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## CHALLENGES FROM IRANIAN TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARD THE INTEGRATION OF ICT IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

Dr. HOSSEIN SIAHPOOSH<sup>1</sup>, MATIN RAMAK<sup>2\*</sup>, ZAHRA KOUHI<sup>2</sup>,  
BEHNAM JAVANDEL<sup>2</sup>

Department of English Language, Ardabil Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran

Email:siahpoosh\_hossein@yahoo.com<sup>1</sup>; \*m.ramak90@yahoo.com

### ABSTRACT

Depending on the fact that teacher' perceptions are a major factor in the process of ICT integration; the present study investigated the perceptions of English teachers in Ardabil towards ICT. The data were collected through a questionnaire to find out teachers' attitudes and their perceptions towards ICT. The study further sought the challenges that may hinder the use of ICT in English lessons. For that purpose, 41 Iranian EFL teachers from various English institutes in the state of Ardabil have been selected as the participants. SPSS version 23 for Microsoft Windows was used to complete the analysis of the collected data. The results indicated that the teachers generally looked with favor at utilizing ICT in language pedagogy. The challenges of using ICT in the context of Iran were also discussed.

**Keywords:**Attitudes,challenges, ICT, perception



Dr. HOSSEIN SIAHPOOSH



MATIN RAMAK



ZAHRA KOUHI



BEHNAM JAVANDEL

### 1. Introduction

Incorporation of technology into educational contexts is becoming an integral part of language teaching and learning programs all around the world (Cross, 2014; Clifford & Granoien, 2008; Salaberry, 2001). The importance of systematic integration of technology has been stressed by the researchers, educational policy makers, and professional standards (e.g., Arnold, 2013; Kessler, 2006; Newhouse, 2002) since it is woven into language learning as a key curricular element (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2006 cited in Arnold, 2013). The literature on the subject indicates that language teachers should be able to engage language learners with appropriate forms of technology to investigate language variations, integrate culture, and connection with target language communities (Arnold, 2013). Due to the importance of raising L2 language teachers' awareness of the potential of technological advances within ESL and EFL programs and preparation for making effective use of them (Arnold, 2013; Kessler, 2007; Stepp-Greany, 2002), the present study aimed to give insights into the issue. Despite the fact that the body of research generally supports using technology in language classrooms (Clifford & Granoien, 2008), the challenges of technology-driven education need to be dealt with as well. For instance, it is suggested that the majority of L2 teachers obtain the required knowledge from informal sources and personal experience rather than through formal instructions and

preparation courses (Kessler, 2006; Robb, 2006). Further, graduates of such courses are generally dissatisfied with the little training that they receive (Kessler, 2007). As Kessler (2007) argues, "reliance upon this kind of preparation may not best serve pedagogical needs due to distinctions between personal and pedagogical uses of technology" (p. 173). Nevertheless, not much research has been done on the effect and usage of technology from the point of view of L2 teachers. The focus of the SLA research has mainly been on how technology affects L2 learners and why teachers should or should not use it, rather than why they do or do not (Lam, 2000). In addition, the use of technology for acquiring second and foreign Languages seems to expand rapidly in the context of Iran during the last decade. To bridge this gap, this article serves as the basis to figure out the perceptions of Iranian ELT teachers towards using ICT as well as studying the challenges that they encounter in implementation of ICT. Accordingly, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the perceptions of Iranian ELT teachers toward the use of ICT tools in teaching English?
2. What challenges are in utilizing ICT in Iranian ELT classes?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 The Use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in Education

*Information and communication technologies (ICTs)* refers to "any product that will store, retrieve, manipulate, and transmit or receive information electronically in a digital form for example, personal computers, digital television, email, and robots. Importantly, it is also concerned with the way these different uses can work with each other" (Thamarana, 2017, P. 703). According to Cartelli (2008), there are two ICT approaches to L2 teaching and learning, i.e., synchronic (e.g., by chat and videoconferencing) and diachronic (e.g., video lessons, practical exercises on internet, blog). In these approaches, technology is viewed as a medium through which the learners are able to negotiate meaning through interaction, interpretation, and collaboration (Kern, 1996).

