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Ubiquitous Learning is a new educational paradigm made possible in part by the affordances of digital media. Ubiquitous Learning is a counterpart to the concept 'ubiquitous computing', but one which seeks to put the needs and dynamics of learning ahead of the technologies that may support learning. The arrival of new technologies does not mean that learning has to change. Learning should only change for learning's sake. The key perspective of the conference and journal is that our changing learning needs can be served by ubiquitous computing. In this spirit, the journal investigates the affordances for learning in the digital media, in school and throughout everyday life.

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Factors Affecting Ubiquitous Learning from the Viewpoint of Language Teachers: A Case Study from Vietnam

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Abstract: Vietnam is promoting the use of information and communications technology (ICT) in education with a view to improving the quality of teaching and moving towards ubiquitous learning. Many ICT tools and applications have been deployed at universities in Vietnam. However, availability of technology is not synonymous with the use of technology. In the area of foreign language teaching and learning, little is known about what could possibly enable or hinder teachers’ use of ICT. The aim of this paper is to present the results of an exploratory and empirical study regarding the use of ICT in modern language teaching at tertiary level in Vietnam. Our case is Hanoi University (HANU), one of the leading universities in the North of Vietnam. A mixed methods approach was applied with 222 survey participants and 43 interviewees including senior management, classroom teachers and ICT experts at HANU. Their responses have shed light on teachers’ perceived enabling and inhibiting factors in relation to ICT use in ubiquitous teaching and learning. It is hoped that teachers and university leaders from other countries may find the case study useful for their better integration of ICT in their classrooms and institutions for ubiquitous learning in the future.

Keywords: Information Communications Technology (ICT), Ubiquitous Learning, Barriers to ICT Use, Language Teaching, Computer-assisted Language Learning (CALL)

Introduction

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS technology (ICT), which is currently being widely integrated into teaching and learning, provides extensive opportunities and challenges for both teachers and learners (Department of Education Science and Training, 2008; Murray, 2008; Rybacki, 2011). In the area of foreign language teaching and learning, these opportunities and challenges range from providing access to new resources, pronunciation drills and text manipulation to interactive practice, collaborative and communicative applications (Dang, 2011; Davies, 1997; Warschauer & Healey, 1998).

In Vietnam, ICT has grown remarkably since the introduction of the internet in the late 1990s (National Steering Committee on ICT & Ministry of Information and Communications, 2010). Expressions of full support from the Vietnamese government for ICT in education and in foreign language teaching and learning can be found in various legal documents, e.g. Directive No. 55/2008/CT-BGDDT on strengthening ICT use in teaching and training in the educational system for the period 2008–2012 (MOET, 2008b), and the 14th draft Education Development Strategy of Vietnam (MOET, 2008a). It can be argued that those legal documents could put considerable pressure on teaching staff to use ICT in their teaching. As can
be seen from ICT experience in other countries, while ICT usage may come easily for some teachers, others have to struggle with ICT and/or may use it only perfunctorily (Haydn & Barton, 2007; Phillips, 2002; Zhao & Frank, 2003; Zhao, Pugh, Sheldon, & Byers, 2002).

Despite the increasing availability of ICT facilities in schools and universities and a favourable legal framework, it has been noted that ICT use by teaching staff in Vietnam is still varied and limited (Peeraer & Van Petegem, 2010). In the area of foreign language teaching and learning in Vietnam, there seems to be a lack of understanding of the complexity of ICT use in foreign language teaching, and of factors which could hinder or enable teachers’ use of ICT. Therefore, this article reports a survey of the teaching staff of a Vietnamese University to identify and analyse the staff’s perceptions of ICT obstacles as well as facilitators with regard to language teaching.

The term ICT has different definitions. It can refer to computers, digital cameras, the Internet, and the World Wide Web (Davies & Hewer, 2012; Finger, Russell, Jamieson-Proctor, & Russell, 2007; Gillespie, 2006). ICT could also be associated with computer-based and computer-related devices (Finger et al., 2007). In this study, the term ICT is used to describe the computer and the internet-based technologies, covering both generic software applications (e.g. word processors, presentation software, email packages, and web browsers) and computer-assisted-language-learning (CALL) software applications plus useful websites about purposeful language teaching and learning (Davies, Walker, Rendall, & Hewer, 2012).

