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ICT in the Application of Language Learning to TESOL in China

Hui Zhang

zzhanghuii@outlook.com

Abstract. Science and technology has become more and more important in education, especially in language teaching and learning. Also, more and more teachers realize it is the popular issue nowadays. In China, the application of ICT in the language class to TESOL has already been a hot topic. This paper is divided into five parts: the first part is the introduction; the second part explains the definition and types of ICT and its advantages in the field of education; the third part describes the basic concepts of TESOL; the fourth part focuses on ICT in the application of language learning to TESOL in China through analyzing the existing problems and underlying causes and providing some suggestion to improve the current situation; the last part is the conclusion. All in all, this paper attempts to contribute to the growing understanding of the present application of ICT in language teaching and learning in China, which will be extremely beneficial for the improvement of the current ICT environment in TESOL, and hopefully offer some references for the future researches in this area.

Keywords. information and communication technology (ICT), TESOL, language learning, application

1.1 Introduction

21 century is an era of information explosion. Different from what had been usually conducted in the previous era, education, in this very era, is full of creation and vigor. Therefore, it is vital for language teachers to be full acquainted with the skill needed to use information and communication technology (ICT) in their lesson delivery. English teachers, most of them, often use various approaches to inspire their students in the language learning process, especially in teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). China, as one of the most representative countries for language learning, has a considerable amount of English learners varying from primary school students to college students. Apart from that, many people who have already graduated and found decent jobs are still required to learn or use English as well. Thus, the study of ICT in the application of language learning to TESOL in China is of great significance, which not only enhances Chinese people's language learning, but also provides realistic reference for language teaching.

2.1 Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

2.11 The definition and types of ICT in education

Nowadays as teachers, especially English teachers, we are faced with all kinds of multimedia teaching devices, such as computers, projectors, smart phones, etc. These behaviors of teachers are understandable, because language learning process can be more inspiring and

interesting through utilizing information and communication technology, namely ICT. Frankly speaking, the skilled implementation of ICT has become one of the most important teaching qualifications for teachers.

Information and communication technology (ICT) is defined as “a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create, disseminate, store, and manage information”, (1) which includes various kinds of technologies and diverse services and applications associated with them, for instance, computers, the Internet, radio, telephony, television, distance learning, videoconferencing and so on. There is no doubt that ICT can be regarded as an umbrella term for any kind of communication devices or application.

However, with fast the development of these technologies and the mature utilization of teachers, ICT is often used in combination with different sort of technologies instead of just the sole delivery devices. That is to say “A number of different ICT tools and applications may be integrated in teaching and learning” (Yunus, et al, 2009). In this way, the classroom learning is much more vivid and attractive than the traditional style.

ICT has been widely adopted in education for several decades. Generally speaking, there are three main types of ICTs commonly being used in education:

E-Learning: e-learning, namely electronic learning which is sometimes called online learning, which always used to describe something related to computer-enhanced learning. It covers learning at all levels, involving both the technologies and associated methodologies in learning utilizing networked and/or multimedia technologies.

Blended learning: blended learning is a relatively complicated learning approach, which refers to “learning models that combine traditional classroom practice with e-learning solutions” (Tinio, 2003). In other words, when blended learning is conducted in the delivery, the teacher often makes full use of different delivery methods at the same time to teach, such as face-to-face classrooms teaching, self-paced learning and online classrooms teaching, etc.

Distance learning: distance learning, often called as open learning, is “a way of providing learning opportunities that is characterized by the separation of teacher and learner in time or place, or both time and place”(2). If a student adopts distance learning, which means he or she studies on his or her own at home or other places rather than an ordinary classroom under the supervision of teachers. However, students who use distance learning can communicate with their teachers and their fellow classmates through many ways, such as e-mail, online forums, instant messaging, video conferencing, etc.

2.12 The advantages of using ICT in education

As one of the globally acknowledged learning and teaching approaches, the use of ICT “offers unprecedented opportunities to the education systems with the capacity of teacher and students to integrate enhance and interact with each other no matter the distance in a meaningful way to achieve the learning objectives”(Akpabio & Ogiriki, 2017). We have to admit that ICT used in the process of teaching or learning, especially in the process of foreign language teaching or learning, does have positive effects.

