



RESEARCH ARTICLE

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE ATTITUDES OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH TOWARDS THE IMPLEMENTATION OF OLPC IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

*Uttam Aryal

Asst. Lecturer, Makawanpur Multiple Campus

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ABSTRACT

The government of Nepal proposed the introduction of a computer for selected students in Primary schools since 2008. With the project OLPC (one laptop per child), the aim of the Ministry of Education in Nepal was to help each student of a class with a lap top computer from their first to their last year at Primary schools. Given the enormous cost of this programme, it was very important that schools would make the best use of ICT. My study therefore, is designed to find out whether this was so and if not why not. I chose as subjects of the study English language teachers in Makawanpur District, based on the hypothesis that any problems which might arise with the implantation of the plan would be found principally in the negative attitudes of teachers involved. This work aims at establishing the reasons for the failure to normalize the use of computers in the English language classroom analyzing in depth the data proceeding from the interviews carried out among sixteen teachers of English from public Primary Schools.

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INTRODUCTION

The difficulty of providing quality education in Nepal, an area whose widely dispersed population in small rural groups forms an educational subsystem with specific peculiarities, is especially serious in the case of specialty subjects like English. It is, on the other hand, the second or the foreign language for the Nepali students. So the government designed a plan of OLPC to wide scale technological literacy project. In recent years, however, there have been an ever increasing number of studies into the possible reasons for the lack of impact of ICT in improving educational results, the different aspects which could be influential such as self-efficiency of teacher's own computer skills or the part emotions play in accepting computers as well as numerous studies on the problems facing the introduction and use of computers in the classroom especially from the point of view of differing expectations and attitudes between students and teachers. Finally several studies have emerged which establish teachers' attitudes as the probable basic cause of the wide distance between expectations and results. Full integration of computers into the educational system is a distant goal unless there is reconciliation between teachers and computers. To understand how to achieve integration, we need to study teachers and what makes them use computers. One of the principal obstacles for the production of

normalization of ICT in English teaching is teachers' attitudes towards them, marked in many cases by fear of expressing opinions about ICT or of admitting the use they actually make of them in the classroom. To admit that they do not use them nor possess the necessary training to integrate them in their teaching could be considered in many cases as something politically incorrect. Most of the people consider in this sense the conflict between what teachers really believe about the use of ICT in the classroom and what they consider that society demands.

Objectives

This study aims at establishing the reasons for the failure to normalize the use of computers, specifically in the English language classroom. The subjects of the study are English language teachers in Makawanpur District, based on the hypothesis that any problems which might arise with the implementation of ICT would be found principally in the attitudes of teachers involved.

METHODOLOGY

Our research provides a qualitative analysis based on in-depth, semi-structured interviews of 20 teachers in Makawanpur District, from community schools. All the interviews were conducted with questionnaire at different schools and later collected for their analysis. In order to respect the secrecy and

confidentiality of the interviewees, we have specially designed questions related with the topics centered on the integration of ICT in the English classroom, the training of teachers in this area, the use of computers in the classroom, considerations as regards their distribution, the duration of lesson periods and the existing English syllabus at these levels.

Considerations with respect to the interviews

The largest group of our research is made up of teachers in the 30-40 age group, with their own permanent teaching post and a wide experience of teaching languages. The majority of teachers who have participated in this study consider that despite the fact that the use of ICT in the classroom has facilitated the rapid access to a large variety of resources, this has not meant a revolution in education. Among the reasons which have restrained this revolution, they claim the low academic level of students, the elevated number of students per class, the deficient functioning of the computers and Internet, the loss of time which supposes their use and finally the lack of training of the teachers:

On the other hand, all of the teachers agree that the said revolution has occurred at the administrative level, in management, control of absences and communication with parents. The same number of teachers believes that the way the ICT has been introduced into the centers of Primary Education in Makawanpur District has not been the most adequate. They believe that it would have been much better to invest the money spent on buying computers in other resources such as the training of teachers. The teachers who are currently teaching in the community schools have the majority of the low level competence of knowledge of the computers and so seem reluctant to support the use of it in the classroom use. They basically believe that the traditional method of teaching is far easier for them than that of the new technology and the computer is the beyond their knowledge and expectations.

We find very interesting the arguments of a group of teachers who, while being in agreement in valuing very positively the potential of ICT, claim that their use in the actual teaching situation and from the pedagogical point of view has not changed the form of traditional teaching. In effect they point out that the methodology continues to be the same. "The theory that one of the principal obstacles for the integration of ICT in education are the barriers existing at the system level also appears in the Report on the Impact of ICT in European centers of education (Balanskat *et al.*, 2006). Martínez and Correa (2009). "Basing their arguments, among others, on said report, claim that the norms and the rigid structure which dominate the system, among which they highlight the timetable, examinations, the clear division into subjects or the criteria used for the different materials imparted, prevent the integration of ICT in teaching and block the possibilities of success in their implementation. The different levels of education, from Primary Education, Primary and even University Studies have norms and principles which are shared by all the members of this group, although unconsciously. Martínez & Correa (2009) compare the incapacity of a speaker to explain the grammatical rules which define the use of his or her language but who know how to distinguish between correct and incorrect utterances, with the teacher who knows how to distinguish between, "practices that they deeply believe are conducive to proper learning and practices that they believe are not. In both cases they are unaware of the criteria underlying

