Using Technology in Foreign Language Teaching (Book Review)

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Using Technology in Foreign Language Teaching, Edited by Rahma Al-Mahrooqi & Salah Troudi (2014). Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 320 pages, Hardcover £52.99, ISBN: 978-1-4438-6522-7.

The integration of information and communication technology (ICT) into foreign language (FL) learning classroom not only suggests learners' positive attitude towards learning (e.g. see Li, Chu, & Ki, 2014) but also transform the language learning and literacy acquisition atmosphere as well as the dynamic of language learning settings (Young, 2003). The book entitled *Using Technology in Foreign Language Learning* aims to explore underwhich conditions technologies used in the learning environment can best be utilized. To achieve this objective, this 13-chapter book with an introductory chapter by the book editors examines the ICT integration into FL classroom learning from the perspectives of actual users and professionals from different countries namely the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Iran, and Malaysia. Six main issues are addressed in this edited volume including (1) the principled approach to integrating technology into course design, (2) approaches to the evaluation of computer-assisted language learning software (CALL) software, (3) the practice of blended learning, (4) teachers' view on technology integration, ICT knowledge and computer skills, (5) the practice of online learning in FL classroom setting, and finaly (5) the use of digital application, and Theories on integrating technology into language teaching practice are also discussed along with a brief summary of each chapter. Readers could benefit from this provision that they can choose which of the chapters may meet their needs and conditions. It is interesting that the book chapters are predominated by a number of studies that were conducted in diverse educational settings and employed using a variety of research methodologies. Moreover, pedagogical implications from the study are presented at the final section of each book chapter. It is therefore, as the editors argue, the book may provide evidence and suggest valuable insights for FL professionals, researchers as well as postgraduate students specifically regarding the ICT integration into FL classroom settings.

In the introductory chapter, the editors, Al-Mahrooqi and Troudi, provide a brief history of computer technology in language learning setting, its advantages as well as challenges that teachers may encounter when incorporating technology in classroom teaching practice. The editors also emphasise some crucial requirements that an FL institution have to meet for incorporating technology such as a solid infrastructure, teachers' and students' attitude towards computer and their computer skills.

A synthesis of relevant literature on approaches for technology integration is discussed in two chapters: chapter 1 and chapter 13. Chapter 1 *Blended learning in EFL: Adopting a principled approach to integrating technology,* authored by Claire Whittaker, focuses on a principled approach for technology integration within a blended learning environment. Whittaker's

discussion in chapter one might be considered as both a short summary and improvement of her early works which appeared in Tomlinson and Whittaker (2013). Only in this chapter, she promotes her thoughts on "how to achieve the principled approach to integrating technology into courses by determining the degree of overlap, the drawbacks and suggesting how we can proceed from this point" (p.8). Whittaker perceives the principled approach as "a systematic approach to the design process that is driven by pedagogy, that adds value to learning, and that is underpinned by language learning theory" (p.9). In order to attain a principled approach for technology integration into a blended language learning course design, Whittaker evaluates various framework and principles. What fundamental from the chapter is that the frameworks and principles addressed by the author seems to fit Reem Al Elbaikan and Salah Troudi's and Richard Peel' research that appear respectively in chapter 2 and 7. Those who are newcomers in incorporating technology within the field of foreign language teaching and learning, thus, will find this chapter beneficial as it also explores the shift of paradigm emphasizing "how various technology can be employed in language teaching to giving pedagogy a central role and organizing activities in the areas of language learning" (p.8).

Review of related literature for technology integration is also discussed in chapter 13 entitled *Approaches to the evaluation of computer-assisted language learning software*. In the chapter, the authors, Vahid Nimehchisalem and Jayakaran Mukundan attempt to seek a proper method for CALL software development and evaluation. They examine the various evaluative criteria and/or instruments suggested by ELT scholars for software evaluation (p. 286). Nimehchisalem and Mukundan argue that the recent frameworks available in CALL literature do not suggest a balanced representation of technical and pedagogical aspects required when evaluating CALL software. For example, the evaluation framework provided by software companies does not satisfactorily address the language skills while the instruments developed by ELT scholars pay much attention to the skills and less focus on technical features in the survey questions. Alternatively, they suggest the need for "a balanced focus on both predictive (before use) and retrospective (while or after use) CALL software evaluation" (p. 298).

