Professional development for ESL lecturers – a struggle to integrate ICT into teaching

Desenvolvimento profissional para professores da ESL – uma luta para integrar o ICT no ensino

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Abstract

Information and Communications Technology (ICT) plays a crucial role in our daily life. In fact, students are considered digital citizens and have become accustomed to being always connected to their devices and the Internet. Given the importance ICT plays in our lives, education institutions nowadays have a duty to incorporate ICT into teaching and learning in order to better prepare students for 21st Century skills and careers. Although certain technological equipment may be available in classrooms, there are several external and internal factors that affect the proper implementation of ICT in classrooms. In preparing students to be career-ready, ICT integration is imperative. This paper will discuss factors affecting ESL lecturers' professional development in terms of ICT application in the classroom. A total of 61 lecturers from 12 non-English-majored universities in Vietnam voluntarily completed this quantitative study's survey questionnaire. The findings show that although ESL lecturers are aware of the significance of some factors affecting ICT implementation in classrooms, they are struggling to learn, to adapt, and to integrate ICT into their classrooms.

Keywords: EFL lecturers; ICT integration; self-efficacy; perceptions; professional development

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Resumo

As TIC desempenham um papel crucial em nossa vida diária. Na verdade, os estudantes são considerados cidadãos digitais e se acostumaram a estar sempre conectados a seus dispositivos e à Internet. Dada a importância que as TIC desempenham em nossas vidas, as instituições de ensino hoje em dia têm o dever de incorporar as TIC no ensino e na aprendizagem, a fim de melhor preparar os estudantes para as habilidades e carreiras do século XXI. Embora certos equipamentos tecnológicos possam estar disponíveis nas salas de aula, há vários fatores externos e internos que afetam a implementação adequada das TIC nas salas de aula. Ao preparar os estudantes para a carreira, a integração das TIC é imperativa. Este artigo discutirá fatores que afetam o desenvolvimento profissional dos professores de ESL em termos de aplicação das TIC na sala de aula. Um total de 61 professores de 12 universidades não-inglesas no Vietnã responderam voluntariamente a este questionário de pesquisa quantitativa. Os resultados mostram que embora os professores de ESL estejam cientes da importância de alguns fatores que afetam a implementação das TIC nas salas de aula, eles estão lutando para aprender, para se adaptar e para integrar as TIC em suas salas de aula.

Palavras-chave: Palestrantes de ESL; integração das TIC; auto-eficácia; percepções; desenvolvimento profissional.

Introduction

Research findings over the last two decades have provided much evidence for the fact that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) application has a favorable impact on education. In spite of such projects, the effects of some professional development programs, and investment by universities in ICT resources, there has been a disappointingly slow improvement in universities (Cox et al, 1999; Passey & Samways, 1997). Although university leaders and lecturers are aware of the importance of ICT integration into teaching, not much attention is paid to ICT professional development for ESL (English as a Second Language) lecturers. ESL lecturers themselves are struggling to learn, to adapt, and to integrate ICT into their classrooms. This paper will discuss how much ESL lecturers are aware of the significance of some factors affecting ESL lecturers' ICT application in the classroom and the practice of ICT application in the classroom. A premise for further studies to be conducted.

Literature Review

ESL lecturers

ESL (English as a Second Language) lecturers give English language lessons to non-native speakers. They typically work in colleges and universities and other educational institutions. ESL lecturers prepare course materials and design lessons that cover all aspects of the English language, whether written or verbal. They monitor students' progress and customize individualized plans for students with special requirements. Additionally, they are in charge of fostering a supportive learning atmosphere and motivating students to achieve their academic objectives. Most ESL lecturers have a degree in English and an ESL or TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) certification. ESL lecturer requirements include basic

software skills, usually MS Office, to handle administrative tasks, such as updating student records. To be successful in this role, it's crucial to have a patient and resilient personality and great communication skills.

