

The Use of Digital Technology for the Success of Learning English as a Foreign Language

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Book review: Evans, M. (Ed). (2009). *Foreign Language Learning with Digital Technology*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group. 210 pp.

Abstract

Since the dawn of Digital Technology (DT), educational technology has advanced considerably. Today, most classrooms use touchscreen technology, wireless laptops and smartphones replace textbooks, and wikis, apps, and instructional websites play an essential role in student learning. The use of DT in the classroom can promote student engagement, assist teachers to improve their lesson plans and allow for personalized learning. It also assists learners in developing critical 21st-century skills. Consistently studies reveal the influence of DT on learner's academic achievements. The writer, in this article, has attempted to make a review of the "Foreign Language Learning with Digital Technology" book which is edited by Michael Evans (2009). To shed light on the influence of DT for foreign language (FL) learning from many different angles.

Keywords: Digital Technology, ICT, EFL, FL

Introduction

It makes it logical to introduce DT into the classroom in an age when we are surrounded by it and everyone seems to be glued to their phone, iPad, or laptop. Students adore technology, and when we utilize it to supplement our teaching, we can invigorate, intrigue, and inspire our English foreign language (EFL) students in new ways (McIver, 2020, ¶1). The incorporation of DT into EFL learning classrooms not only improves student's positive attitude toward learning but also changes the language learning and literacy acquisition atmosphere as well as the dynamic of language learning settings (Mulyono & Halim, 2015, p.117).

"The use of technology in teaching becomes more important in present times because teachers also have to be able to keep up with the technological knowledge of their students" (Richards, 2014, p. 2) for the sake of meeting the expectations of today's "digital natives," who are competent enough and in a way, dependent to computers and other online instruments. Furthermore, using technology to teach, learn, practice, and assess a FL has numerous benefits, particularly in the contexts of EFL, where learners have limited opportunities to practice and analyze their language skills. In addition, the use of technology in educational activities is quite critical for engaging learners in learning (Merç, 2015, p.229).

According to Lam (2000) language, teachers deploy technology in FL classrooms because it allows for a different type of demonstration and creates a sense of excitement among students; not because of a lack of knowledge about teaching with technology, but because of a lack of contact with technology (Merç, 2015, p.229). For instance, through the use of PowerPoint presentations, teachers can provide opportunities for including "colorful texts, photographs, illustrations, drawings, tables, graphs, movies, and transition from one to another through a slide Show" (Alkash & Al-Dersi, 2013, p. 14) which attracts the student's attention to the lesson and it makes learning more interesting.

Review

The book “Foreign Language Learning with Digital Technology”, edited by Michael Evans. This book is an edited work with eight chapters written by academics and practitioners from the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, this edited volume focuses on the two main themes of digital technology and pedagogy and classroom language acquisition. Except for the first chapter, which provides a literature review on digital technology and language learning, the remaining seven chapters each report on a specific project using a variety of approaches; some are descriptive, others are case studies, and others present the results of long-term research projects. They cover a variety of topics related to DTs and language learning with will be present it in this review.

Evans begins his introduction by debating the choice of the title of this book between “digital technology” or “information and communication technology” (ICT). He explains that the former is favored in the United States (US), while the latter is preferred in the United Kingdom (UK), which are used interchangeably. The book's rationale is defined in the introduction, which contains “accounts, examples, and descriptions of effective ways in which technology can enhance language teaching and learning goals, all concerned with qualitative accounts of how the digital environment affects language learners and language learning” (Evans, 2009, p.2). Evans' introduction in particular presents a compelling case for investigating teacher research in a diversity of contexts, including secondary school learners, university students, and trainee teachers (of modern languages or EFL), as well as face-to-face and distance learning. The concept of integration, according to Evans, is the common thread that runs through all of the chapters, since all of the authors, regardless of their domains, investigate how to incorporate technology in language teaching and learning. All in all, He effectively employs current research to support and clarify the educational assumptions that underpin the authors' work in the book, as well as give context for their teaching environments.

