Attitudes towards Computer Use: A Comparison between English Professors and English Instructors in Language Institutes

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Abstract: *Technological innovation is an important aspect of teaching and learning, particularly in the field of language, in the 21st century. Computer technology, which has made many of our everyday tasks easier and faster, is an important variable which can play an important role in learning a second/foreign language. Language instructors' attitudes towards the use of this technology can affect its role in language instruction. In this regard, the purpose of this study was to compare the attitudes of two groups of English language instructors towards the use of computer in language teaching and learning: English language professors at universities and English language teachers at language institutes. The sample of the study consisted of 45 university professors and 50 English instructors teaching in language institutes in Fars Province, Iran. The data were collected using a valid and reliable questionnaire prepared by Ohio University. The findings revealed that university professors held a more positive attitude towards computer use than their institute counterparts.*

Key words: *teachers' attitude, computer use, language institute instructors, English university professors*

Introduction

One of the most expanded areas in educational technologies in the second half of the 20th century was computers. The last two decades have witnessed a worldwide expansion of this technology in the field of education so that most governments in both developed and developing countries have initiated costly national programs to introduce computers into their educational systems. Unfortunately, the implementation of this technology into educational centers such as universities and public and private language institutes has failed to be guided by research in many countries including Iran. In other words, the plans to implement computer technology in such settings seem not to be appealing and practical to teachers, while a number of studies have revealed that teachers' attitudes toward computers can be very effective in the initial acceptance of this technology as well as future behavior regarding computer usage (Koohang, 1989; Selwyn, 1997).

Nowadays, computers and web-based instructions have become more powerful, faster, easier to use, more convenient and cheaper. At the same time, computers can process and keep much more information. Concerning such capacity of this new technology, its role in and effects on teaching and learning a second/foreign language are undeniable. This new technology can be used to help both teachers and students to cooperate with each other and access information faster and more conveniently.

As Ahmad, Corbett and Sussex (1985) argue, computers allow teachers to have real-life interaction. The use of computers in instruction also helps to make better preparation for education (Jones & Moller, 2002; Cabada, et al., 2009; Yazdanpanah, Sahragard & Rahimi, 2010). Computer-assisted language learning (CALL), i.e. the use of computer programs to facilitate language learning, has become widespread throughout the world as the role of computer in teaching and learning is rapidly becoming one of the most important and wildly-discussed issues in education (Spector & de la Teja, 2001).

However, simply having computer technology in classrooms does not necessarily guarantee its effective use. Successful use of computer technology in the classroom depends markedly on the competence and the attitude of the teachers. In fact, regardless of the quantity and quality of technology used in the classroom, the key to how such tools are used with the best possible potential is the teacher. This necessitates the sound competence and the right attitude toward the use of this technology (Kadel, 2005). Most students have found that there are close links and affinities between teachers' attitudes and the use of computer technology in the classroom (Khine, 2001; Yuen & Ma, 2002; Kumar & Kumar, 2003; Teo, Chai, Hung & Lee, 2008). In fact, the teacher's attitude can be a major predictor of his/her future computer use.

With the increasing use of computers in language classes, language instructors, both university professors and language institute teachers, play a significant role in successful use of this technology in their teaching. The teachers' role in this regard can be affected by the context in which they teach (Barker, 2003; Bawane & Spector, 2009; Baran, Correia & Thomson, 2011). In other words, when the paradigm shifts from the university to a public or private language institute, the instructors' attitudes towards the use of computer may vary. In this regard, the purpose of this study was to compare the attitudes of language instructors in language institutes with those of their counterparts at universities.

Theoretical Background

In the last three decades, researchers have given much attention to identifying the parameters that could facilitate technology use in education. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) introduced and developed by Davis (1989) is the most popular theoretical background in technology acceptance studies (McCoy, Galletta & King, 2007). TAM is a model that addresses the issue of how users come to accept and use a technology. This theory posits that there are two

variables determining the user's acceptance of a new technology: perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. These variables lead to the user's positive attitude toward technology.

Research Question

Based on the purpose of the study, the following research question was formulated.

Is there any significant difference between English university professors and language institute instructors regarding their attitudes towards computer use in language teaching?

Review of Literature

Most of the studies on the use of computer in education have focused on perceived behaviors by the users. Pajo and Wallace (2007) have identified 3 categories of barriers: personal barriers (lack of knowledge, skills, training, role models and time), attitudinal barriers (no faith in technology, unwillingness to work with technology, and concern about student access) and organizational barriers (inadequate technical support, hardware, software, etc). These researchers came to this conclusion that the time required to learn how to use technology was the most important barrier. Naidu (2004) in a study exploring the faculty attitude at Manchester Metropolitan University found that lack of time was an important barrier. Another study (Daugherty and Funke, 1998) found that inadequate availability of hardware and software was the main barrier.

In the study conducted by Al-Najaar (2001), it was found that most of the King Faisal University professors had a positive view toward the use of computer technology in education. However, their opinions regarding the quantity of computer applications were different regarding the participants' gender and academic rank. On the other hand, Weiss and Koohang (2001) found that teachers failed to have a high positive attitude towards the use of such technology in their classes.

In a study at Auburn University in the United States, Palmore (2011) found a significant relationship between the professional development status of the faculty and their rate of technology use in their classrooms. The researcher argued that the use of computer was somehow related to the age of the faculty members. Ertmer, Ottenbreit-Leftwich, Sadik, Sendurur & Sendurur (2012) also found that there was a direct relationship between the use of technology and instructors' beliefs. In other words, the more positive one's attitudes, the more use of technology.

On the whole, many studies have shown that a positive attitude toward the use of this new technology results in its more use in education and instruction (Lau & Woods, 2008; Saracaloglu, Serin, Serin & Serin, 2010; Barboza, 2010; Oda, 2011).

Studies on the use of computer by teachers in secondary and high schools and institutes have also found a significant correlation between the teachers' attitudes toward computer and their use of such technology in their classes (Na, 1993; Pelgrum, 2001; Berner, 2003; Tondeur, Hermans, Van Braak & Valcke, 2008; Terpstra, 2009; Karl, 2011; Rahimi & Yadollahi, 2011).

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study consisted of 130 language teachers: 60 university professors and 70 English language institute instructors from Fars Province, Iran, of whom 95 participants, 45 university professors and 50 institute instructors, completed and returned the questionnaires. As a result, the real sample of the study included 45 university professors and 50 language institute teachers teaching English at different levels. The participants' age varied from 20-59 with a mean age of 40. There were 30 females and 60 males. The teaching experience ranged from 1 to over 20 years. All participants had university degrees varying from bachelor's degrees to PhD degrees. These data are shown in table 1.

The universities from which the English language professors participated in this study were Shiraz Azad University, Spidan Azad University, Fars Research and Science University and Marvdasht Azad University. The institutes were all in Shiraz and included Soha, Payam, Navid, Iran and Atlas English language institutes.

Table: 1

Participants: Gender, Age, Teaching experience, and Academic degree

	Frequency	percent
Gender		
Male	30	31.6
Female	65	68.4
Age		
20-29	35	36.8
30-39	34	35.8
40-49	18	18.9
50-59	8	8.4
Teaching Experience		
1-5	22	23.2
6-10	22	23.2
11-15	36	37.9
16-20	13	13.7
21 and over	2	2.1
Academic Degree		
Bachelor's	27	28.42

| Master's | 41 | 43.16 |
| PhD | 27 | 28.42 |

All of those with bachelor's degree were institute instructors and most of those with PhD degrees were university professors (21 professors). Among those with master's degrees, 25 were teaching at the university and 16 were teaching in language institutes. Regarding the participants' gender, most female instructors were teaching in language institutes (42 instructors). Regarding age, most of those under 40 were English teachers in language institutes (45 individuals). Finally, most of the participants with more than 11 years of teaching experience were university professors (31 participants).

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a valid and reliable questionnaire developed by Ohio University professors in 1996 on attitudes towards computer technology. The questionnaire consists of three parts: 48 items on attitudes towards computer, 14 items over computer competence and 17 items on demographic information. The answers to the attitude items included 5 options ranging from "completely disagree" to "completely agree" with the maximum score of 240 and a minimum score of 48. The answers to the second part (computer competence) included 4 options ranging from "no competence" to "much competence" with a maximum score of 60 and the minimum score of 15.

Data collection procedure

The questionnaires were distributed among the participants and they were asked to complete the questionnaires and submit them within a week. In order to make sure that everything was in line with the purpose of the study, the steps of completing the questionnaires were elucidated in detail. The participants were ensured about the confidentiality of their data. They were also asked to call the researchers in case of any ambiguities.

Results

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software, version 19. The results revealed that there was a statistically significant difference between university English language professors and institute English teachers regarding their attitudes toward the use of computer in teaching English. In other words, the university professors had a more positive attitude towards the use of this technology than institute instructors. This is shown in table 2.

Table: 2

University professors and institute instructors' attitudes towards computer use in teaching English

Group	n	Mean	Sd.	t	Df	Sig
Institute Instructors	50	179.12	13.78	4.03	93	0.001
University Professors	45	190.62	13.99			

These two groups were also different regarding their computer competency. That is, university professors were more competent than their institute teachers. Table 3 illustrates this difference.

Table: 3

University professors and language institute instructors' computer competence

Group	n	Mean	Sd.	t	Df	Sig
Institute Instructors	50	38.90	6.69	5.12	93	0.001
University Professors	45	45.58	5.93			

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to compare the attitude of university English professors and that of institute English instructors. The sample of the study consisted of 45 university professors and 50 institute instructors in Fars Province, Iran. The results showed that university professors had more positive attitudes toward the use of computer in language teaching.

Our findings accord Al-Omary's (2002) which showed that in Jordan University of Science and Technology faculty members had a very positive attitude toward computer use in their classes so that over 50% of the professors used computers in their classes daily, and 45% weekly.

One sensible reason for more positive attitude toward the use of computers in education can be attributed to professional development of instructors. University professors are usually more professionally developed than language institute teachers.

Likewise, faculty attitudes towards integrating technology in teaching at Auburn University in the United States (2011) revealed that there was a significant correlation between faculty's professional development and the rate of technology use in their classes. The study also found that the faculty members had a positive attitude toward the use of computer in their classes.

Another reason why university professors may tend to use computers in their classes more is that university curricula are usually more flexible, so they allow more opportunities for the implementation of technology in teaching. In addition, university professors have to keep up-to-date in order to keep pace with new developments in their fields. They want to have access to the latest articles and research in their fields and, undoubtedly, the Internet provides this opportunity for them to do so. That is why they tend to resort to computer technology as a complementary authentic and valid source.

The results of our study are also in compliance with what other researchers (Al-Shayeb, 2001; Al-Manna'I, 2003; Koohrang, 2004; Barboza, 2010, and Oda, 2011) have found in their studies. Such studies have demonstrated that university professors may feel more compelled than language institute instructors to use computers in their classes.

Conclusion

It follows from the findings that when one's competence develops in using technology and he/she finds this technology valuable and necessary in professional development, his/her attitude toward it tends to be more positive. So language teachers should become competent in the use of computer and perceive the value of this technology in their classes. In that case, they will develop a more positive attitude toward this technology.

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