Professional Development

Numerous scholars have acknowledged the significance of language lecturers' ongoing professional development (Williams, 2009; Vo & Nguyen, 2010) in different contexts and through a variety of methodological approaches. Lecturer professional development has been defined as "a life-long process of growth which involve collaborative and/or autonomous learning… lecturers are engaged in the process and they actively reflect on their practices" (Crandall, 2000, p. 36). Freeman (2004) uses the term "second language teacher education" to refer to the professional preparation and the continuing professional development of lecturers while Craft (2000) refers to professional development as a broad range of activities designed to contribute to the learning of lecturers who have completed their initial training.

ICT Integration in the Classroom

ICT stands for Information and Communications Technology. ICT are tools that handle information and produce, store, and disseminate information. ICT and its tools had led to the emergence of online learning. Thanks to ICT, both lecturers and students are learning innovative ways in the education process. Especially, online learning has gained popularity amidst the corona pandemic to ensure that the learning continues (Manpreet Kaur, 2021).

It is imperative for lecturers and students to perceive ICT as not only an important element of their present and future lives but also as an essential one in the development of their countries. That awareness is indispensable for the way both lecturers and students use ICT as an educational resource. Furthermore, in order to adapt their teaching methods to the new ways that people are learning in the twenty-first century, ESL lecturers must integrate technology into their teaching practices (Manpreet Kaur, 2021). Even though the use of ICT is not the final solution for learning outcomes, it is a powerful tool when it is available for lecturers and students and when used properly.

We cannot dispute the significance of ICT in our life. It promotes global connectivity and cooperation. Technology is constantly evolving. It is likable due to certain features like growth, creativity, joy, fun, and consumption. Students are more engaged in their work when ICT is incorporated into lessons. This is because using technology to teach the same concepts in various ways can make learning more entertaining and fun. It is believed that students will be able to retain information more effectively and efficiently as a result of their increased participation (Manpreet Kaur, 2021).

Methods

Research objectives

- To determine how much ESL lecturers are aware of the significance of some factors affecting ESL lecturers' ICT application in the classroom,
- To determine the practice of ICT application in the classroom, to identify the level of ESL lecturers' ICT integration in the classroom.

Research questions

- What are the levels of the importance of factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT to teaching.
- What are the performance levels of factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT into teaching.

Methodology

Research Design

A quantitative research design was used to carry out this study. The population surveyed consists of ESL lecturers at non-foreign-language-major universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. Online questionnaires are sent to ESL lecturers of concern at non-foreign-language-major universities in Hanoi, Vietnam, then data is synthesized and processed.

Participants

The sample consisted of 61 ESL lecturers at non-foreign-language-major universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. They voluntarily completed the questionnaires. All of the samples were teaching at non-foreign-language-major universities in the same geographic region and had almost the same organizational and hierarchical structure, which makes no formal distinction between lecturers' duties and position in university. As the statistics for the total population of Hanoi is unreachable, the researchers did not mention the total population for male and female lecturers in this research.

Data collection tools

The questionnaire is divided into 3 sections. The first section is about the lecturer's profile with basic demographic questions such as age, the participant's sex, educational

qualification, years of teaching experience, and subjects of teaching; it was followed by their awareness of some factors affecting ICT integration into teaching, which referred to teacher's perception; and the last section referred to the practice, the performance levels in reality of factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT into teaching.

Online questionnaires were sent to ESL lecturers of concern at non-foreign-language-major universities in Hanoi. 5-scale Likert is applied in the questionnaire as in table 1:

Table 1 – Likert scale in the questionnaire

Levels of importance	Scale	Levels of performance
very important	5	excellent
important	4	good
fairly important	3	satisfactory
less important	2	fair
not important	1	poor

Procedures

Data collection occurred via random distribution. The researchers sent (via email, and zalo) the Microsoft-forms survey questionnaire to ESL lecturers at non-foreign-language-major universities in Hanoi. Once the online survey questionnaire was sent out, the participants had a week to complete the survey questionnaire, and submit it online. Once the participation deadline lapsed researchers downloaded data files for data analysis.

Results

Research Question 1: What are the levels of the importance of factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT to teaching?