The Context

The site of this case study is Hanoi University (HANU), a public university founded in 1959 in Hanoi. It is a well known institution for foreign language training in Vietnam. Essential training programs in foreign languages for senior Government officials and pre-departure students have been conducted at HANU for over a decade. The university is also a main provider of interpreters and translators for the Government and other international organisations nationwide. Major foreign languages taught at HANU include English, French, Chinese, German, Korean, Japanese, Russian, Spanish and Italian. Foreign languages have recently become the language of instruction for some courses and subjects, e.g. English is being used to teach business administration, tourism, international studies, finance-banking, and computer science; Japanese for computer science, etc. In addition, HANU also conducts Vietnamese studies at the undergraduate level for non-Vietnamese learners. In the future, the university is planning to increase the number of courses conducted in foreign languages to meet the demands of society (Hanoi University, 2011).

HANU is gradually moving into the provision of international education, increasing the use of advanced technologies in teaching and learning in order to equip its students with professional skills to be able to adapt to future working environments. Moreover, HANU is striving to become a research university commensurate with other universities in the Asia-Pacific region and the world. For example, the university publishes *The Journal of Foreign Language Science*, the only journal in Vietnam in the field of foreign language education (Hanoi University, 2011).
**Theoretical Framework**

In order to understand the perceptions of academic staff regarding ICT uptake in this case study, the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) was used (see Figure 1). UTAUT is a comprehensive model developed from the influential constructs of eight theories and models relating to technology acceptance and use, including the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), the technology acceptance model (Davis, 1989), the motivational model (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1992), the theory of planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991), the model of personal computer utilisation (Thompson, Higgins, & Howell, 1991), the innovation diffusion theory by Rogers (1995) and the social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986). Thanks to this combination, UTAUT could possibly explain “as much as 70 percent of the variance in intention” to use technology (Venkatesh, Morris, & Davis, 2003, p. 471). Some constructs within the model deal with individual ICT users (e.g. age, experience, performance expectancy and effort expectancy), whereas others relate to broader contexts (e.g. social influence). In a nutshell, UTAUT provides useful lenses to better interpret factors influencing ICT use by teaching staff at the individual and institutional levels.

![Figure 1: The Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT) (Venkatesh et al., 2003)](image)

**Research Approach**

A mixed methods approach was used in this study to gain a rich picture of factors affecting ICT uptake by academic staff at the case study institution.
Data Collection

Questionnaires were delivered to all teaching staff of language departments at HANU (N=350). Only 222 questionnaires were returned, resulting in a response rate of 63%. The questionnaires aimed to record staff perceptions of, as well as belief in, ICT barriers, enablers, and their actual use of ICT in teaching various language skills. The present status of ICT facilities, ICT training and support was also surveyed.

After the questionnaires were returned, semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior leadership, ICT experts and a number of teaching staff (N = 43) (see Table 1). All the interviews were digitally recorded for later analysis. The interviewees provided multi-faceted insights into the views of the study participants about ICT use, the teaching environment, the quality of ICT facilities, causes of ICT obstacles, ICT enablers, and the teaching staff attitudes toward ICT uptake.

Table 1: Participants in Questionnaire and Semi-structured Interviews

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Data Analysis

The responses from the questionnaires were coded and entered into an Excel spreadsheet before being transferred to the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program for further analysis. As for the recorded interviews, they were transcribed, and then entered into the NVivo program for coding and interpretation. The use of different data sources and approaches can strengthen the validity of the findings (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2011; Mertens, 2010).

Findings and Discussions

The data analysis of both questionnaires and interviews resulted in the identification of inhibiting and enabling factors affecting ICT uptake by academic staff, which will be presented below.

ICT Inhibitors

At the institutional level, there seem to be three main factors, namely lack of ICT guidelines, lack of specific support and motivation, and technical problems. Those factors have also been identified by Mumtaz (2000) and the former British Educational Communications and Technology Agency (BECTA, 2003).

Lack of ICT Guidelines

According to the results of survey data analysis, a lack of ICT guidelines was generally perceived as the first inhibiting factor to be identified. It is generally agreed that a university needs to have an ICT plan, strategy or statement to broadly express the rationale and expectations for ICT use (Collis & Jung, 2003; Jung, 2005; La Trobe University, 2011). In our
case study, the senior leadership repeatedly confirmed that HANU had guidelines for ICT use. In contrast, over 80% of the survey participants responded that they had never seen or read that document. The majority of the respondents (92.5%) also agreed that even if these guidelines existed, somehow they did not reach the staff, consequently leading to the absence of visionary leadership and individualised ICT use by the teaching staff.

