

Perceptions and Attitudes towards Web-based ELT among English teachers in Greece

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Abstract

Web-based education is a growing concern in most European countries and there have been efforts on its application into language teaching or complementing the traditional system with virtual learning and teaching. One of the major obstacles on the implementation of such systems into English Language Teaching (ELT) in Greece, besides other possible barriers, has been the disinclination of the teachers and instructors to adopt Information and Communication Technologies as an effective tool in language teaching. This study has been an attempt to explore the attitudes of English teachers in primary education toward web-based ELT. A questionnaire including 40 questions - dealing with issues on ELT - were sent to English language teachers in Greece. It was assumed that ELT professionals with enough experience in teaching and exposure to web-based resources can be of considerable help in revealing, at least, the fundamental concerns and attitudes towards the integration of ICT into English learning and the factors contributing to their attitudes so as to provide some constructive information and suggestions for the adoption of technology in foreign language education. The findings suggest that teachers have positive attitudes toward online learning in general. With the focus on language and communication, foreign language teachers are continually searching for better ways of accessing authentic materials and providing experiences that will improve their students' knowledge and skills. Almost all respondents expressed the pressing need for a teacher-friendly website to supply web-enhanced English language learning resources and activities. Finally, this study may provide information about the potential of language acquisition through the Web. Important guidelines must be given in order to develop successful online ELT websites.

1. Introduction

In a constantly technologically developing world, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) plays a crucial role and affects our way of life. As the Internet has transformed communication around the world, it is natural that it should play a major role in the foreign language classroom. The use of ICT is a pleasant process for the pupil because with the use of various tools (i.e. multimedia) the course becomes attractive, his/her attendance is increased and his/her interest is retained [1]. In general terms, ICT creates a fertile learning environment, particularly for the acquisition of a second/foreign language. Students can work in teams (collaborative and cooperative learning) and thus learn one with the help of each other [2]. Consequently, the potential role of the Web in formal education should be taken into consideration.

2. Related Literature Review

The integration of Information Communication Technology (ICT) into foreign language education has been assumed as the potential of the new technological tools to revolutionize an outmoded

educational system [3]. ICT has brought about the innovative use of web-based learning in second language learning and teaching, particularly in the area of English as a second language (ESL) [4]. With a variety of hyperlinked multimedia documents and computer-mediated communication (CMC) tools, the Web can support language teachers to integrate Web resources into the language classroom [5]. Moreover, the multimedia nature of the Web is essential for the delivery of authentic materials, including texts, images, sound recordings, video clips, virtual reality worlds and dynamic, interactive presentations. All these characteristics can allow the student to work in numerous ways with the authentic materials found on the page. Recent studies have focused on teachers' attitudes towards ICT in order to shed light on the effectiveness of such technological tools in the foreign language classroom. Baylor and Ritchie [6] state, "regardless of the amount of technology and its sophistication, technology will not be used unless instructors have the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to infuse it into the curriculum". Rogers [7] believes that peoples' attitudes toward a new technology are a key element in its diffusion. Therefore, the key factor not only for adopting the new technology but also for minimising the teachers' reluctance is the positive attitudes towards the use of ICT in EFL. The field of foreign language education has always been in the forefront of the use of ICT to facilitate the language acquisition process [8]. That happens because of their familiarity with English as the main software and ICT language. However, the scrutiny of their resistance or reticence against the web-based aspects of their teaching could lead to a more successful syllabus design and ICT implementation. Many teachers do not regard themselves fully-equipped, comfortable and sufficient in using ICT as they feel more confident with their traditional teaching styles [9]. As Bax [10] points out web-enhanced language teaching has an advantage now that the communicative potential can be realised through web technology but the majority of teachers are still nervous of it. Suggested is the need for a differentiated teacher training approach than that applied thus far, which is to take into account the identified differences in teachers' skills, knowledge, views and perception on the application of ICT in schools.

