TELL Implementation in English Language Teaching and Learning

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Abstract

Technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) has been implemented in language education for decades, and current literature has labelled TELL as beneficial in promoting language development. This research paper reveals how TELL can be adapted to facilitate the English language learning of university students in an ESP course in Thailand. As a qualitative case study, this research utilises different data sources, namely, interviews, student journals, and relevant documents to identify emerging themes and enhance triangulation. The findings in this paper point out some of the advantages of using TELL, especially video production, to reinforce language development, motivation, thinking skills, autonomy, teamwork, and enjoyment. Additionally, doing group projects supports students' English through their collaborative interactions and engagement in productive activities. The findings of this study shed light on existing benefits to and further developments of the activities utilising TELL for scaffolding English language teaching and learning.

Keywords: English language teaching (ELT), Technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), English for specific purposes (ESP), Collaborative learning

Introduction

Literature on technology-enhanced language learning (TELL) reveals its effectiveness as a tool in promoting English language learning and teaching (Al-Mahrooqi & Troudi, 2014; Bradley & Thouesny, 2011; Dinmore, 2013; Gui & Tabatabaei, 2011; Parvin & Salam, 2015). According to a review of the literature, TELL can accommodate different learning styles, enhance autonomy, increase motivation, develop a positive attitude towards language learning (Sangeetha, 2016), and promote communication (Radhakrishnan, 2017) and collaboration (Wang, 2007).

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Some examples of TELL include computer assisted language learning (CALL) software, social network sites (e.g. blogs, chats, emails, discussion lists), audio or video materials, web 2.0, mobile phones, or podcasts. Despite its advantages, obstacles of technology integration in teaching English are also discussed; for example, time spent training students to be literate on new technology, negative attitudes towards the use of technology in learning (Nguyen, 2008), and the high investment costs of new technology (Radhakrishnan, 2017).

Despite potential issues; however, recent literature reports on how TELL can be successfully integrated into language classrooms. In previous studies, TELL was used in developing ELT materials (Mekheimer, 2011), designing a syllabus (Nguyen, 2008), and promoting learning through technological devices like mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) applications (Chinnery, 2006; Joseph & Uther, 2009) or Tablet PCs (Cho, Lee, Oh & Park, 2014). The work of Joseph & Uther (2009) reveals the benefits of MALL in providing authenticity for language development as well. The effectiveness of technological integration with collaborative learning in a higher education context is also investigated (Wang, 2007).

Among these technological tools, videos are widely used in teaching and learning (Engin, 2014; Golshan & Tafazori, 2014; Mahmud, Thang, Tng, 2015. Mekheimer, 2011). For example, Mekheimer (2011) investigated the influence of video-based instructional materials on students' language skills; the findings revealed how video integrated lessons help create more interactions and discussions as well as improve learners' writing skills, listening comprehension, and vocabulary use. In a similar vein, Engin (2014) examined the use of videos in a flipped classroom to enhance students' academic writing skills by integrating a project on digital video tutorials and peer teaching. The findings from this study suggest the effectiveness of digital videos created by students on their development of academic writing skills and language skills.

Echoing the aforementioned literature on the use of technology, this research paper investigates how TELL can be integrated to promote students' learning of English in an ESP context. Its aim is to suggest an effective role for technology (i.e. video production) in language development.

Integration of TELL: A case study

This section reports the findings from an empirical case study conducted at a tertiary level. 28 students registered in an English in Communication Arts course were purposively chosen as a group of participants (Alkassim, Etikan & Musa 2016; Polkinghorne, 2005). A consent form was also prepared to get their permission to participate in the study. Pseudonyms are used to protect their anonymity and confidentiality.

Research question

This case study will answer the following question.

What were the students' perceptions on their participation in the designed technological activities?

Research design

The nature of this research is qualitative, interpretative, and subjective. Accordingly, data was collected from different sources to increase research rigour, discover emergent themes, make sense of the collected data, and answer the research question. This section presents the information on research methods, data analysis and designed activities.

