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The Integration of Different Technologies into Language Learning: Language Learners' Attitude and Motivation A Case Study from Malaysia

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Abstract

The present paper aims at investigating language learners' attitude and motivation toward the use of different technologies such as computers, MP3 and MP4 players, mobile phones, and iPods to boost various language skills. The study was conducted based on a survey design with the help of 30 language learners majoring in TESL. To arrive at the necessary quantitative data, a questionnaire was developed and given to the participants to answer. The findings of this study indicated that most of the language learners have a positive attitude toward the use of different technologies to develop different skills. However, the results obtained from the questionnaire showed that language learners mostly prefer to use computer among the other technologies in order to improve their speaking proficiency and listening comprehension more than other language skills. On the contrary, iPods are used less by language learners for the very purpose of language learning.

Keywords: Attitude, Motivation, Technology, Improve, Language skills

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Introduction

Today, technology has become the track upon which the express train of education is heading toward its destination (Christina, 2006). Accordingly, the growth of its application in the field of education particularly language learning has been considerable. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL), computer and audiovisual equipped classrooms, MP3 and MP4 players and Mobile Assisted Language Learning (MALL) are just few examples of the application of technology to the endeavor of language teaching (Vincent & Hah, 1996; Salaberry, 2001; Hulstijn, 2000, just to name a few).

In the same line, today, technology has also dominated the world by sharing and showing a variety of programs to both instruct and entertain the audience. The impressive developments in audio, video, and computer-mediated communications programs offer many possibilities for language learners to learn the language through fulfilling different activities, in-and-outside the classroom settings, around listening to different programs, watching related videos, and holding conversations in real-time as well as for the learners to learn the language better (Chinnery, 2005; Jingi & Ying, 1999; Parker, 2000; Salaberry, 2001; Ishihara & Chi, 2004; Bedjou, 2006).

Vincent and Hah (1996) summarized the effective application of technology to language learning and underlined the point that CALL must be used because computer technology is extensively applied in society and also it may be a resource of a teaching method to be used as long as it is designed to support learners' strategies.

In short, technology has long opened new doors in the field of education, particularly in the field of language learning. One of the doors that is opened is the development of theories of language learning. However, the prospects for applying technology in language learning are only beginning to be considered, and finding which of those technologies that can be used both in-and-outside the classroom could be of great importance to today's language learners as well as the educators. Accordingly, the present study believes that following challenges are essential to seek:

1. Which technology (Computer, CD and MP3 players, Mobile phones, or iPods) is preferred more by the language learners to be used?
2. Which language skill may be developed more through the use of different technologies based on the language learners' experience with the application of different technologies?

Review of the Related Literature

With the increasing integration of different technologies into language learning, a considerable amount of attention has been devoted to learner's attitudes toward the use of different

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technologies. In this relation, the related literature indicates that various technologies have a central role and great potential in foreign/second language learning. It is also obvious that attitudes of learners shape learning process significantly. Accordingly, the related literature indicates that foreign/second language learners usually have positive attitudes towards the use of different technologies.

Considering this issue, the learners' attitudes toward the use of the Internet for educational purposes were considered in a study conducted by Slate, Manuel, and Brinson (2002). Accordingly, it was found that the main factor for using the Internet was the language used which affected the language learners' attitudes towards the Internet use. In many cases, the language which language learners face in the Internet atmosphere is designed in a way that the majority of people understand it easily. This is what can highly increase the attitude toward the use of this technology.

In another study carried out by Usun (2003), gender of the language learners' was also a significant subject variable that affected attitudes towards the Internet. In this study, both male and female participants mostly had positive attitudes toward the Internet use. Moreover, in other studies (Asan & Koca, 2006; Yang & Chen, 2007) which focused on the integration of the Internet tools into language learning activities, it was found that the students at graduate and postgraduate levels had positive attitudes towards the Internet.

According to Sanders and Morrison (2000), the language learners' attitude toward the computer is an essential influencing factor in the application of technology in various instructional settings. As a matter of fact, the majority of quantitative studies as well as qualitative inquiries have shown that learners' attitude towards the technology-enhanced learning environment is positive and closely related to learning styles or motivational factors (Chapelle & Jamieson, 1986; Craven & R, 1998; Holmes, 1998; Klassen & Milton, 1999; Sanders & Morrison, 2000; Well, 2000, just to name some).

In view of the above, it should be mentioned that the majority of the studies conducted regarding the language learners' attitudes toward the use of different technologies were just around the use of computer or the Internet. In other words, none of them focused on other technologies such as mobile phones or MP3/MP4 players. More importantly, none of them considered the effect of the application of different technologies in language learning to boost different language skills. Therefore, the present study tries to find out which technology is preferred more by the language learners to develop various language skills.

Methodology

A. Subjects

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The participants of the study were 30 language learners at the B.A. level including both males and females who participated in the study voluntarily following an announcement made by the researcher.

B. Instrument

This research utilized qualitative research methodology. The instrument that was used to collect the data was a sample questionnaire which was verified prior to the main study through a pilot study.

