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Phan Banpho

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University ELT Faculty's Use of IT, Their Opinions on the Roles of IT and the Promising Tasks

Phan Banpho

Chulalongkorn University Language Institute

Abstract

The rise and spread of information technology (IT) is widely recognized. However, whether ELT faculty members at leading state universities in Bangkok and their campuses in the vicinity of Bangkok have adopted IT in their teaching has never been addressed. The purposes of this study were to investigate these ELT lecturers' use of IT and to explore their opinions on the role of IT and the computer-related tasks they considered necessary in the new millennium. A sample of 150 lecturers from six leading universities in Bangkok participated in the study. The research instrument was a questionnaire for eliciting the faculty members' use of CAI or CALL, their opinions on the role of IT, and their tasks in the new millennium. It was found that more than half of the ELT lecturers (51.33%) had no experience in using computers in their teaching. However, the vast majority of these lecturers (94.66%) agreed that IT should play a positive role in ELT. As regards writing, about half of the lecturers were undecided if IT would help alleviate the burden of correcting / marking student writing. Although most of the lecturers (93.33%) generally agreed that they had to familiarize themselves with IT, about half (46.66%) were undecided if they had to rely on IT for quality teaching. Most of the lecturers also indicated that they had to use the Internet as well as to change their teaching styles to fit the new environment.

Introduction

Information technology (IT) is growing exponentially, and it has brought about a number of significant changes. IT is becoming widely accepted as a new mode of instructional delivery. Murphy and

Greenwood (1998) have stated that IT can dramatically improve access to information for and communications of ideas by students with special learning needs. IT also enables schools, colleges and universities to cater for the needs of individual students rather than

to the general needs of a class. Sato (1991:8) has stated that IT can supply educational information simultaneously in different locations and provide flexibility in the time of delivery of instruction.

Davis (1992, p.7) has stated that those teachers without skills in the use of IT already find themselves at a disadvantage when it comes to sifting through the deluge of information being published. Nevertheless, as IT enables new modes of instructional delivery, faculty roles and faculty relationships to students, technologists, and others will likely change in significant ways (Katz and Rudy, 1999, p.3). The changes may bring about both positive and negative responses from the ELT faculty. As a result, some may adopt IT in their teaching whereas others may build up defensive mechanisms due to a lack of knowledge and confidence. The changes may also cause fear and resentment (Atkinson, 1992, p.11).

McKenzie, Kirby and Mims (1996, p.91) have suggested that to impart technological skills to students, the ELT faculty should be comfortable with their own abilities. They should be familiar with IT, particularly in the use of computers in their teaching. In addition, the faculty should recognize current changes in the teaching and learning environment. However, whether the ELT faculty at leading state universities in Bangkok, where IT is already available and easily accessible, use computers in their teaching, and what opinions they have on the roles of IT on ELT, have never been addressed.

The purposes of this study were to investigate the use of computers by state university ELT faculty members and to explore their opinions on the roles of IT, and the tasks they considered appropriate.

Method

The subjects of this study were a convenience sample of 150 ELT lecturers at six leading state universities in Bangkok. These ELT faculty members were teaching either at a department of English or language institute in the second semester of 1999. Only respondents who completed every part of the questionnaire and those who returned the questionnaires in time were recruited for the study. The characteristics of these faculty members are presented in Table 1. According to Table 1, most of the subjects (83.33%) were females within the age group of 41-50 years. Most of the subjects (36.67%) had 21-30 years of teaching experience and more than half of them (51.33%) had no experience in using computers in their teaching.

For data collection, a questionnaire of two pages was constructed by the researcher and validated by three senior researchers at Chulalongkorn University Language Institute. The questionnaire was a five-point Likert rating scale with a Cronbach alpha coefficient of .83. The questionnaire consisted of three parts with an open-ended question.

The first part elicited the faculty member's personal information as shown in Table 1. The second, consisting of 6 items, asked for their opinions about the roles of IT. The third part asked them to rate 6 necessary tasks. In the second and third parts, the subjects were asked to indicate whether they strongly agreed, agreed, were uncertain, disagreed, or strongly disagreed with each item.