The rest of the chapters in this edited volume report eleven studies from two different settings: blended learning environment and online learning setting. Two research reports on the practice of blended learning within FL classroom setting are presented in chapter 2 *Blended learning in Saudi Arabia: Potential for its use in EFL at the tertiary level* and in chapter 7 *Challenge and change in online reading: Learners' perception of textbooks and reading online*. In chapter 2, the authors, Ebaikan and Troudi, discuss their study on the potentials of adopting blended learning for EFL teaching and learning in Saudi Arabia. The study is interesting as its findings provide "insights into blended learning's potential for the teaching especially women in Saudi context" (p. 31). The authors believe that blended learning may increase the effectiveness of learning processes regarding the Saudi's culture that segregate sexes in all aspects of life including education (p. 37). Chapter 7 reports Richards Peel's study exploring the use of textbooks and reading online in the blended learning environment in the United Arab Emirates (UEA) context. While in the chapter two the emphasis is on "the essential role of the face-to-face element of blended courses" (p. 30), in this chapter seven, Peel attempts to examine learners' perceptions of the use of traditional textbooks and online reading (via the Internet and through programmes such as BlackBoard Vista [BBV]). The finding is quite surprising as it suggests that the online reading is less popular despite students' positive perception of the usefulness of online reading course (see p. 148). Some plausible factors that contribute to the findings as identified by the author include generational differences (digital natives, digital immigrants, and digital illiterates), learning style preference, learner types (visual learners, auditory learners, kinesthetic learners and read-write learners).

The practices of online learning in FL classroom setting are presented in seven chapters: chapter 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9 and 12. Chapter 3 entitled *Self-access or access to self?: Experimenting with e-*

learning in Oman presents a fundamental view on learner autonomy and learner independence. The authors, Alina Rebecca Chirciu and Tulika Mishra examine "the relationship between self-access learning and self-directed learning in English language education in Oman, by presenting the case of a higher education institution and its implementation of an e-learning platform" (p. 45). The finding of their study suggests that teachers' motivation and autonomy correlate with student motivation and autonomy. Chirciu and Mirsha write, "Student motivation to engage in self-access is directly proportional to the teachers' motivation to engage in it too" (p. 55). Chapter 4 *Integrating information and communication technology (ICT) into EFL classroom practice at Majma'ah university* and chapter 5 *Critical approach to integrating ICT into second language learning* follow up the view presented earlier in chapter 3 by demonstrating teachers' perspective of technology integration, ICT knowledge and skills. Teachers' use of ICT is also accounted within these two chapters.

In chapter 6 entitled *IT and L2 writing skills: EFL students' perceptions of e-feedback on their essays*, the authors, Susan Riley and Alireza Zareekbatani address two issues: (a) the advantages as well as the limitations of the use of information and communication technology (ICT) application in corrective feedback provision, and (b) L2 learners' perspectives on using e-feedback to reduce their local and global mistakes (p. 106). Chapter 8 *The internet chat room: A tool for promoting learner autonomy* reports Jo Mynard and Salah Troudi's study that examined ten new students' autonomous language learning when participating in a classroom-based chat room. Mynard and Troudi highlight some factors that suggest students' engagement with the learning activity enhanced by technology including students' motivation, individualised learning opportunity, design of the task, interaction, the effect of virtual learning environment. Kirsten Gear' study that is presented in chapter 9 *The self access centre WebQuest* still makes an issue related to learning autonomy. In her study, Gear focuses on promoting authentic materials as well as learner' learning independence through the use of WebQuest. She applied a constructivist-based student centred learning (SCL) platform in order to develop student-centered EFL and ESP WebQuests. In chapter 12 entitled *Online language corpora: Implications for EFL teaching*, Shaimaa Abd El Fattah Torky emphasises on the potential use of online language corpora for EFL learning. She evaluates "the practical implications of integrating corpus consultation into the EFL learning environment" (p. 253). Torky suggests an eclectic method to respond challenges in incorporating online language corpora into EFL classrooms.

The use of digital application in classroom setting is presented in two chapters. Al-Mahrooqi and Naqvi's study on ICT integration into digital video project-based instruction appears in chapter 10 entitled *Fostering EFL students' language development via student-created digital videos*. The result of their study shows that students positively perceived the ICT integration into their digital video project based learning activity. More importantly, the study revealed students' improvement on their vocabulary, reading and oral written communication ability. In addition to Al-Mahrooqi and Naqvi, Sandhya Rao Mehta explores the potential use of digital literatures in ELT and their discussion appear in chapter 11 *Is small really beautiful? Exploring digital literatures and their relevance to English language teaching (ELT).*

Overall, the book provides a comprehensive discussion in the area of CALL, specifically the practices of blended learning and online learning. The focus on learning autonomy and motivation which is promoted throughout the pracitce of blended learning and online learning is deliberately maintained by almost all the authors in the book. The fact that the book is composed by actual users and professionals and their writing is based upon academic research suggests evidence-based exploration of blended and online learning within EFL classroom environments. The contexts provided in this book are limited to higher education institutions within Arab countries. This may explain why gender issues in FL classroom is so concerned in the book and are successfully addressed by some of the authors.

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