TECHNOLOGY RELATED EXPECTATIONS OF TURKISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS AT HACETTEPE UNIVERSITY

Asst. Prof. Dr. Mahir KALFA
Hacettepe University
Turkish Education Center
Beytepe, Ankara, TURKEY

Haydar YALCIN
INFORMASCOPE
Hacettepe Teknokent
Beytepe, Ankara, TURKEY

ABSTRACT

Aside from 'lingua franca' of the current age, technology enhanced language learning is stil in its infancy for the less commonly taught languages. Hacettepe TOMER has been teaching Turkish as a foreign/second language to the exchange students for several years though; technology related expectations of the language learners have never been precisely determined. The current study, as an action research of which the institution would benefit from, aimed to explore the language learners' technology related expectations. The sample of the study is 17 foreigner students attending Turkish as a second language programs with different native languages. The data were gathered through a questionnaire form developed by the researchers and a thorough literature review. The results revealed that HUTOMER should enhance their technologic facilities and improve the quality of the language education provided at the institution because participants do expect more multimedia resources during their language education. Suggestions were made for further research.

Keywords: **Turkish as a second language, HUTOMER, digital natives, technology enhanced language learning.**

INTRODUCTION

Currently, educational practitioners suggest that today's learners are grown up in a cyberworld and extensively immersed in technology in daily life. Correspondingly, the relevant literature underlines the importance of educational needs of today's learners who are named as 'digital natives' in various disciplines (Beheshti, 2012; Callas, 2012; Cantijoch, 2012; Dickinson, 2012; Harley, 2012; Houston, 2012; Parry, 2012; Vijayakumar, 2012; White & Le Cornu, 2011; Wilsey & Keengwe, 2012; Zimerman, 2012). The overall findings of the previous research posit that a uniqe instructional paradigm should be implemented into the running educational programs for digital natives. According to Prensky (2001) by developing hypertext memories digital natives think in an alternative way and perceive the information in a different way comparing to digital immigrants.

As one of the academics who coined the term 'digital natives', Prensky (2001) points out that lineer thinking processes which rooted in classic education systems may prevent creativity of digital natives. Digital natives utilizes technology in five aspects as social communication, studying, entertaining, daily use, and professional work. Digital natives can not only easily get access to the information they need but also share these information freely through Internet. Social networking platforms are used by them extensively. Internet technology enhanced the variety of message types such as text, image, animation, voice, and etc. (Cheung, 2011; Kongrith & Maddux, 2005). Respectively, Katırcı (2010) found out that messages conveying more animation and simulation feaures requires less cognitive load comparing to those having lots of texts.

Technology Enhanced Language Learning

The last two decades have witnessed the expansion of technology use in specifically multimedia for foreign language instruction in developing countries. The number of computer applications, communications technologies, and sheer volume of offerings on the Internet has grown at an amazing rate over the past 15 years, and many language educators, heeding instinct, common sense, and anecdotal information, have embraced these new technologies as useful instructional tools (Leloup & Ponterio, 2003). Studies of the effect of technology-enhanced instruction on achievement and studies of student attitudes regarding learning with technology have also increasingly been reported (Salaberry, 2001). As a very important element for communication, technological improvements provide a fertile ground for language learning.

In essence, technology provides second language learners with novel and varied chances for language learning by means of interactive tasks delivered through CD-ROMs, Web pages, and software on the Internet. Admittedly, the effectiveness of the technology depends on how it is implemented.

Thus, language practitioners need to reconsider any methods to language acquisition concerned with describing how language development is initiated due to technology (Chapelle, 2007). With the development of web-based technologies and the Internet, second language students do have access to authentic materials and native speakers at any time. One of the goals of the Hacettepe University Turkish Education Center (HUTOMER) is to identify ways in which language learners can effectively take advantage of these rich resources to enhance their learning and improve their Turkish language skills. For the student who would like to practice their new language outside of the classroom, a wealth of opportunities now exists through the web and the Internet.

The pros of technology in language classrooms have been extensively reported throughout the relevant literature. These advantages include; increased motivation, improvement in self-concept and mastery of basic skills, more student-centered learning and engagement in the learning process, more active processing resulting in higher-order thinking skills, and better recall (Dwyer, 1996; McGrath, 1998).