3. Background and Objectives of the present study

Following this, the Greek Ministry of Education, in an attempt to harmonise and coordinate the national educational policy with that of the European Union (eLearning initiative), has undertaken various programmes for the utilisation of ICT in the educational process. Despite the efforts to expand the use of ICTs in schools the body of empirical research is still small. One could think that this national scale initiative provides a firm ground for applying ICT in schools with success. Unfortunately, this is not the case. Providing schools with computers and introducing programmes for the utilisation of ICT in the educational process is one issue, ensuring their usage is another, more difficult task. To begin to design a web presence to supplement a face to face (FTF) course, a needs assessment should be a logical starting point. The focal research questions the present study seeks to explore are the following:

- What is the level of ICT use in Greek foreign language classrooms by English language teachers?
- What are the attitudes among English teachers towards the use of ICT for ELT (English Language Teaching)?
- What are their expectations of ICT use in ELT?

Given the importance of teachers' attitudes and the relationship of teachers' attitudes to the Web-based ELT (English Language Teaching) design, the purpose of this study was to explore the views of English language teachers in Primary Education. In other words, this survey intended to serve as needs analysis and explore teachers' views on the likelihood of developing online English language teaching platforms well-suited in the Greek context. It explores the potential of language acquisition through the Web.

4. Materials and Method

In this study a survey was employed to collect data. A questionnaire was used in this study, namely ICT use in English Teaching adapted by the University of Warwick [11]. The questionnaire consisted of 3 parts including 40 items used to measure teachers' level of ICT use in the foreign language classroom. The first part, which consisted of 18 questions focuses on the demographic situation of the English language teachers including gender, age, studies, computer facilities in their schools, present English learning and teaching situation in their school/workplace, their attitude towards ICT. The second part consists of 15 Likert-type questions relating to the English language teachers' perceptions of ICT use in English teaching. The third part concerns the English teachers' expectations of ICT use in English teaching with 12 Likert-type items developed to measure their needs and expectations of ICT use in class. The data collection was limited to English language teachers in the public and private sector in primary Education. The participants in this research were 44 volunteer English teachers who filled in a survey questionnaire. The data collected was processed and was analyzed as follows.

5. Results

There were 4 men and 40 women, (mean age 29 years). All teachers had a computer at home and had access to computer facilities in 78% of the schools. Moreover, for the purpose of the first part, teachers were asked to respond to 9 questions measuring their level of ICT use for educational purposes in primary schools. All participants use textbooks as their main teaching material. The majority (77,3 %) describe the nature of their English lessons as interactive whereas the remaining describe it as student- centered. Forty (91%) teachers practice English writing through essays and not by writing diaries, reciting essay templates or writing short comments online (blogs, e-mails, msn,QQ). Thirty-four (77,2%) teachers practice English reading by attending extensive/intensive reading classes. Forty (91%) teachers practice students' oral English by having them chat with classmates in English in the classroom. Thirty two (72,7%) practice English listening skills by attending listening comprehension classes in a language lab. Almost all participants (95%) have tried to use online resources for their studies and 86,3% cannot find the learning resources they need on the web. As for the teachers' attitude towards ICT the majority (91,3%) stated that they like using computers for teaching purposes, feel confident using the Internet and are willing to devote their time online. The results concerning the importance they place on various ICT tools are presented in **Table 1**. These percentages represent how important English language teachers consider the following ICT tools.

Items	Percent
Computers	55
www/search engines	50
Data base packages	60.5
Any chatting software	82.4
Powerpoint	62
E-mail	46
Running a blog online	49.9
Online resources for foreign language (FL) teaching/learning	64.5
Discussion forum	54.5

Table 1. Teachers' opinion of ICT tools

According to the results in the second part, the participants (96%) consider that foreign language learning can be more entertaining if the internet is used for communication in class and believe (65%) that email is a good way for teachers and students to communicate. Moreover, they support the opinion (88.3%) that the multimedia environment of the internet helps students to understand online English materials. They find that good web search skills can enhance English teaching but have difficulty in finding a website which provides educational material for the levels they teach (54.5%) or may even not know how to choose suitable websites for their learning (74.2). Finally they express the need for an ELT website that gives free access to education (86%) and allows them to use their own educational material (82%). The results (percentages) are presented in **Table 2**.