On the one hand, the utilization of ICT in the teaching process is really convenient and beneficial to teachers. Firstly, teacher can easily adapt the teaching materials in accordance with the circumstances, learners’ needs and responses with the help of ICT ; secondly, teachers’ educational needs can be satisfied enormously, because they are able to have access to various authentic and even remote teaching materials on the Internet instead of relying solely on printed textbooks; thirdly, teachers can receive a thorough and quick feedback in their teaching process via the use of ICT; fourthly, teachers’ lectures can become more interesting and less ordinary,

which can hugely draw students' attention and make them have a deep involvement with the class. (Houcine, 2011) Obviously, ICT plays an indispensable role in the teaching process.

On the other hand, the utilization of ICT in the learning process is motivating and effective for the learners. Firstly, learners' motivation and participation can be greatly strengthened by the utilization of ICT when they are learning, since vivid multimedia devices make the learning process much more attractive than the boring textbooks and teachers' nonstop talking. Secondly, with the help of ICT, learners have the opportunity to conduct independent learning, to have critical thinking, and to explore and discover rather than merely listen and remember, because they can learn anytime at any place without too many restrictions. Thirdly, learners' communicative and collaborative skills can be trained through diverse ICT-supported learning which always requires interaction and cooperation among students and teachers. Fourthly, learners' attainment and outcomes including daily study and examinations will be improved to some degree (Houcine, 2011). Therefore, learners will enjoy the learning more attentively and efficiently if ICT is utilized in the learning process.

3.1 Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL)

With the rapid of growth of globalization, English as a universal communicative language is becoming more and more popular around the world. Known as the combination of both pedagogy and English, Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) starts to gain ground and people majored in TESOL is becoming trendy as well.

Many scholars have conducted researches on Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Crookes (1997) studies the ecology of teaching, and he thinks that various reasons like the lack of opportunity for professional development, insufficient teaching materials, fierce competition, etc. may cause teachers to pay more attention to basic survival rather than professional needs. Burns (1996) thought that teachers were greatly affected by beliefs about language and the language learning process, but contextual factors still mattered a lot, such as the learners and the institution. As an ESL teacher and applied linguist, Atkinson (1999) works in the field of appropriate pedagogy, discourse analysis and English for specific purposes, and he thinks that culture is a central yet under-examined concept in TESOL. And Freeman had provided in 2002 a clear account of the development of research into mainstream teachers' cognition. Rigg (1991) presents some key aspects from the whole language perspective in via describing examples of whole language principles in practice TESOL. (Rigg , 1991) These scholars have focused on various aspect in TESOL through establishing the subject and challenging others, which makes TESOL full of academic vigor.

TESOL teaching mode is not to decompose English knowledge into cooperative teaching, but to integrate various teaching methods together, which pays more attention to the theoretical application to practical teaching, reforms the application of college English teaching system from the perspective of basic practice, and changes the traditional English style.

As the globalization of education accelerates, English as an international language becomes more important. China, has the increasing frequency of exchanges and cooperation with the international community, requires more TESOL teachers, and the popularization of school education and international integration is inevitable.

4.1 ICT in the application of language learning to TESOL in China

4.1.1 Current situation

As we all know china is a country with a considerable number of English learners, since China has participated into the World Trade Organization in 2001 and hold the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008. Mandarin is the official language in China, but English, as one of the

compulsory subjects for Chinese students varying from primary schools to college students, is often considered as a difficult subject for students. Noticeably, limited vocabulary and unfamiliar grammar rules are the two of the most cited points of the difficulty, which results in students' unwillingness of active learning and teachers' teaching pressure.

What's more, due to the relative traditional way of English teaching approaches and the purpose for higher scores in examinations, the results of English language learning in Chinese education at almost all levels are generally recognized to have been a little bit disappointing. What most students are perceived in the process of learning English is called "deaf and dumb English" by some people in mixture tone of banter and seriousness. There is no doubt that the examination-centered education, particularly in English learning, cannot satisfy society's true needs and learners' personal needs for career development.

With the development of science and technology, ICT utilized by many English teachers in China to facilitate language learning and their teaching process, because it is obvious that the interplay between the learners' ability and the technology they use in teaching and learning process will enhance the learners' capacities. In China, the integration of ICT into language education is regard as a solution to deal with the exiting complicated problems in the development of the whole country, since we always think young students are the successors of the country. In the meanwhile, the utilization of ICT is believed to help the country to keep up with the world, and to bridge the gap between the domestic level and that of the developed countries.

Moreover, TESOL profession is becoming more and more popular as well, and a large number of Chinese, even foreigners have begun to try their efforts to take an examination related to TESOL and are eager to get the certificate for TESOL. Apart from that, some Chinese students start to go abroad to pursue their further study on TESOL. When they graduate from the college, many students go to primary and secondary schools to teach EFL courses, and others to language schools in the United States or other countries that needs teachers to teach English, such as South Africa, China, French, etc. There are still some students entered the field of the publishing circle and became TESOL textbook editor.

