

METHODS OF USING INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES IN TEACHING READING

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Abstract. *English is one of the most important languages, which have played role in the process of globalization and knowledge explosion. It is the most common means of communication throughout the globe. This is why it is termed as Link language, Global language as well as Lingua Franca. In Turkmen context, it is treated as EFL (English as a Foreign Language). Use of English language has become vital for better learning and earning. Therefore, it is necessary to teach English and develop English language skills among the students from school level. The government, NGOs and educational institutions are working at various levels and taking measures to ensure better ELT (English Language Teaching) and developing English language skills among the students. To teach English and develop English language skills various approaches and methods are in use in our country. However, most of them are traditional, less interesting, ineffective as well as less motivating. So, it is necessary to use modern approaches and tools of ICT (Information and Communication Technology) to develop better understanding and acquisition of basic skills i.e. LSRW (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) of English language among the students at all levels. ICT has many things to offer to both teachers and students for the enhancement of their vocabulary and improvement of English language skills. Nowadays, ICT tools and approaches are being used widely due to their convenience, omnipresence, effectiveness and being economic. Some of these approaches, facilities and tools are CAI (Computer Assisted Learning), CALA (Computer Assisted Language Assessment), CALI (Computer Assisted Language Instruction), CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), MALL (Mobile Assisted Language Learning), TELL (Technology Enhanced Language Learning). There are Blogs, Wiki, e-mail facility, Digital libraries, multimedia, mobile learning, free and open source software and social media, MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses), Virtual classrooms, documentaries, Digital storytelling, Mobile Applications, i-Pads, Digital Notebooks, Tablets, Smart Phones, Recorded audio- video materials, Online spoken tutorials, Digital pronunciation dictionaries and others. Modern studies and researches show positive results of integration of ICT in the field of ELT and development of English language skills, especially in teaching reading These facilities have covered the way of individualized learning and provided freedom of learning anytime, anywhere according to needs and convenience of the learners.*

Key words: *ICT, ELT, reading,*

INTRODUCTION

In the digital age, the use of modern means of information communication technology (ICT), such as smart boards, e-platforms, digital classrooms, distance learning, electronic textbooks, and training programmes becomes an integral part of the

entire teaching process at all levels of education. Higher educational institutions are also highly involved in variety of ICT tools.

Turkmenistan is a young nation-state, with a vision to develop as a self-sufficient and sovereign nation and play a prominent role in the world affairs. Increasing spread of globalization has shown its increased influence in the country. Since 1991, Turkmenistan's social, economic and political situation has led to essential changes in Turkmen education in general, and in English Language Teaching (ELT) in particular. The national reform policy since the Independence, October 1991, has significantly changed the socio-economic situation in modern Turkmenistan. This policy has gained prominence with the arrival of the Esteemed President of the country Serdar Berdimuhamedov. One of his main aims is to orient the country towards modernization and industrialization with a multi-sector commodity economy. Turkmenistan opened its doors to the world, beginning a new period of scientific, educational and commercial cooperation with many countries.

The Importance of ICT in Education

Today we do not need to go any further than our own home or even room, to see some form of ICT in our lives. Whether it be a computer, plasma TV, or mobile phone, we all have them in some part of our lives. In today's society, people as consumers of ICT, all strive for the one dream – the dream of a connected life. This makes ICT a lifestyle choice for much of the population. In addition, this lifestyle choice is changing the way we communicate, increasing the rate of consumerism, and changing how we interact and gather information (Sherringham, Dec 2008/Jan 2009 as cited in Kumari, 2020, p.112).

ICT has invaded and transformed many aspects of our lives to the extent that we live in an environment that is dominated by technology which itself is consumer-driven (Semenov, 2005 as cited in Kumari, 2020, p.112). No matter how we perceive its presence, there is no denying that it is an important part of our lives and that it is here to stay. These are the key issues to remember in relation to the importance of ICT in Education:

- **E-learning or Online Learning:** The presence of ICT in education allows for new ways of learning for students and teachers. E-learning or online learning is becoming increasingly popular and with various unprecedented events taking place in our lives, this does not only open opportunities for schools to ensure that students have access to curriculum materials whilst in the classroom but also allows them to ensure students outside the classroom such as at home or even in hospitals can learn.

- **ICT brings inclusion:** The benefits of ICT in education is of such that students in the classroom can all learn from the curriculum material. Students with special needs are no longer at a disadvantage as they have access to essential material and special ICT tools can be used by students to make use of ICT for their own educational needs. Despite this, it opens up new issues related to the 'digital divide' and providing access to ICT tools and resources for those who are less fortunate.