C. Procedure

The qualitative method of data collection was through the utilization of a survey questionnaire. A questionnaire was designed to investigate language learners' attitudes and motivation towards the use of different technologies such as computer, MP3/MP4 players, and iPods in language learning. This set of questionnaire contained 15 items regarding the use of different technologies. It should be mentioned that 4 of the items are related to the improvement of different language skills (Appendix I).

The five items for the use of different technologies were:

- 1) Computer
- 2) CD and MP3 players
- 3) Mobile phones
- 4) iPods
- 5) No technology at all

The four language skill items were also:

- 1) Speaking proficiency
- 2) Listening comprehension
- 3) Writing
- 4) Reading

Before the actual data collection was conducted, a pilot study was carried out to assure the validity of the questionnaire. To do so, the questionnaire was given to 5 trial language learners majoring in TESL. Then, the questionnaire was modified based on the responses provided by the trial group in order to achieve better results. After the pilot study which resulted in the modification of the questionnaire, the questionnaire was distributed to 30 students at the University of Malaya in Malaysia to collect the necessary data.

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In this study, there were 15 items that investigated the language learners' attitude toward the use of different technologies in language learning. Accordingly, a positive attitude and motivation toward the use of different technologies in general was depicted in A (agree) and a negative attitude toward the use of different technologies in general was depicted in SD (disagree). Moreover, if the participants agreed on the use of different technologies, they were required to specify the type of technology they use.

Results and Discussion

The results obtained from the questionnaire can be summarized as follow:

- 54% of the participants preferred the use of computers and computer based technologies such as the Facebook, and Twitter. Accordingly, the participants had a positive attitude toward the use of computers and more than 45% of the participants declared that they use computer to improve their speaking proficiency more than the other language skills.
- 23% of the participants used MP3/MP4 players to improve their language skills.
- 10% of the participants used their mobile phones for language learning. According to the participants' responses, they can use their mobile phones for saving different audio/visual language materials which can be used everywhere.
- 8% of the language learners used iPods. Most language learners did not use this technology because they could not afford buying one.
- 5% of the participants had a negative attitude toward the use of different technologies. Accordingly, they preferred traditional print material rather than new technologies. However, those who said no to the use of technologies in language learning had no specific reason for that to be reported here.

In general, the majority of respondents had a positive attitude towards the use technology. In response to the statement "I like the use of different technologies for my English learning", 28 of the participants expressed their agreement. This shows that the majority (96%) of the participants had a positive attitude towards the use of different technologies for language learning.

The following figure shows the statistical data related to the language learners' attitudes regarding the use of different technologies in developing different language skills.

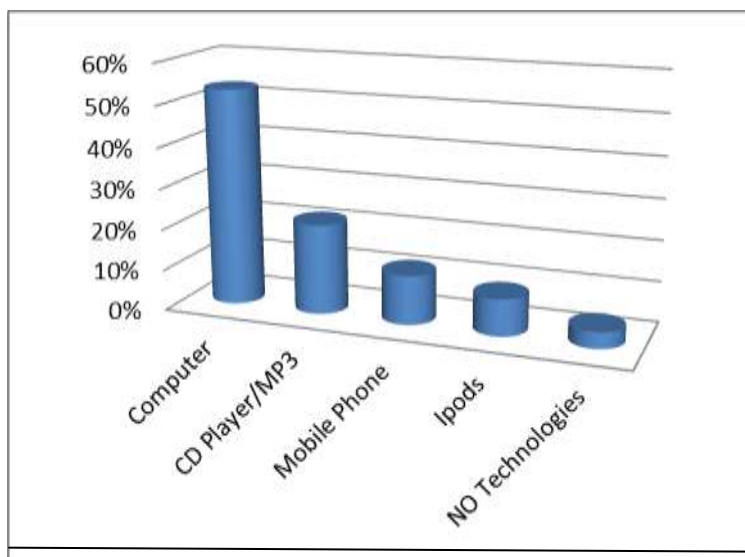
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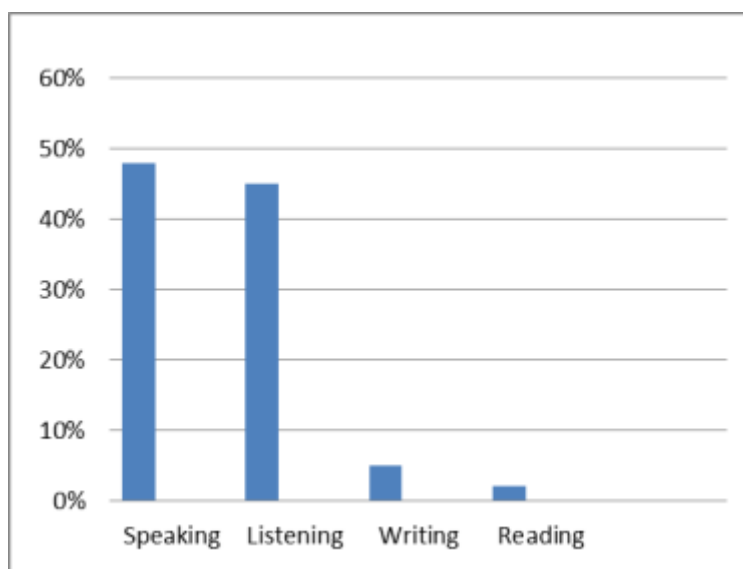
Figure 1. Language preferences towards the use of different technologies to boost different language skills



Another set of more valuable data was taken out of the questionnaire indicating which language skill may be developed more through the use of different technologies according to the language learners' ideas. It should be mentioned here that in order to arrive at a more reliable data, comprehensive empirical studies require using different technologies with different skills.