The pervasiveness of ICT has brought about rapid changes in the field of education in general and language learning in particular (Moradi&Khalkhali, 2008). According to Hanrahan (2006), "[t]he technology in the classroom is something other than English in a disciplinary sense, yet it's often inherently textual nature is intimately woven into the practice of English studies" (P. 32). L2 learners are already not only technology literate, but also they are becoming the pioneers of change for the future of modern education (Brooks, 2001). Research on the area of second language acquisition (SLA) reports a number of positive, affective benefits regarding the general use of technology in classrooms including increased motivation, improvement in self-concept and mastery of basic skills, more student-centered learning and engagement in the learning process, and more active processing resulting in higher-order thinking skills and better recall (e.g., Arnold, 2013; Beauvois, 1998; Cross, 2014; Lee, 2014; Nowaczyk, 1998; Sanaoui and Lapkin, 1992; Warschauer, 1996; Youns, Hashim, Embi, & Lubis, 2010; etc). Moreover, recent advances in technology enable the visualization of educational materials in an innovative and realistic manner. Therefore, it is recommended that educational environments take advantage of this capability to provide easy access of information (Moradi&Khalkhali, 2008).

### 2.2 Teachers' Perceptions towards the Use of ICT in Teaching

Lam (2000) investigated underlying factors influencing L2 teachers' decisions about using or not using technology in the classroom. Oral interviews were conducted with 10 L2 teachers and analyzed for their content. The results revealed that the teachers' decisions about technology mainly depended on the teacher's personal beliefs in its benefits or lack thereof, i.e., whether the teacher is personally convinced of the benefits of using technology for L2 instruction, rather than a resistance to it. The pros believed that it can help their students learn the target language better by offering a variety of input and motivating learners, while the cons reported a lack of confidence in the advantages of technology for their students. The author concluded that teachers are not really 'technophobic' and that institutions are perhaps overly technophilic in their rush to obtain the latest innovations without considering the needs of teachers and students.

Kessler (2007) conducted a survey on L2 teachers' perception and usage of computer in teaching as well as their overall attitudes to it. A web-based survey was distributed among 108 randomly selected master's degree graduates in teaching English as a foreign language. The findings indicated that informal CALL preparation is closely linked to teachers' attitude toward technology while formal CALL teaching preparation is not. Additional findings revealed that the teachers appeared to be confident about CALL overall, but they

were not confident when creating CALL-based materials. Moreover, they felt less confident when making decisions about the integration of CALL, particularly in addressing aural/oral skills.

In a case study, Zhelezovskaia (2016) investigated 5 foreign language teachers' attitudes towards the use of ICT in their instruction in the context of Finland through the reported experience of ICT implementation. The analysis of the qualitative data revealed that the teachers reported a positive influence for ICT implementation on both teaching and learning processes. However, they pointed out the negative sides of ICT use such as distraction of the students from usage of technology and technical problems causing frustration to the teachers. In addition, the responses revealed that the teachers were provided with adequate training in ICT implementation.

The results of a survey by Thamarana (2017) on 85 Indian teachers' attitudes to the use of ICTs in English learning context suggested that the majority of the teachers had positive attitudes towards ICTs. They agreed that ICTs play a great role in language teaching and helps in self-understanding. They also reported that ICT does not hinder interaction with the students. The findings also suggested that ICT supports language teaching by increasing intrinsic motivation of the teachers and making the teaching of the concepts easier.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The present study utilized quantitative methodology. It employed the use of questionnaire as the research instrument. The data collection was based on the questionnaire distributed to the respondents and this served as instrument. The questionnaire was designed in order to gather sufficient data pertaining to the goals of the study.

#### **3.2 Sample**

Samples of the study were 41 English teachers, 15 male and 26 female, teaching in different educational contexts such as institutes, universities, or schools. A 'snowball' sampling strategy was adapted where some targets were identified and then they asked to introduce other potential participants who are qualified to take part in the study. Their ages ranged from 23–44, with the mean of 29/7. About proficiency level, 23 of them were in advanced level, 12 upper-intermediate level, and six intermediate level. Nine participants had more than 10 years of teaching experience, 14 teacher with an experience between 6–10 years, and others had less than 5 years of experience.