- **ICT promotes higher-order thinking skills:** One of the key skills for the 21st century, which includes evaluating, planning, monitoring, and reflecting to name a few. The effective use of ICT in education demands skills such as explaining and justifying the use of ICT in producing solutions to problems. Students need to discuss, test, and conjecture the various strategies that they will use.

- ICT enhances subject learning: It is well known these days that the use of ICT in education adds a lot of value to key learning areas like literacy and numeracy.

- ICT use develops ICT literacy and ICT Capability: Both are 21st-century skills that are best developed whilst ICT remains transparent in the background of subject learning. The best way to develop ICT capability is to provide them with meaningful activities, embedded in purposeful subject-related contexts.

“We live in the age of scientific and technological progress” (Berdimuhamedov, 2014, p.159). It is a time when ICT is pervasive and permeates throughout all industries in the economy whether it may be health, education, environment or manufacturing. In education, computer technology has become so essential that the Turkmenistan’s Ministry of Education introduced it as one of the subjects in curriculum from primary to tertiary education. The use of ICT has had wider reception and can be of great use in the teaching of English language. The literacy skills of students are an issue of great importance. The studies show that it is possible to achieve large improvements in writing and reading by fostering a community of learners that focuses on scientific inquiries utilizing ICTs (Alfassi, 2010).

The Use of ICT in Teaching Reading

Reading is more than one-step learners need to develop. As the experience has taught when reading, the learner has the possibility to acquire new vocabulary, to learn more about the world and to develop strategies for language learning. Definitely written language plays an important role in language learning. It is precise to take in consideration that, there are different types of skills used quite naturally when reading in a mother tongue. Unfortunately, when learning a second or foreign language, people tend to employ only “intensive” style reading skills. Students studying a foreign language often feel that if they do not understand each word they are somehow not completing the exercise. Integration of ICT in the education system has the ability of enriching the quality and effectiveness of learning and teaching processes. It is very important in the development of children’s literacy. It does not only offer the teacher the opportunity to enhance their curriculum, but it provides learner many opportunities to improve. Using ICT can help students with poor reading skills since they are more accessible and handy too. It does not only affect the way children learn but it also affects the way we teach. As teachers, we also should develop the ability to “edit” materials in order to avoid distractions or to extend them to higher levels. We should teach students to look for the best information and materials on line and to be more independent. We should be able to provide continuous support to learners and help them in the development of skimming and scanning strategies. There are some research, stating that the most important prospects of using ICT in teaching reading comprehension included the obvious improvement in vocabulary building and usage using online dictionary; as well as the excitement about reading comprehension lessons often expressed by the students, which facilitated students’ learning process and promotion of meaningful learning among others. However, there were problems that were very prevalent with the use of ICT in the classrooms. These were: difficulty in classroom control, distractions caused by irrelevant websites, poor maintenance, and lack of infrastructure. The findings of the study are expected to provide the teachers and policy makers with a better and more accurate picture of problems and prospects of integrating ICT in the teaching of reading comprehension in ELT and EFL classrooms.

Effects of ICT on reading.

It seems noticeable that the emergence of ICT has had a very important impact on our reading habits in everyday life. When we take the train or the bus, we hardly see anybody with a book or newspaper in his or her hand. Instead, people hold their smartphones, tablets, e-books, and computers.

Reading is an important part of teaching and learning. There are many reasons why getting students to read. Firstly, many students want to read the text in English for their career, either for study purposes or simply for pleasure. Written language plays an important role in learning the language.

Harmer (2001) states that reading is also useful for other purposes such as language acquisition. If the reading is really interesting and engaging, the acquisition is likely to be successful. Reading provides opportunities to acquire new vocabulary, to study grammar, to learn punctuation and the structure of the sentence.

According to Mikulecky (2008) "Effective reading is essential for success in acquiring a language. After all, reading is the basis of instruction in all aspects of language learning: using textbooks for language courses, writing, revising, developing vocabulary, acquiring grammar, editing, and using computer-assisted language learning programs."(p.1)

There have been discussions about what kinds of reading texts are appropriate for language learners. The greatest argument has centered on whether the text should be "authentic" or not. Learners find authentic texts more motivating than pedagogical texts (Little, Devitt & Singleton 1994 .p.5). Some researchers agree on the point that the process of language development can be more effective if the learners read authentic material at an appropriate level. The reason for it people have worried about more traditional language teaching materials which tended to look artificial and to use oversimplified language which any language learner would find not useful. Another proposal was provided by Regan(2005). He thinks that teachers should ask themselves three questions:

1. What do you expect English language learners (ELL) to know after reading?
2. What language text may be appropriate for ELL?
3. What specific academic language should be taught?

