Perceptions and Attitudes towards Integrating Internet in EFL Instruction in Iran

Rana Najjari [*]
M.A., Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch
Gholam-Reza Abbasian
Ph.D., Imam Ali University & Islamic Azad University (South Tehran Branch)

Abstract

This study investigated Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions and attitudes towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction; and the congruence of their attitudes and perceptions. As a mixed-method research, the data was collected both through questionnaires and interviews. Chi-square test was run for quantitative data and the qualitative data were transcribed, coded and thematized. The findings gathered from both qualitative and quantitative methods showed that both teachers and learners had positive perceptions and attitudes towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction and indicated that the factors like lack of facilities and hardware equipment limit Internet integration in Iranian setting. Moreover, the groups indicated that using Internet in EFL instruction and teaching process could be facilitative because of more accessibility to authentic sources, possibility of teacher-student interaction out of the educational environment and improvement of acquiring English learning skills in a faster and efficient way.

[*] Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch, Iran
 Email: *ranajjari15@gmail.com*

1. Introduction

Along with the impact of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), the Internet is widely used in many sectors. Since the early 1990s, Internet has increasingly grown in many fields such as science, business, etc. Today, integrating computer and Internet technology in classrooms has had a great influence on educational environments. The use of Internet for education is very important, since it offers more information than the largest libraries do in the world. Using Internet at universities has a positive value and efficient consequences. Many universities around the world are also using Internet for educational and instructional purposes for easy and effective teaching (Usun, 2003). Internet has become an essential part in educational institutions, since it plays a vital role in meeting information and communication needs of students, teachers and institutions. Teachers are being invited to give their teaching materials and other support resources available through Internet (Dede, 1996). In order to make a proper use of Internet in schools, colleges and universities, there is a need to understand the attitudes and perceptions of teachers and learners towards the use of it. Researchers have proposed that attitudes towards Internet may directly affect Internet adoption and use (Grabe, 2001). Therefore, this study is an attempt to explore the perceptions and attitudes of Iranian EFL teachers and learners towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction and investigate the facilitative and debilitative factors in using it in teaching and learning process.

2. Literature Review

Internet has revolutionized the computer and communications world like nothing before. Mueller (1996, p. 77) has described Internet as "an information distribution system giving anyone connected to it instant access to an immense amount of information". According to Krol and Ferguson (1995), Internet is a connection of networks means to the end user who wants to do something useful such as running a program or finding access to some unique information. Nowadays, Internet is being proposed as the preferred technology to improve instruction, increase access and research, and raise productivity in higher education (Baer, 1998). According to Koohang (2004), Odabasi (2002) and Paris (2004), the use of Internet in teaching has the potential to motivate learners and teachers; increase participation and interaction in the classroom; provide learners with a more active role in their learning and help to facilitate cross-curricular work. Similarly, Harmer (2007) writes that learners and teachers can find practically any kind of information they want on Internet. They can access newspapers, encyclopedias, history sites, film guides, lyrics, and broadcasting associations.

In 1993, Iran became the second country in the Middle East to be connected to Internet, and since then the government has made significant efforts to improve the nation's ICT infrastructure. Iran has developed IT/technology parks, infrastructures for local emails, instant messaging (IM), domestic search engines, e-commerce, e-government, distance education and social medias. Distance education based on e-learning has attracted much attention in recent years in Iran. Accordingly, increasing numbers of universities are becoming interested in providing virtual educational opportunities to the students in different academic fields. Shiraz University was the first institution which provided virtual education, but in only one study area, in 2004 (Safavi, Bavaghar, & Ghafari, 2007).

Teaching and learning foreign language through technology has become a new trend in foreign language education all over the world. Technology is playing a greater role during class and home study, as computer-assisted instruction and interactive media technologies supplement the traditional use of the chalk and the blackboard (Liu, 2009). The use of computer technologies in language instruction, especially the use of Internet, has significant potential to enhance EFL instruction (Garret, 1991). Accordingly, Internet has become a tool for language teaching and learning (Fotos, 2004). Sayed Abdallah (2010) argued that Internet is used in education because it facilitates learning, teaching and communication and he mentioned that students can study any topic in English independently online, and they can also find many activities on Internet to use in order to improve their proficiency.