Research methods

To promote more reliable results of qualitative research, three different research methods, namely focus group interviews or FG (Bryman, 2016), students' journals (J) and other related documents, such as assignments are used for data collection, meaning construction (Creswell, 2005), and triangulation (Newby, 2010). To make sense of the data, verbatim data from interviews are mainly used as a primary data source whereas the data collected from students' journals and other related documents are considered as a secondary data source.

Due to the low English proficiency of the participants, Thai is used as a medium for interviews and journal writing. To validate the reliability of the researcher's meaning interpretation, a back-translation technique (Brislin, 1970) is additionally adopted.

Data analysis

This study follows a qualitative research paradigm in which meanings are interpreted subjectively. To make sense of the data collected, thematic analysis (Boyatzis, 1998) is a major technique for careful interpretation of the recorded

interviews, written journals and other data sources. In this study, the analysis is composed of three main stages—(1) coding, (2), categorising, and (3) theming. The emerging themes from the data analysis are presented to answer the research question.

Design of activities

These designed activities are comprised of three main stages: Introduction Stage, Discussion Stage and Project Stage.

● Introduction Stage

The main objective of this activity is to introduce content from news sources, documentaries, and advertisements; in addition, necessary grammar structures are introduced to the participants to facilitate their production of video projects and news or advertisement scripts. At this stage, the teacher plays an important role in delivering the content. Peer teaching is also adopted to enhance students' understanding.

● Discussion Stage

This activity focuses on collaborative learning, allowing students to learn from each other through productive discussions and interactions (Dillenbourg, 1999, pp. 1-2). In this study, the discussions take place in a classroom where students are assigned to work in groups, e.g. writing their scripts for news articles, advertisements or a documentary. Students are also placed in a single group for the entire term.

● Project Stage

This group project work promotes not only productive interactions among group members but also "meaningful engagement" (Stoller, 2002, p.107). At this stage, they must work collaboratively to produce video projects, news articles or magazine advertisements. In this circumstance, the teacher's role was to be a facilitator. The designed activities are explained in **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Designed Activities

Projects	Aims	Activities
Print or online news articles	Students write a news article.	Stage 1: Discussion (In class activity)
News on TV	Students produce a VDO clip reporting news on TV.	- Students work in groups. - Each group discusses and plans their group project.
Magazine adverts	Students create advertisements for print or online magazine.	Stage 2: Design (Homework) - Students work in groups and write their scripts for print and VDO production
TV adverts	Students produce a TV advertisement.	
Documentary	Students produce a documentary.	Stage 3: Production (Homework)

Findings

The themes emerging from the data analysis suggest that students have both positive and negative perceptions on their participation in the designed activities. Further details are discussed below.

Positive perceptions of students on the designed activities

For positive perceptions, they commented that the designed activities are helpful in promoting their English language learning.

Benefits of TELL

In this designed project, technology is significant in promoting and motivating them to pursue further English language learning.

- **Language development**

As mentioned in the preceding sections on the benefits of technology, the findings echo those of the existing literature on the usefulness of technology in language development (Engin, 2014; Mekheimer, 2011). Similar to Engin's study (2014), some students share ideas on how video production can help improve their writing. They said:

"I think producing a video clip is a good idea because it allows us to practice by ourselves...making a video supports us to write a script..." (Siri, FG, my translation)

And:

"...I like a project of making a video clip. We have to think of sentences to be used for advertisements..." (Siporn, FG, my translation)

Also, it is found that script writing for videos, news, a documentary, and advertisements are helpful in promoting their grammar learning:

"...at first, I don't know how to write [a script]. I started from writing a script in Thai. Later, I translated it into English...This allows me to learn [grammar] by myself." (Arm, FG, my translation)

This emergent theme shares a similar finding to the study on the use of video to promote grammar learning (Ilin, Kutlu & Kutluay, 2013).