Table 2 – Levels of the importance of factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT to teaching

	Factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT into teaching		**Levels of the importance**						
			Very important	Important	Fairly important	Less important	Not important	$\overline{X}$	**Rank**
1	Infrastructure	N	23	19	17	2	0	4.03	4
		Percent	38%	31%	28%	3%	0%		
2	Technology	N	24	21	13	3	0	4.08	3
		Percent	39%	34%	21%	5%	0%		
	Professional Development	N	34	22	5	0	0	4.47	1
		Percent	56%	36%	8%	0%	0%		
	Self-efficacy	N	23	14	15	9	0	3.84	5
		Percent	38%	23%	25%	15%	0%		
	Lecturers' Perceptions	N	33	13	14	1	0	4.28	2
		Percent	54%	21%	23%	2%	0%		
							Mean $\overline{X}$ ***:***	***4.14***	

Data from Table 2 shows that ESL lecturers at non-foreign-language-major universities in Hanoi attach great importance to five factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT to teaching with ***Mean*** $\overline{X}$ **= 4.14**. Of the five factors (Infrastructure, Technology, Professional Development, Self-efficacy, and Lecturers' Perceptions) Professional Development is of the most importance with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 4.47, and Self-efficacy is of the least importance with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 3.84.

Research Question 2: What are the performance levels of factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT into teaching?

Table 3 – Performance Levels of factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT into teaching

	Factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT into teaching		**Levels of Performance**						
			Excellent	**Good**	**Satisfactory**	**Fair**	**Poor**	$\overline{X}$	**Rank**
1	Infrastructure	N	0	14	28	19	0	2.92	2
		Percent	0%	23%	46%	31%	0%		
2	Technology	N	3	13	17	28	0	2.85	4
		Percent	5%	21%	28%	46%	0%		
3	Professional Development	N	0	15	16	27	3	2.70	5
		Percent	0%	25%	26%	44%	5%		
4	self-efficacy	N	3	13	21	22	2	2.90	3
		Percent	5%	21%	34%	36%	3%		
5	Lecturers' Perceptions	N	0	25	26	6	4	3.18	1
		Percent	0%	41%	43%	10%	7%		
							Mean $\overline{X}$ ***:***	***2.91***	

Data from Table 3 shows that performance levels of factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT into teaching are low with ***Mean*** $\overline{X}$ = **2.91**. Of the five factors (Infrastructure, Technology, Professional Development, Self-efficacy, and Lecturers' Perceptions) Professional Development is of the poorest in performance with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 2.70, and Lecturers' Perceptions is the best in performance with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 3.18.

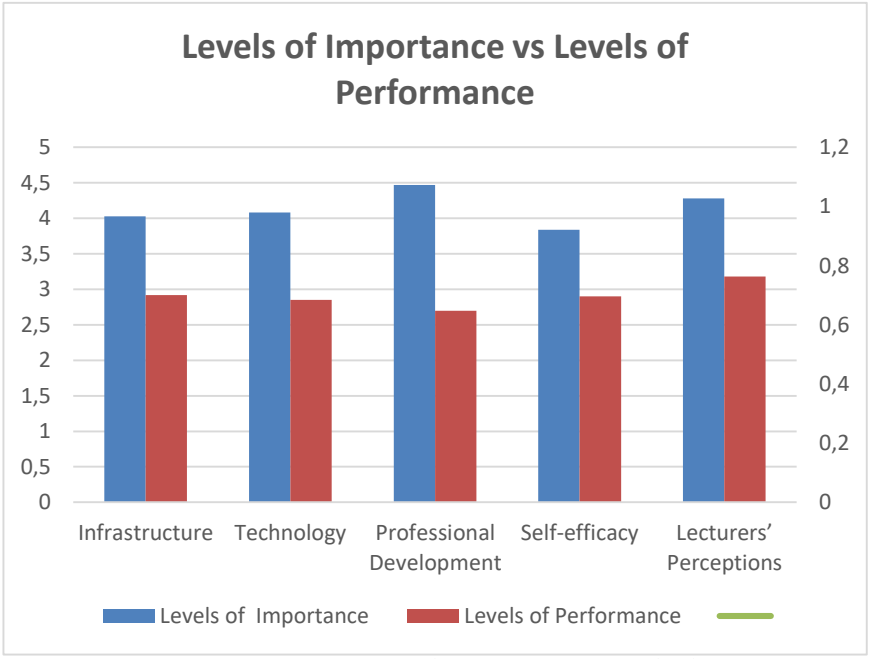

Chart 1: A comparison between the Levels of Importance and the Levels of Performance towards some factors affecting ESL lecturers applying ICT into teaching

Discussion

Infrastructure

Although Infrastructure affects the application of ICT into teaching a lot with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 4.03 (Table 2), data from Table 3 shows that Infrastructure doesn't really meet the requirement of reality in applying ICT into teaching with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 2.92.