Teachers' Internet self-efficacy and believes about web-based learning are critical determinants of their attitude towards web-based professional development (Pin & Chung, 2009). Fisher (1999) found that teachers' attitudes were strongly related to their success in using technology, emphasizing the importance of prior experience with technology. In a study of EFL teachers' attitudes toward ICT, Albirini (2006) noted that a participants' perception of ICT attributes was the largest factor in predicting their attitudes toward ICT. Therefore, a new technology will be increasingly diffused if the adopters perceive that the innovation has an advantage over the previous innovations, is in agreement with existing practices, not complex to understand and adopt, shows observable results and can be experimented with on a limited basis before adoption (Rogers, 2003).

To shed light on the perceptions about using Internet in Iranian EFL setting, this study was designed to uncover the perceptions and attitudes towards its employment and integration from the teachers' and learners' perspectives. So, this problem and purpose was realized in the form of the following research questions:

1.   What are Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards integrating Internet technology in EFL instruction?
2.   What are Iranian EFL learners' perceptions and attitudes towards integrating Internet technology in EFL instruction?
3.   Do Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions and attitudes towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction match?
4.   What factors facilitate and debilitate integration of Internet technology in EFL instruction from the teachers' perspectives?
5.   What factors facilitate and debilitate integration of Internet technology in EFL instruction from the learners' perspectives?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of the study were 30 full-time and part-time PhD holder EFL teachers and 50 EFL learners from BA and MA levels of TEFL who were between 18 and 50 years old. In this study, all the participants were from Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch, Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages.

3.2. Instruments

The research instruments of this study were a questionnaire and a series of semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire that was used in this research was provided by Mubireek (2001). The first section of the questionnaire collected the teachers and learners' demographic information and the other sections of the questionnaire consisted of 41 items in Likert-type statements, each with five choices of response from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree", which measure EFL teachers and learners' use of Internet, level of access to Internet, Internet skills and perceptions of Internet. Besides, both groups were interviewed based on a number of general questions which developed in a manner to cover major themes of the respective questionnaire.

3.3. Procedures

This study was carried out in two phases. First, the questionnaire was administered and distributed to the sample of study. The participants of this study were asked to provide the answers to the items of the questionnaire. The pertinent instructions were read to the participants and problematic items were explained in order to safeguard reliability in the face of any unsystematic variance. Then, participants randomly selected from both groups of EFL teachers and learners were interviewed on a number of questions covering the major themes of the respective questionnaire of the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Data Analysis

Given the nature of the data and the instruments used, the quantitative data were analyzed based on frequency, percentages and chi-square analyses and the qualitative data were transcribed, coded and examined as follows.