In addition to grammar knowledge, students claimed that this video project improved their speaking skills and pronunciation. For example, they stated:

"I like a video clip...I like [it] because I have a chance to pronounce [English] words....and practice speaking..." (Wila, FG, my translation)

And:

"Everybody has a chance to practice their speaking...We can apply what we learned to produce [video clips]." (Siri, FG, my translation)

Producing a video clip also motivated learners to improve their speaking as evidenced in the following statement:

"It [the video production] encourages me to improve my speaking...motivates me to speak English..." (Korn, FG, My translation)

The data from students' diaries also revealed activities to support their language development as shown in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Students' English language learning

Activities	Number of students discussing activities in their journal
Script writing	24
Grammar learning	9
Speaking practice	1
Pronunciation	6

- **Motivation on English language learning**

A review of the literature on language teaching reveals many discussions about motivation and language learning (Cook, 2008; Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Mahmud, Thang, Tng, 2015; Tarone & Swierzbin, 2009). The findings from these studies share a similarity with those in TELL literature. This is that both cite the use of videos as a key factor increasing English language learner motivation levels, as evidenced in the verbatim data below.

"Having chances to watch some English ads, I feel more motivated to improve myself. I want to write an English script...I want to practice speaking...study more English..." (Supree, FG, my translation)

From the evidence above, I argue that technology can be applied to assist language learning and increase motivation. The findings from this study also suggest the usefulness of technology in providing authentic materials (Cook, 2008), allowing students to engage in more meaningful learning.

Advantages of group work projects

- **Language development**

In this study, students were assigned to work in groups to produce video clips, news articles, a documentary, and advertisements (See Design of activities).

Completing a group project was a very challenging activity for students, which also played a key role in promoting their English skills. They stated:

"...We talk to each other. Some group members have very poor English, but we help each other to learn..." (Siporn, FG, my translation)

And:

"At first, we don't know how to start writing [a script]. We had to write the script in Thai before translating it into English. By doing this, we also learn how to use a subject or a verb." (Arm, FG, my translation)

Similarly, others argued that doing a group project helped improve their writing as evidenced in the following verbatim data:

"They [group members] help revise my work...like not to use "to" or use "it" instead..." (Korn, FG, my translation)

And:

"...I think doing a group work is very good...friends [group members] teach me how to write...We work collaboratively..." (Kan, FG, my translation)

This evidence reveals how a first language is used to assist with the learning of a second language. Furthermore, collaborative learning enhances learning via interactions and feedback given (Hedge, 2000).

Additionally, it was evident that the process of writing a script helped increase students' vocabulary, especially regarding technical terminology from communication arts. For instance, Supree stated:

"Writing scripts for news or documentary make me choose more appropriate words or jargons...I have learned more technical terms from doing this project" (Supree, FG, my translation)

It is also evident in students' journals (J1, J2, J5 & J6) explaining on how the project supports their vocabulary learning.

Interestingly, script writing gave students more confidence in using new language as shown in Areeya's verbatim data.

"I was not able to speak English…I am afraid to make mistakes. But after having chances to write scripts, I feel I don't care much about errors…At least, I am able to communicate…" (Aree, FG, my translation).

In sum, doing a group project seems to promote language learning by engaging learners in the tasks assigned. In other words, this designed activity improved the English skills of the students, especially writing and speaking skills. Moreover, it enhanced their awareness of grammar usage and increased their knowledge of vocabulary.

- **Responsibility and teamwork**

Apart from language development, the group projects were beneficial for learners because they became more self-disciplined and responsible. Some students claimed that while engaging in this project, they increased not only their self-responsibility but also a collective, group responsibility as shown in the following evidence:

"A group project is a good activity as it promotes students' responsibilities…it [working in a group] is appropriate… [we] share knowledge of how to write a script to each other…" (Supree, FG, my translation)

The data from the student's journals (J1 & J5) also addresses the benefits of peer teaching in learning. Moreover, the analysis reveals that doing group work saves students' time since, as mentioned by Wani (FG, my translation,) they have a lot of homework assigned from many subjects.