Table 1: Characteristics of the subjects

Characteristics	N (150)	% (100)
Sex		
Male	25	16.67
Female	125	83.33
Age		
20 – 30	30	20.00
31 – 40	33	22.00
41 – 50	53	35.33
51 – 60	34	22.64
Teaching experience (yrs)		
1- 10	47	31.33
11 – 20	37	24.67
21 – 30	55	36.67
> 30	11	7.33
Present position		
Administrator	15	10.00
Instructor	135	90.00
Experience in using computers (yrs)		
No experience	77	51.33
1 – 5	56	37.33
6 – 10	10	6.67
> 10	7	4.67

The questionnaires were distributed to the ELT faculty members through the head of the English department and/or director of the language institute at each university. Before the due date, telephone contacts were made for confirmation and arrangement for collection of the questionnaires.

The obtained data were processed and analyzed by the SPSS computer program to determine the mean, standard deviation, Cronbach alpha coefficient, t-test, and Chi-square test.

Results

The variables under investigation were the participant's use of computers in their teaching, their opinions about the role of IT

on ELT, and the computer-related tasks they considered necessary. These variables were analyzed according to the following independent variables: gender, age, teaching experience, present position, and computer experience. However, since the subjects of the study were dominated by females and lecturers (as opposed to administrators), gender and present position were not included in the analyses.

The main findings were as follows:

The Lecturer's Use of Computer

1. It was found that more than half of the state closed-university ELT faculty

members (51.33%) had no experience in the use of computers in their teaching.

2. The lecturers aged 41-50 years used computers in their teaching more than those younger. However, there was a very low

relationship between age and experience with computers, statistically insignificant at the level of .05.

Table 2: Faculty's opinions on the role of IT

Roles	N	%
Major role on ELT	142	94.66
Four basic skills	111	74.00
Self-study	144	96.00
Teaching information	134	89.33
Marking writing	92	61.33
Teaching environment	120	80.00

$$\chi^2 = 6.25, p = .05$$

The Lecturer's Opinions on the Role of IT

1. The vast majority of the lecturers (94.66%) were in agreement that IT would play a more important role on ELT in the new millennium, 38.82% indicating *agree* and 55.82% *strongly agree*.

2. Most lecturers (74%) believed that IT could enhance the teaching of all four basic language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing.

3. The great majority of the lecturers (96%) did believe that IT could support self-learning and self-development, 42% agreed and 54% strongly agreed.

4. Most lecturers (89.33%) believed that IT would enable the ELT teachers to update teaching information.

5. Most of the lecturers (61.33%) disagreed or were undecided if IT would alleviate the ELT lecturers' burden of correcting/marking students' writing. In contrast, 9.33% were in agreement that IT could lessen this burden.

6. Most lecturers (80%) were in agreement that IT could alter the English teaching environment, 58% agreed and 22% strongly agreed.

When the proportions of the categories (roles of IT), excluding the marking of writing, which was a negative response, were tested, it was found that the remaining 5 categories were significantly different at the level of .05.

Necessary Lecturer IT-Related Tasks

1. Most lecturers (93.33%) were in agreement that ELT teachers had to familiarize themselves with IT, 46% agreed and 47.33% strongly agreed.

2. Most lecturers (89.33%) were in agreement that ELT teachers with no experience with computers had to acquire computer literacy, 52% agreed and 37.33% strongly agreed.

3. Most lecturers (73.33%) agreed that ELT teachers had to learn to use CAI (or

CALL) programs, 51.33% agreed and 22% strongly agreed.

4. Most of the lecturers (66.66%) were undecided or disagreed that ELT teachers had to rely on IT for quality teaching, whereas 20% believed that IT could foster quality teaching.

5. Most ELT lecturers (80.66%) were in agreement that ELT teachers had to learn

to use the Internet, whereas only 16% were uncertain or disagreed.

6. Most ELT lecturers (71.33%) indicated that they had to change their teaching styles to fit the new environment in the new millennium, 43.33% agreed and 28% strongly agreed.

Table 3: Necessary IT-related tasks

Necessary Tasks	N	%
Familiarization	140	93.33
Computer literacy	134	89.33
CAI (or CALL)	110	73.33
Quality teaching	100	66.66
Internet	121	80.66
Teaching styles	107	71.33

$$\chi^2 = 6.81, p = .05$$

When the proportions of the categories (necessary tasks), excluding quality teaching, which showed a negative response, were tested, it was found that the remaining 5 categories were significantly different at the level of .05.

