VISIONS AND APPLICATIONS OF ADMINISTRATIONS OF SCHOOLS OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES ON TECHNOLOGY PLANNING

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to unfold the perspectives of the administrators currently working or have recently given up their posts in the schools of foreign languages in seven Turkish Universities on technology planning and integration. The data were gathered via a questionnaire. In general, the results of the study revealed that none of the schools of which data were gathered has precisely been planning technology as defined in the relevant literature. Besides, there is a significant gap between the state and foundation universities' visions and applications on the planning and integration of technology and professional development activities. While foundation universities gradually keep track of innovative applications and trends, state universities have fiscal, personnal, and bureaucratic problems to catch the technology train in order to plan their technology visions. One of the many problems nearly all of the participant institutions have with technology planning and integration is the lack of informed decisions and adequate guidance of technology expertise.

Keywords*: Technology planning, professional development, technology integration.*

YABANCI DİLLER YÜKSEK OKULLARI YÖNETİMLERİNİN TEKNOLOJİ PLANLAMASINA DÖNÜK GÖRÜŞ VE UYGULAMALARI

Özet

Bu çalışma, Türkiye'deki yedi farklı üniversitenin Yabancı Diller Yüksekokullarında son bir yıl içerisinde görev yapmış ve halen yapmakta olan yöneticilerin görüşleri doğrultusunda, söz konusu okulların teknoloji planlama vizyonlarını ve bu doğrultudaki uygulamaları ilgili alanyazındaki gelişmeler doğrultusunda incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Veriler, ilgili alanyazın incelenerek, araştırmacı tarafından geliştirilen bir anket aracılığıyla toplanmıştır. Çalışmanın sonucunda, genel olarak, veri toplanan okulların henüz teknoloji planlaması konusunda kuramsal ve uygulama bağlamlarında alanyazında belirtilen nitelikleri geliştirmemiş oldukları görülmüştür. Diğer taraftan, devlet ve vakıf üniversitelerinin teknoloji planlaması, teknoloji ile ilgili sistem, araç ve mesleki gelişim etkinlikleri bağlamlarında belirgin bir ayrım içerisinde

oldukları ortaya çıkmıştır. Vakıf üniversiteleri yenilikçi uygulama ve eğilimleri giderek daha etkin bir şekilde takip ederken, devlet üniversitelerinin teknoloji planlama vizyonlarını geliştirmede bütçe, personel ve bürokrasi noktalarında ciddi problemleri bulunmaktadır. Hemen tüm yüksekokulların teknoloji planlaması ve entegrasyonu ile ilgili yaşadıkları problemlerin temelinde yapılandırılmış bir karar alma mekanizmalarının olmaması ve teknoloji uzmanlığı noktasında yeterli personel ve bilgi desteğinden yoksun olmaları yatmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler*: Teknoloji planlaması, mesleki gelişim, teknoloji entegrasyonu.*

1. Introduction

The last decade was characterized by explosive developments in information and communication technologies and their influences on human beings' ambition to learn. Technoliterate children will challenge educators to accommodate their learning needs in imaginative ways because technology changed the way children think and learn. The Internet is rapidly becoming pervasive around the world, and technology will have an even greater impact on what and how we teach in the future (1). Doubtlessly, evolving learning theories attached to technology assisted strategies provide a huge potential to the foreign language pedagogy. The traditional language labs have transformed into multimedia supported language learning centers. The old-fashioned charts, cassettes and videotapes are out of date in today's language classrooms (2). All stake holders of the foreign language education have realized the fact that instruction can not be designed without taking the current learners' high literacy levels and daily use of technology into account (3). Respectively, while investing huge amounts of money into the technological aids, there should be a methodology by which institutions can plan technology. To realize the benefits of technology, schools must develop a plan for **integrating technology into the curriculum. Technology planning** is a systematic way of decision making on how to integrate the latest technology into the curriculum within a wider scope including many issues such as, timely schedule, professional development, equipment purchases, content development, and instructional design (4). Technology implementation starts at the inception of the planning development strategy. An effective technology plan is based on the shared vision of educators, parents, community members, and business leaders who have technological expertise. It ensures that technology strengthens existing curricula and supports meaningful, engaged learning for all students. It also specifies how the technology will be paid for and how its use will be supported (5).