Well, I have no idea whether we have those [ICT guidelines] or not. I really don’t know, but I cannot confirm that there is no such document. All I can say is that I have never seen or read that document. (Interviewee, ID 03)

Lack of Specific Support and Motivation
HANU has made efforts to improve ICT facilities over the years, e.g. buying more computers, LCD projectors, digital databases, and installing more servers (Hanoi University, 2011). However, like other public universities, HANU has no financial incentives for ICT use by staff. Those who use ICT effectively in their teaching do not receive any rewards or official recognition. Similarly, nothing is done to those who do not apply ICT at all. As a result, nearly 50% of survey respondents perceived that they did not receive strong support for ICT use from the departmental leaders. “We only receive unofficial praise or our students pass on good words to others, that’s all. Perhaps we don’t receive any material incentives” (Interviewee, ID 22).

Technical Problems
Frequent complaints were made by academic staff about technical problems, e.g. computer breakdowns, electricity cut offs and the unstable internet connection at HANU. Over 80% of survey participants felt discouraged by the slow internet connection, which delayed access to online audio and video resources considerably, or resulted in a long waiting time. Technical problems could also mean a waste of valuable lesson time.

Our internet bandwidth is probably not very broad so the waiting time is long. Our regular joke is that after we command the computer to do something, it takes a long time for the computer to ‘think’, long enough for us to do many things before what we command appears on the computer screen. (Interviewee, ID 41)

At the teaching staff level, major obstacles included limited access to ICT facilities, lack of lecturer-oriented ICT training and increased workload for academic staff.

Limited Access to ICT Facilities
Over 80% of the respondents reported that they had limited access to computers. Most of the desktop computers at HANU are concentrated in the main library and a few computer labs. Those computers have to be shared by both academic staff and students. Even though a high percentage of the teaching staff (66.2%) reported having a laptop, these laptops were

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1 Interviews were conducted in Vietnamese. The examples presented here have been translated by the first author.
personal property and were only intermittently brought to classrooms. Laptop computers are not generally available for loan at HANU.

*The university can only invest in the ICT infrastructure, for example investments in improving the internet network, but about the equipment [laptop computers], it is the responsibility of the individual lecturer. The university cannot provide everything.* (Interviewee, ID 42)

There were only a few desktop computers for shared use in each department. Over 70% of the questionnaire respondents agreed that the quality of the desktop computers was much less than adequate. Therefore, these computers were only used to check emails or read e-newspapers, rather than for lesson preparation. Less than 60% of respondents reported having access to desktop computers at the university. Hence, the frequency of computer use by teaching staff at the university was not high. For example, 46.2% of staff reported that they ‘sometimes’ used a computer at HANU, 15.6% rarely and 4% never.

**Lack of Lecturer-oriented ICT Training**

To assist teaching staff to know how to use ICT facilities, HANU occasionally conducts training courses. However, the quantity and quality of those courses do not meet the actual needs of the academic staff. During the past two academic years, teaching staff received about 5–10 hours of training on average. According to over 80% of the survey participants, the frequency of those ICT training courses fell short of the staff’s expectations. In addition, due to the top-down approach, ICT training organised by HANU did not take into account the actual ICT skills which the teaching staff needed to teach different skills/subjects. The training content mainly covered basic, generic skills such as internet searching, word processing and PowerPoint presentation rather than focusing on specific programs with potentially more specific relevance for language teachers such as audio editing, video editing, e-lecture preparation, etc. As a result, ICT use by staff for language teaching purposes was not felt to be supported and, in consequence, limited.

**Increased Workload**

In general, it is argued to be time consuming to prepare a technology-enhanced lesson (Beggs, 2000; Dang, 2011). This view was shared by over 60% of the survey participants. The common thinking of teaching staff is to teach what is available in printed textbooks rather than spending more time on using technology. Using ICT in teaching requires lecturers to devote considerable time, first to learn how to use new technology, next to use ICT for lesson preparation, and then to use ICT in classroom teaching. Over 60% of respondents reported feeling that attempting to use ICT made their workload heavier.

*As for lecturers, increased workload means having less time for new technologies or new software. A single demonstration of how to use an interesting software program is not enough. Several illustrations are not enough either. ICT users need to have time to actually try out this new software program by themselves; it could be a failure or success; but that’s the way they learn how to use new technology. Unfortunately, our teaching staff have no time for that, I mean, let’s look at their workloads; they have*
many hours of classroom teaching, a lot of lesson preparation, and on top of that they have to teach extra classes to supplement their family’s income. All that affects their time available to learn how to use ICT. (Interviewee, ID 38)

While the ICT barriers are powerful, there are also driving forces for ICT uptake by the academic staff at HANU.

**ICT Enablers**

The drivers at the institutional level can consist of two factors, namely positive ICT perceptions by leadership, and continuous improvement of ICT infrastructure.