Chapter 1, ‘Digital technology and language learning: a review of policy and research evidence’ written by the editor. Evans provides a thorough review of the literature, including policies on the use of ICT in language teaching, evidence of its influence in schools, and applied linguistics research on the effect of e-learning on language learners. The chapter begins by examining significant policy documents in the US and England that provide guidance or set rules for the use of DT in language instruction. The evidence of the influence of ICT use in classrooms is next examined. Studies in England, for example, established a correlation between high ICT use and academic achievement, as well as a favorable impact on student motivation. According to research from Ofsted in 2004, heavy ICT use in the classroom was detrimental to the quantity of target language use, but Evans believes this is changing as technology is increasingly employed as a vehicle in productive work. Then, similar evidence from the US and Australia is examined. The following section of this chapter is devoted to a review of evidence from applied linguistics and the CALL literature. Even though Evans reports research that provides overviews of the topic, he identifies that much of the literature address small-scale experimental research studies in adult and higher education; he characterizes the value of such research as providing “qualitative and often detailed accounts of the processes by which technology can support language learning” (Evans, 2009, p.18).

In the second half of the chapter, the editor goes over some of the significant endings described in the CALL literature. He is organized using terminology defined by Warschauer (1996) and Gruba (2004) to account for differences in CALL approaches: ‘structural CALL’, ‘communicative CALL’ and ‘integrative CALL’. He ends the chapter by claiming that in recent years, there has

been a rising convergence between the two viewpoints education research and applied linguistics research, and he states that at all levels mediation of technology be a helpful tool to be used in language teaching and learning. This comprehensive overview paints a complete picture of the background in which the projects are given in the rest chapters, as well as defining key terms in the field and providing a theoretical foundation for the whole volume.

Chapter 2, 'The potential of the internet as a language-learning tool', which is by Iain Mitchell shows us how to use the internet to teach and learn languages at the secondary school level in various innovative ways. Many of the examples are aimed at French and German as target languages, and the book's central issue of integration is approached from the perspective of integrating assignments that use various types of textual and audio material from the internet inside the confines of the classroom. To illustrate, the Internet provides a variety of sources like *news websites, commercial websites, websites for young people, and culturally authentic websites* via which different types of stimuli such as *texts, audio files, videos, etc.* can be found and used in various ways to expand learner's vocabulary, practicing language skills like reading and listening, to get exposure to authentic language and improve learner's language awareness. In addition, Mitchell sees the internet as a valuable source of authentic cultural material that can be incorporated within the confines of language acquisition at this level. Mitchell ends the chapter with two key points that apply throughout the entire book: how the material is utilized is just as important as the appropriate choice of content, and it can only be efficient enough if it is "integrated into an overall philosophy of second-language pedagogy and acquisition" (Mitchell, 2009, p. 59).

Chapter 3, 'Trainee teachers' perceptions of the use of digital technology in the languages classroom' by Linda Fisher. Fisher examines how personal, pedagogical, and societal factors affect the rate at which FL teachers complete a pre-service training course integrate and acculturate the goals and practice of e-learning in their classrooms. In this chapter, the case studies of some trainees who just completed Fisher's training course at Cambridge University has been mentioned, which is concern with the trainee's attitudes about ICT before they began teaching and discovers that they were scared and apprehensive. It then examines the impact of subject culture in the departments where they completed placements, demonstrating that it was a significant element in their learning. Later, it goes on to discuss ways in which ICT fits into language pedagogy, as well as cautions stated by trainees as their course continued, most of which were around the need for balance in how ICT is integrated into learning. By the end of the chapter there is a demonstration of how, over nine months, the five trainees had evolved into passionate and skilled users of technology who were committed to continuing to use it because of its pedagogic fit.

Chapter 4, 'Digital technology as a tool for active learning in MFL: engaging language learners in and beyond the secondary classroom' by Rachel Hawkes. Hawkes presents her own experiences as a very innovative FL teacher at a secondary school in England, and she is revealing how her department's use and understanding of technology as an educational tool has developed over time under her guidance. Based on data obtained through classroom observations and interviews with staff and students the study offers an example of the deployment and usage of ICT for language education as integrated into an active learning pedagogy. It demonstrates how digital technologies were used as a springboard for creating a new learning environment and approach for the entire department, and it focuses on topics like second language interaction, grammar instruction, learning styles, assessment, classroom management, and authenticity. Also, the study explores how ICT (email, video recordings, and blogging) can be used outside of the classroom. It also illustrates that ICT use was essential in improving learner's attainment and motivation, although

the reader may wonder if the enhancement was attributable as much to the careful thinking regarding pedagogy and teaching tactics which is detailed in the chapter as to the actual use of ICT.