1.1. Technology Planning and Related Issues

Since technology is a powerful tool when properly implemented it lends itself well to learning and instruction and improves student learning and achievement. Integrating technology into the schools will help prepare students to succeed in a rapidly changing world. Technology integration is also important because it supports the goals of educational change. To ensure that technology is effectively integrated into the schools, educators and community members must collaborate to create a formal

technology plan. To be successful, a technology plan must promote meaningful learning and collaboration, provide for the needed professional development and support, and respond flexibly to change. Technology being utilized to teach a foreign language includes, but is not limited to, computers and software, interactive white boards, intranet, television, videos, computer-based laboratories, digital cameras, personal digital assistant (PDAs), smart classess learning management systems which are of open source or not, and etc (2). Creating a plan for technology integration with the aim of supportting education change means more than buying software and hardware. To keep track of the latest educational paradigms, a technology plan should promote meaningful learning and collaboration. Relatively, (3) points out that when technology is designed in a detailed and systematic way, technology planning aids the educational settings to identify current and future needs in terms of technology resources and also saves time and money. So demanded outcomes can be achieved faster with a comprehensive plan of technology. As an organized and continual process technology planning is basically a document developed with a simple planning strategy aiming to enhance the use of technology in the fields of management, assessment and communication. One of the most critical issue of being successful in technology planning depends on the fact that whether it has administative support or not. These plans should both possess a wider scope and to be realistic in terms of defining all strengths and weak points of the institution's technology requirements and its integration. A technology plan that is not integral to the overall improvement plan is likely to be short-lived (6). That is to say, it is a crucial need to involve all stake-holders into the technology planning process such as teachers, learners, parents, administrators, non governmenal organizations, and technology experts. Briefly, it is crucial to create an atmosphere in which a strong common sense and colloboration have occured in order to be successful in the process of technology planning.

Planning is an ongoing process that translates organizational policy and technology needs into concrete actions. It allows educational organizations to take advantage of technology innovations while minimizing the negative impact of unexpected challenges. Planning provides a road map for the implementation of technology and can result in more efficient expenditure of limited resources and an improvement in student achievement (7). Thus, there should be a technology planning team and a lead person to coordinate and monitor the whole process. Every member of the team should know what to do and how to do it. Teachers should also seek opportunities to work in teams to design technology-supported projects, integrate appropriate technology into curricular areas, develop objectives that describe appropriate technology goals for students at each grade level, create lesson plans that incorporate authentic uses of technology, develop proficiency in technology through professional development and collegial support, use technology for routine tasks as well as for curriculum development. The pre-planned time schedule should be obeyed and the experiences of other schools and institutions should be taken into consideration. May be the most important aspect of technology planning is to develop a learning vision including a para-

digm in which the question 'why and how should the technology be used?' is responded precisely. The notions should be included in this learning vision may be:

- The types of the tasks that learners will encounter,

- The techniques to assess the learners' performances,

- What are the roles of teachers in the learning process,

- What kind of learning materials will be implemented and used,

- What will be the basic difference between the current and target learning environment (2).

Similarly, district and school technology plans should start with instructional goals (8). Technology related objectives must be linked to curricular goals and frameworks. He also underlines that technology and the assessment systems must be compatible. On the other hand, some educators may oppose the use of technology plans as a means to better learning. They may argue that such plans shift the focus of schools from the content of the information conveyed to the means of delivery. Other educators may believe that schools and teachers lack the technical knowledge and experience needed to create effective technology plans. They may think that the professional development time and funding necessary to upgrade teachers' technology skills could be better spent on learning more about content areas and teaching strategies. These are also the critical points should be taken consideration into technology planning.

Technology planning can support schools and educational organizations within the technology decision-making process by establishing standards, norms, and methods for evaluating, purchasing, implementing, and using technology. Moreover, technology planning can help educational organizations identify program and technology priorities and match those priorities with organizational, human, and financial resources. Briefly, many educators clearly notice that the stakes increasing as the market for technology use in schools expands rapidly. As a result, technology planning and professional development are becoming priorities among schools, educational organizations, and policymakers. Hence, technology planning process leads clarity and long-term direction for the use of technology in both instructional and management practices.

1.2. Professional Development and Technology Planning

Technology is transforming society, and schools do not have a choice as to whether they will incorporate technology but rather how well they use it to enhance learning (9). In a consolidated planning method, technology is viewed as an important tool to support the purposes and operation of a school system, including curriculum, teaching and learning, data analysis and decision making, and staff development (10). Admittedly, use of technology interferes the way EFL teachers teach. As they are included in the process

of technology planning, they become more willing to experiment their teaching, become more learner-focused, to establish collaborative working relationships with other teachers to design interesting mix of traditional and nontraditional teaching and learning strategies, incorporate more collaboration among students (11).