4.1.1. Quantitative Data Analysis

4.1.1.1. Investigation of the First Research Question

The first research question addressing Iranian EFL teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction was probed through frequency analyses and calculating the percentages. As displayed in figure 1, most of the EFL teachers (72%) have chosen the occasionally (30.2 %), frequently (25.4 %) and very frequently (16.4 %) options that shows they have positive perceptions and perspectives about using and integrating Internet in their classes. Also, the minor portion of them (28.1 %) has chosen never and rarely options. It shows that the majority of EFL teachers prefer to use and integrate Internet in their teaching process.
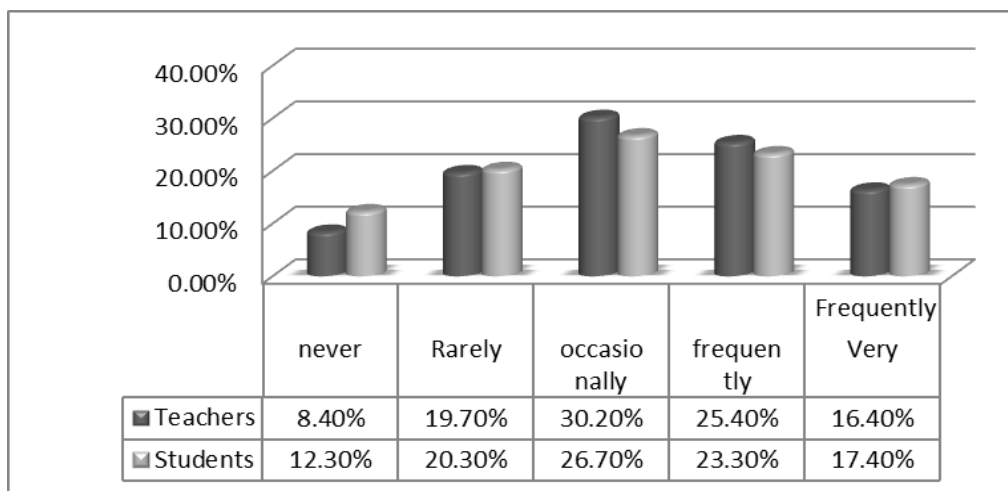
	never	Rarely	occasio nally	frequen tly	Frequently Very
Teachers	8.40%	19.70%	30.20%	25.40%	16.40%
Students	12.30%	20.30%	26.70%	23.30%	17.40%

Figure 1. Percentages for integration of internet by groups

4.1.1.2. Investigation of the Second Research Question

The second research question addressing Iranian EFL learners' perceptions and attitudes towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction was probed through frequency and percentages. As displayed in figure 2, most of the EFL learners (67.4%) have chosen the occasionally (26.7 %), frequently (23.3 %) and very

frequently (17.4 %) options that shows they have positive perceptions and perspectives about using and integrating Internet in their classes.
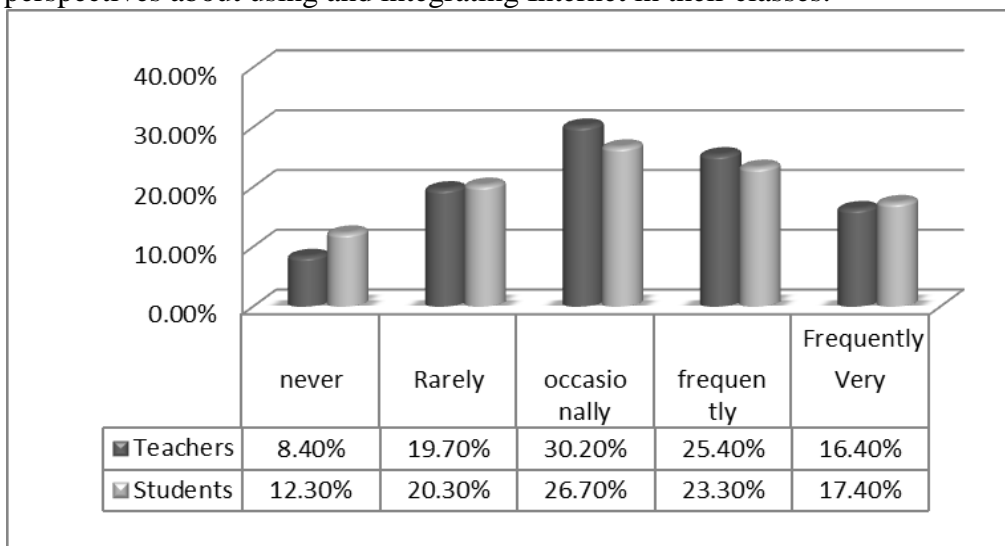

	never	Rarely	occasio nally	frequen tly	Frequently Very
Teachers	8.40%	19.70%	30.20%	25.40%	16.40%
Students	12.30%	20.30%	26.70%	23.30%	17.40%

Figure 2. Percentages for Integration of Internet by Groups

4.1.1.3. Investigation of the Third Research Question

The third research question addressing the extent to which Iranian EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions and attitudes towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction match was probed through chi-square analysis.

