The integration of information and communication technology into current ELT coursebooks: a critical analysis

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Abstract

This study analyses the integration of Information and Communication Technology into current English Language Teaching coursebooks and the use of these multimedia resources in language classrooms. After giving theoretical underpinnings of ICT use in language learning, a study was conducted to unearth which ICT tools are integrated or ignored in the current ELT coursebooks that have been used during the last three years by English Preparatory Schools of five universities in North Cyprus. The study also discusses the reflection of ICT-integration in the coursebooks based on recent literature. Finally, certain pedagogical implications are addressed of these research findings.

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Keywords: Information and communication technology, ELT coursebooks, foreign language teaching

1. Introduction

The use of coursebooks in English Language Teaching has gained great popularity due to, especially, the increasing number of ELT preparatory schools founded in either many universities or private and state schools and also owing to the preferences of administrative and teaching staff for ready-made teaching materials, which provides ready syllabus to be followed at ease. As Richards and Rogers (2001) suggest, coursebooks are indispensable elements of the curriculum since they make the content specific and also define coverage in an explicit way. Despite some shortcomings such as the failure to present appropriate and realistic language models, inadequate cultural understanding, lack of contextualisation of language activities, and so on (Richards & Renandya, 2002), many advantages are stated as its providing a clear framework which both the teacher and the students can easily follow, its serving as a syllabus which includes a carefully planned and balanced selection of language content, its letting the students learn new material, review and monitor progress, its supplying tasks and texts with appropriate level for most of the learners (Ur, 1996 & Littlejohn, 1998).

Bearing this possible vitality of ELT coursebooks as an essential constituent in mind, we are to ensure that careful selection is made and that the coursebook selected closely reflects the needs of the learners, the aims, methods, and values of the teaching program (Cunningsworth, 1994 p. 7). Preeminent theorists in the field of textbook design and analysis such as Williams (1983), Sheldon ( 1988), Brown (1995), Harmer (1996) all contend, for instance, that evaluation checklists should have some criteria pertaining to the physical characteristics, methodology, approaches,
and so forth. Nevertheless, these are only very crude indicators of suitability, however, as Cunningsworth (1996) affirms, there are different criteria to be taken into account when selecting the coursebook like practical factors and pedagogical referents of the new also changing era. In this respect, Information and Communication Technology has come to be regarded as an increasingly important part of English Language Teaching and seems that it will become a normal part of ELT practice in the coming years (Dudeney & Hockly 2007, p. 7), which is the reason why we need to establish appropriate parameters, in addition to the traditional ones, to evaluate a coursebook and put forward some guidelines to reflect them to the foreign language classroom.

2. Information and communication technology in ELT

Information and Communication Technology stands for new multimedia technologies, including computer software, CD-ROM, the internet, mobile phone, television, film as well as internet-based Project work, e-mail, chat, blogs, wikis, podcasts, and so forth (Andrews, 2000b). A large amount of research has been conducted to better comprehend the effect of ICT on students’ language learning and demonstrates that the use of ICT in language classes increases the students enthusiasm and achievement and also makes them stay longer on the task. (See Tunstall & Gipps, 1996; David et al., 1997; Moseley et al., 1999; Pacher, 1999). Moreover, Cox (1999) reports research findings that if students believed that ICT could help them in their long-term future, they would spend more time on using ICT. Lankshear et al. (2000) state that ICT can help students with intellectual disabilities to promote their communication skills and self-confidence, in brief, their language learning. Furthermore, Chapelle (2001) points out that ICT increases students’ computer literacy, strengthens their cultural awareness, and develops their social identity in the target culture.

On the other hand, some problems emerging with the use of ICT in the language classroom have been explored by many researchers (Standholdz et al. 1996; Cox, 1998; Johnston, 1998; Cox, 1999; Selinger, 1999; Lankshear, 2000; Torgerson et al, 2002). The negative issues they pointed out in their findings are, mainly, the expense which prevents ICT from being used as widely as desired, parents’ doubts even fears about the vast amount of ICT use, insufficient time allocation due to pre-arranged syllabus, also lack of technical support dedicated to the use of ICT, and lastly teachers’ inconfidence for their few skills on the new technologies. In this sequence, concerning the availability of the necessary technology, recent studies conducted by Directorate General of Education and Culture (2002) indicate that all Member States of the European Union as well as pre-accession countries are making remarkable effort to catch up and to bridge the new ICT. As to the technical support and time allocation, the same survey reveals that ministries of education began to show a growing awareness of the need to address the question of providing specific support for ICT in ELT and also special teaching/learning programs are being developed, albeit most frequently taught and used in Europe. Regarding the families suspicions, as Vogel (2001) suggest, it is the teacher’s or instructor’s task to endure that learners do not, for example, just surf the Web at random, but by directed within a specifically structured task, obtain the maximum benefit possible from time spent online. At this juncture, a shift of paradigm is necessary in teacher roles more like a facilitator, mentor, integrator (of new media), researcher, designer (of complex learning scenarios), collaborator, orchestrator (of technology, learner and curriculum), learner and evaluator rather than a dominant and authority figure in the classroom.