#### **3.3 Research Instrument**

A questionnaire was used as the main instrument of this study. The questionnaire is the one which is designed by Thamarana (2017). It consisted of 20 items. A 5-point Likert scale was used that ranged from strongly disagree toward strongly agree. In addition, some demographic information such as gender, age, proficiency level, and teaching experience were added to the beginning of the questionnaire.

#### **3.4 Data Analysis and Procedures**

For the ease of data collection, questionnaire designed in Google forms program and sent electronically through email and telegram to the participants and they were asked to send the questionnaire to the other possible cases. The data gathered from the participants were analyzed using the descriptive statistics in order to collect the frequency count and percentages. They were presented in the form of tables. Demographic variables of the participants were also gathered to support data in order to understand the overall analysis. The data analysis utilized was the Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS).

### **4. Result**

Table 1 presents responses of the teachers under survey, about the statements of the questionnaire. Percentages indicated that most of the teachers agree with using ICT in the classrooms and they have a positive attitude toward it. More than 90% of the teachers agree that using ICT, students can understand more effectively and they can express their thinking in a better way (statements 12 and 13). Among participants 95% agree with the idea that technology will give them the opportunity to teach skills in an effective and better way. Teachers mostly agreed with four statements, feel comfortable with ICT, consider Internet advantageous, more useful than traditional ways, and help them to teach more effectively, with 46/3% completely agree responses (statements 1, 2, 10, and 14). On the other hand, they believed that different

technological instruments such as YouTube (70%), Smart Phones (75%), and LCD Projectors (83%), have positive attitudes and a large percentage of teachers agree to use them (items 4, 5, and 7).

Majority of teachers think that ICT will change both the way of their teaching (85%), and the way of students' learning (87%). Items 3, 6, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 account for challenges that teachers face with. Most of the teachers believe that the number of technological equipment is not sufficient in the classrooms. Although 68% of the teachers believe that students are familiar with technology, the use of technology do not incorporated into teaching materials.

Table 1: The Frequency of Teachers' Responses (%)

Items	N	1	2	3	4	5
1. I feel comfortable with the idea of using ICT as an instructional tool in teaching	41	0	1(2/4)	5(12/2)	16(39)	19(46/3)
2. The use of Internet in teaching and learning is most advantageous	41	0	0	5(12/2)	17(41/5)	19(46/3)
3. If something goes wrong I will not know how to fix it	41	10(24/4)	20(48/8)	5(12/2)	4(9/8)	2(4/9)
4. The idea of using YouTube videos in teaching and learning makes me confident	41	2(4/9)	1(2/4)	9(22)	14(34/1)	15(36/6)
5. The use of the Smart Phone as instructional or learning tool excites me	41	1(2/4)	0	9(22)	19(46/3)	12(29/3)
6. The use of ICT in teaching and learning scares me	41	16(39)	20(48/8)	1(2/4)	3(7/3)	1(2/4)
7. The LCD Projector is a valuable instructional tool for teachers	41	0	0	7(17/1)	9(22)	25(61)
8. The ICT will change the way I teach	41	0	2(4/9)	4(9/8)	21(51/2)	14(34/1)
9. The ICT will change the way students learn in my classes	41	1(2/4)	1(2/4)	3(7/3)	21(51/2)	15(36/6)
10. The teaching with the use of ICT is more useful than traditional ways of teaching	41	0	2(4/9)	5(12/2)	15(36/6)	19(46/3)
11. The ICT is not conducive to student learning because it is not easy to use	41	7(17/1)	18(43/9)	12(29/3)	3(7/3)	1(2/4)
12. The use of ICT helps students understand concepts in more effective manner	41	0	0	3(7/3)	23(56/1)	15(36/6)
13. The ICT helps students learn because it allows them to express their thinking in better and different ways	41	0	0	4(9/8)	22(53/7)	15(36/6)
14. The ICT helps teachers to teach the language skills in more effective ways	41	0	1(2/4)	1(2/4)	20(48/8)	19(46/3)
15. The use of ICT will help the teachers teach writing skills better in classes	41	0	2(4/9)	10(24/4)	16(39)	13(31/7)
16. The required equipment is available in the classroom	41	2(4/9)	13(31/7)	13(31/7)	8(19/5)	5(12/2)
17. The number of technological equipment is sufficient	41	5(12/2)	14(34/1)	9(22)	10(24/4)	3(7/3)
18. I have access to Internet in the classroom	41	8(19/5)	15(36/6)	2(4/9)	9(22)	7(17/1)
19. The students have enough familiarity (knowledge and skill) with the way of using technology	41	3(7/3)	4(9/8)	6(14/6)	19(46/3)	9(22)
20. The use of technology appropriately is incorporated to the teaching materials, activities, and tasks	41	2(4/9)	10(24/4)	6(14/6)	20(48/8)	3(7/3)

