

Teachers' Attitudes about Computer Technology Training, Professional Development, Integration, Experience, Anxiety, and Literacy in English Language Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

Computer technology is an important and necessary part in our personal and professional lives. It has made many of our everyday tasks easier and faster. In the classrooms, some important variables such as the classroom teacher and the teacher's attitudes towards the effective use of computer technology have not been paid attention. This paper examines how teachers understand the use of computer technology resources in English language teaching. The aims of this paper are to define the teachers' attitudes, explain teachers' attitudes and computer technology training, discuss computer technology and professional development, elaborate teachers' attitudes and computer technology integration, define teachers' attitudes and computer experience, discuss teachers' attitudes and computer anxiety and interest, and review teachers' attitudes and computer literacy. By reviewing the related literature, it is indicated that simply introducing computer technology resources does not guarantee teachers' use of these in practice. Knowledge of teachers' attitudes about teaching, learning, and computers provides them the opportunity to design and implement English language teaching and learning.

Keywords: computer technology; attitude; training; professional development; integration; experience; anxiety and interest; literacy

1. Introduction

New and innovative approaches in computer technology have challenged traditional approaches to language teaching and learning. Computers provided many resources and opportunities that have brought about new tools, approaches, and strategies in language teaching and learning. The success of any initiatives to implement computer technology in an educational programme depends on the support and attitudes of teachers involved. It has been suggested that if teachers believed computers not to be fulfilling their own or their students' needs, they are likely to resist any attempts to introduce computer technology into their teaching and learning (Askar & Umay, 2001). Computers influenced many aspects of our social and work lives, as well as many of our leisure activities. Computer skills and knowledge have become more positively correlated with both occupational and personal success. Therefore, as we move into a technology based society, it is important that classroom experiences with technology be equitable and unbiased for males and females. In most cases, the teacher is key to effective implementation of the use of computers in the educational system and given that teachers have tremendous potential to transmit beliefs and values to students, it is important to understand the biases and stereotypes that teachers may hold about the use of computers and the factors that act as facilitators to teachers' positive computer usage.

Teachers' attitudes towards computers affect the successful use of computers in the classroom and these attitudes, whether positive or negative, affect how teachers respond to technologies. This in turn affects the way students view the importance of computers in schools (Teo, 2006) and affects current and future computer usage.

In support of the importance of teachers' attitudes towards computer use, Zhao, Tan and Mishra (2001) provided evidence to suggest that the teachers' attitudes are directly related to computer use in the classroom. For example, teachers often view the computer as a tool to accomplish housekeeping tasks, manage their students more efficiently, and to communicate with parents more easily. The success of student learning with computer technology will depend on the attitudes of teachers, and their willingness to include the computer technology (Teo, 2006). Gaining an appreciation of the teachers' attitudes towards computer use may provide useful insights into computer technology integration and acceptance and usage of computer technology in teaching and learning. No matter how sophisticated and powerful the state of computer technology is, the extent to which it is implemented depends on teachers having a positive attitude towards it (Huang & Liaw, 2005). In this paper, the definition of teachers' attitudes, teachers' attitudes and computer technology training, teachers' attitudes and professional development, teachers' attitudes and computer technology integration, teachers' attitudes and computer experience, teachers' attitudes and computer anxiety and interest, and teachers' attitudes and computer literacy are elaborated.

2. Definition of teachers' attitudes

According to Hogg and Vaughan (2005), an attitude is defined as a relatively enduring organization of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols. In the educational environment, teachers' and students' attitudes play a significant role in the achievement of educational objectives. Regarding the use of new innovations in the classroom, traditional teaching methods are being forced to accommodate what are inappropriate information technologies. Teachers' attitudes play a prominent role in educational interaction as well as instructional choices and are fundamental in examining the outcome of technological integration in the classroom (Albion & Ertmer, 2002; Becker, Ravitz, & Wong, 1999). Allport (1935) as cited in Albarracin et al., (2005) mentioned that an attitude is a mental or neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual's response to all objects and situations with which it is related. His definition emphasizes two important aspects that contribute a lot in understanding the concept of attitude. Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) emphasized that an attitude is a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object.