However, the use and deployment of ICT in English Language teaching is far from satisfactory as ICT tools are reserved traditionally out of the planned syllabus, which is, in fact, directed by the coursebook used for teaching the language. Off-the-shelf commercially produced software packages are provided for limited language skills or components like only for listening or pronunciation, yet a detailed inclusion of various skills and components dedicated by ICT tools is infrequently used in the language classroom. Generally, they are considered to be available for solely self-study but not for in-class use. This illogical inconsistency about what to use individually or in-class seems to be based on insufficient integration of ICT into ELT coursebooks and its inadequate reflection to the course.
3. Identification of current ELT coursebooks

This process was carried out through some enquiries into the ELT coursebooks utilized by the preparatory schools of five universities in North Cyprus in the 2008-2009 Academic Year. In accordance with the responses gathered, the following five ELT coursebooks were identified as the most commonly used ones in North Cyprus TESOL setting:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Current ELT coursebooks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of the Book</td>
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<tr>
<td>Face 2 face</td>
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<tr>
<td>English for Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pathfinder</td>
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<td>Total English</td>
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4. Results and analysis

This section consists of two main parts, the first of which reveals the ICT integration into the current ELT coursebooks and the second of which is a discussion of basic implications related to ICT inclusion or ignorance in these coursebooks. Upon investigating the coursebooks mentioned above, it was found out that few of ICT tools were integrated into these textbooks; however, most of them were totally ignored, which was presented in table 2 below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. The ICT tools integrated/ ignored in the current ELT coursebooks</th>
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<tr>
<td>ICT tools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Audio CDs</td>
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<tr>
<td>CD-Roms</td>
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<tr>
<td>DVDs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chat</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-mail</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social software (blog, wiki, podcast)</td>
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<tr>
<td>The internet (web page)</td>
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<tr>
<td>E-portfolio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internet-based project works</td>
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(√ = integrated ICT tools / -- = ignored ICT tools)
In the following section, these ICT tools will be expounded by proposing the pedagogical benefits of them under the recent literature in the field.

4.1. ICT tools integrated into EFL coursebooks

4.1.1. Audio CDs and CD-Rom

In this section, only audio CDs and CD-ROMs are handled since these are the most common ICT tools integrated into the coursebooks. It is quite vivid that all coursebooks supply audio CDs for both teachers and learners and they are widely used for listening and pronunciation exercises. Audio CDs and CD-ROMs are alike but CD-ROMs contain multimedia files that are programmed to use texts, images, audio and video to provide interactivity. They are, in fact, good at providing grammar practice activities and listening and reading materials for the learners yet they are less effective for speaking practice as it is difficult to go beyond a ‘listen and repeat’ model, which means lack of real interaction. Also, they have testing materials incorporated so that the learner can check their own progress as well as a grammar reference section and a mini dictionary. Although they are accompanying language coursebooks, they are exposed to stay ‘standalone’ resources, maybe, since the CD-ROMs offer a ‘closed’ program unrelated to the the rest of what teachers and students were teaching and learning, they did not perceive it as particularly valuable and lost interest (cf. Sharma, 1999, p.2).

4.1.2. DVDs

DVDs started to appear along with CD-ROMs in the field of language teaching in 1990s. Although they are similar to CD-ROM, they have greater shortage capacity and they are usually used as an alternative to video cassettes which are increasingly becoming outdated. In fact, audiovisual texts in digital versatile disc (DVD) format provide a flexible resource as they offer soundtracks in different languages with the advantage of freedom to choose between watching a film, scene or extra feature with subtitles (captioned texts) or without subtitles (non-captioned texts) so that the students can enhance flexibility and adaptability to different options rather than develop a habit that may then be hard to break (Chun, 1996; King, 2002). Even if only one computer is available in the classroom, with a data projector or ‘beamer’, the teacher can add variety to the lesson by projecting the video onto a screen for whole class to view and work on together with the learners taking turns to take control of the computer mouse but, of course, a DVD related to the course content is accessible with the coursebook that is used in the language classroom.

4.1.3. E-portfolio

Portfolio can serve as part of an assessment program, which either includes a record of students' achievements or simply documents their best work. The portfolio documents the students' learning process and can be used as a means of promoting learner reflection. The most common areas of students’ reflections presented by Nunes (2004) are: syllabus (7%), instruction (36%), learning (43%), and assessment (14%). The majority of researchers agree that the main benefit of portfolios is promotion of reflective practice, because without reflections the portfolio remains a folder of the accumulated papers (Coombe & Barlow, 2004). Apart from paper portfolios are there so called electronic or digital portfolios, in other words, technology based portfolios. With traditional portfolios, files or binders holding papers, pictures, drawings take up a lot of space. The students can create an online portfolio of their written work on their own through a recent innovation, which is weblogging whose advantages in language classes comprise instant publishing online, awareness of having a readership (Kavaliauskienë, Anusienë, Mâzekienë, 2006), or they can use the e-portfolios provided by the coursebook itself. However, this very useful ICT tool is among the ignored ones as only one coursebook (Total English) offers such an opportunity.

4.1.4. The Internet

Table 2 above clearly shows that all of the coursebooks provide the students with a web page since the internet has come of age as one of the most popular application of all ICT tools. When the WWW is integrated into the
classroom, and teachers are brought into other parts of the world, they are considered as participants in much wider and more complicated learning communities than ever before. (Lankshear, et al. 2000). Its three main features as multimodality, non-linearity and the vast potential for communication (Pacheler, 1999) reveal that the internet is considered as potential collaborations for language learning which can occur at a distance and asynchronously. (Cummins & Sayer, 1995). However, some drawbacks are recognized in relation to the use of the internet that is too much time and energy allocated to select some suitable websites or to organize the ones provided by the coursebook according to the course content. With paper-based coursebooks, there is a long established tradition and a set of definable criteria to assist decision-makers (Cunningsworth, 1995; Ellis, 1997; Mc Donough & Shaw, 1993) whilst further studies might usefully investigate the criteria used for selection and evaluation. The fact that no such criteria exist with web material and that 'we are still a long way from any worldwide collaborative pooling of talent and time’ (Felix, 2001: p.189) would seem to represent major challenges.

4.2. ICT tools ignored in ELT coursebooks

4.2.1. Chat
A growing movement to make use of computers to engage in authentic communication with native speakers and/or other language learners lead to the implementation of computer-mediated communication (CMC) in teaching and learning English. CMC is a form of highly structured, instructor-planned and instructor-directed online communication for EFL learners. As Connicks (1999) points out, this type of activity or ”synchronous communication" provides students with learning opportunities that cannot be duplicated in the classroom. Also, as Lee (1998) asserts, the use of online chat rooms as a medium for communication provides an individualized, interpersonal, and interactive environment which allows students to gain active learning experience beyond those of the traditional classroom. There are different chat forms such as text chat, audio or voice chat, public chat and private chat. In the EFL context, in particular, the use of text-based chat has captured an increasing attention (Bearden, 2003; Freiermuth, 2002; O’Down & Perez, 2003), but more technologically advanced forms of CMC such as voice and video chat remained much more limited and descriptive (Czikó & Park, 2003; Hampel & Hauck, 2004; Lamy, 2004). When it comes to the integration of chat use in the ELT coursebooks, there happens to be no such an opportunity. In fact, each coursebook can provide the learners with a username and a password, which can be changed by the learner later on demand, and a chat room link so that they can get connected to all users of that book and, in the mean time, they can improve their language skills in the target language in a way that they will really enjoy.

4.2.2. E-mail
Although not as widely used as the WWW, it is still of major significance owing to the fact that reading and writing emails either in or outside class time gives a learner more exposure to the target language and interaction is ‘real’ in the sense that learners are writing to real people – either the teachers or other learners- using a ‘real’ medium (Dudeney & Hockly, 2007 p.62). In this respect, Frankin and Litchfield (1999) suggest that students having problems with writing and reading could be motivated via the use of email pen pals in other schools and other parts of the country. This can also be used for submitting a classwork or homework and returning marked assignments by the teacher on condition that the coursebooks allow them to do it in that way. What is more, according to DfEE (1998) as cited by Gamble et al. (2000), 75 percent of students and pupils would have their own e-mail addresses by the year of 2002 in the U.K, which implies that using e-mail is something the learners are already familiar with, so the teacher will not have difficulty to teach them how to use it. Even though it appears to be a well-established practice and a newer notion for language learning (Altshul, 2001), it still remains as an application that the learners can use for their daily goals.
4.2.3. Social software

Blogs, wikis and podcasts are all examples of social software, which allow people to connect, to communicate and to collaborate online. To begin with, a blog is essentially a web page with regular diaries and journal entries, which can be kept by an individual or a group who will regularly post comments, thoughts, analyses, experiences of daily life, interesting links, which will allow people to create an online community (Camphell, 2003; Ward, 2004). Secondly, a wiki is a collaborative web space, consisting of a number of pages that can be edited by any user, which implies that a wiki is more dynamic allowing multiple authors access word processing document available online (Lipponen, 2002). Lastly, a podcast, coming from combining iPod and broadcast, is an audio and/or video file that is broadcast via the internet and can be downloaded to a computer or a mobile device such as an MP3 player for listening/viewing by using RSS- Really Simple Syndication- a podcasting software. Podcasts can provide audio learning materials that build a connection between the instructor and students, and among students (Schlosser & Burmeister, 2006). In the same vein of other ICT tools, these social software applications are also neglected on the web pages of the coursebooks which are used for only online exercise provision, not very different from the paper-based ones.

5. Basic implications

In overall terms, thus, the data reviewed so far have shown that there is a gap between the available literature on the use of technology for teaching purposes and the experience of the actual implementation process in the EFL context (Timucxin, 2006, p. 262); for instance, coursebooks. To achieve urgent and vital integration of ICT in any educational context and material numerous factors inevitably need to be considered.

In the first place, everybody engaged in the language learning and teaching process, the students, teachers, administrators, book writers, publishers, are to be very conscious of advantages of the information and communication technology for providing ‘scaffolding’ for the language development. In other words, it should be found out whether the normal potential advantages of ICT tools in supporting learning, as described in the literature (e.g. Plass et al., 2003), are enhanced in any way by use of the coursebooks in that presenting information in multiple modalities can contribute positively to the learners who are supposed to actively process information (Altrich et al., 1998).

Secondly, a central aim for ICT practitioners should be to strive for ‘normalisation’ (Bax, 2000), namely the state in which the technology is so embedded in practice that it ceases to be regarded as either a miracle cure-all (cf. Murray & Barnes, 1998) or something to be feared. Bax states that the state of normalisation will have been achieved:

‘when ICT tools are used everyday by language students and teachers as an integral part of every lesson, like pen or a book... without fear or inhibition, and equally without an exaggerated respect for what they can do. They will not be the center of any lesson, but they will play a part in almost all. They will be completely integrated into all other aspects of classroom life, alongside coursebooks, teachers and ...’ (Bax, 2003)

In the final line, stakeholders’ worries and misunderstandings about the integration of ICT tools into the language teaching material should be minimized. Although most teachers are fairly competent computer users, some are still hesitant about using technology due to two contrasting ideas, which are, firstly, the feeling that they can lose authority in case the students might know more about technology than they do (Jarwis, 2004) and the belief that the technology is the sole determinant in successful teaching, described as ‘technical fallacy’, which may result in misuse or underuse because of teachers’ over-reliance on the technology (Bax, 2000). At that point, training can be the key solution in the effective use of ICT during which they can internalize how to evaluate and select teaching resources and how to solve practical and theoretical problems in conjunction with the integration of technology into the coursebooks. Thus, as has been shown, this section reveals some significant implications for the extension of good practice of ICT tools integrated into EFL coursebooks in a strategic way.
6. Conclusion

The development of ICTs has resulted in a dramatic change in almost all parts of the society and the global world. A similar change is fundamental in education, likewise, in language learning context so as to comply with changes. In this respect, the changes required the integration of ICT tools and applications to all aspects of language learning process like teaching, learning, curriculum, management as well as materials, especially coursebooks as a main medium used to teach English Language since ICTs overlap the needs and expectations of the learners that are grown up in a constantly changing and innovating society. Furthermore, ICTs provide the learners with more individualized learning experiences, which contributes both to autonomous and lifelong learning. However, the range of ICT tools remain limited to CD-ROM, Internet, DVD and some types of Audio materials. The other ICT tools are supplementary materials for currently existing coursebooks and they are completely 'stand-alone' courses without any connection to the content of the textbook. Thus, these ignored ICT tools are never included in the lesson, simply, for keeping the planned course or coursebook.

It seems evident that the introduction and increased use of ICT in English Language teaching and learning will go hand-in-hand with the popularization of easily manipulated and user-friendly devices. As long as teachers lack confidence in their ability to master the new technologies, they still have some way to go until the normalisation of technology in language teaching, where the use of ICT becomes as natural as the use of papers and pens. In summary, it can be said that the positive potential of ICT in ELT has been recognized and technology and materials are available, but what is missing is the efficient integration of them into the currently used coursebooks and the ongoing teacher training if we are to reap the benefits of rich learning environment which ICT offers for foreign language learning.

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