Role of Technology in Language Learning

It is rare to find a language class that does not use some form of technology. In recent years, technology has been used to both assist and enhance language learning. Teachers at K-16 levels have incorporated various forms of technology to support their teaching, engage students in the learning process, provide authentic examples of the target culture, and connect their classrooms in the U.S. to classrooms in other countries where the target language is spoken.

Further, some technology tools enable teachers to differentiate instruction and adapt classroom activities and homework assignments, thus enhancing the language learning experience. Distance learning programs can enable language educators to expand language-learning opportunities to all students, regardless of where they live, the human and material resources available to them, or their language background and needs. In sum, technology continues to grow in importance as a tool to assist teachers of foreign languages in facilitating and mediating language learning for their students.

While technology can play an important role in supporting and enhancing language learning, the effectiveness of any technological tool depends on the knowledge and expertise of the qualified language teacher who manages and facilitates the language learning environment. In some cases, however, school and university administrators have permitted technology to drive the language curriculum and have even used it to replace certified language teachers. Language technology companies have made unsubstantiated claims about their products' abilities to help students learn languages, thus confusing administrators into thinking that these technologies can be an effective cost-cutting measure. There is currently no definitive research to indicate that students will acquire a second language effectively through technology without interaction with and guidance from a qualified language teacher.

Position Statement

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) acknowledges and encourages using the potential of technology as a tool to support and enhance classroom-based language instruction. ACTFL also acknowledges the potential of well supervised and articulated distance learning programs to fill a need where classroom teachers are not available. However, because language is one of the most complex of all human activities and interactions ACTFL also recognizes the pivotal role of a qualified language teacher to incorporate and manage the implementation of technology so that it effectively supports the language learning experience.

The use of technology should never be the goal in and of itself, but rather one tool for helping language learners to use the target language in culturally appropriate ways to accomplish authentic tasks. Further, all language learning opportunities whether provided through technology or in a

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traditional classroom setting, should be standards-based and help develop students' proficiency in the target language through interactive, meaningful, and cognitively engaging learning experiences, facilitated by a qualified language teacher.

Therefore, ACTFL strongly advises school and university administrators to place the responsibility for language instruction in the hands of qualified language teachers rather than solely in technology programs. Cost-cutting measures such as replacing teachers with software or online programs for language learning or launching new language programs using language software or other technologies will disadvantage language learners if learners will have significantly fewer opportunities to develop language proficiency under the necessary conditions of a dynamic environment and interaction with and guidance from a qualified language teacher.

- See more at: http://www.actfl.org/news/position-statements/role-technology-language-learning