Each cell in Table 1 displays three pieces of information; frequency, percentage and standardized residual (Std. Residual). While the former two indices are descriptive, the Std. Residual is a standardized index based on which the frequencies of any two vertical cells can be compared for significant differences. That is to say; any Std. Residuals beyond the ranges of +/- 1.96 denotes significant differences between two vertical cells. Based on these results, it can be claimed that almost same percentages of teachers (16.4%) and students (17.4%) believed that Internet could be integrated into EFL instruction *very frequently*. Another 25.4 % teachers and 23.3% of students evaluated the level of integration as *frequently*. An almost the same percentages (19.7 % vs. 20.3 %) evaluated Internet integration as *rarely*.

Table 1

Frequencies, Percentages and Std. Residual; Integration of Internet by Groups

		Choices					Total
		never	Rarely	occasionally	frequently	Very Frequently	
Teachers	Count	103	242	371	312	202	1230
	%within Group	8.4%	9.7%	30.2%	25.4%	16.4%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	-2.6	-.3	1.4	.9	-.5	
Students	Count	252	417	548	477	356	2050
	%within Group	12.3%	20.3%	26.7%	23.3%	17.4%	100.0%
	Std. Residual	.0	.3	-1.1	-.7	.4	
Total	Count	355	659	919	789	558	3280
	% within Group	10.8%	20.1%	28.0%	24.1%	17.0%	100.0%

However, the two groups showed different attitudes regarding two of the choices. The teachers (30.2 %) more than students (26.7 %) took a neutral position by selecting the '*occasional*' choice. On the other hand the students (12.3%) more than teachers (8.4%) believed that Internet could be *never* integrated into EFL instruction. None of the Std. Residuals were beyond the ranges of +/- 1.96 except for the two groups' attitude on lack of Internet integration in EFL instruction. The students (Std. Residual = 2 > 1.96) significantly believed that Internet could be *never* integrated in EFL instruction. On the other hand the teachers significantly selected this option less than what was expected (Std. Residual = - 2.6 > - 1.96).

The results of chi-square (Table 2) (χ^2 (4) = 16.11, p = .003) indicated that there were no significant differences between teachers and students' perceptions towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction. Thus the null-hypothesis was rejected.

Table 2
Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.115[a]	4	.003
Likelihood Ratio	16.485	4	.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.820	1	.051
N of Valid Cases	3280		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 133.13.

4.1.2. Qualitative Data Analysis

It was considered advisable to further probe into the issues motivating the study by conducting one to one interviews with some of participants; because the semi-structured interviews would allow the participants more extended and meaningful opportunities to comment on the questions the study was designed to investigate.

The interviews were conducted with 3 EFL teachers and 4 EFL learners from Islamic Azad University South Tehran Branch, Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages. Among the participants who indicated their willingness to participate in follow-up interview, the interviewees were selected randomly. They were asked four basic questions:

- *Do you advocate the use of Internet for educational purposes? Why or why not?*
- *Which factors do you think limit your use of Internet in EFL instruction?*
- *In your opinion, how can Iranian EFL teachers/learners integrate Internet in teaching/learning process?*
- *How can the use of Internet facilitate English teaching and learning process?*

Key findings arising from the analysis of the interview data are presented in accordance with the following themes: (a) teachers' attitudes towards the use of Internet for educational purposes, (b) learners' attitudes towards the use of Internet for educational purposes, (c) factors limiting the use of Internet in EFL instruction, (d) facilitative effects of integrating Internet in EFL instruction. The qualitative findings are considered in the fourth and fifth research questions.

4.1.2.1. Investigation of Fourth Research Question

The fourth research question addressing the factors facilitating and debilitating integration of Internet technology in EFL instruction from the teachers' perspectives was investigated through interviews.