Following is the statistical analysis of the participants' ideas regarding the development of different language skills through the use of different technologies.

Figure 2. Language skills development through the use of different technologies



The findings of the present study are in line with many studies which proved the positive attitudes and motivation of language learners toward the use of computer technology in language learning (Chapelle & Jamieson, 1986; Craven & R, 1998; Holmes, 1998; Klassen & Milton, 1999; Sanders & Morrison, 2000; Well, 2000; just to name some). Nevertheless, what is importantly novel about the present research is that language learners used computer technology for the development of their speaking proficiency and listening comprehension. The participants of the present study stated that they can practice oral communication in low affective filter atmosphere created by the computer technology with high motivation.

Some of the reasons that caused the majority of the language learners to have a positive attitude toward the use of computer technology may be due to the fact that traditional and classical language teaching in classroom can be monotonous, boring, and even frustrating at times. This can cause language learners lose their interest and motivation in learning. CALL programs can provide student ways to learn English through computer games, animated graphics, and problem-solving techniques which can make drills more interesting. CALL also allows learners to learn the language even without having to attend language classes by creating a personal learning environment out of the classroom border.

Turning blind eyes to the fact that language learners with different proficiency levels require different learning styles will cause serious conflicts. In this regard, many computer based programs can provide different drills based on the language proficiency level of the learners. For example, from easy drills to very difficult ones or from slow drills to fast ones.

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More importantly, thanks to the portability of laptops, computer assisted language learning can be used anytime and anywhere. As a matter of fact, the time and place flexibility of using computer are two essential factors that enable language learners to choose appropriate time and place for learning.

Another factor that makes language learners prefer computer technology may be that the language learners can sometimes benefit from feedback given by the computers. Computers can give instant feedback and help the students to solve the related language problem at the very first stage. Language learners can use the computer which is a kind of technology in both formal and informal learning settings to do some repetition and drills which are believed by the behaviorists to boost language learning.

Lastly is the repetitive aspect of some of the programs. In this relation, students have freedom of expression within certain bounds that programmers create, such as grammar, vocabulary, etc. They can repeat the course they want to master as many as they wish. However, the present research does not want to hold the view that repetition is beneficial to language learners or not. What the research tries to emphasize here is that computer technology gives the freedom to repeat any authentic language materials as many times as language learners need.

However, 4% of the participants believed that the use of different technologies for language learning is a waste of time and energy. They stated that they could learn more, for example, from traditional print materials than electronic ones. This could be due to the fact that the application of different technologies requires having some knowledge about the technology itself. Moreover, some language learners prefer not to use different technologies for language learning because of some possible technical problems associated with the use of various technologies.

Conclusion

The present research conducted with the help of 30 language learners aimed at investigating the language learners' attitudes and motivations towards the use of different technologies such as computer, CD and MP3 players, iPods, and mobile phones. Moreover, it tried to find out what language skill may be improved more according to the language learners' experience.

The finding of this study was indicative of the fact that language learners' have a positive attitude towards learning English through the use of different technologies particularly computer. The language learners believe that the use of computer makes the lesson interesting, exciting and effective for them.

Regarding the improvement of different language skills through the integration of different technologies into language learning, the participants reported that they mostly use different technologies in order to improve their speaking proficiency and listening comprehension more than other language skills. This improvement was achieved through the use of computer

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technology for chatting or the application of particular computer programs that enable language learners to practice oral communication and listening comprehension out of classroom setting.

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APPENDIX I

Please, mark agree or disagree for each question. Moreover, write the type of technology which you use more.

Number	Question	Agree	Disagree	Technology
1	<i>I like the use of different technologies</i>			
2	<i>The use of different technologies is useful</i>			
3	<i>The use of different technologies is effective</i>			
4	<i>The use of different technologies is interesting</i>			
5	<i>Different technologies provide different exercises</i>			
6	<i>Different technologies provide authentic input</i>			
7	<i>I gain more knowledge through the use of technology</i>			
8	<i>I can learn better by the use of different technologies</i>			
9	<i>The use of different technologies is exciting</i>			
10	<i>I do not need to carry lots of materials</i>			
11	<i>I have access to English easily</i>			
12	<i>I can improve my speaking proficiency</i>			
13	<i>I can improve my listening comprehension</i>			
14	<i>I can improve my reading ability</i>			
15	<i>I can improve my writing ability</i>			

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