The poor infrastructure prevents lecturers and students from applying ICT into teaching and learning. To succeed in integrating ICT into teaching and learning, teaching and

learning must be supported by a strong foundation in technology, particularly network infrastructure (Build the 21st century classroom infrastructure, 2018). Universities can equip their classrooms for tomorrow's networking requirements by concentrating on the appropriate technology advancements in network administration and security from the right vendor. However, due to the limited budget and funds, infrastructure is often neglected when making the decision to purchase technological tools as well as equipment. Collaborative classrooms also need a robust Wi-Fi signal to ensure that students can connect to the internet from any location, at any time, using a variety of devices (Build the 21st century classroom infrastructure, 2018). Infrastructure can interfere with Wi-Fi connections and restrict technology devices' access to the internet. Facing the poor infrastructure among non-foreign-language-major universities in Hanoi, to integrate ICT into teaching some lecturers have to turn on their own personal hotspots for better Wi-Fi connections. Furthermore, in old buildings, the improper power voltage prevents multiple technology devices from being used at the same time.

Technology

While Technology is the third important factor affecting the application of ICT into teaching with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 4.08 (Table 2), data from Table 3 shows that Technology doesn't meet the requirement of reality in applying ICT into teaching with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 2.85. Inadequate Technology affects ESL lecturers' ICT application right in the very first phase.

From the perspective of the constructivist, students create knowledge as a result of their interactions with the environment, building on existing knowledge and dependent upon the relevance of the content or instructional activity in their own lives. From the sociocultural perspective, ICT offers the platform and the tools to interact through a variety of media with people and groups (Pittman & Gaines, 2015). There is an obvious demand for students to be prepared to use technology. However, due to tight budgets and funding, universities fail to provide sufficient resources to give all students access to suitable technology. Although both lecturers and students want to mobilize technology in the classroom more, the resources are simply not available. In fact, ESL lecturers are struggling to implement ICT in classrooms where inadequate tools and equipment are obstacles.

Facing the problem of inadequate technology, universities implement Bring Your Own Device (BYOD). BYOD is a policy that allows students to use their own devices, usually their smart devices such as mobile phones, tablets, or laptops to access subject content. BYOD is called a trend for the fact that more and more educational institutions turn the green light to it, which solves financial problems Students gain benefits from BYOD in the way that their technological skill is better, and they can avoid the lack of equipment during "rush hour" prior to exams or deadlines. BYOD also gives students the feeling of ownership during the learning process and project work. Above all, the most important benefit is flexible time, which means students can study at their own pace whenever and wherever they want. In fact, BYOD should have it position as language teaching and learning is not only CALL (computer-assisted language learning) but also MALL (mobile-assisted language learning). (Nguyen Thi Van Khanh, Ha Thanh Huong, Do Thanh Tu (2022). However, as society advances closer to the ICT era, it is critical to close the gap between resource availability and utilization. The bigger the

gap is, the more necessary ICT-related professional development is. Given the inadequate technology access, effective professional development should, therefore, is of priority.

Self-efficacy

Albert Bandura defined self-efficacy as a person's belief in his or her capability to successfully perform a particular task (Bandura, 1977). Although self-efficacy is attached importance to (*Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 3.84), the performance level of self-efficacy is low with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 2.90.