Professional development, which is one of the most important components of overall technology planning process, is all about making sure that teachers have the finest and most up-to-date tools to do their job (12, 13, 14). In this respect, profesional development activities provide teachers with solutions and points of view for the instructional situations that technology can help or influence. It motivates the teachers to learn the required skills to use technology efficiently while teaching. However, the critical point here is not to satisfy individual workshops and just one sessioned activity and to go beyond these restricted and old-fashioned models. Instead, effective professional development activities should be on-going and implemented to the staffs' daily lives. The literature on the professional development put the emphasis on its compatibility with the latest research outcomes and posits that effective professional development should be inegated into the school's or instiution's plan of technology (13,14,15,16). Professional development activities integrated to the school technology plans should:

- be related to the learner aspect of the learning,

- be related to the running curriculum,

- include hands-on technology,

- provide and introduce various learning experiences,

- promote active teacher participation,

- be ongoing,

- have adequate funding,

- include constructive self-assessment (3).

In the contemporary period, institutions which try to develop their foreign language education must bridge the gap between their practices of language learning and their tools that facilitate learning with the help of technology. They should also seek for precise answers to the following questions (3) in order to design the technology planning and integration processes in a systematic way:

- Why do we invest in educational technologies?

- What rationales have shaped these investments?

- What are the requisite steps to ensure that technologies are effectively implemented?

- What specific recommendations have been given priority?

- What assumptions underlie our vision for how technologies can impact teaching and learning, and how have these changed?

Organization of professional development programs for faculty should emphasis good pedagogy rather than good technology, recognize that faculty should be end users not technicians, collaborative efforts for infusing technology will build skills for all participants, and reduce the burden of creating instructional technology products (17). In other words, staff development activities should help teachers become comfortable and proficient with the technology and give them the opportunity to devise ways to use it in their classrooms. The uniqueness of each teacher and class must be acknowledged and used to build specific teaching strategies to meet the goals outlined in the plan. Teachers must have a reason to use the technology and should be involved in developing projects that apply technology to student learning (6,18). Teachers also must have access to on-site technical support personnel, who are responsible for troubleshooting and assistance after the technology and lessons are in place.

Undoubtedly, almost none of the teachers can ignore the capabilities of technology in learning environments. Besides, the emergence of new technological tools in foreign language teaching have drastically transformed the conditions where foreign language instruction takes place. However, there has been an obvious lack of evidence demonstrating how tertiary level educational organizaitons have been planning the implementation of technology into their overall curiculum. Administrative involvement and leadership are vital issues for the technology planning and implementation process. If organizational leaders do not recognize and support the technology plan, it will be hard to implement and can be damaged. To sum up, in order to make sense of imminent technological change and the status of technology implementation in foreign language learning, a profound analysis of educational settings in which language instruction take place is needed. This study may contribute to shed light on the current state and points of view of schools of foreign languages at various Turkish universities on;

- electronic technologies and ways their impact can benefit each of the four language skills;

- appropriate pedagogical strategies for technology planning in language learning;

- specific, noteworthy, technology-based applications for language learning;

- teacher education issues;

- technology implementation strategies to maximize positive impact on language learning outcomes;

- the potential for using technology to learn about the language learning process itself.

2. Method

2.1. Research questions

This paper tries to unfold the perspectives of the administrators currently working in the schools of foreign languages in seven Turkish Universities on technology planning and integration. It also seeks for their visions towards the challenges and opportunities in integrating technology into foreign language curriculum. It summarizes those schools technology planning mentalities in terms of professional development activities, long term objectives of technology integration, budget arrangements, and educational technology investments. The research questions through which the current study sought answers are as follows:

1. What are the current situation and properties of schools of foreign languages in terms of technology use and planning?

2. What are the **perceptions and awareness of schools of foreign languages to-**wards technology-related novelties?

2.2. Methodology

The data were collected through a questionnaire developed through the relevant literature by the researcher and delivered to the administrations of seven 'school of foreign languages' of various Turkish universities including both civil and private ones. Seven administrators who are also language instructors contributed to the study. Besides, while collecting the data, participated administrators were asked to respond to the questionnaire on behalf of the institutions' formal visions and strategies. The data collection instrument was also checked by an expert in research methodology and revised acoording to the feedback received. The schools from which the data were gathered are the Hacettepe, Metu, Ankara, Gazi, Bilkent, Etu, and Başkent Universities. The criterion for defining the schools was their location that all of them are settled in Ankara which is the capital city of the country. The names of the universities will not be mentioned in this paper in order to keep their anonymity. Instead, the code 'S' will be used for state universities and 'F' will be used to refer to foundation (private) universities.

