

Chapter 1

An Overview of EFL Teachers' Individual Differences in CALL

Samaneh Yadollahi
Shiraz Office of Education, Iran

ABSTRACT

Individual differences have been proven to be among the most important factors affecting technology acceptance and use among teachers. Individual differences consist of a range of traits from personal characteristics, to cognitive and emotional components. The purpose of this study was investigating two sets of variables affecting teachers' use of technology in language classes including personality characteristics (such as age, teaching experience, and gender) and technology-related variables (such as computer literacy, anxiety, attitude, use and ownership) in the literature. The chapter reviews the research done on the role of these factors in language teachers' acceptance and use of technology in language classes.

INTRODUCTION

The use of educational technology is currently the focus of much interest in a great deal of research. Using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools as a delivery and supportive means for instruction is a controversial issue. This brings about many new challenges for educators and researchers with respect to a large number of factors that affect the acceptance or rejection of ICT tools by teachers.

In the field of language teaching and learning, the computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and technology-enhanced language learning research have typically focused on increasing teaching effectiveness and learning outcome through using technology to affect proficiency and achievement, providing feedback, and creating interactive multimedia-based learning facilities and environments; while teacher-technology interaction is taken for granted (Chen & Liu, 2008). Notwithstanding a huge improvement in the development of ICT infrastructures and access, this expansion confronts a major challenge similar to other innovative plans implemented in many different countries with wild speculations about the relationship between technology availability and teachers' use of technology for instructional purposes. The major challenge includes insufficient research (Albirini, 2006) and theory (Mahdizadeh, Biemans,

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& Mulder, 2008) related to the ICT needs of the society. The imbalance between theory, research and investment in ICT tool ends up with “casting doubt on the success and cost effectiveness of such initiatives” (Mahdizadeh, Biemans, & Mulder, 2008, p. 143). At this point, little is known about EFL teachers' technological qualifications, the type of problems they have in using ICT tools, their perceptions and preferences of CALL use in education, their readiness in using CALL in terms of required technology literacy, and the level of anxiety and negative attitude towards these tools.

Moreover, considering the current trends in education, a modern English classroom would not be complete without computers, software, Internet connections, projectors and a variety of high-tech devices. In this context, teachers as the most important agents of education should be able to use information and communication technologies actively during teaching-learning process. Therefore, given the teachers' significant role in this process, success of educational change is dependent on the teachers' empowerment in pre-service and in-services courses (Ekizoglu & Ozcinar, 2010).

CALL has also been the focus of interest among many researchers. Despite the ever-increasing number of studies regarding CALL itself, little research has been done to gain a clear understanding of EFL teachers' characteristics and their relationship with CALL use. Therefore, more research inquiries in this respect seem to be of vital importance in order to facilitate the effective teaching and learning in CALL environment. However, there is no doubt that the use of CALL in classrooms remains a challenge for most teachers. Therefore, assisting teachers to successfully use CALL tools in their teaching is a matter of great importance. In doing so, computer-related constructs such as computer literacy, computer anxiety, and computer attitude should be explored, because these constructs are considered as essential contributors to technology adaptation process (Agyei & Voogt, 2011). Moreover, research on teachers' use of technology in language classes shows that while ICT infrastructures have developed rapidly across the countries all over the world; teachers still avoid using technological tools in the process of teaching and learning. It is evident that this avoidance is related to many factors including teachers and students' characteristics. This study is a comprehensive review of the studies done on two aspects of teachers' characteristics that have crucial roles in their technology acceptance and role: personal characteristics and technology-related variables.

EFL TEACHERS AND CALL USE

Since the mid-1980s, Information and Communication technology (ICT) has been introduced into many educational systems throughout the world. The use of CALL in schools is diverse based on three goals: technology for instructional preparation, technology for instructional delivery, and technology as a learning tool. Firstly, teachers may use technology for instructional preparation including preparing various classroom activities and, instructional materials, communicating or collaborating with peers, students and their parents, locating digital resources, and creating lesson plans. Secondly, when technology is used for the purpose of instructional delivery, the teacher presents instruction by means of technological tools or students may use computer-assisted learning applications such as drills and practice, tutorials, and simulations. Thirdly, when technology is used as a tool, teachers use basic software applications (i.e. word processing, presentations, databases, spreadsheets, Web 2.0 tools, and concept mapping) to extend students abilities to solve problems, create products, or communicate and share their perspectives with each other (Inan & Lowther, 2010).

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