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Research in Use of Information & Communication Technologies (ICT) for Developing Listening Comprehension Competency in Foreign/Second Languages: Benefits and Challenges

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Abstract

In a foreign language classroom, use of ICT gives students a great opportunity to acquire sustained forms of listening. Wide range of tools is available which can be used in language classroom and support listening comprehension outside the classroom. This paper aim at learning about benefits and challenges in the use Information and Communication Technologies and digital skills in foreign language teaching and learning based on the previous researches. The methodology adopted in this paper is historical, upon collection of information from previous researches, conclusion is drawn.

Keywords- Foreign Language Learning, ICT tools for FL Listening, Information & Communication Technologies, ICT, Listening Comprehension

Introduction

Out of four¹ language-learning skills, Listening comes first. Students of a foreign language have to acquire listening skill because they need to develop their comprehension in not only foreign language but in all fields of a curriculum. In a foreign language classroom, if only teacher is speaking and students have only the opportunity to listen to their teacher. This can be difficult for them. Use of Information and Communication Technology in the classroom gives students a great opportunity to acquire sustained forms of listening. A wide range of tools are available which can be used in language classroom and also support listening comprehension outside the classroom when someone aims at developing communicative skills of a particular foreign language. This paper aims at learning about benefits and challenges in the use Information and Communication Technologies and digital

skills in foreign language teaching based on the previous researches. The paper also aims to examine practices of language teachers and their use of various ICT tools in second language teaching. The goal of this study is to gain more insight into how ICT is used and what are the potential benefits of its use in teaching set up of foreign or second language.

Review of Related Literature:

ICT stands for Information & Communication Technology. People living in the millennium internet have witnessed a great impact of Information and Communication Technologies on their lives. ICT has almost influenced every occupation including the way a foreign language is learnt and taught. Information and Communication Technology provides opportunities for learning as well as for teaching a particular language. A variety of supplemental activities, which can be used for teaching and learning a language, are available on internet. Various tools of ICT facilitate language learning in such a way that learners become motivated, and independent to practice language skills out of the classroom environment as well (Yunus, 2007). During the process learning of foreign language teaching, teaching and learning of listening skill has been found most important, as it is the first skill in the order of four language skills (ibid.). Listening means accurately receive and interpret a message in the process of communication. Figs 1 and 2 indicate that in the process of communication a person spends his/her 70% of time while communicating and 49 % of total communication is while listening (Adler et al. 2001).

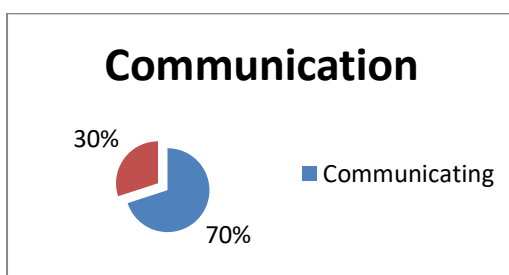


Fig. 1 - Time Spent on Communication (Adler et al. 2001).

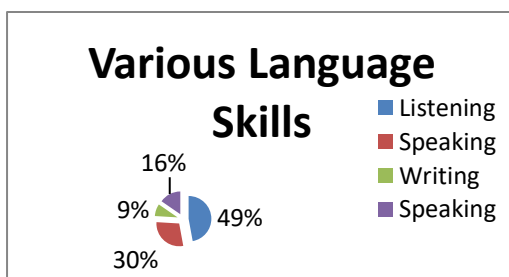


Fig. 1 - Time Spent on Various Language Skills while Communicating (Adler et al. 2001).

Using ICT to Support Language Development:

There are many ways in which use of Information and Communication Technologies can contribute literacy development when it comes to learning of language skills namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Van Scoter and Boss, 2002). Out of all four skills, listening is the one, which can be called very significant for learners of any language to acquire. For teachers also it is important and intricate in nature. Various concepts of pronunciation are also problematic non-native speakers, which can be learnt through use of ICT in classroom as well as in, own time (Charami, 2014). There are many supplemental listening activities, for additional practice e.g. listening tests and comprehension questions, exercises, pronunciation exercises, vocabulary tests, and so forth. Learners can search internet and find activities according to their choice and interest to enhance their listening skill as well as other language skills (Yunus et al, 2009). For example, resources available on internet include recorded sounds (Lee et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2003).

Benefits of Using ICT for Developing Listening Comprehension:

Researchers have found use of ICT very helpful to develop any of the four language skills. Development and improvement of Listening skill in particular have been found possible through ICT for these reasons:

1. In today's world, students have been termed as net generation and native speakers of various tools of ICT such as computers, video games, and Internet as these all have digital language. These learners expect that school or university programs would definitely offer them opportunities to use technology during their course e.g. well-equipped computer labs or language lab in case of learning a language (Peterson, 2010).
2. Learners become independent when they use technology on their own and thus they can practice language skills outside the classroom as well such as in office, home, net café, labs etc. (ibid.).
3. Various ICT skills, which are learnt in classroom e.g. searching information on internet, can be very helpful in practical life as well. Listening can be practiced through ICT tools and thus a lack of real world exposure can be catered for through listening to native speakers of a particular language. Ultimately, learners become effective listeners (ibid.).
4. If ICT is used in the classroom, great chances are there that material available is current and updated. e.g. listening of news, directly from news website can make students able to listen to a material without any previous practice and background. It would be an activity based on immediate listening (ibid.).