Notes: N= the number of students who answered.

1= strongly disagree; 2= disagree; 3= neutral; 4= agree ;5= strongly disagree.

## 5. Discussion

Regarding the first research question of the study, the frequency of the learners' responses indicated that Iranian EFL teachers generally have positive attitudes towards using ICT in EFL classes and they also utilize different types of technology in their teaching. In line with the findings of the previous research, they mostly reported that utilizing different technological tools do pay off. Using ICT results in more effective learning, provides learners with more opportunities to express themselves, and positively influences the way teachers teach English. One possible reason for such findings would be the charming nature of technology in Iranian society. They also developed confidence in using ICT, perhaps due to the expansion of using technological tools as an inseparable part of living in the recent decades. This implies that different aspects of utilizing ICT need to receive more attention by EFL scholars. As Arnold (2013) argues, "methods instructors should expand the discussion of ICTs to provide a solid basis for continued professional development" (p. 230). This gives direction for educational policy makers to improve the current policies regarding the application of ICT in educational settings. However, it should be noted here that perhaps such a result is, in some part, the result of conducting the survey via a internet-based interface and eliciting participants through an electronic invitation. While the sample was arrived at randomly, perhaps those who were less inclined to participate through an internet-based interface selected themselves out of the study. Perhaps this method of delivery resulted in a higher rate of responses by those who are technologically inclined.

Regarding the second research question of the study, the findings of the questionnaire addressed some challenges of utilizing ICTs which Iranian English teachers encounter, i.e., insufficient knowledge of working with the tools, lack of familiarity with the latest advances of educational technology, unavailability or lack of sufficient number of the required equipment in the class. Some of the teacher believed that the learners do not have enough knowledge and required skills to use technology for the purpose of language learning. On the other hand, the majority believed that ICT is appropriately incorporated into the learning materials and textbooks that they teach. Yet, most of them reported that teaching through ICT does not essentially result in learning since such tools are not easy to use. Due to the limitations of the study, it is not clear that whether the teachers acquired the knowledge of applying ICT through formal training and reliable sources. Here, one point to be made is that if teachers continue to rely upon informal, ad-hoc methods of preparation, they may not be able to exploit the resources and learning opportunities available to them as ICTs continue to evolve. As Kessler (2007) argues, "those individuals who are not personally, financially, or socially inclined to seek such informal development are not likely to receive it in this current model" (p. 184). Accordingly, further research is needed to know to what extent the types of preparation would further influence ELTteachers' perceptions of the potentials of ICT.

## 6. Conclusion

The present study and the previous ones show that the use of technology is determined by a wide range of factors, ranging from external factors such as access to appropriate materials and professional development opportunities to more internal factors such as awareness of the benefits of technology and personal attitudes towards technological innovations. Nevertheless, the results should be generalized cautiously due to the limitations of the study. The study also has implications to further research. Teachers' attitude towards the use of ICT may vary according to their ICT skills, the context of teaching and learning, the learners characteristics e.g., age, proficiency level, learning style, etc, the policy of stakeholders, and so forth.

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