A balance has to be kept between real English on the other hand and the students' ability and interest on the other. There have been proposals to keep this balance. According to Harmer (2007) to get the maximum benefit from their reading, students need to be involved in both extensive and intensive reading. Whereas with the former, the teacher encourages students to choose for themselves what they can read to do so for pleasure and general language improvement. Van Kraayenoord (2002) detailed, "Students will quickly become disengaged if classroom teaching does not connect with their lives, and if it does not engage them as learners with topics and issues that have interest and meaning for them" (p. 398). Reading the information on the internet and downloading the latest hits from websites, and reading the latest news about stars are just a few examples that connect with students' real lives.

The priority of reading materials mostly chosen by the respondents was reading online information, followed by food/nutrition, then jokes, etc. These results pointed to the high rate of reading for general information (online news). In this sense, the students tend to read for pleasure/entertainment or for grabbing rich of information for the sake of their own (rather than reading for academic purposes (reading journals or e-books).

The most common content first clicked when the respondents were online being about computers and the internet. The second was followed by entertainment third was education. The result is attention-grabbing because the majority of the respondents, as university students, did not put education as the content that first clicked when they were online. Instead, they chose about computer and the internet then entertainment. Indeed, it strengthens the possible reason previously stated that they had a purpose of being entertained during surfing on the internet. The respondents can be encouraged to access not only computer and internet or entertainment but they can be encouraged to access education as it is connected directly to their daily lives as students. However, the number of respondents for accessing education content was still in the third place but it may become different if the lecturer makes use of some applications or make a group on sites. Students can develop their reading habits on education content too.

The responses to the question "Techniques to develop reading habits" show different results. The most frequent technique to develop reading habits was reading materials about hobbies and interests. By providing reading materials, about hobbies and interests around the students' the respondents can be more motivated to develop their reading habits. In the second place was studying to improve vocabulary knowledge followed by book reading. The respondents were still confident that these techniques could develop their reading habits. The more they read the more vocabularies they master. The statistics of frequency became smaller for the options consistent use of dictionary and daily newspaper reading. It was possibly connected to the speed and space needed to access by the respondents. As an optimistic generation, they preferred to use media that can access any information fast without a time limit. Shens' (2006) and Chauhan & Lal's (2012) survey results at which EFL students' reading habits have shifted from paper-based to internet-based reading supports the result of findings.

Naveen and Nagesh (2016) have surveyed on Impact of ICT on the reading habits of students. The findings of the research conclude in this way: The developments in the ICT have changed the education system or curriculum around the world. The universal changes particularly the ICT affect the reading habits of students. ICT includes any device or product, which enables the capturing, storing, transmitting, and displaying of data and information electronically. It is obvious from the study that 100% of the respondents have reading habits. 91% of respondents agreed that the ICT has made an impact on their reading habits. Notably, more than half of the respondents (65%) use the internet to read e-books

(Kumara & Kumar, 2018 as cited in Hymavath 2018) have conducted a study on the impact of ICT on the reading habits of the students at Tumkur University. The survey was conducted by using a questionnaire. The findings of the study showed the following results:

- 1) Students read books daily at home.
- 2) In the classroom, (majority of the students strongly agreed that the print books are more expensive than Internet sources).

The study results also indicated that students have accessed the Internet every day and the students used ICT in support of their academic work. The study recommends that the university authorities in to provide more ICT facilities to all the students. It is also necessary to conduct more ICT-based learning programs for the students. (p.237)

A notable finding of the studies shows that ICT brings variety to class. Students get used to learning the language in a new and pleasant way, not just by interacting with

the teacher and reading the book. The students are very much interested to read when ICT is implemented. It is also found that students' use of ICTs can positively affect their reading.

CONCLUSION

In general, there are many advantages regarding the use of ICT in the teaching of reading and writing in ELT classes. For the advantages, it is reported that using ICT could help to meet the teachers' teaching objectives as ICT aids the teaching process. This comment resonates with Melor Md Yunus (2007) finding that ICT could be a learning tool in education. Moreover, another finding was that ICT is viewed not as a conventional method, but a new creative method of teaching. The researcher interpreted, as one, which could activate active learning among the students (Mullamaa, 2010). The integration of ICT in the teaching of reading was said to encourage learners' independence and self-discovery skills like searching for educational related materials online. This data supports findings by Blachowicz et al. (2009) who found out that the learning technology allowed students to develop independent work habits and to build both their skills and confidence about literacy and about using technology. Students could take responsibility for finding answers to suit their own learning needs (Choi & Ho, 2002 as cited in Sweeny, 2010).