated the integration of ICT tools in teaching and learning in my language institutes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the research question 2 revealed that 38(63%) affirmed that English language teachers in ytc sihtare computer literate while 22(36.66%) disagreed on this item. Regarding the second item,
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25(41.66%) of the respondents agreed that language institutes are equipped with various ICT tools for effective teaching while 35(58.33%) asserted that language institutes are in wallowing in dearth of ICT tools. As for item three, it revealed that 37(61.66 %) of participants are in favor of this point; however, 22 (36.66%) of participants disagreed. It is clear-cut that the majority of the English language teachers in egaugnal institutes are incompetent in teaching with these modern technologies. Thus, adequate provisions for the procurement of these tools should be provided so as to pave the way for the use of these tools.

Table 3: The results of items regarding the third research question

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Agree Frequency</th>
<th>Agre Frequency %</th>
<th>Disagree Frequency</th>
<th>Disagree Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Computer literate teachers are at advantage over the illiterate ones.</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>76.66</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>18.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The traditional method of teaching is more effective than the use of ICT in the English language class.</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>31.66</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>68.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EFL teachers prefer the traditional method of teaching to ICT method.</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>48.33</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>51.66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As table 3 reveals, 49 (76.66%) of the respondents agreed that teachers who can manipulate computer are at advantage over their colleagues who cannot work with computer. In practice, they meant that using computer can have productive teaching outcomes than their unskilled counterparts. However, 11(18.33 %) disagreed on this item. As for the second item, 19(31.66%) of respondents preferred to use traditional teaching directed instruction to ICT, while 41(68.33%) desired to use ICT tools. Concerning the third item, 29 (48.33%) of the participants believed that EFL teachers prefer the traditional method of teaching to ICT method, on the other hand, 31(51.66%) did not believe so. From the disclosure of respondents it can easily be speculated that most of the EFL teachers tend to adhere to their own conventional methods of teaching despite their awareness on the unparalleled contributions of information and communicative technology on teaching and learning process.

Discussion and Conclusion

From the above mentioned findings, it can presumably be concluded that information and communicative tools (ICT) enhance, improve, and accelerate the teaching and learning of English language skills and strategies. Pedagogically, learning by-doing is considered the most effective way to learn, in particular learning a foreign language. Interestingly enough, the emergence of different technologies, specifically the internet has provided learners authentic learning experiences from experimentation to real-world problem solving (Lombardi, 2007). As the findings of this study revealed ICT may possibly pave the way for learning and encourage EFL students to mix institute lessons with their own studies and connect them with other students all over the world. What is more, the majority of English language teachers have mentioned that traditional methods of teaching and learning are not more effective than the use of ICT in English language class, they expressed that computer literate teachers are at advantage over the literate ones, yet they have not changed their stereotyped and old-rugged form of teaching. Sadly to note, some English language teachers have a slim access to the use of ICT, but the few ICT tools provided are not sufficient and are not linked to a central server. On the other hand, some teachers are not computer literate so as to present in their classes appropriately. One of the main problems is lack of exposure to ICT tools in emos of the institutes, insufficient ICT tools, and insufficiency make most of the teachers uncomfortable and not confident enough in operating these tools in the classrooms.

Despite the importance of ICT in education, it is widely noted that the teaching principles should be to appreciate new technologies in the areas and functions where they provide something decisively new and never let machines take over the role of the teacher or limit functions where more traditional ways are superior. Some teachers have widely believed that traditional teaching methods of teaching should not be sacrificed at the altar of ICT, it should not be accorded dominance at the expense of traditional teaching;
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it should not dominate class, but should serve as an assisting instrument rather than a target. Personally speaking, appropriate mixture of new technology and traditional method of teaching can be an ideal way of smoothing the process of teaching and learning.

New technology can undoubtedly and readily provide teaching and learning space for not only EFL teachers but also EFL learners in language institutes. The results of this paper have revealed that utilization of technology would ameliorate and support the teaching of language skills. In the same way, it infuses changes in the quality of language teaching, provides authentic online materials, allows access to data collection and grants privileges to upload, download or transfer of information, injects innovations to methods of teaching, broadens teachers’ knowledge on subject matter, permits theoretical and practical use of technology facilities.