- **An autonomous learner**

From assigning the students group projects, it became evident that such an activity promoted autonomy (Palfreyman, 2003). The reason they become self-

directed learners (Hedge, 2000) was because of their experience in producing assigned projects—that is, script writing for news on TV, a documentary or advertisements. This engagement influentially led them to learn more autonomously (e.g. J2, J4) in order to improve their writing on news headlines, advertising, slogans or documentaries. The verbatim example below also reveals how the student improves her learning:

> "Sometimes, I don't understand about tenses like past simple. I have to study more...After that, I start writing scripts for project..." (Atcha, FG, my translation)

- **Development of thinking skills**

    Previous research on English language teaching found a connection between learners' thinking ability and the development of their writing skills (Jacobs, G. M., Heike, T. & Renandya, 2018; Zhou, 2016). The findings from this study also add to the literature in this field. According to the interview data, the group work project allows students to develop their thinking and share their ideas through writing script activities (A, FG, my translation). In this instance, writing a script plays an important role in enhancing thinking skills. Students stated:

> "Script writing, such as adverts makes us think and plan more—from a script stage to a production stage..." (Aree, FG, my translation)

In addition, it was found that group work promotes creativity. For instance, some students mentioned:

> "We like the time when we sit and work together because we can exchange our ideas...Also, we can think more creatively, and maybe, we produce a work that nobody has done before..." (Korn, FG, my translation)

And:

> "I like a project as it promotes group members' creativity. If doing an individual work, I get stuck..." (Santi, FG, my translation)

These examples reaffirm the effectiveness of group projects in supporting the engagement of students in learning (Stoller, 2002) through their production of written tasks.

- **Enjoyment and new experience**

Students also had a positive attitude towards their participation in doing a group project. They stated that they had fun while working with other group members and gained new experience. For instance, some said:

> "...I feel happy when I work in group. I have a lot of fun working with new friends. I think I gain a lot of new experience." (Arm, FG, my translation)

> And:

> I have a lot of fun while working with friend... I feel unconfident if I have to work by myself..." (Santi, FG, my translation)

- **Motivation on English language learning**

Like the use of technology in the classroom, doing group work also enhances learners' motivation in learning English as evidenced in some examples of verbatim data below.

> "I am not good at English, but my English is not the worst...I have to improve myself to do the exam and the group project. For me, the group project is significantly important for this subject..." (Chaboon, FC, my translation)

> And:

> "I am curious how they [group members] write a script...I ask myself why I can't do it. Since I have worked in groups for a term, I realized that I have to improve myself..." (Asa, FG, my translation)

Negative perceptions of students towards group projects

Despite positive perceptions, some students discussed problems they had while doing the group project. These include problems regarding teamwork, feelings

of tiredness, concerns about fairness and project assessment, time management issues, and stress about limited grammar knowledge.

Problems on teamwork

Many students complained that teamwork was a critical issue as each group member may not do the same amount of work. For example, Nari said:

"This group project is very effective for some groups in that they really help each other...But some may not do anything at all..." (Nari, FC, my translation)

This also led to student fatigue as evidenced in Nari's verbatim data:

"I feel tired as only a few people work on [the group projects]...but we need to share our marks to a whole group..." (Nari, FG, my translation)

Moreover, Nari complains about the responsibilities of different group members within the same project. In his view, "fairness" is very important. For instance, he argued:

"...Some don't want to work [on the project]; some who do work always take responsibility. I think it is not fair..." (Nari, FG, my translation)

Project overload

In addition to teamwork, project overload was another issue raised by the students. These overloaded projects effected their time management and caused overwhelming feelings of tiredness:

"We feel tired. When we work on our projects, we feel very tired, and we don't want to do anything else at all..." (Chaboon, FG, my translation)

And:

"The disadvantage is that our time is different. If we are assigned to do a project outside classrooms, it is very difficult for us to manage it as our learning timetables are not the same..." (Jira, FG, my translation)

As seen in the above examples, it could be said that an overload of assigned projects places a burden on students. There is additional literature which discusses the impacts of work overload on learning (Kember, et. al., 1996; Lizzio, Simons & Wilson, 2002).