Additionally, there seems to be a beneficial multimedia effect, especially for low achieving students, when it is utilized to illustrate conceptual and factual information (Nowaczyk, 1998).

Latest developments in information and communicaiton Technologies (ICT) have evolved the roles of language stakeholders.

To exemplify, language learners are supposed to be actively involved in the learning process rather than being passive recipients since they are expected to control their own learning in a technology-enhanced learning environment (Brown, 1991).

Correspondingly, language teachers expose new demands of those learners (digital natives) in integrating new technologies into the second/foreign language classroom. Teachers also seek for better ways of providing students with linguistic skills, meaningful communication, and cultural transformation.

Learners' beliefs influence their consciousness, attitude towards learning, learning strategies and policies. Determination of learners' and teachers' beliefs in language teaching/learning process may provide vital insights in shaping effective learning/teaching methods. Currently, Turkish Language is becoming one of the most popular languages in the world (Bayraktar, 2002). However, there have not been adequate studies which are directly related to computer/technology assisted/enhanced Turkish learning.

Thus, the chief aim in many of the previous research was to teach Turkish as a foreign language or just to provide information on Turkish language.

The main motivation of the current study is to explore the technology enhanced language learning expectations of students attending language courses at HUTOMER (Hacettepe University Turkish And Foreign Language Teaching, Research And Implementation Center). The study is also set out to determine the general perceptions of the HUTOMER students toward the language education they receive. HUTOMER, founded on the well established perception of education and experience of Hacettepe University in language research as well as on the vast experience of teachers, is the outcome of 28 years of experience.

HUTOMER shares the universal principles, adopts a scientific approach, uses contemporary methodology and techniques in language teaching and aims to teach Turkish in the most accurate way as the mother tongue and in the quickest and most accurate way as a foreign language. Besides, it is acknowledged that it is not enough to teach Turkish without providing the learners with the ability to use the language in the most effective way. It is also maintained that the languages get more powerful through contacts with other languages. Thus, the efforts devoted to the field are in accordance with these facts. HUTOMER offers language courses by highly competent academic staff qualified teaching programs a modern physical environment, and in a friendly teaching atmosphere.

The certificates given at the end of the programs by Hacettepe University are recognized worldwide. Thus, technology enhanced language learning expectations of HUTOMER students should be determined in line with the factors affecting these expectations. The research questions addressed in the current study are as follows;

- **What are the demographic features of the foreigners attending HUTOMER?**
- **Are the HUTOMER students satisfied with the current way of language education?**
- **Do the technologic facilities provided at HUTOMER meet the language learning requirements of the learners?**
- **What are the technology related expectations of foreign students at HUTOMER?**

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Initially, 43 language learners attending four different programs running by HUTOMER were asked to respond to the questionnaire form. A total of seventeen students of Turkish as a foreign language participated in the study.

Of the seventeen participants, nine were male students and eight were female students (mean age 27, ranging from 19 to 37 years). Mother tonque of the particpants are English, German, Arabic, Russian, Abhaz, and Tatar. Participants' Turkish Language learning experience ranged from 2 months to 13 months while their experience in using computers for work-related purposes ranged from 4 years to 9 years. All participants had access to the Internet at home and school.

Data Collection and Analysis

A questionnaire was sent to the 43 language learners via e-mail, and 17 of them replied the survey. The questionnaire form consisted of 14 items to which the students responded to likert scale items ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

RESULTS

Of the seventeen students who participated in the study, eleven students indicated that they use the computer in the classroom and use it mainly for preparing teaching materials and activities. Among the seventeen students, eight students indicated that they use the computer less than 4 hours a day and three students indicated that they use the computer more than 4 hours a day. It was also found that ten teachers use the computer very often (more than three times a week) while one student uses the computer sometimes (once to twice a month) for language instruction in the classroom. The following table portrays language learners' perceptions toward the language instruction provided at HUTOMER.