Chapter 5, 'Engaging pupils in bilingual, cross-cultural online discourse' is written by Michael Evans. Evans presents the results of four-year research that featured asynchronous Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) between 14–16 year old English pupils learning French and students of comparable ages learning English in francophone nations such as France, Canada, and Senegal. The goal of the study was to see how much the students could learn from one another by participating in online interaction. Evans first concentrates on program and task design before moving on to the examination of interactions and participant impressions. This demonstrates that while learners had various thoughts about whether their English had improved as a result of the experience, they valued the opportunity to communicate with others the most. In line with the evidence, the tasks opened up the opportunities for reading practice that the teacher could use outside of the online exchanges, as well as an opportunity to practice various genres of written communication from communicative writing in the classroom. Two points are presented in the conclusion that needs to be addressed further: the function of the instructor in such programs and the difficulties that arise when participation is low. The latter is related to the assertion that participants' choice of first language, second language, and code-switching is critical to good engagement and the success of experiments.

Chapter 6, 'SIDE by side: pioneers, inventors and the tyranny of educational distance' Cal Durrant. The author discusses a project that supports the teaching of languages to high school students in Western Australia's rural and remote areas. The author states how digital technology (such as telephones, email, interactive multimedia, and satellite technology) is being used to alleviate the isolation associated with distance education, allowing language students to learn in a classroom setting similar to that of a traditional school.

Chapter 7, 'Teacher and student perceptions of e-learning in EFL' Miranda Hamilton. She investigates teachers' and young adult students' reactions to using a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) as a platform for learning English as a second language. On the VLE, students could interact synchronously and asynchronously within the class, as well as participate in a jigsaw reading activity. As it comes in the study the analysis tackles the participants' preconceptions and priorities before beginning the program, during the project, and in their follow-up comments. She gets to the point that the capability of conceiving, making sense of, and cognitively map the pedagogical qualities of their technological teaching and learning environment appears to have been related most strongly to a personally held system of beliefs, values, and principles. As emphasizes in the chapter there is a need of understanding participants' backgrounds and attitudes to inform future advancements.

Chapter 8, 'From textbook to online materials: the changing ecology of foreign-language publishing in the era of ICT' by Carl Blyth. Blyth reports a 'case study of the development and impact' of two websites (*Tex's French Grammar and Français interactif*) that he created and produced at the University of Texas at Austin, and which together constitute part of an online course for undergraduate French students. The author uses the 'metaphor of ecology of language use' to demonstrate a process in which DT is perceived as an essential part of a language curriculum rather than a supplementary resource.

The author claims that the advancement of DT and open publishing is resulting in the creation of materials that are more student-centered and user-friendly. The chapter begins with defining terms like ecology, open-source, and open access, as well as viewing open education as a knowledge ecosystem. It goes over some open-source educational content, then turns to going over the stages of enhancement of the University of Texas at Austin French courses and analyzing the fundamental ideas of the successive versions. It emphasizes the importance of incorporating students in the planning process to find a balance between “what they believed students required [...] and what students said they wanted” (Blyth, 2009, p. 188). According to Blyth, this led to a shift in content and an increase in usability, putting students at the center of the learning process.

Conclusion

All in all, this book illustrates the importance of technology throughout the process of language learning. It makes learning more fun and offers different engaging ways of language learning. As Evans points out in the end, each chapter is unique in terms of content and even format, which not only keeps the book interesting to read but also clearly demonstrates the relevance of pedagogy in the context of digital technology in education. Although this book is useful for novice teachers, researchers, and ICT users, the principles of pedagogy. It is a good source for educators to know how they should approach teaching and learning using technology.

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