Knowledge of grammar

Knowledge of grammar among group members was a major factor influencing the development of project work plans, due to the fact that they faced issues in writing their scripts. This is evidenced in the example below:

"I think the only problem on doing a project is grammar. It is a writing project...[We] cannot produce a very good one because of our poor knowledge of grammar..." (Supree, FG, my translation)

Suggestion for revision of activities

Students also suggested some ideas to improve the designed activities and make them more effective in assisting with student learning. Firstly, they commented that students should be allowed to work with different groups and not remain in the same group for the entire term, as shown in the example below:

"To avoid the problem [on fairness], a teacher should rotate students to work with other classmates..." (Anan, FG, my translation)

Secondly, working on a group project in class might solve the problems of work overload and improve work quality as evidenced in Kanit's verbatim data:
"[We] should do a group project in class, not assigned as homework. For me, there are many assignments, and I am not able to finish them all. This really affects the quality of the project..." (Kanit, FG, my translation)

To avoid this problem, students agreed that they should have more opportunities to do individual assignments, which allow students to take on individual responsibility for their work and achievements (Supree, FG, my translation);

in addition, there should be a fewer projects assigned as student had difficulty with time management (Piya, FG, my translation).

Thirdly, the students argued that they should have more opportunities to interact with materials or assignments during class time, so they could have acquired more knowledge through interaction and practice as shown in the example below.

"Teaching content is still important. We have to study, but we want to practice more. Students should gain chances to practice writing… (Bam, FG, my translation)

Lastly, knowledge of grammar was one of the main student concerns as was mentioned by Supree:

"[I] want to learn basic knowledge of grammar and tenses that are used for writing news scripts such as past tense…" (Supree, FG, my translation)

Lessons learned for the case

The findings suggest that a collaborative and creative activity on VDO production of a news report, a documentary or an advertisement can play a successful role in promoting and motivating students to learn English. In this case, they gain opportunities to interact and work collaboratively. This result corroborates previous research on the effectiveness of learners' engagement through collaborative learning (Wang, 2007). The results from this study also show collaborative learning to be a successful method of developing learners' creativity (Nevin, Thousand & Villa, 2002), and writing skills (Lin & Yang, 2011; Wang, 2007). In addition, language practice within the context of a meaningful and productive activity enhances a positive attitude towards English. This also increases learners' motivation to improve their English, and encourages them to speak English to fulfill their communicative needs (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

However, further modification of the activities is needed to assist with language learning in this context.

- Direct engagement with course content is essential to promote autonomy. In this case, more interactive activities like peer teaching should be integrated to enhance interactions, scaffold students' learning and promote their understanding of the taught content. In addition, online materials should be prepared for students to study by themselves, especially print or online sources. A teacher's role should be changed from a transmitter to a facilitator.

- To increase productive interactions among the students and the teacher, an online community like Facebook, blogs, or Messenger should be created (see. Amin et al., 2015).

- To avoid the problem of fairness, students should be allowed to work with other class members. This will promote more interactions and peer feedback (Lin & Yang, 2011).

- The number of projects assigned may not greatly affect students' learning processes. Since time was a constraint, fewer projects should be assigned to avoid learners being burdened by their studies. To engage more students' learning, a variety of activities could be included to promote different learning styles (Cook, 2008; Lightbown & Spada, 2006); for instance, activities to support analytic or holistic learners (Willis, 2000).

Conclusion

This research paper sheds light on how technology-enhanced language learning can be used to promote English language learning and teaching in an ESP context. The findings also suggest that the designed activities may yield positive results only for some students; accordingly, it is crucial to modify the activities to make them more appropriate and beneficial for all students. Nevertheless, as a qualitative case study, generalisability of the findings may not be a primary concern, but the findings are applicable to other contexts. Consequently, further research may be conducted with different groups of participants, or investigated on a larger scale to verify generalisablity.

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