Participants' perceptions on ICT in ELT	Percentage
Computers can serve as tools for teaching purposes	91
The WWW can allow me to do more interesting and imaginative work	81
A good English language (ELT) teaching website is a fast and efficient means of getting updated information/material	91
Good web search skills can enhance my English teaching	86.3
Teachers should change the traditional teaching method and adopt online materials as the main teaching tool	42.2
I find searching for online materials time consuming	27.7
I need ELT websites that have educative/informative/communicative purpose	82

Table 2. English language teachers' perceptions of ICT use in English teaching.

The third part refers to teachers' expectations of ICT use in English teaching. Based on the results of the responses the participants displayed a keen interest in using web-based material (72.3%) as that may provide students with more practical and useful knowledge. They hope (72%) that the use of an ELT website will help them teach the foreign language more efficiently. The results (percentages) referring to rest of the items in the third part are presented in **Table 3**.

Items	Percentage
I need to use online learning resources to supplement my textbooks	72.7
I need an ELT website that caters for all my teaching needs	76.7
I hope online teaching can be used more often to help students to improve their language skills	90.2
I hope computers can be used to provide more interactive activities for students	91

I hope English teachers can use more up-to-date online materials	90
I think learning a foreign language through ELT websites is an effective method	45
I hope to use ELT teaching websites to do more interesting and imaginative work	87
I want to use a lot of online materials for English teaching	72.7

Table 3. Teachers' expectations of ICT use in English Teaching.

6. Discussion

The findings revealed that the level of ICT use varies by the research participants. Mostly, young teachers tend to use ICT applications and resources, such as the Internet, CD-Rom, and power point presentation. Meanwhile, search engines, Email, chatting software, blogs, online resources appear to be rarely used by EFL (English as a Foreign Language) teachers. This result is in compliance with the findings of Pelgrum and Plomp [12] who found that only a small number of teachers were using ICT as an integral part of teaching process. Teachers are more likely to incorporate ICT use in their classroom if they see its relevance to language instruction and are convinced that the design of educational software is compatible with educational goals and the individual learning needs of students [13]. Teachers have a positive attitude towards ICT and believe that online learning has the potential to enhance their English teaching as long as it is easily accessible and tailored to their actual needs in primary foreign language education. In the same lines are also Graham et al [14] who emphasise the importance of selecting good web sites and always supporting students throughout the process. The results indicate that there is a need for an ELT website that has educative/ informative/ communicative purpose and provides educational material for all levels. As it is difficult to have good web search skills and searching for online materials is time consuming, teachers should have at their disposal selected and easily accessible online material. According to Atkinson [15] the role of the teacher has changed. The teacher is merely the facilitator of the process organising and guiding, but mostly supporting. The results definitively indicated that the majority of the teachers have a positive attitude towards the use of ICT in the teaching and learning process.

7. Conclusion

This study examines the level of ICT use in ELT in primary school education and the attitudes and expectations of teachers towards the use of ICT for educational purposes. Almost all respondents expressed the pressing need for a teacher-friendly website to supply web-enhanced English language learning resources and activities. Using ICT in education should be considered as a way of learning, discovering, sharing and creating knowledge. However, often investment in the latest technologies is done without considering the target group's needs and interests [16]. Being the agents who implement ICT in learning and teaching, teachers should be in the center of attention. In general terms, it is important that the e- material fits the needs of the learners by making sure that computer work whether in the classroom or in self access fits in effectively with the ongoing curriculum. ICT integration in ELT should be based on student-centered teaching approaches, teaching of all basic



skills (reading-grammar-writing-listening-speaking), interactive activities focusing on virtual learning practices, multiple level teaching approaches and thematically-based tasks.

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