**Positive ICT Perceptions by Leadership**

It is generally agreed that the positive perceptions and beliefs of leadership in ICT play an essential role in ICT integration within an institution (Schiller, 2003). It is fortunate that different generations of HANU leadership have had a strong belief in the potential of ICT in teaching and learning foreign languages. This has been manifested in considerable investment in continuous upgrading of ICT facilities, digital databases and verbal encouragement of ICT use at various meetings. It can be stated that without the determination of the university leaders, the ICT integration could not have reached its current status.

*The first facilitator, I think, is that HANU leaders have been dynamic and keen on ICT use. We can see that HANU is one of the leading universities which wishes to apply ICT throughout the university. It is the strong determination of the leadership which can inspire and motivate the managerial and teaching staff. (Interviewee, ID 38)*

**Continuous Improvement of ICT Infrastructure**

Another facilitator is possibly HANU’s efforts to continuously improve the ICT infrastructure so as to work toward an ICT-friendly environment on campus. Over the past decade, HANU has, among other initiatives, increased the number of desktop computers, bought more digital databases, installed more LCD projectors and widened the internet coverage (Hanoi University, 2011). During the interviews, HANU senior leaders revealed an ambitious plan to further invest in the ICT infrastructure in the next few years.

*Our university has a plan not only to improve the existing ICT infrastructure, but also to upgrade our transmission network, and external information processing stations, including our existing system of fibre optic cables in order to ensure a higher performance capacity and a larger coverage area. Regarding facilities, our university has also considered building a separate high-tech compound with the loans from the World Bank if we have a project in the future. (Interviewee, ID 42)*

The teacher-level enablers could be classified as perceived usefulness of ICT for students, perceived benefits of ICT for teachers and perceived ease of ICT use.
Perceived Usefulness of ICT for Students

According to the results of the quantitative data analysis, the teaching staff applied ICT in their teaching because they perceived that ICT was useful for students. It was strongly agreed by the survey respondents that ICT would increase study motivations for students (100%); enhance employability for students in the future (95.7%), especially in the era of information society and knowledge-based society; promote autonomous learning (92.5%); help students understand subjects more deeply (92.5%) and help students obtain better academic results (92%). Given the strong influence of fast-changing technologies, the students who were born in the 1980s and later are often referred to with such terms as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), or the Net Generation learners (Oblinger & Oblinger, 2005). If learners are more technology savvy, teachers will need to adopt new technologies to meet their interests and expertise.

Perceived Benefits of ICT for Teaching Staff

The study results showed that teaching staff members were convinced of the educational benefits of ICT. There was a high agreement among respondents that ICT use would help them access extensive teaching resources on the internet (99.5%); improve their teaching performance (99.1%), especially with the use of multimedia resources downloaded from the internet; better communicate with colleagues via email (99.1%); enhance lesson preparation (98.1%); increase productivity (96.7%); facilitate sharing of teaching experiences with others (95.3%) and develop their professional expertise in their subject areas (94.9%). Those benefits are also mentioned by other researchers (Davies & Hewer, 2012; Murray, 2008). In reality however, there is a gap between the academic staff’s perception and their actual use of ICT.

Interestingly, while most staff (95.3%) agreed that ICT made it easier for lecturers to share their experiences with others, about 60% of respondents reported that a culture of sharing experiences in ICT use in language teaching was still absent at HANU. In other words, there is still a big gap between staff’s perception of ICT benefits and their actual use and promotion of ICT as a teaching tool.

Perceived Ease of ICT Use

Internet and computer programs are generally seen as user friendly. According to the survey results, teaching staff found it easy to use the internet (86.8%) especially to search online teaching resources; to use a computer (83.1%); to use ICT for lesson preparation (77.4%) with a focus on Word and PowerPoint; to use ICT in classroom teaching (76.6%), mainly with PowerPoint and to self study how to use ICT (66.7%). However, the level of difficulty increased when it came to the use of software or applications to edit audio and video files.

Conclusions

The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in this case study suggests three ICT inhibitors at the institutional level: lack of ICT guidelines, lack of specific support and motivation, and technical problems; three ICT barriers at the teaching staff level: limited access to ICT facilities, lack of lecturer-oriented ICT training and increased workload; two ICT enablers at the institutional level: positive ICT perceptions of leadership and continuous improvement of ICT infrastructure; and three ICT drivers at the teaching staff level: perceived
usefulness of ICT for students, perceived benefits of ICT for teaching staff and perceived ease of ICT use.

A clear understanding of the inhibiting and driving factors may help the senior leadership and the academic staff to develop appropriate and evolving strategies to cope with the challenges, and to integrate ICT more effectively into foreign language teaching.

