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How does technology affect language learning process at an early age?

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Abstract

There is a rapid increasing interest in the need to use technology in language learning at an early age. Young learners need motivation and they can easily lose their concentration during long language learning process. Technology can be one of the ways to create real and enjoyable atmosphere for young language learners when it is used correctly and effectively. Technology lets young language learners gain language skills outside the classroom when they interact actively. Many researches claim that children can improve their language and cultural awareness by using technology in different social and cultural contexts and language awareness can be faster through intercultural communication. Technology gives this chance to young learners and offers them unlimited resources. The main purpose of this research is to examine the teacher candidates and young learners' perspectives on technology use during language learning process. This research is a qualitative study which contains two structured questionnaires with 12 language teacher candidates and 10 young learners from a state primary school. In order to analyze language teacher candidates' point of view on language awareness through technology, 6 questions were prepared for them and 6 questions were also prepared for young learners' ideas. Two structured questionnaires were examined by 2 experts in the field of language teaching. After the research application, teacher candidates mentioned that technology based games, cartoon films, blogs and some social sites for children affect young learners and increased their language and cultural awareness and young learners explained that English lessons could be easy and enjoyable when the teachers use technology outside the classroom.

Keywords: Technology; language awareness; young language learners

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1. Introduction

Research studies in foreign language area for young learners indicate that technological development is very important and effective in learning a new language. Technology, internet and some computer games could promote language learning positively if they are used correctly. Gee (1996) mentions sociocognitive approach gives language learners chances to interact in an authentic social context. Internet can provide sociocognitive approach through authentic tasks and project based studies. Online games can support and improve various vocabulary fields and also give valuable language feedback. (Pensky, 2002). Scott and Ytreberg (1990) explain the child development and say that young learners like playing with language such as using games, rhymes, songs and stories and Internet is one of the good places to use language interactively. Young (2013, p.339) indicates that students raise their language awareness by using on-site games, discussion in different social and cultural context. Bull& Ma (2001) accept this idea and add that language awareness can be faster through intercultural communication. Technology provides this chance to young learners and offers them unlimited resources. Harmer (2007) mentions the importance of computers and internet-based activities and adds that teachers should encourage the students to find suitable activities and games in order to be successful in language learning .Cameron (2009, p.155) thinks that young learners should be encouraged to choose interesting subjects and topics from the internet. Clements and Sarama (2003) state that correct technological materials can be beneficial for students. Harmer also (2007) claims that computer-based language activities improve cooperative learning. In today's world computers are good friends of children. They can motivate them and bring natural atmosphere into their world. Tomlison (2009) informs that computer-based activities provide language learners rapid information and excellent materials. He also explains that multimedia and all sorts of internet materials encourage learners to learn more. Parents have the same idea with language teachers and believe that computers help their children be interested in language learning and improve their brain in a positive way. (http://kaiserfamilyfoundation.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/7427.pdf.)

It is a well known fact that children can lose their concentration in a short time. Using enjoyable and authentic materials sometimes can make this period longer. Internet provides children lots of authentic materials. Swaffar (1985) explains the importance of authentic materials and says that language learners can find out unlimited cultural knowledge which can be interesting for students and have a chance to compare with their own culture. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011, p.199) claim that technology provides teaching resources and brings learning experience to the children's world. Technology also provides lots of authentic materials and young learners may be motivated easily in a long language learning atmosphere. They also mention that electronic chatting, games, e pan pals and podcasts can be interesting for language learners. Children are generally visual learners. They want to see while they are learning. Internet and computer-based activities bring visual materials to the children's world. Children can improve their listening, reading and writing skills via media and internet.

(Larimer and Schleicher, 1999). Brewster, J. Ellis, G. Girard ,D (2004, p.146) say that via e- mails , the internet, satellite and cable TV, young learners can experience the real value of English in their life. Young learners are full of energy and it can be sometimes difficult to teach them foreign language in class period. Technology can be one of the ways to create real and enjoyable atmosphere for young language learners and increase their language awareness when it is used correctly. Technology also lets young language learners gain language skills outside the classroom when they interact actively.

1.1. Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to find out the language teacher candidates' points of view on language awareness through technology and it also reflects 10 young language learners' ideas on technology in their learning process. This study is limited to 12 language teacher candidates from Akdeniz University, Faculty of Education, and 10 young learners from a state school in Antalya. It is also limited to 6 structured questions.

2. Method of the study

In the present research a qualitative method was used to understand the language teacher candidates' and young language learners' point of view. Qualitative research is related to human behavior and explains the problem from the