The interviewees indicated that the factors which limit their Internet use in EFL instruction are as follows: (a) lack of hardware equipment, (b) learners' unfamiliarity with Internet applications and their limited computer knowledge, (c) unavailability and problem of access to Internet in classroom, (d) lack of time. The teachers suggested that using Internet in EFL instruction and teaching process could be facilitative in these ways: (a) accessibility to authentic sources, (b) possibility of teacher-student interaction out of the educational environment, (c) improvement of acquiring English learning skills.

4.1.2.2. Investigation of the Fifth Research Question

The fifth research question addressing the factors facilitating and debilitating integration of Internet technology in EFL instruction from the learners' perspectives was investigated through interviews.

The interviewees indicated that the factors which limit their Internet use in EFL instruction are as follows: (a) avoidance of using Internet by instructors and institutes, (b) the low speed of Internet, (c) unavailability of equipment and hardware facilities in the classroom. The learners suggested that using Internet in EFL instruction and learning process could be facilitative in these ways: (a) making learning process more interesting and enjoyable, (b) faster and efficient way of accessing to information, (c) accessibility to new and online articles, e-books and English teaching websites.

4.2. Discussion

Addressing the first research question, both quantitative and qualitative data analyses showed that Iranian EFL teachers generally have positive perceptions towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction. The data gathered through the questionnaire on the use of Internet, access to Internet, Internet literacy and perceptions to Internet was probed through frequency and percentages showed that 72% of Iranian EFL teachers have positive perceptions and perspectives toward using Internet in their teaching process and EFL instruction. Also, EFL teachers in interviews indicated that Internet changes a teacher-centered class to a learner-centered one and makes teaching and learning more interactive and reciprocal and provides infinite source of knowledge, references and authentic materials. This is in the line with Mubireek (2001) study in which the ESL teachers at the Ohio State University had also positive perceptions toward the use of Internet in ESL instruction and they perceive Internet use as a way to increase personal convenience, increase access to information, and improve job performance.

As to the second research question, the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data showed that Iranian EFL learners generally have positive perceptions towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction. The data gathered through questionnaire on the use of Internet, access to Internet,

Internet literacy and perceptions to Internet was probed through frequency and percentages. The findings showed that 67.4% of Iranian EFL learners have positive perceptions and perspectives toward using Internet in their teaching process and EFL instruction. Also, EFL teachers in interviews indicated that Internet makes learning more interesting and it may improve the teaching methodology and promotes the efficiency of learning process. Using Internet facilitates the process of learning and it can save time and improve learners' knowledge in an appropriate and easy way. It provides more sources to learn and improves our knowledge. This is in line with the study of Hong, Ridzuan and Kuek (2003) about students' attitudes toward the use of Internet for learning, revealed that generally students at University Malaysia Sarawak had positive attitudes towards learning using Internet. The students generally had the basic skills in using Internet and perceived the learning environment in the university encouraged them to use Internet as learning tool. The students' basic skills in Internet and their perceptions of the learning environment were related to their use of Internet to supplement their learning requirements. Students with better basic skills in Internet and perceived the learning environment to be supportive of using Internet for their learning tasks generally had better attitudes toward using Internet to improve their studies.

Similarly, the findings from questionnaire, in a bid to address the third research question, showed that Iranian EFL teachers and learners generally have positive perceptions towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction. The data gathered through questionnaire on the use of Internet, access to Internet, Internet literacy and perceptions to Internet was probed through chi-square and cross tabs. Based on these results it can be claimed that almost same percentages of teachers (16.4%) and students (17.4%) believed that Internet could be integrated into EFL instruction very frequently. Another 25.4 % teachers and 23.3 % of students evaluated the level of integration as frequently. An almost the same percentages (19.7 % vs. 20.3 %) evaluated Internet integration as rarely. The teachers (30.2 %) more than students (26.7 %) took a neutral position by selecting the "occasional" choice. On the other hand the students (12.3%) more than teachers (8.4%) believed that Internet could be never integrated into EFL instruction. The results of chi-square (Table 2) (χ^2 (4) = 16.11, p = .003) indicated that there were no significant differences between teachers and students' perceptions towards integrating Internet in EFL instruction. The same result was reached by Onsoy (2004). Her study was about students' and teachers' attitudes towards the use of Computer-Assisted Language Learning at the Preparatory School of Celal Bayar University. This study examined how students and teachers perceive use of computer technology resources in language learning and teaching by investigating the attitudes of students and teachers towards computers and the use of computer-assisted language learning (CALL), the similarities and differences between