Table: 1
Language learners' perceptions toward the language instruction provided at HUTOMER

Items	1. StronglyDisagree	2. Disagree	3. Not Sure	4. Agree	5. Strongly Agree
1. I am contend with the language education quality at HUTOMER.	6%	14%	17%	50%	13%
2. Educational materials provided at HUTOMER meet my language learning requirements.	15%	39%	11%	39%	7%
3. Language education provided at HUTOMER should be more interactive.	12%	22%	6%	27%	33%

The results presented at the Table: 1 indicate that more than half of the participants (63%) believe that the average quality of the education provided at HUTOMER institution is satisfactory.

However, the results presented at the second line of the table (strongly disagree + disagree: 54%) posit that language learners do have some concerns whether they are satisfied with the learning aids and tools provided at HUTOMER.

In other words, while more than half of the participants perceive language teaching materials provided at language teaching programs at HUTOMER as not very effective, nearly half of them declared that they are contend with the educational materials they have exposed at the institution. On the other side, language learners attending HUTOMER programs pointed out that running language learning instruction at the institution should be enriched through more interactive language learning aproaches and methods.

The following table presents results of the items depicting participants views on the identical importance of learning technologies at language education provided within HUTOMER.

Table: 2
Language learmers' perceptions toward the required learning technologies at HUTOMER

Items : … should be utilized for language teaching at HUTOMER	1. StronglyDisagree	2. Disagree	3. Not Sure	4. Agree	5. Strongly Agree
Personal computers	39%	33%	7%	15%	6%
Laptops	28%	60%	12%	0%	0%
Tablet PCs	21%	15%	39%	19%	6%
E-book reader	17%	23%	32%	17%	11%
Interactive whiteboards	11%	17%	10%	32%	30%
Mobile learning applications	6%	23%	10%	27%	34%

Table: 2 portrays the participants' views on the required learning technologies to improve the language teaching quality of the HUTOMER. The items were as follows; personal computers, laptops, tablet PCs, e-book readers, interactive whiteboards, and mobile learning applications. In terms of the personal computers, laptops, and tablet PCs, majority of the participants expressed their preference in favour of laptops comparing to personal computers and tablet PCs. This result indicates that language learners at HUTOMER perceives notebooks more functional comparing to desk top computers and tablet PCs which are relatively novel devices without any solid utilization within language education.

As for the necessity of the e-book readers, participants of the study do not have any clear perceptions. The results points out that 32% of them are not sure whether e-book readers are required at HUTOMER or not.

On the other hand, language learners would like to have interactive white boards and mobile learning applications throughout their education at the institution. Language learners' perceptions on implementing technology enhanced language education at HUTOMER are presented at the Table 3 below.

Table: 3
Language learners' perceptions on implementing technology enhanced language education at HUTOMER

Items I believe that..	1. stronglyDisagree	2. Disagree	3. Not Sure	4. Agree	5.Strongly Agree
More ICT should be integrated into HUTOMER curriculum	6%	14%	10%	38%	32%
More multimedia should be utilized within HUTOMER	6%	17%	17%	44%	17%
Distance education technology should be utilized within HUTOMER	6%	22%	17%	44%	11%
More educational materials should be used to support language learning processes at HUTOMER.	11%	33%	28%	11%	17%
Asynchronized instructional technologies should be incorporated into HUTOMER beside f2f learning mode.	6%	11%	11%	61%	11%
Language learners should not be bounded to physical settings.	17%	11%	50%	17%	6%

The results regarding the first item in the table shows that a vast majority of the participated language learners (70%) perceives ICT as an important and supportive aspect of overall language learning competence. The responses of participants toward the second item questioning their beliefs of multimedia use at the institution shows that language learners do have positive perceptions toward the use of multimedia in language education. Correspondingly, the results point out that participants' views are positive for implementing distance education technology into the language education programs at HUTOMER. Interestingly, two thirds of the participants (72%) perceive the use of educational materials at HUTOMER as adequate comparing to those checked agree (17%) and strongly agree (11%) options. The following item on the table is about participants perceptions toward the asynchronized instructional technologies in language education.

The results indicate that participants do have a clear consensus on the positive effect of asynchronized instructional technologies in language education.

Finally, the results at the table points out that half of the language learners are not sure about the last item.

That is to say, the participants do not have any clear idea on the negative effect being bounded to classes and school settings in terms of location and time as well.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This descriptive study explores the technology enhanced language learning expectations of students attending language courses at Hacettepe University Turkish Language Education Center.

