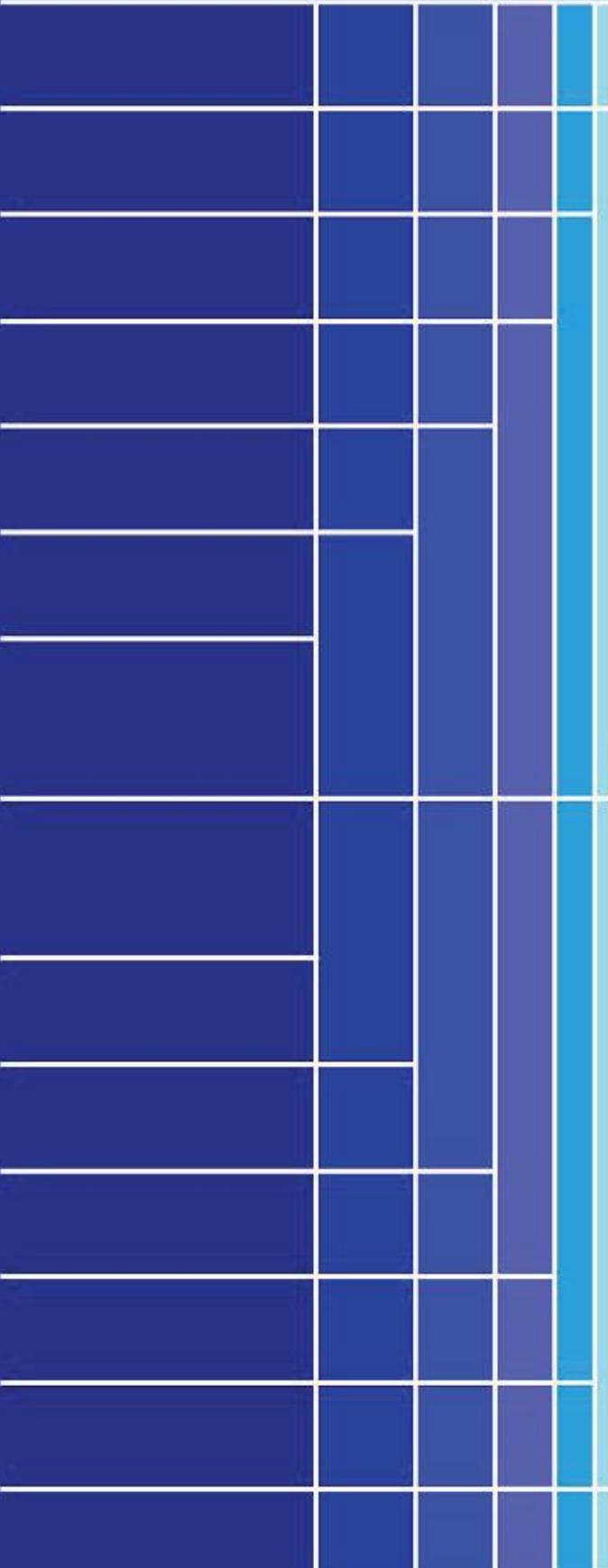


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Merits and Demerits of Using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Tools in Iranian High School English Classes

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Abstract

In this decade, significant progress has been made in the field of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to the extent that sometimes seems impossible to imagine life without the achievements of the field. That is why the present researcher, as an English teacher, decided to investigate the merits and demerits of using ICT in Iranian high school English classes. The study also aims to examine the implementation of ICT tools to motivate English teachers to teach better and encourage the learners to learn better. In this regard, a questionnaire was used to collect English teachers' perceptions about the merits and demerits of using ICT tools in their classrooms. The results of this study are hoped to provide insights to the Ministry of Education in Iran to improve the insufficient use of ICT tools in English teaching and learning classes.

Keywords: information and communication technology (ICT), merits, demerits, questionnaire, education

Introduction

Teaching and learning processes have been affectedly reshaped in higher education by the development of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) tools (Pulkinen, 2007; Wood, 1995). ICT for education is more imperative today than ever before since its mounting power and capabilities are imposing a change in the learning environments available for education. ICT are a diverse set of technological tools and resources used to communicate, and to create disseminate, store, and manage information. Communication and information play a central role in education procedures; therefore, ICT in education has a long history. ICT are basically information managing tools – a varied set of goods, applications and services that are used to produce, store, process, distribute and exchange information. They include “old” ICTs like radio, television and telephone, and the “new” ones as computer, satellite and wireless technology and internet with their associated tools. ICT has played an educational role in formal and non-formal settings, in programs provided by governmental agencies, public and private educational institutions, for-profit corporations and non-profit groups, and secular and religious communities. ICT has always been considered important in the classes in general, and in English classes in particular. The implementation of ICT, during the last two decades, in education has become a substantial subject in research on educational reform (Drent & Meelissen, 2008). This study is specifically aimed to investigate the merits and demerits of using ICT tools in Iranian Junior High School English Classes. Since teachers are thought to play a key role in effective implementation of educational modifications, part of this project concerns empowering teachers in pre-service and in-service courses (Paraskeva, Bouta, & Papagianni, 2008). Accordingly, studies on factors that influence ICT utilization by teachers, in different countries, have recently begun to expand (e.g., Baylor & Ritchie, 2002; Granger, Morbey, Lotherington, Owston, & Wideman, 2002; Robinson, 2003; Hew & Brush, 2007; Hermans et al., 2008; Paraskeva et al., 2008; Kim, Jung, & Lee, 2008; Inan & Lowther, 2010; Zamani, 2010).

The results of this string of research confirm that technology has the capacity to provide opportunities for influential teaching and learning environments (Hermans, Tondeur, van Braak, & Valcke, 2008) and

can affect students' learning (Cancannon, Flynn, & Campbell, 2005), motivation (Mahdizadeh, Biemans, & Mulder, 2008), critical thinking (Lim, Teo, Wong, Khine, Chai, & Divaharan, 2003), and autonomy (Claudia, Steil, & Todesco, 2004).

Literature review

ICT is a term which refers to technologies used in creating, accumulating, storing, editing, and disseminating of information in different forms. ICT is considered as a revolution that engages the use of computers, internet and other telecommunication (Bandeled, 2006). Some merits and demerits of using these tools exist in teaching English classes of Iranian Junior High School English Classes (IJHSEC). The present study debates the topic under the following outlines:

- Merits of ICT in enhancing qualified education.
- Demerits of ICT in enhancing qualified education.
- Merits of ICT for students.
- Merits of ICT for teachers.

Merits of ICT in enhancing qualified education.

There are a number of merits derived from the use of ICT tools in enhancing quality of ICT education like, firstly, the ability of learner to decide when to learn irrespective of geographical location without stress. Secondly, ICT also empowers learners to discover and explore new ideas or innovations from experts around the global world through the use of common ICT available facilities. Thirdly, the existence of ICT in education system will enable students to deliver lectures, empower educators to monitor learners' improvement and even aid evaluators to assess them timely. However, (Nwosu & Ugbomo, 2012) listed the following as the merits of ICT in enhancing qualified education:

- **Active Learning:** ICT- enhanced learning mobilizes tools for examination, calculation and analysis of information, thus providing a platform for student inquiry, analysis and construction of new information. Learners, then, learn as they do and, whenever appropriate, work on real-life problems in depth, making learning less abstract and more relevant to the learner's life situation. By doing so, and in contrast to memorization-based or rote learning, ICT-enhanced learning foster learner engagement.
- **Collaborative Learning:** ICT-supported learning encourages interaction and cooperation among students, teachers, and experts regardless of their location. Apart from modeling real world interaction, ICT-supported learning provides learners the opportunity to work with people from other cultures, thereby helping to enhance learners' teaming and communicative skills as well as their global awareness. It models learning done throughout the learners' lifetime by expanding the learning space to include not just peers but also mentors and experts from different fields.
- **Creative Learning:** ICT-supported learning progresses the manipulation of existing information and the creation of real world products rather than the regurgitation of received information.
- **Integrative Learning:** ICT-enhanced learning promotes a thematic, integrative approach to teaching and learning. This approach eliminates the artificial separation between the different disciplines and between theory and practice that characterizes the traditional classroom approach.
- **Evaluative Learning:** ICT-enhanced learning is student-directed and diagnostic. Based on ICT-enhanced learning, there are various learning pathways and different articulations of knowledge. ICTs allow learners to explore and discover rather than simply listen and remember.

Demerits of ICT in enhancing qualified education.

The integration of ICT in classrooms can also result in demerits. Teachers may have difficulty in the integration thereof. The teacher must manage, at all times, the navigation of students during school hours. It can justify them that all websites are not reliable or acceptable. In a word, students need to make better use. Moreover, researchers claim that when integrating ICT, children with access to this information, are more likely to detach themselves from the rest of the group because they can hardly play when the children are team. When writing on the computer, it cannot be two people at once. Hence, the integration of technology has its own limits. Some important demerits of ICT in enhancing qualified education are inadequate ICT facilities and unsophisticated accessories. In Iran, most ICT facilities are not adequate to enhance qualified education to learners and teachers, even where it exists they are not sophisticated enough to stand the taste of time like the ones acquired in developed countries. Problems of quality and lack of resources are incorporated with the education institutions battle to cope with every increasing students' numbers. One of the major demerits of ICT is failure to reach its full potential in the foundation stage in teacher's attitude. According to Hara (2004), within the early years education, attitudes towards ICT can alter noticeably. Some consider it as a potential tool to assist learning whereas others disagree with the use of technology in early year settings. As Blatchford and White-bread state, the use of ICT in the foundation stage is unhealthy and hinders learning (Blatchford & White-bread, 2003). In theory, some people may view the teachers without the experience of ICT throughout their learning having negative attitude towards it, since they may lack the training in that area of the curriculum.

Merits of ICT for students

Some fundamental and essential merits of ICT tools for students in English classroom are:

- a) Higher quality lessons through greater collaboration between teachers in planning and preparing resources.
- b) More focused teaching, tailored to students' strengths and weakness, through better analysis of realization data.
- c) Improve pastoral care and behavior management through better tracking of students.
- d) Achievement of understanding and analytical skills, including improvement in reading comprehension.
- e) Development of writing skills, also fluency, originality and elaboration.
- f) Encouragement of independent and active learning and self-responsibility for learning.

Merits of ICT for teachers

Following are some major and real merits of ICT for English teachers:

- a) ICT facilitates sharing of resources, expertise and device.
- b) More flexibility in when and where tasks are accomplished.
- c) Easier planning and preparation of lessons and designing materials.
- d) Access to up-to-date pupil and school data, anytime and anywhere.
- e) Achievement of ICT literacy skills, confidence and enthusiasm.
- f) Enhancement of professional image projected to colleagues.
- g) Motivating students to continue using learning outside school hours by using computer during lessons.

Methodology

This study is just one part of a huge project. The general purpose of the main study was to explore the effectiveness of using ICT tools in Iranian junior high schools in English classes.

Participants

The participants were 60 Iranian English teachers chosen based on stratified random from high schools of one city in Iran. Twenty-three male (38.33) and thirty-seven female (61.66) English teachers were selected randomly from the population.

Instruments for data collection

Personal Information Form (PIF)

By using a personal information questionnaire, teachers' personal features were collected. Teachers were requested to provide information about personal variables like: gender, age, academic degree, years of experience, workload of weekly period, and area of teaching.

The Role of ICT Tools Form (RITF)

All in all, seven strategies were applied to assess the role of ICT tools in his/her teaching by giving the following options: never, rarely, sometimes, often, and always.