2.3. Data Analysis

In this section, the data collected will be analysed according to what the basic differences between the state and foundation universities are, and whether there is a general tendency towards a unique response to the questions asked in the questionnare. The first question asked for these universities aims to learn the technological facilities they use while teaching. The general view indicates that nearly all schools have the

same kind of facilites such as teacher laptops or PCs, OHPs, projection devices, CD and DVD players, and of course Tvs. However, while one of the state universities has none of them in the classroom, a foundation university provides the teachers and learners with wireless access to Internet with personal laptops and also with the LMS based in-class activities via projection devices.

3. Findings

A significant part of the questions in the survey aims to assess the schools' technology related possessions in terms of both viewpoints and equipments. Respectively, the chart given below was designed to indicate the categorical information about the schools' technology based wealth.

Table 3.1. The General Information About the School Of Foreign Languages' Current Situation and Properties in Terms Of Technology Use and Planning.

		S1	S2	S3	S4	F1	F2	F3
1	Number of Academic Staff	220	150	105	132	190	70	50
2	Smart Class	√	X	X	X	√	√	X
3	Budget for technology investment	√	X	√	√	√	√	√
4	Call team or respondent	√	X	X	X	√	√	√
5	System Failure Management	√	X	X	√	√	√	√
6	Paying attention academic staffs' technology literacy	√	√	√	√	√	√	√
7	A concrete Professional Development Program	√	X	√	X	√	√	√
8	Number of PD Activities in 2005-2006 Academic Year	X	12	3	20	20	24	17
9	Whether the instution currently makes, records available to the public over the Internet or not?	√	√	√	X	√	√	√
10	Whether the institution has a long term technology planning policy or not?	√	X	X	X	√	√	√
11	Whether the technology planning process for the school is frequently monitored or not?	√	X	X	X	√	√	√
12	Whether the administrators of the school are involved in technology related professional development process or not?	√	X	√	X	√	√	√

As it is stated in the relevant literature, the cost of implementing a technology plan may be a source of conflict in a school that is already struggling with low funding.

Money to purchase computer equipment may be taken from instructional budgets, causing cutbacks in what some educators consider to be necessary materials. As it is shown in the table, there is a gap between state and foundation universities. In terms of nearly all items, foundation universities have significantly much more endeavour to use teachnology and try to implement technology planning to their institutional profile. The only similarity among all of the schools appears on the issue of offering the information service to the public via Internet. However, it should be noted that the only information delivered by the state universities to their learners (or parents) are the grades and absenteeism info of the learners. On the other hand, two of the foundation universities have been delivering various contents through Internet such as learning management system based interactive learning activities. The only state university having the same sensitivity and readiness to the technology integration is the S1 and it is one of the most reputable universities in Turkey. This institution possesses a more powerful infrastructure, background, and fiscal wealth comparing to the other universities in the country.

When the issue is the adoption of the **technology-related novelties, there is a gen**eral consensus on the benefits of 'online courses'. However, it is clear the 'novelty effect' of the technology influenced the participants' responses. Both a state university and a foundation university checked all items and presumably aimed to express their visions and eagerness to get the high-tech. However, this result does not mean that they have completed the required procedures and processes to implement a technology plan into the overall curriculum development process. To clarify this point, we should note that the state university which perceived all novelties as important, in fact, has many restrictions and lack of facilities. On the other hand, the schools which have many required facilites such as LMS software and smart classes and those developed technology related materials have just checked the items they need or they have been planning to implement. So, these results have some critical implications on what technology planning is and what it is not.

Table 3.2. Perceptions Of Schools Of Foreign Languages Towards Technology-Related Novelties

Please indicate which of the following technology-related novelties would be useful to your instiution in the future. (Check all that apply.)						
	S1	S2	S3	S4	F1	F2	F3
Designing a unit with a technology component	√		√	√			√
How to use technology as a management tool				√			√
Online courses		√	√	√		√	√
Virtual field trips				√	√		√
Online professional development programs		√	√			√	√

The following table is about the ongoing professional development activities of the schools that participated in the research. The activities asked were about designing a unit with a technology component, how to use technology as a management tool, online courses, virtual field trips, and online professional development programs. Since this study tries to derive information on practical events, realistic responses have been reached. Interestingly, two of the state schools pointed out that they have been doing nothing for the aim of developing professional skills of the staff. However, although there is a positive variance for the foundation universities, the activity types checked by both foundation and state universities are so restricted and do not include sophisticated ways such as online programs and videoconferencing. Apparently, this result indicates that some universities have a tendency to ignore professional development which is one of the most critical aspects of technology planning.