Respondents also expressed their opinions at the open-ended question. Some of the most interesting are as follows:

1. ELT teachers should incorporate CD-ROM/CAI in course design.

2. ELT teachers should promote learner autonomy in class so that they can become autonomous language learners.

3. ELT teachers should do portfolio assessment through the use of computers and the Internet.

4. ELT teachers should also act as an IT resource for language students.

5. ELT teachers should also provide consultation because students need human contact. CAI cannot replace teachers.

6. ELT teachers should facilitate students.

7. ELT teachers should provide students with lessons and exercises on computers.

Discussion

The main purposes of this study were to explore the use of computers by ELT faculty members teaching at state closed-universities in Bangkok, and to explore their opinions on the roles of IT and the IT-related tasks they considered necessary. One hundred and fifty faculty members, 25 males and 125 females, who were teaching at six leading state universities in the second

semester of 1999 were recruited for the study.

Analysis of the data obtained revealed that more than half of the faculty members recruited for this study had no experience with computers. This result is in agreement with Knutel's assertion (1998) that despite tremendous institutional investments in computer technology, most (51.33%) professors do not use the technology for instruction although computers are accessible in their workplace. Brief interviews with a small convenience group of lecturers indicated two main reasons why many ELT lecturers did not use computers were their insufficient literacy in computers and computers not being the integral part of their teaching. However, these lecturers might also believe that language teaching is a very sophisticated activity requiring human experience, judgment and appropriate decision making. Also, it may be that many lecturers did not receive computer education so they might not have adequate knowledge to use computers, and at the extreme, some might express resistance to computers. As regards teacher attitudes towards computers, Christensen (1997) found that teachers who received computer education tended to exhibit more positive attitudes toward IT. Above all, although many lecturers wanted to use computers, they might be unable to find appropriate computer programs that suited their lessons.

Regarding age and the use of computers, this study found that the older group, aged 41-50, used computers more than the two younger groups, aged 20-30 and 31 to 40. This result disagrees with that of Hill (1993) who found that faculty members who were 40 and younger used computers more than did those who were over 40. Part of this discrepancy may be due

to a racial difference. Also, it is possible that the lecturers in this age group had more experience than the younger groups so they felt more confident to try something new and challenging. In addition, men and women in this age group still have the energy and resources for making changes in their external situation, and they often take up long-neglected projects and interests (Crain, 1992, p.295). Also, Levinson (1977), cited in Crain (1992, p.298), conducted a study on middle aged people and found that the people in this age group had neglected parts of their self-development and urgently sought expression and stimulation to reappraise their lives. Moreover, they might have realized that a great number of their peers and students use IT so they had to use it if they did not want to lag behind.

In terms of the role of IT, most lecturers in this study believed that IT had positive roles in ELT: having a more important role, promoting the teaching of all the four language skills, supporting self-learning and self-development and enabling the teachers to update teaching information. This result confirms the advantages of IT for ELT. Despite these advantages, about half of the lecturers (49.33%) were undecided if IT would help reduce their burden of marking student writing. A reason why many lecturers were uncertain that computers could assist in marking students' writing may be due to their limited knowledge about computers, particularly the computer's potential. Also, some might be influenced by the results of many research studies, such as that of McCord (1997), which have found that computers and the Internet play an important role in essay planning and prewriting activities, not the marking of the writing assignments. However, according to the author's experience in writing many

CALL programs, including Sentence Writing and Describing the Pie Chart, ELT teachers can direct computers to assist in marking student writing if they learn the appropriate computer language.

IT contributes to many changes in ELT, particularly the mode of instructional delivery, classrooms and environments. ELT teachers, therefore, are inevitably required to find the tasks that can help them benefit the most from IT. This study found that most lecturers, ranging from 93.9% to 71.5%, felt it was necessary to focus on the following tasks: familiarizing themselves with IT, acquiring computer literacy, learning to use CAI or CALL programs, using the Internet, and changing their teaching styles to fit the new environment. A reason for this may be that when potential technology is readily available and most students are familiar with it, the teachers themselves have to use it. Another reason may be that they might be afraid of social pressure, especially student, peer and institution pressure.

As far as quality is concerned, this study found that 46.66% of the lecturers were undecided and 20% disagreed that ELT teachers had to rely on IT. This result confirms the fact that IT is only one of many factors that contribute to the quality of teaching, particularly the relevance of content or information and how the information is presented. In addition, teachers usually make a great contribution to quality teaching: they construct knowledge, design teaching and learning materials, plan the lessons, give advice to students, evaluate students' learning and improve the materials and methods of presentation according to the data obtained.