5. Practice through ICT gives an opportunity to listen at own pace including pausing and then reading transcript meanwhile. Learners can listen and then solve questions as well to get immediate feedback about their listening comprehension progress (ibid.).
6. Learners can select material of their choice and interest from plenty of material available on net for listening. There are specific websites for foreign language and second language learners. Using authentic websites enables a learner to plan activities at his/her own and sufficient guidance is available for developing listening or any other skill on such websites (ibid.). As a matter of fact, students get an access to information and are able to respond as well as there are varieties of listening texts available through various tools of ICT (Underwood and Underwood, 1997).
7. Through listening and responding to talking books, students also develop many social skills such as negotiation, decision-making, and problem solving. Vocabulary and text comprehension is also improved. For example, through digital video production students learn how to use “abstract and sophisticated language” when they are discussing about such videos or films (Reid *et al.*, 2002).
8. Use of ICT makes students learn to organize and present information in various styles and thus this improves their listening comprehension as they start identifying the main features of a text they are listening (Becta, 2006).
9. Using ICT for developing listening skill is also helpful for teachers as they easily choose teaching materials according to learners’ requirements and responses what they desire. In this way, lessons become interesting and help learners to participate actively in classroom boosting their motivation level as well (Houcine, 2011).
10. Through ICT, it is possible to focus on a single aspect of listening such as pronunciation, pace, intonation, stress etc. (ibid.).

Challenges faced in the use of ICT:

The integration of Information and Technology into language learning gives rise to a number of challenges mainly due to the differences in the age, and learning style of the learners. The attitude and ability to perceive also matter in this regard. Researches which were conducted to highlight barrier of ICT have identifies confidence, self-efficacy, and educational background as some of the many factors that affect learning of language through ICT. It was also identified that during online learning, various constraints limit the learning that may be administrative and instructional as well. Other barriers are limitations of social interactions, academic skills and technical skills and problems. Lack of motivation in learners and lack of time and support for studies also act as barriers to use of ICT. Apart from these, financial barriers such as high cost of technology and limited access to the

Internet also matter. The influencing factors from the internal as well as external perspectives are interest of students in language learning and their motivation. Environment of institution also directly and home environment indirectly effect the learning attitudes of the students. (Yunus et al, 2009)

In many regions, the use of ICT is specific and subject to the most identified factors like curriculum development and infrastructure, that includes electricity, transport, financing, initiatives, and other basic services to training and capacity building. Government support is also perceived as an important factor in development and use of ICT. It is perceived that the most self-directed students are those who are enrolled in face-to-face courses and experience learning as “shared partnership” between their instructors and themselves. On the other hand, Web-based courses do not have such interactions with the instructors and other class fellows so learners are unable to get their queries resolved immediately. Learners sometimes have incompatibility or less understanding of web-based materials, or lack of motivation, which create hurdles towards successful use of ICT. In short, there are many different factors, which can work as barriers for learners while ICT as a result to which, solutions must be worked on to improve use of ICT by learners to make them comfortable with ICT various tools. (Yunus et al, 2009)

Attitude towards the use of ICT

Personal attitude towards use of ICT matters as a factor and can influence a teacher or a learner in the use of Information and Communication Technology because it influences the attention towards the use of ICT. Researchers have found existence of positive relationship between levels of experience favorable attitudes towards the use of ICT tools. Learners’ use of email and internet indicates that it supports their studies. Learners also believe that hat ICT plays a significant role to enhance and support learning. Learners and teachers have also been found to use Information and Communication Technologies as an alternative to face-to-face learning and teaching activities. Research has also found that majority of the students use the course-based Web Communication Technologies and is generally in favor of using ICT. Through the use of ICT in classrooms the learners develop critical thinking skills and a positive attitude towards ICT although there are differences between their perceptions about ICT due to their individual traits such as gender, academic background, or use of computer. Teachers’ critical thinking skills and their attitudes toward Information and Communication Technologies also influence their learners’ individual characteristics and perception about ICT. (Yunus et al, 2009)

So far as listening activities are concerned teachers' attitude towards ICT has been found more favorable towards ICT compared its use as a tool for any other language skill such as reading. Mostly teachers think that ICT is well suited as a tool in foreign language classroom listening activities. Most of the teachers have been found using ICT for teaching of listening skill. According to them using

different types of digital material which has been spoken by native speakers is very appropriate for developing listening comprehension. Even a textbook version available online provides the possibility to listen to a native speaker reading the texts. For learners to have an access to computers to use ICT is a very important factor according to language teachers. However, the most important feature to be considered while using ICT to teach listening comprehension is the authenticity of the material and most of the teachers like to choose teaching materials which are recorded and presented by native speakers.

It is appropriate to familiarize the learners with different accents, cultures and traditions of English speaking people language moreover, using ICT for listening activities and exercises might be good for teachers when if their students are already used to listening to English music or films with lyrics of songs and subtitles in case of films. (Linder, n.d.) To expose learners to native speakers is important even if the teacher is fluent in English and familiar with proverbs and dialects because it is impossible that one person is master of different aspects English. As stress and lexical and semantic features of various dialects of a foreign language are very important for language acquisition, ICT is a suitable source in this regard (Hedge, 2000).

Conclusion

A wide range of tools of ICT are available to develop listening skill which can be used in different types of setups and learning environments. It is however to be considered that not all of them are suitable for every environment and for every level of foreign language learning. It is the responsibility of curriculum designers and teachers as well to choose and suggest these tools which can provide best learning opportunities according to the individual learning differences. These tools can be used in isolation as well as in combination according to the requirement of the class and level. As listening is considered the most difficult skill for learners to develop and master in a foreign language classroom, Access to ICT material makes the task much easier for them. Use of ICT learning can take place in classroom as well as in own time almost at any place according to the convenience of the learners.

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Endnote

¹ Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing.