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The role of technology and technology training in language teachers' professional development in the private sector

Bio data

Bao is currently a Ph.D. student at the Graduate School of International Culture and Communication Studies, Waseda University. His research field is applied linguistics, particularly computer assisted language learning (CALL) and teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL). His current study is on language teachers' well-being in Vietnam and Japan and the importance of CALL to language teachers' professional development in the two countries.

Abstract

Although the importance of teacher education in CALL has been studied in recent years, how language teachers learn technologies at their workplace and whether the education helps them advance their careers are not yet fully understood. With technology integration becoming a popular teaching approach and the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) implementing the project "National Foreign Language Project 2008-2020" in Vietnam, it is necessary to study these two subject matters to provide sufficient support on both micro and macro levels, which hopefully may help boost their confidence and enhance their occupational development. Moreover, regardless of the high number of Vietnamese teachers of English in the private sector in Ho Chi Minh city, little is known about how they incorporate technology and its importance to their career pursuit. Therefore, to gain more insight, a case study focusing on the private sector was employed using a mixed-method approach. Data collected from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews were analyzed thematically. A questionnaire survey later was administered to lend more support to the final findings. Final results suggested that although teachers found the provided technologies challenging sometimes, they expressed their enthusiasm toward the learning process. They also regarded their institution not only as a workplace but also as a community where they learn about technology integration from their colleagues and enhance their future career prospects. Lastly, the relationship between teacher education in technology and professional development is also evident on three different levels, namely individual, peer, and institutional levels.

Conference paper**Introduction**

Research into language teachers' perspective towards computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is not uncommon. Previous empirical studies have suggested that while integrating CALL into language classrooms may have positive impacts in terms of language teaching and learning (Drossel et al., 2016), it may also create more burden on teachers when sufficient training and support are not provided (Stockwell, 2012). However, even though these studies (Drossel et al., 2016; Stockwell, 2012) are important for understanding language teachers' attitudes toward technology, they were

often carried out in the public sector or public university institutions. It can be seen that language teachers' perspectives in institutions in the private sector is not yet fully understood.

Regarding Vietnamese EFL context, the "National Foreign Language Project 2008-2020 Project" has brought about changes to not only the language teaching field but also to research related to language teachers, especially enquiries regarding difficulties they may encounter from 2008 to 2020. For instance, language barrier (Le, 2007), teaching resources (Le, 2012), and ineffective teaching methodologies (Le & Barnard, 2009) have been evident in previous studies. However, little is known about how to support language teachers and their professional development in both the private and public sectors.

Finally, when it comes to CALL and technology integration, training is usually the commonly debated topic as to which kind of training is sufficient and effective has not yet been agreed on among scholars. In entering their working environment, language teachers play several roles, some of which are time managers, motivators, and technical supporters (Son, 2018). However, these roles are not yet studied thoroughly as determining factors in CALL and language teachers' professional development in their workplace. To support this, Evans et al. (2011) argue that if technology affordances, when enhanced at both individual and social levels, can be helpful to language education, particularly to improving engagement in the workplace.

Therefore, the study was set out to understand how language teachers in the EFL context of Vietnam perceive and execute technology integration in their workplace. Technology training and its importance to teachers' professional development are also another topic of interest as the insight can be beneficial to both teachers and language institutions in the private sector.

Methodology

Using convenience sampling, two teachers were employed for classroom observations and individual post-observation semi-structured interviews. They both recently graduated from universities with a bachelor's degree in English language teaching. In terms of their teaching experience, they had only been teaching for nearly a year by the time the study was conducted. Data gathered were then analyzed thematically and triangulated with results collected from a questionnaire administered to teachers in the same institution. Findings were discussed in terms of three main categories: (1) teachers' perspectives toward CALL; (2) teachers' perspectives toward technology training and learning in their workplace; and (3) teachers' perspectives toward the role of CALL in their professional development.

Results and discussion

Data analysis suggested language teachers' perspectives toward CALL and its role in their professional development can be observed in two interconnected layers, namely individual and social levels of an ecological environment through three relationships, which are teacher-student, teacher-teacher, and teacher-institution relationships. This is in line with the suggestion made by Colpaert and Stockwell (2022) about the socialization of a "Smart CALL" environment where teachers, students, and institutional managers are communicating and influencing one another.

At the individual level, the "SMART CALL" environment helps bring more positive thinking to the teachers and improve the relationship with their students. Regarding their attitudes, the language teachers in this study perceived CALL as a challenge to their career. However, they did not feel intimidated but enthusiastic and eager to learn and apply it to their language classrooms. The obstacles that pertain to CALL and technology were actually motivators, driving them toward self-education and their innovations in

teaching approaches. The workplace in this context has been helpful in providing a learning environment for the teachers to learn about CALL and improve the practices of technology integration. Observations have shown that the teachers used technologies quite often during their class time even though the teachers later mentioned in the interviews that they did not have enough experience with technology. Moreover, according to the interview data, because of this environment, the participants were able to gain more confidence and feel more welcome to the technologies at the institution regardless of their lack of experience in CALL, which eventually would improve their career prospects. The CALL environment also provided teachers more useful affordances to connect, interact, and communicate with their students. Classroom observations have also shown that both teachers used technologies and the provided applications at the institution to interact and establish good rapport with their students in both teaching and homework time. Also, during the interviews, both teachers in this study mentioned that if it had not been for this healthy relationship, they would not have been able to continue their professions.

At the social level, the "SMART CALL" learning environment in this study helped strengthen the bonding among teachers. Both teachers mentioned that peer support was indispensable to their professional development. Through this community, they were able to share their experience in CALL with their colleagues and discuss their anxiety as novice teachers. This helped boost their confidence in language teaching and feel more assertive toward their careers. In other words, the "SMART CALL" environment in this research "reduces the workload and cognitive overload for teachers and learners, reduces their anxiety, increases their self-efficacy, and satisfies their need for autonomy, relatedness, and competence" (Colpaert & Stockwell, 2022, p.3). Moreover, the teacher-institution relationship was also evident in this study as to how the participants discussed their expectations toward the institution in terms of CALL training. Findings obtained from interviews and a questionnaire indicate that teachers expect to have more training on the technologies employed at the institution. However, these expectations had not yet been met. For this reason, this study suggests that communication between teachers and stakeholders, especially institutional management, is of great importance as to fulfill the "SMART CALL" environment, where teachers have more space to convey their needs and institutions have more opportunities to listen to their employees. This, as a result, may help schools in the private sector devise a more reasonable training program accordingly, which contributes greatly to language teachers' professional development.

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