the distinction" (Martínez and Correa, 2009) Where students are concerned, although ICT help the teachers resolve certain discipline problems in the classroom, because they awaken interest in the students and motivate them, they also contribute to the fact that it becomes more complicated to make the student concentrate on the activities to be carried out in the English class, given that the usual tendency is for them to use the computer to play, consult their emails or chat. None of the participating teachers have received any training in including ICT in their teaching during their university studies or in the Postgraduate Teacher Training Course. They have simply completed the university courses and basically passed the license test of the government. They are not prepared to teach such course in the new technology of the computers and with the assistance of the computers. They had never expected that one day they have to teach in computer so from the very beginning to the end of all academic year they were in tension relating to the objective, content, method and evaluation of the overall program. For that reason they stress the importance of introducing subjects which develop the use of ICT in the English class during these studies. In the same way they point out the necessity of including this training in the teaching practice which they believe should be part of the training of Primary school teachers, in the same way as it is obligatory for primary school teachers.

Normalization of ICT in the English class

A minority believe the normalization of ICT has been achieved exclusively among the students. But in general the teachers of English who participated in this study consider that normalization of ICT in the English class has not been achieved, and in fact it will not be easy for this process to occur in the very near future. Among the impediments for achieving this normalization, the most important is the lack of training of the teachers in new technologies. To a lesser extent they point out the excessive dependence on textbooks in the English class, the lack of time to experiment with new resources or the discipline problems in the centers. Half the teachers interviewed do not believe in the usefulness of carrying out a process of normalization of ICT in the English class in the centers of Primary Education in Makawanpur District. They do not consider positive that so much importance is given to their use, as they believe that for teaching it is more useful to count on a great variety of didactic resources. One of the main problems affecting this normalization is that the teachers in the participating schools do not have any type of specialized pedagogic advice for including ICT in the English class. The only help they receive is from other colleagues who know more about their use. The most important is that both experts in programming for education purposes and the classroom teachers, who are the ones who really know the needs for integrating ICT in the teaching-learning process, should work together and achieve in this way a dialogue between pedagogical and technological perspectives, and so, related dichotomies such as practice-theory, doing-thinking and learning-teaching might be provisionally reconciled around the challenge of effective designs for educational interaction and applied knowledge building. As regards the computer applications used, the Net and the CDs provided by the different publishers are the most widely used by the English teachers. The materials developed by the English men, they think it inappropriate or difficult to use. There exists a wide group which coincides in claiming that the material and the computer applications on the market neither adapt to the

programs of English language subject, nor to the contents which they have to impart in the classroom. Only four of the participants claim to have taken part in the elaboration of computer materials for the English class, among which they mention the creation of blogs, power point presentations and the program. Despite the fact that since the 2008-2009 academic year, the Education Committee has made piloting program of the inclusion of aspects related to ICT in the subject programs, the majority of the teachers claim that these do not include either evaluation or the activities to be carried out using computers. They often claim that the government wasted the money without the proper plan and project. The rest claim that they are only referred to in very general terms: "finish the course." Our evaluation system emphasizes the "pass" but not the perfection and it values the score in the mark sheet not in the excellence in the performance.

The course also seems as to kill the budget of the nation because it was not further enforced and not even the evaluation of the program. It came as a shock and went as three day blow. No one seems responsible to evaluate and implement the revised courses so that it can rightly address the present needs of the students. All those computers have nearly been useless in most of the schools and have been replaced by the traditional method of teaching and use of chalk and black board. It seems that we are planning to further the journey of the modernization throwing all the means of modern equipment and happily adopting the ancient old methodology and the trends of teaching. All those chalks and black board rightly symbolizes our present condition and future forecast.

Conclusion and proposals

The majority of the teachers interviewed consider that ICT supposes a great advance for education in general, but as things are now, none of them consider that they have proved a revolution in the field of education, in part because computers are used to work in the same way as in traditional teaching. Neither are they in favour of an excessive use of computers in the language classroom because they consider that they interrupt their development and their usual dynamics. The system or the methodology employed up to now are to a large extent responsible for this type of attitude. The truth is that the general perception of the teachers is that the use of the computer in the classroom continues to be for the pupils, synonymous with play, entertainment and amusement. They consider it a prize or reward.

I think that if the integration of technology in the classroom in the next ten years is to look any different from the last ten, we must focus time, money and resources in the areas that can have the greatest impact for our students, our teachers. Unfortunately, almost twenty years later, we can affirm that the introduction of ICT has not changed significantly the methodology of English teaching, at least in Makawanpur District. We cannot talk of the normalization of ICT to a large extent because the opinion of teachers has not been taken into consideration, and after all they are the ones who have in their hands the control of the changes necessary to bring them about. For that reason the first proposal of the present study is that teachers should be provided with the instruments necessary to be able to integrate successfully ICT in the classroom. Promoting an integral training programme beginning at the university with the introduction of subjects which increase the use of ICT in the English classroom; offering more in service improvement courses which take into consideration the real needs of the classroom, and which are specialized for each area of knowledge. Training which should be accompanied by pedagogical advice, essential if ICT are to be included in the practice of teaching.

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