As computer technology plays a more and more significant role in education, it is necessary for language teachers to examine how to integrate CALL into the classroom. The findings of the study reported in this article indicate that Turkish as a second language learners have positive attitudes toward the use of computers in general and recognize the benefits of using information and communication technologies in the language classroom.

As underlined in the relevant literature, emerging technologies in the field of language pedagogy have provided a wide scope to language researchers, learners and instructors in terms of imbedding technology into the language learning curriculum (Celik, 2011; 2012).

In other words, second language learners are digital natives, and language education programs should be designed and developed according to needs and expectations of these current generation learners. In the light of these findings, HUTOMER should enhance their technologic facilities and improve the quality of the language education provided at the institution. However, as one of the major limitation of the study, since the number of participants are so narrowed, it is not very promising to make hypothetical comments on the results. The further studies in the same context should elicit the reflections of the language learners through interviews or focus group discussions.

This study has found that generally participants do expect more multimedia resources during their language education at HUTOMER. An implication of this is the possibility that teaching Turkish as a second language is relatively novel in Turkey and thus interactive multimedia materials are not being used very frequently at these institutions. HUTOMER administration should plan implementing interactve and mobile learning Technologies conveying learning messages in a variety of techniques.

The results of the study indicate that the students' perceptions of and attitudes toward technology enhanced language learning are generally positive. As evidenced by the students' responses to the questionnaire, all students consider new learning contexts created by the use of computers as essential and desirable environments. They tend to believe that the use of computers adds value to their learning and technology enhanced learning is an efficient method for improving the quality of their learning because technology enhanced learning can provide both teachers and students with useful information and resources, various modes of presentation and authentic contexts. It appears that technology enhanced learning is adopted among the students because they are aware of the benefits of using computers in foreign language learning. From a pragmatic perspective, almost all students considered technology as a useful learning aid that can enhance ways of learning by offering them a variety of language inputs and expanding students' learning experiences in real contexts.

This supports the findings of Lam (2000) indicating that educations practitioners consider technology as a tool or as a means to assist learning and teaching.

Correspondingly, the teachers argue that computers, Internet and CD-ROMs could offer new opportunities for better language practice. They state that the use of educational technologies can make the process of language learning easier and faster and play a key role in the Nation's Educational Reform Plan. However, the teachers agree that using computers in the classroom cannot completely ensure better quality of education.

They tend to think that the quality of education depends exclusively on the quality of teachers, not the use technologies, and think that their positive attitude and continuous attempt to introduce new technologies and teaching materials to the class guarantee effective language instruction.

A limitation of this study is that the numbers of participants were relatively small. An issue that was not addressed in this study was whether the results were checked through qualitative data which could be obtained via interviews or reflections papers produced with/by foreign language learners at HUTOMER. It is recommended that further research be undertaken about actual technology use of language learners for pedagogical purposes. Considerably more experimental work will need to be done to determine the effective technology supported language learning strategies and methods.

BIO DATA AND CONTACT ADDRESS OF AUTHOR:

Mahir KALFA, has got an MA degree from Ankara University Turkish Literature and Language program and holds a Ph.D from Turkish Literature and Language program of Ankara University, faculty of Humanities and Letters. He worked as a lecturer at Kara Elmas University in Zonguldak. He is currently employed at Hacettepe University as a faculty. His research interests are Turkish language and literature, Turkish as a second/foreign language, and language pedagogy.

Assistant Professor, Mahir KALFA, PhD
Hacettepe University TOMER, Beytepe, Ankara, TURKEY
Phone: +90 312 297 8350
Fax: +90 312 297 8351
Email: mahirkalfa@hotmail.com

Haydar YALCIN is the general coordinator at INFORMASCOPE which specializes in providing information services and library technologies such as e-resources, automation systems, and library tools to academic, research, public and special libraries and information centers in Turkey and Central Asia. He worked as librarian at Hacettepe University, archivist at Ministry of Economy, and automation Librarian at Bilkent University.

Haydar YALÇIN
INFORMASCOPE
Hacettepe Teknokent, Beytepe, Ankara, TURKEY
Phone: +90 312) 297 8350
Fax: +90 312 297 8351
Email:haydar.yalcin @gmail.com

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