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# Technology-Enhanced Language Learning Tools In Iranian EFL Context: Frequencies, Attitudes And Challenges

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## Abstract

The purposes of this study are to investigate the most and the least frequent Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) tools in Iranian EFL context; and to find the answer for what the attitudes of EFL teachers towards using these tools in their language courses are. To meet the end, this study was conducted with the 32 male and female EFL teachers at different universities and language institutes within Iran. In quantitative phase a questionnaire developed by researchers was distributed among participants. This questionnaire consists of two main parts: demographic information and a five-point Likert scale about the teacher's attitudes and frequency of use of TELL tools. Moreover, in qualitative phase of the study, a semi-structured interview was used in exploring the EFL teachers' perceptions towards using TELL tools in their language courses. The researchers hypothesized that, among the assigned TELL tools, computer and video projector have the most frequent and web 2.0 technologies have the least frequent use in Iranian context. Moreover, they assumed that the attitudes of teachers towards applying technology in EFL courses are positive, although they have lots of barriers and challenges. These findings support other studies which have noted the advantages of using technology in language courses. Finally the findings show that this study has some implications for language teachers, material developers and syllabus designers for improving the usage of TELL tools in the foreign language learning context.

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*Keywords:* Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), English as a Foreign Language (EFL), frequency, attitude;

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## 1. Introduction

Today, developments in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) have become an integral part of our personal and social lives and also influence our professional career. This advancement has led teachers, syllabus and

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material designers to consider the possibility of integrating technology into the mainstream curriculum development.

Although some years ago there were different difficulties in applying technology-based tools in classes to help learners with their language study, today teachers who fail to draw upon technology in language teaching are likely to be considered behind the times (Chapelle, 2008). ICT programs provide so many novel opportunities for language learning (Doughty & Long, 2003; Tafazoli & Chirumbu, 2013). Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), as the name suggests, is the use of technologies in service of language learning. It has taken up the goal of modern approaches to language teaching, including communicative language teaching, task-based learning, process approaches to writing and training in language learning strategies in enhancing student autonomy and control over the language learning process (Warschauer et al., 1996).

One of the main goals of any language organization and institute is to make language teaching and learning become more flexible and make students' learning become more individual and more autonomous. To reach this goal, they are trying to use technologies such as computers, cell phones and etc. to break the constraints of time, space and conditions in learning. The implementation of technological resources is directly related to the way teachers perceive their use and functionality (Yunus, 2007). According to the author, it is necessary that teachers have positive attitudes towards a certain technology to adopt it efficiently in his/her working activity. With the guidance of this suggestion, the present study explored the responses for these questions: What are attitudes of Iranian English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers towards Technology-Enhanced Language Learning tools? And what are the most and the least frequent TELL tools in Iranian EFL context?

## 2. Review of Literature: TELL in Iranian Context

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) is the study of applications of the technology in language teaching and learning. The main aim of TELL is to find ways for using technology for the purpose of teaching and learning the language. In other words, TELL is the use of technologies that improve and facilitate educational learning. In this section, we consider TELL as a synonym for Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL).

This part of the review of literature aims to have a brief review on different applications of TELL/CALL tools and devices in Iranian language teaching and learning classes. The literature shows that technology can handle a wide range of activities and carry out programmed functions in different situations. The application of CALL from 1960 to date had a great influence on language teaching and learning in all around the world, but it is a new dimension in Iranian context. Hashemi and Azizinezhad (2011) believe that CALL helps to generate autonomous learners. Moreover, Ghasemi, Hashemi and Barani (2011) held the idea that through using internet, the learners can be provided current and up-to-date data and vast amount of information that can be retrieved easily and quickly.

The purpose of the recent study by Talebi and Teimoury (2013) was to examine the effects of CALL on Iranian language learners' pronunciation ability. Findings from this study indicated that integrating computer-based materials in a classroom had significant effect on the students' pronunciation skills.