An important idea in Bandura's social cognitive theory from 1977 is self-efficacy, which influences how you choose to engage with others and your environment. Together with the goals that people set, self-efficacy is one on the most powerful motivational predictors of how well a person will perform at almost any endeavor. It is anticipated that making use of technological devices in digital classrooms will increase learners' achievement. The theory of self-efficacy is "that people process, weigh, and integrate diverse sources of information concerning their capability, and they regulate their choice behavior and effort expenditure according to that information" (Bandura, 1977). We have control over our behavior not control of the outcome. In addition, the correlation between lecturers' ICT integration in the classroom and their self-efficacy is said to be significant. (Li, Worch, Zhou, & Aguiton, 2015). Due to the high demands of student performance and accountability, if lecturers see the advantages of ICT application on students' achievement, they would more likely apply it to their practice and vice versa. The feeling that students know more about IT than lecturers makes them self-deprecating, which may add to some lecturers' perceived low self-efficacy. ESL lecturers themselves are trying to overcome the feeling of unconfidence and reluctance in ICT application. Therefore, ICT-related professional development is what ESL lecturers are badly in need of. Only when they are equipped with ICT skills, can ESL lecturers raise their self-efficacy and be willing to integrate ICT into teaching.

Lecturers' Perceptions

Lecturers' Perceptions is the second most important factor affecting the ICT integration into teaching with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 4.28. It is understandable that its performance level is of the highest with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 3.18.

Despite the fact that technology is becoming more accessible in universities, lecturers are usually portrayed as hesitant users. They are accustomed to the old practice which leads to frustration, hesitation and cautiousness when trying to shift to a new paradigm. That's the reason why lecturers, especilly the over-50-year-old, stay away from the application of 21st century technological devices. Lecturers who integrate technology are those who are not digitally literate, capable of comprehending and using data from a number of digital sources. They are aware of the effort needed to acquire the new technology and the practicality or value of ICT applications (Mac Callum, Jeffrey, & Kinshuk, 2014). This is in line with current studies

that discovered the readiness -or lack thereof- of the lecturers had the greatest overall impact on whether lecturers applied technology in their courses (Inan & Lowther, 2009). ICT integration requires a lot of factors, among them, Lecturers' Perceptions come first. Professional development, therefore, does not limit to the expertise and profession but also the perceptions and awareness of ESL lecturers. Consciousness decides actions. As long as ESL lecturers are aware of the importance of ICT integration, they will try to overcome the immediate difficulties. As a result, raising awareness should also be included in ICT professional development program.

Professional Development

While professional development is the most important factor affecting the application of ICT into teaching with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 4.47 (Table 2), data from Table 3 shows that the performance level of professional development is currently the lowest with *Mean* $\overline{X}$ = 2.70. The lack of sufficient professional development makes ICT applications hard, and in some cases, impossible. Even given adequate technology access, without effective professional development, it is impossible for lecturers to integrate ICT into their classrooms. Only when lecturers are provided with ICT knowledge, skills, resources, and immediate support can they integrate technology into the classroom to maximize its effects on teaching and learning (Papanastasiou, Zemblyas, & Vrasidas, 2003).

Besides, studies show that providing lecturers with good infrastructure and adequate technology does not help much in raising higher levels of ICT integration in the classroom. Only when lecturers themselves are fully awere of the significance of ICT application, and their self-efficacy, can they make breakthroughs in ICT integration in the classroom. Besides, sufficient and effective professional development should be among the top priority factors. Universities, therefore, need to provide ICT-related professional development regularly in accordance with the development of the digital age. However, according to Academic Impressions (2016), research shows that up to 33% of education institutions think that the first thing they will do is to cut their budget for professional development when the budget is tight; 52% will cut funding for professional development activities equivalent to cuts in other activities; 9% will maintain the budget for professional development activities, although it is possible to cut the budget for other areas; and 1% will increase the budget for professional development activities.

Conclusion

Although university leaders and lecturers are aware of the importance of ICT integration into teaching, not much attention is paid to ICT professional development for ESL lecturers. Facing the problem of poor infrastructure, inadequate technology, low self-efficacy, and the lack of ICT professional development, ESL lecturers themselves are struggling to learn, to adapt, and to integrate ICT into their classrooms. In order to equip students, in other words, digital citizens for 21st Century skills and careers, ICT application in classrooms is imperative.

Therefore, ESL lecturers professional development in terms of ICT application is of great importance.

It is recommended that the research be conducted as an experiment with one more group of leaders and/or with higher number of lectures and/or leaders. Then, the survey is revised to cover more factors/items related to ICT.

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