According to Eagly and Chaiken (1993), attitude is a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favour or disfavour. Computer attitudes are influenced by different variables such as training (Tsitouridou & Vryzas, 2003), knowledge about computers (Mukti, 2000), computer anxiety and liking (Yildirim, 2000), and computer experience (Kumar & Kumar, 2003). In most cases, many of these factors interact with one another to influence on attitudes towards computers.

3. Teachers' attitudes and computer technology training

Becker et al., (1999) and Gobbo and Girardi (2001) stated that there is a positive relationship between computer technology training and teachers' attitudes. Training can significantly influence the ways in which a teacher includes technology tools in the classroom. In an examination of teaching styles and technology integration in Italy, results showed that both personal theories of teaching and the level of competence with technology play a major role in how teachers implement technology and in their perception of their own and their pupils' motivation (Gobbo & Girardi, 2001).

A study carried out by Veen (1993) that described the daily pedagogical practices of four teachers in the midst of implementing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in their classrooms in Dutch, found that the most important factor effecting teachers' use of ICT was teachers' attitudes regarding what should be taught and the way it should be taught. Computer related technical skills were found to be less important than skills related to the teachers' competence in managing activities and communicating lessons.

Teachers must be given the opportunity to become acquainted with newly introduced technologies. Mcalister et al., (2005), in their study of teachers' use of computers to teach mathematics, found that overall attitudes towards using computers were very positive, although many of them had limited experience with computers. Mcalister et al., (2005) stated that more training and support in information technology should be given to teachers and more value should be placed on the teacher as a role model for students.

Lack of in-service training and insufficient technological infrastructures were the factors that have a significant influence on the effective use of technology by teachers (Gulbahar, 2008).

Egbert, Paulis, and Nakamichi (2002) had participants of twenty English as a second language and foreign language teachers in their sample. They used surveys and follow-up interviews on technology use in class. They concluded that lack of time, support and resources prohibited the use of CALL by the teachers. Warschauer (2002) discussed the training of teachers in Egypt about the use and applications of CALL. He said that an Egyptian university lecturer expressed his view as: we have the hardware, we have the software, but we lack the human ware. Ridgway and Passey (1991) stressed out the importance of training teachers and exploiting the use of computers more than as a word processor in the classroom. Similarly, Jones (2002) argued that teachers need to become informed users of technology and stressed the importance of technology training.

4. Computer attitudes and professional development

Teacher professional development in computer technology integration is found to affect teachers' computer technology use. Inadequate teacher training is often cited as the most serious obstacles in helping teachers learn how to use computer technology in their instruction (Bauer & Kenton, 2005; Mitchem, Wells, & Wells, 2003; Yang, 2008). For example, Yang (2008) found that due to the lack of information technology experts or teachers, 46.3% of the 378 teachers in his study reported that no professional development on technology integration was offered in their educational institutions in China. In addition to inadequate training, the kind of training teachers receive also matters. There is an agreement that the traditional workshops or summer "institutes" well removed from classroom practices are often not effective in helping teachers learn to integrate computer technology into the instruction.

Effective professional development must be sustained, content-focused, and collaborative to effect change in teacher practices in ways that ultimately improve student learning (Li & Protacio, 2010; Shi & Bichelmeyer, 2007; Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). A focus on a specific content area or a particular pedagogical strategy will enable teachers to take this new knowledge from the professional development and integrate it with their classroom practices. Therefore, teacher professional development in computer technology cannot just focus on computer technology applications; it must connect with a specific curriculum and subject area and with specific attention to the pedagogical practices associated with the subject area. Since the effectiveness of computer technology integration is more rooted in pedagogical and design principles, rather than computer technology itself (Chen, 2004; Dudeney & Hockly, 2007; Parks et al., 2003; Zhao, 2003), teacher professional development must focus on not only how to use a particular hardware or software, but also on how it is used in alignment with more effective pedagogy, content, and context.