According to the findings of a research by Meihami, Meihami and Varmaghani (2013), using CALL materials in the listening comprehension classroom can improve Iranian EFL students listening comprehension. Based on a study by Kargozari & Tafazoli (2012), podcasts proved to be efficient to improve Iranian EFL learners' listening ability. Their findings also confirmed that podcasts generated a feel of satisfaction and confidence among the learners. Moreover, podcasts provided a positive feeling in the class. The main purpose of Ghalami Nobar and Ahangari's (2012) research was to investigate the impact of using computer and internet on improving EFL learners' listening comprehension skill and motivation. The findings of the study indicated that the use of computer had a significant role on the improvement of EFL learners' listening comprehension.

It was statistically proved that the blended online instruction has significant impact on Iranian EFL learners' vocabulary knowledge (Soltani Tehrani & Tabatabaei, 2012). The research project by Barani (2013) seeks to investigate the results of a study of the effect of CALL on vocabulary achievement of Iranian university students EFL Learners. The results obtained throughout the study indicated there was a significant difference between CALL users and nonusers in favor of the experimental group. Game-Based Learning (GBL) refers to different kinds of software applications that use games for learning or educational purposes. In recent years, both in potential of computer game as language learning and teaching tools and in research into their use, there has been interesting interest. The result of the study by Tafazoli (2012) showed that, playing video games has positive effect on Iranian EFL vocabulary retention. Moreover, the positive attitudes of participants in this study is a proof that we can encourage students to attend more in language learning classes by providing them more computer tools and devices.

The same study by Rezaei & Pakbaz (2013) indicates that the EFL learners have a positive attitude towards learning via video games, which will help them utilize these games as a motivating agent in language learning schedule. The results of the research by Zamani & Mohammadzadeh (2013) showed that most of students like online social networks and online social networks can be used to facilitate English language learning. In another study, Tafazoli & Chirimbu (2013b) showed that how Facebook has positive effect on learning English idioms. Yousefzadeh (2012) concluded that using Multimedia Messaging Service (MMS) has a significant impact on vocabulary learning of Iranian EFL elementary level students. The results of Abdollahpour and Asadzadeh Maleki's (2012) research demonstrated that using a dictionary on a mobile phone resulted in a significant difference in participants' vocabulary learning and the participants who had benefited from mobile-assisted learning had a significantly better performance on vocabulary retention than the participants in traditional groups. The findings of this study confirmed the usefulness of SMS on students' vocabulary learning and retention. The results of Alemi, Anani Sarab and Lari's (2012) study showed that, in the short term, there was not any significant difference between learning vocabulary via SMS and by using a dictionary, however, learning vocabulary via SMS helped the participants in the experimental group to enhance their vocabulary knowledge in the post-test. But in the long term, vocabulary learning via SMS helped students to retain more vocabulary compared to those who used a dictionary for vocabulary learning.

As can be seen from the study by Jafarian, Soori and Kafipour (2012), the computer was an effective tool for improving Iranian EFL high school students' writing achievement. The study by Fardy, Noori Shorabi and Mohammadi (2012) aimed to explore the effect of CALL on the reading comprehension of narrative texts of Iranian male freshmen. The results of this study showed that there were statistically significant differences between two groups that can be attributed to the effect of CALL on the reading comprehension of narrative texts. The findings of the Kargozari and Tafazoli's (2011) study confirmed the fact that the use of vodcasts was a valuable means of instruction. Students had access to the material of instruction whenever and wherever they liked. The main objective of the Behjat, Yamini and Bagheri's (2011) study was to find out if there is any significant difference in the writing performances of learners who are in a hybrid learning environment and those who take face2face instruction. The results of the study showed that those who are taught in a blended or hybrid environment, i.e., using in-class along with online instruction and practice, outperform in their essay writing ability compared to those who attend a traditional face2face environment.

The following part, Method, presents the method and procedures being used during the data collection process. The first section set a design of the study; and the second introduces the settings, instrument and the participants.

### **3. Methodology**

#### *3.1. Design of the study*

This study aims to study the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' attitudes towards Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), and to find the most and the least frequent TELL tools in Iranian EFL context. A TELL written questionnaire consists of 20 questions: 5 background items and 15 Likert type items was administered to all participants. The data collected through the questionnaire was subject to descriptive analysis through SPSS 17.0. The rationale behind the use of descriptive statistics was to obtain complete and detailed perceptions of teachers to TELL. Moreover, semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers were conducted to find more on TELL literacy, teachers' attitude and TELL tools, etc.