Merits of ICT Tools in Teaching English Classroom Form (MITTECF)

Attitudes towards merits of ICT tools in teaching English classroom with 10 items were assessed by giving the following options: strongly disagree, disagree, no opinion, agree, and strongly agree.

Demerits of ICT Tools in Teaching English Classroom Form (DITTECF)

Attitudes towards demerits of ICT tools in teaching English classrooms were assessed by giving 10 items and giving the following options: strongly disagree, disagree, no opinion, agree, and strongly agree.

A total of sixty questionnaires were administered in each of the four sample high schools named Science, Happy, Sky, and Unique. The fifty questionnaires were equally retrieved immediately from the respondents.

Table 1: High Schools Involved in the research in Iran

Name of high schools	Number of questionnaires retrieved and used
Science	13
Happy	10
Sky	12
Unique	14
Flower	11

Table 2: Number of Distributed and Collected English Teachers' Questionnaires

School name	School type	Gender of the school	Educational district	Distributed questionnaires	Collected questionnaires	Percent
Science	Govern.	Boy	City	13	13	100%
Happy	Govern.	Boy	City	10	9	90%
Sky	Govern.	Girl	City	12	10	83.3%
Unique	Govern.	Girl	City	14	12	85.7%
Flower	Govern.	Girl	City	11	10	90.9%
Total				60	54	90%

Table 3: Role of ICT Tools in Teaching English Classes in Iran

No	Strategies	Science	Happy	Sky	Unique	Flower	Total	%
1	Listening cases	10	7	11	8	8	44	73.3
2	Video record lessons	11	9	10	11	10	51	85
3	Making the learners to learn computer soft wares	12	10	11	14	11	58	96.6
4	Engaging the learners in group activities	13	10	12	14	11	60	100
5	Teaching web sites	8	5	7	9	9	38	63.3
6	Team teaching with ICT tools	13	10	12	14	11	60	100
7	Speaking, listening, reading and writing cases with computer	13	10	10	9	10	52	41.6

Table 4: Schools and ICT Tools in Teaching English Classes in Iran

No	ICT tools used	Science	Happy	Sky	Unique	Flower	Total	%
1	Internet	20	20	20	20	20	60	100
2	Online database	2	2	4	2	3	13	21.66
3	Scanner	2	2	1	1	2	8	13.33
4	computer	10	5	8	7	8	38	63.33
5	Smart board	3	2	1	5	2	13	21.66
6	Website	4	5	2	3	1	15	25
7	Weblog	8	9	6	7	8	38	63.33
8	Fax machine	2	2	1	1	2	8	13.33
9	Data projector	3	2	1	5	2	13	21.66
10	Video recorder	6	5	8	9	2	30	50
11	Laptop	8	5	6	7	5	31	51.66
12	Online quiz	1	0	1	2	1	5	8.33
13	Podcasts	1	1	1	2	2	7	11.66
14	Text chat (sms)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
15	Social networking sites	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Table 5: Merits derived from the use of ICT facilities

No	Merits	Science	Happy	Sky	Unique	Flower	Total
1	Access to what I need anytime	15	12	16	10	7	100%
2	Access to remote resources I want anytime	5	12	11	9	6	71.66%
3	Else of research done quick and easy access to remote resources	11	8	9	4	10	70%
4	Improvement in the quality of education	10	12	10	11	15	96.66%
5	Quality of research improvement	12	11	13	10	10	93.33%
6	Quick access to research participants	9	10	7	6	4	55%
7	Teaching and learning enhancement through the use of quality information resources	13	12	9	11	12	95%
8	Active learning enhancement	12	13	10	13	12	100%
9	Encourages collaborative and interactive learning	11	10	10	9	10	83.33%
10	Encourages interactive approach to learning	8	10	9	7	6	66.66%