Professional development programs have been used by many academic institutions to equip teachers with the skills needed to incorporate computer technology into classroom teaching and learning, mandated the integration of computer technology in the classroom, and issued a great number of initiatives to encourage computer technology use (Sheumaker, Slate & Onwuegbuzie, 2001). In 2000, International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) published its National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers, which clearly states, "All candidates seeking certification or endorsement in teacher preparation should meet educational technology standards" (p.1). National Council on the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) responded with a similar standards requirement for teachers (1997). Teachers' professional development has since been prominently recognized and funded as an essential component to ensure effective computer technology use in the classroom (King, 2002a).

5. Teachers' attitudes and computer technology integration

According to Cox et al., (1999), teachers who reportedly value the integration of technology change their teaching in order to better incorporate technology approaches. Software availability and teacher willingness to use the software can have positive effects on the teachers' attitudes towards the adoption of technology in the classroom (Sephehr & Harris, 1995). Interactive venues and discussion boards can help teachers to learn with technology instead of solely using the technology to teach (Coniam, 2002; Ducate & Arnold, 2006). Additionally, teachers who report a strong commitment to teaching as well as their own professional development have been found to integrate technology tools more readily (Becker et al., 1999; Hadley & Sheingold, 1993).

Thoughts, perceptions, beliefs, experiences, knowledge, and growth of teachers studying and attempting to integrate the use of computers in their classrooms were studied by Norum, Grabinger and Duffield (1999). The important theme they found running throughout this research was teachers' strong assertion that they needed to change personally and take on new roles if technology was to be effectively integrated into their classrooms. Most of the teachers involved in this study saw themselves as the place where change efforts needed to begin. Experiences with technology planning highlight the well-documented observation that teacher attitudes toward technology and technology integration seriously impact the success of professional development programs. They thus need to be seriously considered (Albion, 1999; Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Hannay, 1999).

Positive attitudes toward technology integration increase learning to use technologies in teaching and learning; negative attitudes constrain it. This does not necessarily mean that only teachers with positive attitudes should be included in technology training activities. It does mean that negative attitudes among participants need to be valued and addressed, and that positive attitudes should be encouraged and developed. Teachers often recognize that their students do indeed need additional input and output activities to help them continue to improve their language skills, particularly pronunciation skills (Albion, 1999; Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Hannay, 1999).

As the teacher plays the key role in classroom change and teachers tend to accept only changes that they perceive facilitate their work, exploring teachers' attitudes toward technology integration is necessary (Guskey, 1989; Saye, 1998). Early in 1987 Woodrow observed that the infusion of computer technology into school curriculum has the potential to drastically change educational practices. However, to successfully change traditional instructional practices, teachers must have positive attitudes toward the educational issues involved. If teachers are resistant to the change, the proposed curricular and procedural changes will have a slim chance of success. This is true of any educational innovation, but it is particularly true of technology use in education because the change involves both the acquisitions of new technology skills and pedagogies (Saye, 1998; Woodrow, 1987).

Allan and Will (2001) measured Chinese teachers' attitudes toward the pedagogical use of computers. These attitudes also play an important role in the effective investment in computer technology to support instruction and successful integration of computers in teaching (Koochang 1989). Teachers' attitudes are a major enabling/disabling factor in the adoption of technology (Bullock, 2004). Similarly, Kersaint, Horton, Stohl, and Garofalo (2003) found that teachers who have positive attitudes toward technology feel more comfortable with using it and usually incorporate it into their teaching. Woodrow (1992) asserts that any successful transformation in educational practice requires the development of positive user attitude toward the new technology. The development of teachers' positive attitudes toward ICT is a key factor not only for enhancing computer integration but also for avoiding teachers' resistance to computer use (Watson, 1998). Watson (1998) warns against the severance of the innovation from the classroom teacher and the idea that "the teacher is an empty vessel into which this externally defined innovation must be poured" (p. 191).

6. Teachers' attitudes and computer technology experience

Computer experience often fosters positive attitudes towards computers; moreover, the lack of computer instruction often accounts for teachers' low confidence level when they initiate computer activities. This feeling of low confidence often results in high anxiety towards computers. High anxiety can lead to negative attitudes and eventually negatively influence the learning process (Dupagne & Krendl, 1992).