For instance, in the period of compulsory education, English is one of the major subjects in the college entrance examination, which is undoubtedly the most important examination for Chinese students because it is sometime life-changing to the students. At this period of time, English teachers often write the key information on the blackboard, but they also uses computers, combined with PowerPoint and a projector, to elaborate their courses and inspire their students, since students are always banned to bring cellphones or other entertaining digital devices on campus. Sometimes, teachers will play some English songs during the short ten-minute break between classes to ease students' stresses and relax their minds.

However, in the period of higher education, English learners can be generally divided into two groups of students. The first group of students is English majors who have to focus on English learning whole-heatedly. The second group of students are non-English majors, English, for them, just one of the public compulsory courses. In most colleges, non-English majors only have to attend the college English lesson for the previous two years, if they pass the final English examination, there will be no English learning tasks when they are in junior and senior year. If they fail the final English examination, there is a second chance for them to attend the make-up examination at the beginning of their junior year. If they pass the make-up examination, they can bit farewell to English class. If they fail the make-up examination, there is no choice for them but to retake the college English lesson once again in their junior year. Moreover, some Chinese universities and colleges do have English requirements for their students. Some require the non-English majors to pass the CET Four or CET Six and the English

majors to pass the TEM Four or TEM Eight so that they can graduate successfully from the universities and colleges and get their diplomas. Aimed at different target students, English teacher often adopt different ICT to facilitate their teaching, such as self-made courseware, PC-based teaching facilities (multimedia platform) , projector, computer-assisted English teaching software and Internet teaching resources. Besides, college students all have smart phones, some English teachers communicate with students with instant communication tools like We Chat, QQ, Tencent Conference, etc. Particularly, during this Covid-19 Pandemic, many English teachers make full use the Internet resources like MOOC, Rain Class etc. to make distance-teaching. Obviously, with the help of ICT, we can truly achieve the teaching goals and complete the teaching task and the students can have the opportunity to learn online instead of wasting too much time in isolation at home.

4.12 Major problems

a. Lack of ICT-related resources

One of the most important problems in the ICT-enhanced language education is that there is the insufficient information and communication technologies infrastructure available, especially in some rural areas. We have to admit, ICT is really effective in the process of language learning and teaching, but it is costly as well. It requires certain kind of classroom or teaching buildings equipped with computers, projectors, the Internet service, electricity, etc. Thus, it is sometimes unaffordable to schools and ordinary family. As China is still a developing country, there is a relatively huge gap between urban areas and the countryside. Some rural places even have no steady supply of electricity, not to mention the smooth Internet speed. Therefore, many schools are reluctant to update these teaching facilities to reconstruct the technological teaching environment to enhance English teaching and most families don't have the access to ICT- supported learning. Take this Covid-19 Pandemic as an example, some students in cities have at least one or two computers to take the online courses and make notes with ipad or smart phones, while the students in some rural areas only have one smart phone to deal with all the courses and sometimes the phone cannot receive the signals.

b. Poor communication between teachers and students

Under the ICT teaching and learning environment, interaction between teachers and students, and the communication among students is vital. In this way, students can share various language learning experiences with each other and exchange ideas instantly. When faced with some language learning difficulties, such as pronunciation in speaking, unfamiliar words and expressions in reading, controversial topics in writing, etc. , students can resort to these useful information and communication technologies and solve the problems on their own, or learn from each other, or ask timely help and suggestions from their English teachers. However, if the students are not active to these information and communication technologies, and unwilling to get involved in the ICT- supported teaching atmosphere, there will be no effects at all. After all, some Chinese students are accustomed to traditional ways of teaching and like to be taught everything by their teachers and memorize what they have learned in the class. It is hard for them to adapt themselves quickly to the creative learning style and to think independently and critically. What is more, some senior teachers who are not good at communicate with students online prefers face-to-face teaching and writing everything important on the black board. They are afraid of changes, and unable to make a full use of the new ICT .The poor communication will surly exert bad influence on the learning effects.

c. Lack of systematical knowledge and skills

The success of ICT integrated in the language learning process is, to a large extent, accounted for by teachers' knowledge about the technologies. Before going to teach to students, English teachers must get a thorough understanding about how and when to use ICT tools to achieve particular teaching purposes. The goal of the English teacher is to make learners acquire sufficient mastery of the language that enables them to understand their lectures. However, some English teachers and students don't have a systematical knowledge about ICT and unfamiliar with the operation as well. As a matter of fact, for English teachers, ICT-related skills are not only about how to use these devices and teaching tools correctly, but also involving skills of organizing various kinds of classroom activities with diverse information and communication technologies so as to help and guide students to take active part in the learning process and improve students' English competence. Lack of English teachers with good ICT knowledge and skills is a worldwide problem in China at present. Moreover, as learners, students themselves should also learn how to set clear goals for their English study through monitoring their learning statements, examining their learning performances, and exchanging their learning feelings so that they can make full use of the ICT and have their whole learning process in good control .