Though Iranian English language teachers are acclimatized to incessant subject innovations, but tend to be recalcitrant to technological pedagogical innovations which could improve the quality of teaching.

Nearly the majority of EFL teachers are aware of the benefits and advantages of ICT in teaching English language; however, most of them are complacent about the chalk and talk method. It can be attributed to either the easiness of handling class in traditional method or the teachers’ resistance to change. Likewise, some teachers are not able to work on technological tools such as computer, thus, they prefer to adhere to traditional methods of teaching. Ineptness of some teachers to use technological tools can possibly be attributed to their lack of confidence contributed to their inability to use computers in their classrooms.

sediseB, it is widely stipulated that many teachers who do not consider themselves skillful enough in using ICT feel anxious about using it in front of the students who perhaps know more than they do. Some learners with personal computers and other ICT tools do not know how to make use of them; they do not know educative websites to log in. Some do not utilize them for educational purposes, they prefer to ponce about with these tools, while away time, surf the internet for frivolities and access chat rooms for non-educative purposes while some are unaware of its uses and importance.

By and large, some Iranian EFL teachers have presumably negative attitudes towards using technology. In practice, they should liberate themselves from negative disposition to ICT in which they are enmeshed, and partake in the new lease of life in which ICT has brought to teaching. If teachers have negative attitudes toward technology, providing them with excellent and up to date ICT facilities may not influence them to use it in their teaching (Buabeng-Andoh, 2012). This is the reason most of the English teachers cannot explore the ICT tools in institutes. Since some of the English teachers do not progress in ICT use, learners are not beneficiaries and bear the brunt. Therefore, they should have access to ICT though; access to ICT and the ability to use it cannot be possible without sufficient time, effective training and technical support. Therefore, all these must purposefully be put in place for effective results.

Although new technology is advantageous, some Iranian teachers and learners are unfit to raise their shoulders in today’s technologically competitive world. In effect, teachers and students should improve on their ICT skills either by self-training or with the help of luminaries. If teachers could cultivate positive attitude to ICT use, educational sector could probably witness a new lease of life. The traditional method (product model) which is teacher-centered should not be solely relied on, but be used alongside with the modern technological method (process model) which is learner-centered. By this, there will be improvement in learners’ linguistic competence, communicative competence and performances in examinations.

To sum up, it can be concluded that Iranian EFL teachers are interested in getting to know and using new technology in their classes; however, lack of skill in appropriate use of modern technology can vastly hinder the use of it. More importantly, EFL teachers should have their orientation changed about ICT and develop more positive attitude towards using ICT tools in the classrooms. Language institutes’ managers should provide the opportunity and encourage teachers to get to work on computer and different types of software in class. On the other sense, EFL teachers should encourage the students to team and individual work; thus, assignments should be given to students online while the teachers could score them online and correct assignments online. Therefore, the students have to work on the net and get familiar with it more.

All in all, organizing some workshops can be very fruitful to develop and guide EFL teachers towards
ICT use and keep teachers abreast of the contemporary trend in education and put them through on how to teach English language with ICT tools. What is more, language institutes should provide necessary ICT tools for effective teaching and learning by considering appropriate ICT that would facilitate better teaching and learning of English language.

Pedagogical Implications, Limitations and Suggestions
This study can presumably enable EFL teachers and students use appropriate ICT tools in the teaching and learning of English language institutes respectively. Strictly speaking, it is a kind of eye-opener for the education ministries, curriculum planners, and concerned bodies on the importance and challenges of integrating ICT into English language teaching and learning and panacea for the raised problems. Pedagogically speaking, the combination of theory and practice in foreign language learning should be matched together by the use of modern technology. In other words, modern technical ways should be followed for effective learning and teaching of the second language. English language teachers should highly encourage their students to use technology in developing the language skills inside and outside of the class. Above all, educational institutions should modernize and equip their technical instruction capabilities by using new equipment and laboratories for supporting the teaching and learning process. Concerning the limitation of this study, the finding cannot fully be generalized to other language institutes all over the country. It can be recommended that for the future researchers to go through the similar study in different language institutes in various cities of Iran and compare the EFL teachers’ attitudes toward using ICT in EFL classes.

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