Results

The table (1) shows that sixty questionnaires were distributed in each of high schools and all were retrieved and allocated to the study. The table (2) revealed that five schools took part in this research, three of which were girls' schools and two of which were boys' schools; the total questionnaires which distributed among them were (60) and collected questionnaires were (54). All schools were Governmental and their names were Science, Happy, Sky, Unique and Flower. The maximum percent belonged to Science (100 %) and the minimum percent belonged to Sky (83.3 %). The table (3) shows that all English teachers know the role of ICT tools in teaching English classes and want to involve the learners with the best strategies in their teaching but their viewpoints are different; Strategy (No- 4) is the most popular strategy on which English teachers agree and believe that there is no negative viewpoints about it (100%), but in strategy (No-7) quite vice versa, their ideas are different and they believe that ICT tools should not be used in any four skills of English (41.6%). The table (4) shows that all English teachers used the following ICT tools. These ICT tools include Internet, Online database, Scanner, computer, Smart board, Website, Weblog, Fax machine, Data projector, Video recorder, Laptop, Online quiz, and Podcasts ,in which English teachers of five high schools have been involved but none of English teachers in five high schools have been involved in (Text chat & Social networking sites). The study ,as shown in table 3, revealed that 60 (100%) have used Internet, 13(21.66%) have used online database, 8(13.33) scanner,38(63.33%) computer,13(21.66%) smart board, 15(25%) website, 38(63.33%) weblog, 8(13.33%) fax machine, 13(21.66%) data projector, 30(50%) video recorder, 31(51.66%) laptop, 5(8.33%) online quiz, 7(11.66%) podcasts. Regarding table (5), the study revealed that the five high schools have benefited from the ICT facilities through what is needed at any

point in time. The research have showed (100%) derived from Access to what I need anytime , (71.66%) derived from Access to remote resources I want anytime, (70%) derived from Else of research done quick and easy access to remote resources,(96.66%) derived from Improvement in the quality of education, (93.33%) derived from Quality of research improvement,(55%) derived from Quick access to research participants,(95%) derived from Teaching and learning enhancement through the use of quality information resources,(100%) derived from Active learning enhancement,(83.33%) derived from Encourages collaborative and interactive learning,(66.66%)derived from Encourages interactive approach to learning. The study also revealed that ICT tools enhance Access to what I need anytime and Active learning enhancement and has to notice to Quick access to research participants.

Discussion

In general, a number of merits and demerits can be considered regarding using ICT tools in English classes. For the merits, it is reported that using ICT could help to meet the teachers' teaching objectives as ICT aids the teaching process. The results of the study revealed that English teachers used technology chiefly in teaching followed by speaking, listening, reading, writing, vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar. The outcomes of the study also showed that ICT tools like Internet, Online database, Scanner, computer, Smart board, Website, Weblog, Fax machine, Data projector, Video recorder, Laptop, Online quiz, Podcasts, Text chat(sms), Social networking sites are almost less used in high schools of Iran. Besides, the findings indicated that English teachers have formulated a selective ICT-use strategy based on the nature of language skills/components they teach with a general tendency to use digital portable devices.

Conclusion

The merits and demerits of ICT tools, undoubtedly, are a prerequisite to qualified ICT tools in education in general and in English classes in particular. The result of the study has showed that the merits of ICT tools have recently gained groundswell of interest. It is a significant research area for many scholars around the world. Their nature is highly changed by the face of education over the last few decades. Truly, a small percentage of schools in some countries effectively use ICT tools to support and change teaching and learning procedures in many areas. As shown in this study, many students consider ICT tools very helpful in that it helps them do assignments better and that the teachers teach English better and more meaningful. ICT tools, likewise, help teachers work in teams and share ideas associated with school curriculum. Many English teachers use ICT tools to support modern teaching methods to improve students' pedagogy and learning processes in new opportunities of using ICT tools in English classes , as well. Many of English teachers believed that, firstly ICT tools can change the lessons' pace, secondly ICT tools, with the groundswell of interest can enhance the quality of teaching and learning in schools of Iran.

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