their attitudes and factors that affect students and teachers' use of CALL program at the Preparatory School of Celal Bayar University. The findings indicated no difference between the attitudes of students and teachers towards computers and the use of computers in language instruction in general.

The act of integrating ICT into teaching and learning sought through the fourth research question is a complex process and one that may encounter at a number of difficulties. These difficulties are known as "barriers" (Schoepp, 2005). Becta (2004) grouped the barriers according to whether they relate to the individual (teacher-level or learner-level barriers), such as attitudes, lack of time and lack of knowledge or to the institution (school-level barriers) such as lack of access to resources and lack of hardware and equipment. The results of qualitative data showed that teachers indicated the barriers which limit their Internet use in EFL instruction are related to both individual and institution scope. The two limiting factors "learners' unfamiliarity with Internet applications and their limited computer knowledge" and "lack of time" referred to individual scope and the "lack of hardware equipment" and "unavailability and problem of access to Internet in classroom" related to institution scope. The results are consistent with Chen (2008) study which investigated the issues and barriers that EFL teachers encounter when trying to incorporate Internet into their instruction. She indicated that lack of time, inadequate institutional support and lack of planning for technology integration into classroom are the most serious problems in integrating Internet into instruction.

Also, the teachers' perceptions about facilitative effects of integrating Internet in EFL instruction are consistent with the results of the studies such as Adams and Burns (1999) and Muir-Herzig (2004). They indicated that use of computer and ICT shifts the learning environment from the traditional 'teacher- centered' towards the 'learner-centered' approach and changing EFL learner to a student who is active in the search for the fulfillment of his or her own learning needs and to use the language in an authentic situation.

In a bid to explore the effective factors looming ahead of Internet integration addressed in research question five as argued before, the barriers grouped into individual scope (teacher-level or learner-level) and institution scope (school-level). The results of qualitative data show that learners indicated the barriers which limit their Internet use in EFL instruction are related to both individual and institution scope. The factor "avoidance of using Internet by instructors and institutes" referred to individual scope and the other two limiting factors "the low speed of Internet" and "unavailability of equipment and hardware facilities in the classroom" referred to institution scope. The results are consistent with the Baniabdelrahman, Bataineh and Bataineh (2007) study that was about Jordanian EFL students' perceptions of their use of Internet. They investigated the infrequent use of Internet for EFL

purposes may be attributed to a host of factors, but the most important of which are lack of computers and hardware equipment in the classroom, difficult reservation of computer laboratories and instructors because they do not make Internet assignments part of students' class work.

Also, the learners' perceptions about facilitative effects of integrating Internet in EFL instruction are consistent with the results of Singhal (1997) study in which he indicated that Internet is a valuable resource to both language teachers and learners. Language learners could communicate with native speakers through e-mail and Internet facilitates the use of the specific language in an authentic setting. Internet can also be used to acquire information from language resources for a variety of purposes. Internet also serves as a medium for experiencing and presenting creative works. While students can peruse the information on Internet, they can also use it as a platform for their own work such as essays, poetry, or stories.

5. Conclusion and Implications

Based on the findings of this study, Iranian EFL teachers and learners had positive perceptions and attitudes towards using Internet in their teaching and learning process and they had enough expertise in Internet skills. Both Iranian EFL teachers and learners believed that using and integrating Internet technology facilitate the teaching and learning English language and they were willing about benefiting from this technology in their program; but the integration of Internet in EFL instruction in Iran is still not implemented and the main reasons were the lack of facilities and hardware equipment in educational environment and the lack of Internet-based curriculum and teaching program.

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