4.13 Suggestions

As we all known, the utilization of the ICT in education, especially in language learning, is an irresistible trend in the modern society. How to improve the ICT- enhance teaching and learning effects is of great importance. There are some small suggestions of the application of ICT language learning to TESOL in China.

a. Suggestions to the government

Many Chinese schools, particular primary schools and high schools, are state-operated. The government should make a full use of ICT and provide more financial support to update the related teaching equipment. Perhaps, an ICT - related educational policy should be put forward, through which ICT facilities will be funded legally and publicly, and the utilization of them will be monitored as well. In this way, Chinese language learners can keep in pace with the technological development and the changing competencies required in the 21st century.

b. Suggestions to the school administrations

School administrations should give their full support for the better application of ICT in language teaching and learning. Firstly, school administrations should try to seek for financial support both public and private so as to fund the construction of ICT facilities. Inadequate ICT facilities for language teaching not only disappoint teachers' teaching passion, affect the teaching process and teaching efficiency, but also decrease students' learning enthusiasm and language proficiency. Secondly, school administrations should provide more opportunities of sustained training related ICT for both teachers and students, which will lead to a better cooperation between them in the class. Thirdly, school administrations should, based on the features of the subjects, deploy ICT in classroom, especially language-related subjects, and teachers should be encouraged to use presentation software like Microsoft PowerPoint to teach and students should be given the accesses to ICT as well.

c. Suggestions to the TESOL teachers

Teachers, particularly TESOL teachers, should keep up with the times and contiguously update their knowledge both academically and technologically. Firstly, teachers should get a

thorough understanding of ICT and master the use of it so as to satisfy the fast changing requirements for them. Secondly, teachers should learn how to organize an attractive and thought-provoking class with the help of ICT, not only activating students' learning interests but also cultivating students' self-learning habit. Thirdly, teachers should strengthen the content of their course, focusing more on the teaching objectives rather than the entertaining effects of the class.

d. Suggestions to the learners

Learners should try to stimulate their learning initiatives under the ICT enhanced learning environment. Firstly, learners should participate in various learning activities without much prompting, which will not only strengthen their basic language skills but also improve their interpersonal skills since they can talk and communicate more with teachers and the fellow students. Secondly, students should try to learn the meaning of self-discipline and self-control. Under the ICT- supported learning environment, it is easy for learners to be distracted by the various information on the Internet rather than concentrated on language learning. Therefore, learners have to remind themselves of the learning purpose through self-control and self-discipline.

5.1 Conclusion

In China, driven by the pressure of examination-oriented, the current mixture mobile learning is relatively strong in cultivating students' deductive thinking, and the proportion of memory, practice and testing is too large, while it is relatively weak in cultivating critical thinking, real problem-solving skills and innovative thinking skills. There is a widespread belief that ICT plays an important role in reforming and transforming teaching and learning at different levels of education, especially in language teaching and learning. Thus, the application of ICT in language learning to TESOL in China is of great significance and realistic meaning. It is crucial for teachers to encourage and guide their students to use ICT-related tools and to provide their students with some Internet resource in language learning so as to strengthen students' language competence. Admittedly, there are still some problems existing, the integration of ICT in the education system is the trend of this era, which not only improves classroom teaching learning process, but also provides the facility of e-learning, blended learning and distance learning for learners without the restrictions of geographical location, age, time, etc. Obviously, the advantages of it outweigh its disadvantages. As time goes by, the problems will be gradually solved and there will be a bright future ahead of us.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

1. Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest
There are no any potential conflicts of interest in this study.
2. Research involving Human Participants and/or Animals
In this research, there is no involving Human Participants and/or Animals.
3. Informed consent
Done

Since this article is a concept paper to introduce the ICT application in TESOL students in China. So, it is more explained as current situation, problem, or suggestions. As s conclusion, there is no potential conflict of interest, or any human or animals involved, so this study will not hurt anyone.

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