There has been a correlation between computer experience to positive attitudes (Chou, 1997; Gaudron & Vignoli 2002; Ropp, 1999; Woodrow, 1992; Yildirim, 2000). For example, Woodrow (1992) reported correlations between computer experience and attitudes toward technology. Chou (1997) also highlighted that computer experience influenced teacher attitudes toward computers. Ropp (1999) found that there is significant relationship between computer access and hours of computer use per week and computer attitudes.

Teachers' attitudes have been found to be a major predictor of the use of new technologies in instructional settings (Abas, 1995a; Blankenship, 1998; Isleem, 2003). Christensen (1998) states that teachers' attitudes toward computers affect not only their own computer experiences, but also the experiences of the students they teach. In fact, it has been suggested that attitudes towards computers affect teachers' use of computers in the classroom and the likelihood of their benefiting from training. Positive attitudes often encourage less technologically capable teachers to learn the skills necessary for the implementation of technology-based activities in the classroom.

7. Teachers' attitudes and computer anxiety and interest

According to the report of International Society for Technology and Education (2001), relatively few teachers (20%) report feeling well prepared to integrate technology into classroom instruction. Although computers have been put in the classroom, many teachers are still skeptical of the value computers have provided for teaching and learning. Studies indicate that the level of feelings teachers have toward computer use range from euphoria to uncertainty, to hostility and fear (Berson, 1996; Saye, 1998). Some teachers show little interest in using instructional technology, while others are obviously resistant to its use. Some positively accept the concept, but feel somewhat bound by lack of training for effective integration (Chin & Hortin, 1993). Still others have ambivalent feelings toward technology. Feelings of uncertainty, hostility and fear naturally lead to many teachers' reluctance or resistance to technological innovation. They will continue to adhere to their traditional practices with which they feel more confident and comfortable.

The effective use of computer technology enables teachers to facilitate and adjust their instructional strategies to optimize students' learning (Teo, Lee, & Chai, 2008). In this respect, when teachers' role and activity in the process is taken into account; it is important to know teachers' interest in technology and their attitudes, affective features towards technology (Erkan, 2004; Rohaan, Taconis & Jochems, 2010). According to Kagan (1992), teachers' attitudes appear to lie at the heart of teaching and tend to be associated with a congruent style of teaching. Teachers' attitudes and emotions also build the meanings they bring to innovations such as technology integration. Hence, changes to teaching style, as might be required by working with technology, may necessitate changes to teachers' attitudes (Albion & Ertmer, 2002).

8. Teachers' attitudes and computer literacy

Primary teachers' perceptions and awareness level about specific technologies, the role of technology in education, and how they see the technological problems that are faced by basic education school systems in Turkey were investigated by Asan's, (2003). The results showed that many teachers were not computer users and lacked a functional computer literacy background upon which to build new technology and skills. The study also indicated that the use of computer and related technologies was not routine part of their teaching and learning environment.

The science teachers' attitudes toward computer assisted learning (CAL) were investigated by Cavas and Kesercioğlu (2003). The results showed that the majority of science teachers had positive attitudes toward CAL and no gender difference exists between science teachers' computer-assisted learning attitudes. Ocak and Akdemir (2008) expressed that science teachers' computer literacy level is related to their computer use. And also computer literacy level of the teachers increases their integration of computer applications in their teaching. In the study, most of the teachers use Internet, email, and educational software CDs as computer applications in the classrooms. They found statistically differences in the integration of computer applications as an instructional tool.

There is a relationship between teachers' attitudes toward computer technologies and their computer competence. In their study of the correlation between teachers' attitude and acceptance of technology, Francis-Pelton and Pelton (1996) maintained although many teachers believe computers are an important component of a student's education, their lack of knowledge and experience lead to a lack of confidence to attempt to introduce them into their instruction. A large number of studies showed that teachers' computer competence is a significant predictor of their attitudes toward computers (Berner, 2003; Na, 1993). Al-Oteawi (2002) found that most teachers who showed negative or neutral attitudes toward the use of ICT in education lacked knowledge and skill about computers that would enable them to make "informed decision" (p. 253).