By limiting the study context to only one university in Vietnam, it seems that part of a bigger picture of ICT use in foreign language teaching in Vietnam is likely to be lost. However, given the previous research on ICT use in education in both developed and developing countries (OECD, 2004; Trucano, 2005), it could be hoped that the study results may be taken forward by university leaderships, academic staff and researchers in other contexts as well.

Further research may be needed regarding the impact of ICT use on language teaching, specific ICT skills essential for language teachers, appropriate forms of ICT training for language teachers, and good practices for ICT use in language teaching.

**Acknowledgements**

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References


**About the Authors**

**Xuan Thu Dang**

Xuan Thu Dang started his professional doctorate studies (on the use of ICT in language teaching in Vietnam) at La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia in 2009. He was formerly Deputy Dean of the English Department, Hanoi University, Vietnam. Since 1991 he has been involved in teaching and research mainly in Vietnam in the discipline areas of English as a foreign language, technology in teaching, learning and professional development, translation and interpreting skills. Thu has been working as a high-level freelance interpreter for the European Commission since 2002. Last year Thu assisted a project in Royal Children’s Hospital in Melbourne about using the ambient technologies to create classroom presence for children absent due to health reasons. He is now working on phase 2 of the project using broadband-enabled ambient and phatic technologies to connect hospitalised children with their schools and families in Melbourne, Australia. His current research interests include ubiquitous learning, e-learning, mobile learning, blended learning, innovative use of ICT in teaching and learning, and best practices of ICT use in higher education.

**Dr. Howard Nicholas**

Dr. Howard Nicholas is Senior Lecturer in Language Education. He is based on the Bundoora campus. He has wide research and teaching experience in child and adult second language acquisition (German and English) and in the acquisition of German as a first language. He has researched extensively in the area of mobile technologies and education. From 1991 to 2007 he was Senior Researcher in the joint Macquarie University-La Trobe University Australian AMEP (Adult Migrant English Program) Research Centre. Howard was Vice-President, President and Immediate Past President of the Applied Linguistics Association of Australia between 2000 and 2008.

**Prof. Ramon Lewis**

Professor Ramon Lewis has made a strong contribution to the fields of classroom management and adolescent and adult coping. He is currently involved in researching the implementation of his Developmental Management approach to classroom behaviour in over 250 Primary and Secondary schools in Victoria, Australia. His writing has reached a wide national and international audience of parents, teachers and community leaders as well as a professional audience of teachers, psychologists and human service personnel.
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Conference
Members of the Ubiquitous Learning Community meet at the Ubiquitous Learning: An International Conference, held annually in different locations around the world. This Conference has evolved from the e-Learning Symposia held in Melbourne, Australia in 2006, 2007, and 2008 connected with the International Conference on Learning. It is also connected to the Ubiquitous Learning Institute in the College of Education at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, USA. The Conference was held at Northeastern University, Boston, USA in 2009; at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada in 2010; and at University of California, Berkeley, California in 2011. In 2012, the Conference will be held at iHotel Conference Center, University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois, USA.

The Ubiquitous Learning Conference investigates the uses of technologies in learning, including devices with sophisticated computing and networking capacities which are now pervasively part of our everyday lives’ from laptops to mobile phones, games, digital music players, personal digital assistants and cameras. The Conference explores the possibilities of new forms of learning using these devices not only in the classroom, but in a wider range of places and times than was conventionally the case for education.

Our community members and first time attendees come from all corners of the globe. Intellectually, our interests span the breadth of the field of education. The Conference is a site of critical reflection, both by leaders in the field and emerging academics and teachers. Those unable to attend the Conference may opt for virtual participation in which community members can submit a video and/or slide presentation with voice-over, or simply submit a paper for peer review and possible publication in the Journal. Online presentations can be viewed on YouTube.

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The Ubiquitous Learning Community enables members to publish through three mediums. First, by participating in the Ubiquitous Learning Conference, community members can enter a world of journal publication unlike the traditional academic publishing forums—a result of the responsive, non-hierarchical and constructive nature of the peer review process. Ubiquitous Learning: An International Journal provides a framework for double-blind peer review, enabling authors to publish into an academic journal of the highest standard.

The second publication medium is through a book series Ubi-Learn, publishing cutting edge books in print and electronic formats. Publication proposals and manuscript submissions are welcome.

The third major publishing medium is our news blog, constantly publishing short news updates from the Ubiquitous Learning Community, as well as major developments in the emerging field of ubiquitous learning. You can also join this conversation at Facebook and Twitter or subscribe to our email Newsletter.
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