#### *3.2. Setting, participants and instrument*

This study was conducted at the University of Applied Science & Technology and Islamic Azad University in Iran. These universities offer wide range of degree courses and programs related to language such as TEFL, Translation Studies, English Literature and etc. The questionnaire was administered to 32 EFL teachers teaching different subjects such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), general English, translation courses, . There were not any predetermined exclusion criteria for teachers except being an English teacher.

To pilot the questionnaire, an Institute of Higher Education in Mashhad, Iran, was chosen. The reason for selecting this Institute - offers TEFL, Translation Studies, etc. - was to ensure that the samples for the piloting

represent the whole population of teachers in different language-related majors for the study. The piloting process observed and the constructive feedback from the teachers and other research scholars and experts was taken into consideration.

#### 4. Results

As far as the efficacy of TELL programs for teaching English language was concerned, a great majority of (85%) teachers valued the TELL tools as a highly effective medium for teaching English language. The screen of computers implies that short mini-lessons will be more convenient as it reduces the amount of exposure to the screen. A small number of the teachers (20%) liked and preferred to use traditional tools than TELL tools.

Regarding participating in TELL-related workshops, it was found that a great majority (85%) of teachers in the study like to participate and consequently be aware of latest educational technologies and their instructional use and usages. As it is not anticipated, the results also showed that more than half the participants were not apprehensive about the cost of buying new TELL tools for teaching.

In qualitative phase, in order to cross-check the attitudes of various teachers towards TELL tools, semi-structured interviews were also conducted to 10 teachers. The results revealed that all the interviewees regarded TELL tools for teaching and learning English as very important; this corroborates the results of the quantitative phase. To see the TELL literacy of the participants, the participants were asked to define TELL tool. The responses showed that all the teachers found TELL tool as any technology-based tools which help students to learn English and teachers to teach English as best as possible.

Of all the participants, 91.66 % of them have TELL experience. Among them, 50.99% have been teaching English through computer and video projector, 18.18% have been using websites, 12.65% of them mobile phones and 3.63% have been using web 2.0 technologies. However, some of the participants complained about their administrators' lack of concern with regard to how and what purposes they used TELL tools. The other problem pointed out by interviews was that they weren't permitted to have some TELL devices such as mobile phones, video games, etc. in some classes.

#### 5. Discussion and conclusion

Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL), as defined in section 2, may be a vital supplementary tool for English language teaching and learning, however, we have to consider all the aspects of using TELL in our classes. Considering technology's double face is the key factor in applying TELL (Saeedi, 2013:41). We have to pay attention to technocentrism and the lack of experimentation in applying CALL (Plana & Ballester, 2009; cited in Saeedi, 2013:46).

TELL tools could be regarded as a practical and convenient medium for teaching and learning English language. Tafazoli (2012) argues that TELL is best regarded as a student motivator. Students, teachers, administrators and parents' attitudes define whether the aims and goals can be achieved effectively and adequately through TELL. The study investigated the attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers towards TELL. Also, it aims to find the most and the least frequent TELL tool in Iranian EFL context. It can be concluded that the majority of the teachers, keeping in line with modern development in technology, feel comfortable with technology and believe that technology can save their time and effort. In addition, most of them have this desire to even pay for the new TELL programs and tools to be fruitful in their classes. They also need the support of administrative for applying TELL devices in their language classes.

To conclude, the results suggested that including TELL programs and devices into language classrooms is beneficial for language teaching. Creating a positive attitude in teachers on the use of technology and computers in their classes, it could be claimed that the contribution of such a course to the system of education is remarkable. Given the new trend in the TELL and its novel demands to implement technology in schools and universities, there is a pressing need on the side of teachers and professors to develop a positive attitude toward TELL and its incorporation in their practices.

The findings of the present study can be looked upon as a general driving force to the educational policy makers around the world, and to the Iranian Ministry of Education and Ministry of Science, Research and Technology, in particular, to allocate more budgets on providing state-of-the-art TELL programs and devices in schools and universities. In addition, course designers can benefit from the outcome of the present study by allocating more

computer activities in schools and universities curriculum.

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