Zammit (1992) said that a major obstacle to successful technology integration was the lack of teacher confidence and skill when using technology. Supporting this result, in the study of Akpınar (2003) where he studied the level of primary and secondary school teachers' using the technological opportunities, it is concluded that half of teachers do not use computers for educational purposes in activities outside the classroom and almost half of them never use computer software in educational activities. Again in another study (Erdemir, Bakirci & Eyduran, 2009), pre-service teachers stated that they do not feel themselves adequate for using internet and computer for the purpose of teaching, while they felt that they are adequate for using search engines; they can prepare basic materials for teaching but not complex and multi-purpose educational devices.

9. Contribution of computer technology to English language teaching and learning

There are numerous benefits of computer technology when it is integrated deliberately and comprehensively into teaching and learning (Apple Education Inc., 2009). These benefits are as follows:

1. Computer technology supports student achievement. When integrated into instruction appropriately, computer technology has significant positive effects on student achievement in reading, literacy, mathematics, and science.
2. Computer technology engages students in learning and content creation. Integrating computer technology into formal learning and engaging students to create and publish their own work for a worldwide audience make institutions more relevant, resulting in higher levels of student achievement.
3. Computer technology increases access to education, virtual communities, and expertise. Schools and universities often provide students in disadvantaged communities their only access to computing devices and the Internet.
4. Computer technology fosters inclusion. Computer technology is instrumental in providing solutions that help schools and universities create inclusive learning environments that engage all students regardless of ability, disability, background, or learning style.
5. Computer technology helps prevent dropouts. The National Dropout Prevention Centre cites computer technology as one of 15 strategies that have the most positive impact on the high graduation rate.
6. Computer technology facilitates differentiated instruction. Computer technology can help teachers provide personalized, just-in-time instruction for all students, which are especially important when supporting underperforming students, English language learners, and students with disabilities.
7. Computer technology empowers learning and research in critical STEM fields. Computer technology, including scientific simulations, computer labs, and visualization tools, is an essential tool for inquiry-based learning, advanced research, and collaboration in the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields for higher education.
8. Computer technology strengthens career and technical education. Computer technology gives teachers the opportunity to prepare students with new kinds of knowledge and skills that are in demand in high-growth emerging industries.
9. Computer technology extends the learning day. Access to a computer and an Internet connection can support learning beyond traditional school and university hours and classrooms.
10. Computer technology supports teacher quality. Research shows that ongoing, job-embedded professional development makes the most difference in improving teacher quality; computer technology enables online learning as well as access to web resources and virtual communities of practice.
11. Computer technology enables timely and innovative assessments. Technology-based assessments can make tests easier to administer and score, answer the need for more frequent classroom-based assessments, enable teachers to expand feedback through better communications with students, and provide real-time feedback and guidance.

10. Conclusion

Technology resources do not guarantee EFL teachers language instruction. Teachers should be convinced of the usefulness and benefits of these resources in improving teaching and learning. This suggests the need for effective guidance, support and training for teachers in integrating computer technology resources into language instruction through direct practical experience. Training should not be limited to how to use computer technology; it should show teachers how they can make use of computer technology in improving the quality and effectiveness of their instruction, as well as how such technology resources can be effectively integrated into the curriculum. There is a need for ongoing training and assistance in helping teachers to better employ computer technology resources in pedagogic practices. Although it is important to know that teachers need more equipment or more time to plan for computer technology use, it may not always be enough. It may also be important to understand teachers' reasons for computer technology using or not using computer technology and their attitudes about the value of computer technology in teaching and learning practices. While introducing computer technology resources to teachers, their pedagogical potential should be emphasized and guidance and assistance should be provided on ways of integrating these resources into instruction. Teachers need to be provided with explanation, guidance and assistance from trainers and other colleagues, and also the opportunities to reflect and discuss the integration, share outcomes and possible problems with each other.

To understand how to achieve better integration, we need to study teachers and what makes them use computers, and we need to study computer technology resources and what makes teachers want to or need to use them. The innovative nature of technology, as it continues to change and expand, will require teachers to adapt and change the way they approach teaching and learning.

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