According to the results of the study, the lecturers, administrators and all parties concerned should observe the following:

1. Since more than half of the university lecturers did not use computers in their teaching, several measures should be undertaken urgently. These measures should include different levels of training programs, particularly seminars and workshops on computers. These seminars and workshops should be specially organized for the lecturers with limited and no experience in computers. Initial training programs should aim at familiarizing these groups of lecturers with computers. Also, the training programs, either pre- or in-service, should emphasize the "know about" of computer and information technology, and later programs may deal with the "know how," or the actual use of computer programs and IT for language teaching and learning.

Examples of training programs are as follows:

1.1 *Computer literacy programs*

Workshops and seminars should be offered to those ELT lecturers who have never used computers. These programs should be specially organized to encourage these lecturers to learn computer basics and to expose them to various ways to use computers in ELT.

1.2 *Workshops on using multimedia computer programs / CD-ROMs* University ELT lecturers with limited experience in using computers in their teaching should be strongly encouraged to participate in these workshops.

1.3 *Workshops on using the Internet* University lecturers with some experience in computers should be encouraged to participate in workshops on the Internet, particularly E-mail and the World Wide Web.

2. Administrators should provide easy access to computers and the Internet and

provide guidelines or IT manuals for faculty members.

3. Useful computer programs and web sites should be made available to all faculty members.

4. The pioneers in IT of each ELT department should be strongly supported and encouraged.

5. ELT lecturers should realize that one of the most promising tasks is to acquaint

themselves with IT before asking the students to use IT.

This study, however, is not comprehensive and the institutions and the subjects were not sizeable. Future research should include universities in every part of the country. Also, future research should examine in depth the reasons why and why not the ELT lecturers use IT in their teaching.

The Author

Asst. Prof. Phan Banpho is currently coordinator and lecturer of Technical English for Medical Science Graduates. He has also taught a course in computer in language teaching for ELT teachers. He is a member of three CULI boards: The Executive, Planning and Development, and Research. He was the first vice president of CU Faculty Senate. Asst. Prof. Phan Banpho has contributed a number of articles on various topics to CULI publications, PASAA PARITAT and PASAA.

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Appendix

English Language Teachers and Information Technology In the New Millennium

Please indicate your opinions by placing a tick (✓) in each appropriate box.

Part I : Personal information of the informant

1. Sex : 1.1 ☐ Male 1.2 ☐ Female

2. Age : 2.1 ☐ 21-30 years 2.2 ☐ 31-40 years

2.3 ☐ 41-50 years 2.4 ☐ 51-60 years

3. English language teaching experience :

3.1 ☐ 1-10 years 3.2 ☐ 11-20 years

3.3 ☐ 21-30 years 3.4 ☐ More than 30 years

4. Present position :

4.1 ☐ Administrator (e.g. Dean, Department / Division Head)

4.2 ☐ Instructor / Lecturer / Professor

5. Experience in using computers for language teaching :

5.1 ☐ No experience 5.2 ☐ 1-5 years

5.3 ☐ 6-10 years 5.4 ☐ More than 10 years

In the next two parts, please indicate your opinions by placing a tick (✓) in each appropriate box. The box numbers stand for the following:

5 - *Strongly agree*

3 - *Uncertain*

2 - *Disagree*

4 - *Agree*

1 - *Strongly disagree*

Part II : Your opinions about the roles of IT

No	Some major roles of IT on ELT	5	4	3	2	1
1.	In the new millennium, information technology (IT) will play a more important role on ELT.					
2.	IT can enhance the teaching in all four basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing).					
3.	IT supports self-learning and self-development.					
4.	IT enables the teachers to update teaching information.					
5.	IT alleviates the teachers from their burden of correcting / marking students' writing.					
6.	IT alters the English teaching environment.					

In your opinion, what are other roles of IT on ELT?

Part III : Your opinions on IT-related tasks in the new millennium

No	Necessary IT-related tasks in the new millennium	5	4	3	2	1
7.	ELT teachers must familiarize themselves with IT.					
8.	ELT teachers with no experience with computers must acquire computer literacy.					
9.	ELT teachers must learn to use CAI (or CALL) programs.					
10.	For quality teaching, ELT teachers must rely on IT.					
11.	ELT teachers must learn to use the Internet.					
12.	ELT teachers must change their teaching styles to fit the new environment.					

In your opinion, what are other IT-related tasks?

Thank you for your kind cooperation.