

Chapter 12

The Use of ICTs in Second Language Education: Opportunities and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

As many aspects of our lives have been increasingly digitized, education has likewise taken its share from this digitization. Consequently, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been progressively incorporated into education to improve the effectiveness of educational practices in formal and informal educational settings. ICTs hold great promise for second language education since they have the potential of providing language learners with increased opportunities to engage with the target language and culture even with a mouse click or a tap on their smartphones. This chapter presents an overview of how ICTs have been employed in the field of second language education over the decades by specifically elaborating on the rationale behind ICT adoption, the properties of ICTs utilized, advantages and disadvantages of ICT adoption in the field, and factors that might impede or facilitate ICT adoption in second language education. The chapter concludes with practical considerations that might affect the efficiency of ICT adoption in second language education.

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technology (henceforth, ICT) has become a buzzword in the modern era. ICTs encompass a myriad of technological tools and resources that help not only communicate but also produce, disseminate, store, and manage information. Not surprisingly, these days, a substantial majority of people spend most of their day using various ICT technologies such as personal computers, notebooks, mobile phones and tablets (Godwin-Jones, 2019; Jarvis, 2014). As many aspects of our lives have been increasingly digitized, education has also taken its share from this digitization.

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Even though ICTs are not specially designed for educational purposes, they hold great promise for increasing and enriching educational opportunities independent of physical and institutional limitations (McLoughlin & Lee 2010). As a result, incorporating ICTs in language education has gained considerable significance over the years. To date, there have been a plethora of studies that investigated the use and impact of internet and computer technologies on education in general, and on language learning in particular. Nevertheless, ICT is not limited to only internet and computer technologies and encompasses several other tools including social media, mobile applications, school information systems and online learning platforms (Bai, Wang, & Chai, 2019).

Since meaningful and authentic communication and exposure in second languages are of utmost significance to effective language learning, ICT tools have been employed in several ways in the field (Hanson-Smith, 1999; Warschauer & Kern, 2000). The use of ICTs in second language education has gained tremendous momentum, specifically in the last decade. There has been a strong pressure to use ICTs in classrooms to develop students' technological skills, foster their integration into the modern society that has been shaped by information technologies and improve teaching and learning practices to a great extent (Bottino, 2004). This situation may be accounted for by a number of individual and educational benefits that ICTs offer for second language education. To illustrate, ICTs may promote language learning and teaching practices in many ways including but not limited to providing rapid access to information and learning materials, instilling motivation in individuals to learn and interact in the target language, increasing the quantity and quality of learning and teaching opportunities and providing timely and appropriate feedback to learners. Moreover, previous research has demonstrated that incorporating ICTs into language learning may support learners' self-regulating learning and problem-solving skills and improve the efficiency of teaching practices (Levy, 2009; Sorebo, Halvari, Gulli, & Kristiansen, 2009).

It can be foreseen that, in close parallel with the advancements in ICT technologies, the adoption of ICTs in language education will continue to gain increasing momentum. For instance, while read-only Web 1.0, which is the first stage of the World Wide Web consists of webpages connected by hyperlinks, its successor, Web 2.0, refers to dynamic and user-generated content and social media. On the other hand, Web 3.0 may be defined as evolution and a more semantic and personalized form of Web 2.0 (Goy & Magro, 2012). Historically, the inception of Web 2.0 has been profoundly influential on language learning and teaching since Web 2.0 allows for the construction of learner-generated and collaborative content via tools such as blogs, wikis and social media. Hence, it would be safe to assert that with the introduction and spread of the forthcoming Web 3.0 and Web 4.0., second language learning field would be affected and even be shaped by ICT related developments beyond our imagination.

In the last decades, ICTs and second language education have cultivated a meaningful relationship that has benefited language educators and learners to a great extent. ICTs are being adopted for a number of purposes such as to create educational materials, design lessons, conduct assessments, improve language learning experiences and promote life-long learning. This growing interest in the adoption of ICTs in language education has given way to diverse benefits alongside challenges. ICTs have turned into a gold standard in many second language classes since they extend learning opportunities outside the walls of the classrooms and enable language learners to become potential creators of and collaborators on language content.

As such, this chapter focuses on the adoption of ICTs in second language learning by providing information about the historical background of this adoption, various ICT tools and forms that are employed in second language learning and teaching, and practical considerations that need to be taken into account while adopting ICT tools in second language education.

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