

Factors Influencing Teachers' Use of ICT in Language Teaching: A Case Study of Hanoi University, Vietnam

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Abstract

This conference paper presents the results of an exploratory study of the use of ICT in modern language teaching at tertiary level in Vietnam, taking the case of Hanoi University (HANU), Vietnam. A mixed methods approach was used. The responses of the research participants have shed light to two major areas: i) teachers' current use of ICT facilities, and ii) teachers' perceptions about enablers and inhibitors of ICT use in language teaching.

The case study could provide food for thoughts for language teachers and university leaders from other countries so that ICT could be better integrated in their classrooms and institutions in the future.

1. Introduction & context

The term ICT can cover a wide range of technologies and has different definitions. Within the scope of this study, ICT is defined as computer-, and the internet-based technologies, and can be categorised into two types: i) generic software applications, e.g., word processors, presentation software, email packages, and web browsers; and ii) CALL software applications and useful websites with a focus on purposeful language teaching and learning [1].

Academic research and literature have illustrated extensive benefits of ICT in language teaching and learning, e.g. getting access to endless online resources of authentic materials, making teaching and learning more enjoyable, and promoting autonomous learning, just to name a few [1]. Despite extensive benefits of ICT, there still exist barriers to effective integration of ICT into language teaching. Challenges can be external, i.e. lack of ICT access, equipment, and training; can be internal, i.e. teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards ICT use in teaching and learning. Internal barriers are hard to recognise, consequently more difficult to tackle [2]. Barriers can happen at the teacher level or at the institutional level [3-7]. Challenges at the teacher level could be inconfidence in ICT skills, time-consuming lesson preparation, unreliable internet access, lack of control over inappropriate materials on the internet, insufficient computers, and lack of timely technical and administrative support. At the institutional level, there may be a lack of ICT facilities, un-updated software and hardware, lack of technical and administrative support, and lack of long-term vision.

Together with the trend of increasing ICT integration into teaching and learning around the world, Vietnam is promoting the use of ICT in education from primary to tertiary levels in a hope of enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. A number of legal documents have been issued to create a favourable condition in this regard [8-12]. Like other universities, Hanoi University, HANU in short, also embraces ICT in teaching and learning.

2. Case study description

HANU participated in this study. It is a public university founded in 1959 in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, well known for foreign languages training [13]. Within this case study, we only focus on 16

language departments/centres at HANU. The goal of the research is to explore possible factors which could facilitate and/or hinder the use of ICT in language teaching.

A mixed methods approach was applied. In total, 222 questionnaires were collected from the 350 ones delivered to language teachers, resulting in the response rate of around 63%. There were more female participants (~80%) than male ones (~20%). Follow-up interviews were conducted with 43 participants (F = 53%, M = 47%), inclusive of HANU senior leadership, ICT experts and language teachers.

This research is mainly based on the Technology Acceptance Model which was developed by Fred Davis and Richard Bagozzi [14]. Two core elements of this model are perceived ease of use, and perceived usefulness [15-17].

Data were analysed and facilitated by appropriate software programs, such as SPSS for quantitative data analysis, and NVIVO for qualitative data analysis. Relevant information regarding ICT inhibitors and enablers was extracted from the analysis of data and was selectively reported in the major findings below.

3. Findings & discussion

3.1 Teachers' current use of ICT facilities

In general, teachers use ICT to prepare for lessons and to deliver those lessons in class. For lesson preparation, the results show the following common pattern of ICT use. Teachers search the internet; download relevant materials; design practice activities with word processing; prepare presentations with Microsoft (MS) PowerPoint. Email is used for exchange of communication with other colleagues and/or students. Such programs as audio editing, mindmapping, video editing, e-lecture making, photo editing, Hot Potatoes, screencasting, and voicethreads are often viewed as difficult and consequently rarely used by teachers.

For classroom teaching, PowerPoint presentations are popular. Wherever the internet is available, teachers use it to supplement teaching points. Word processing is also used especially for writing classes. Voice recording is sometimes used for recording students' presentations or for pronunciation practice. It is noticed that the following software programs, i.e. mindmapping, education blogs, and voicethreads, are rarely used due to their high level of difficulty in the eyes of teachers.

3.2 Teachers' perceptions about ICT inhibitors in language teaching

Data analysis reveals three major ICT inhibitors. The most important barrier is a lack of vision. 81.6% of the respondents claim that they have never read an ICT plan. Next, 82.5% agree that this ICT plan, if it exists, has not been disseminated to teaching staff. As a result, language teachers do not know why they need to apply ICT, and where ICT will lead them to.

The next inhibitor lies in teachers' belief that ICT increases burden on their shoulders. It is believed that ICT increases workloads for teachers. As the rule of thumb, one hour of ICT-enhanced lesson requires 3-4 hours of preparation. Therefore, it is generally agreed that lesson preparation using ICT is time consuming. Laptops are not for loans, therefore have to be purchased by teachers. On average, the price of a netbook is equal to two-month salary of a teacher. Hence, teaching with ICT is really a burden for teachers in terms of time, money and workloads.

Another major barricade is the lack of access to ICT equipment and training. 58.1% of the respondents have access to a desktop computer which they have to share with other colleagues. Computers and internet connection are found only in a small number of classrooms, computer labs

and the main library, making it difficult and inconvenient for teachers to use. In terms of ICT training, over the past two years teachers received about 5 hours of training on average, with limited focus on MS Office programs. Hence, many teachers do not feel confident or competent in using ICT.

3.3 Teachers' perceptions about ICT enablers in language teaching

The factor analysis suggests three possible ICT enablers. The most important factor is teachers' positive beliefs and attitudes toward ICT use. 100% of the respondents are aware of the benefits of ICT. Most respondents believe that ICT would enhance lesson preparation (91.1%) and improve teaching performance (98.1%). Many teachers even think that ICT would increase their productivity. However, positive attitudes are necessary but not enough – teachers need to actually use ICT in their daily teaching [13].

The next enabling factor is perceived ICT usefulness for learning. In the views of most teachers, ICT would promote autonomous learning; facilitate a shift from teacher-centric method to learner-centred approach. Some teachers even believe that ICT would help students understand subjects more deeply; gain better results in their studies; enhance employability for students in the future.

Perceived ease of ICT use is another facilitator. In general, teachers find it easy to use the internet and computers for lesson preparation and classroom teaching. Regarding the scope of usage, the teaching staff often stick to their comfort zone, e.g. internet browsing, download, , MS Word, and MS PowerPoint. Interestingly, many teachers find it easy to use ICT to share teaching experiences with others. There is a shift in thinking thanks to ICT. In the past when all materials were paper-based, sharing resources with others could be synonymous with losing power or having less resources. However, when most of materials are now digitalised, sharing resources and experiences may mean empowerment, collaboration and expansion of knowledge. However, a culture of sharing teaching resources and experiences has just taken shape and is at the initial stage at HANU. This culture needs further nurturing and cultivating in the future.

4. Conclusion

Despite a small scale of this case study, the following messages can be drawn up:

- An ICT plan needs to be developed with clear purposes, expectations and vision; to be well disseminated to all staff; and to look beyond current developments in ICT.
- ICT equipment is important, however, ICT support and training are vital. Training workshops have to be conducted on a regular basis, taking into consideration of the specific needs of teachers.
- An organisational culture of collaboration and sharing should be cultivated and nurtured.

It is also hoped that this study could be useful for other training institutions worldwide in their endeavour of ICT integration. Future studies could explore possible strategies to deal with inhibiting factors in order to boost ICT uptake in language teaching and learning.

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