Chapter 43

Technology Use and Acceptance Among Pre-Service Teachers of English as a Foreign Language:
The Case of a Learning Management System and an Educational Blog

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ABSTRACT

This chapter reports two case studies done in a teacher training university to find the effects of two technology-based learning environments on learning and technology acceptance of pre-service teachers of English as a foreign language. In the first case, a learning management system was used to support writing ability in a writing course. In the second case, the effect of an educational blog on increasing phonological awareness was probed into. Both studies adopted a pretest-posttest control and experimental group design. The results revealed that, while controlling for the participants' entry-level ability, the experimental group outperformed the control group in their final assessment. Perceptions of those who experienced technology-based environments were assessed by a questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. It was found that most participants enjoyed using both technologies for learning, accepted them as valuable educational sources, and preferred to extend using them into other university courses.

ORGANIZATION BACKGROUND

Shahid Rajaee Teacher Training University (SRTTU) is the only teacher training university in Iran that works in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. The mission of the university is to educate pre-service teachers of almost all disciplines at the undergraduate program and to empower in-service teachers at graduate and postgraduate courses.

When I started my work at SRTTU in 2004, the university was developing its technological infrastructure a little bit slowly. The reason I guess was that many of our colleagues were not so much interested in using information and communication technology in their classes, and some even did not believe in the usefulness of such tools for learning and teaching purposes. The university had a very well-equipped computer lab with high speed Internet at the time. Then all classes were equipped with video projectors and personal computers within a couple of weeks to help instructors use technology in their teaching. Some incentives were also provided for those who were eager to teach with technology.

This led many instructors including me to overuse the PowerPoint presentations in teaching almost all courses for the next two years. Based on the feedback I received from my students and the research I did (Rahimi & Forouzeshnia, 2010), I started looking for alternative technologies that could work with our students who had shown roughly high negative attitudes to technology (Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2009a), although they had rather satisfactory access to computers and the Internet at home and/or on the campus and a high level of portable device ownership (Rahimi, 2006).

Meanwhile the country was embarking on the fourth five-year development plan (2004-2009) considering the following top agenda for the development of the information and communication technology infrastructure nationwide:

- Technology use in schooling and higher education.
- Expansion of e-learning and distance learning programs.
- Development of educational software for the national syllabuses.
- Expansion of the private sectors' role in the development of the information and communication technology infrastructure.
- Increasing access to technological tools for the public in general and for academic centers (schools and universities) in particular (Iran's National Document of Development, 2006).

As a result of the accelerated pace of the development of the information and communication technology in this era, the country reached a satisfactory level of technology access, connectivity, and use by the nation. According to Iranian Ministry of Information and Communication (www.irantelecom.ir), in 2009 more than 25 million people in Iran have had access to the Internet and this put Iran in rank 17 among top twenty countries of the world with the highest number of Internet users (Internet world stats, 2009). All state universities were connected to the Internet and most of them had wireless networking. More than 35 million people have had mobile phone connections. High rate of computer ownership and use was also reported among Iranian student population (Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2009b).

Thus, within two to three years, in academic year 2007-2008 we observed a revolutionary change in SRTTU's information and communication technology policy and almost all the-state-of the art technologies were available in the university. This brought the chance of using Web 1.0 (email services), web 2.0 (podcasts, wikis and blogs), and many other technological tools in teaching English courses. Some local conferences were also held in SRTTU on educational issues with a lot of useful workshops that promoted instructors' awareness of uses of technology in education[1].

As I had wider arrays of choices to integrate technology in my courses during these years, I started doing some research to understand the effect of technology on our students' learning in different courses. Here the results of two case studies are reported. In the first case, I investigated the effect of a learning

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