Table 3.3. Information About the Technology Related Activities in Which Academic Staff of SFLs Have Participated

Please indicate which of the following technology related activities in which your academic staff have participated:						
	S1	S2	S3	S4	F1	F2	F3
On-line professional development							√
Webquests					√	√	
Technology workshops	√	None	None	√	√		√
Workshop with videoconferencing							
Other (Please specify.)							

The perceptions of the participating schools' administrators on the degree of their awareness towards the novel technology related applications into the field of English language learning and teaching were given in the table below. May be this table is a minor scene of the schools self-assessment on their vision of planning and integrating technology into their discipline. As it can be easily drawn from the second line, except for a state school, a natural division exists; and while foundation universities put themselves at the top awareness level, state universities perceived their awareness at the medial level. This can be considered as a result of many different reasons, but the fundamental ones are, undoubtedly, fiscal restrictions and respective difficulty of employing highly literate staff at state institutions. Of course, this scene is also related to the dynamism of the foundation universities' administrations, something that can not be seen in the state organizations very easily.

Table 3.4. Awareness Levels of SFLs Towards the Novel Technology Related Appications into the Field of ELT

To what extent are you aware of the novel technology related appications into the field of ELT?				
Not at all				To a Great Extent
1	2	3	4	5
	S3	S2, S4		F1, F2, F3, S1

The last question asked to the universites was about their visions towards the technology integration in the future. The obtained answers point out that all instiutions want to do something for integrating technology. The general gap between the state and foundation universities has gone on in this part too. There were foundation schools planning to spend hundred thousands of dolars to set up two video conferencing halls and aiming to get wireless Internet access in the very near future as a part of their continuing technology plan. On the other hand, there were also state universities just wishing to keep up with novel technology with a yearly budget that can be used to buy three or four personal computers. However, it is also clear that technology integration requires more than just wanting or spending money for this aim. Or it is not to buy every kind of popular hardware and software and then perceive itself as an institution that has completed the technology integration process as claimed by the biggest state university. Interestingly, none of the universities mentioned the issue of technology based professional development while talking about their future plans on technology integration.

4. Discussion / Conclusion

To sum up, as it is defined in the literature, it is hard to say that these schools of foreign languages in Turkey have been planning their technology integration properly by taking the related issues into consideration-- such as professional development, colloborative teams, targeted budget parts, etc. Some school administrators seemed not to associate technology with program. It looks they view technology as equipment not requiring program evaluation. Equipment may be evaluated for speed, efficiency and cost but not learning power.

To manage the implementation of technology into the school, decision makers must create specific duties, regulations, and policies that are counter to the collaborative nature of the technology plan or the ever-changing nature of technology. It is imperative that the vision statement and the technology plan are developed with foresight, consensus, and long-range goal planning. However, there is a great tendency in many foundation universities and those of the state, to have relatively good fiscal positions due to their self-resources, to try to implement innovative technology facilities into their learning environment. Although those attempts deserve some appreciation, the theoretical perspective of technology-planning has not quite been achieved at these organizations. The problems they have with technology integration is, at first, a lack

of informed decision making, and adequate guidance of technology expertise. The first pre-requisite in reaching success at these institutions is to have strong administrative support and, related experts, or would-be experts, by the end of the professional development programs that thay run. Especially the state universities have a real porblem of inadequate know-how to complete the whole planning process, let alone deciding which type of network they need, or how best to connect to the Internet.

First of all it is hoped that the findings of this study are used to draw conclusions about the current awareness of Turkish universities towards the notion of technology planning. Admittedly, those institutions may revise their point of views, and get only some implications in technology-planning for foreign language learning settings from this study. However, it is important to point out that all educational institutions aiming to provide learners with EFL programmes in Turkey should renovate their professional development philosophy to be compatible with developing a visionary plan that would enable the use of innovative technologies in educational settings.

Finally, technology planning must not only include what the program will provide and what sources will be exploited, but also the assessment strategies that will provide program impact data. These school of foreign languages participated into the study, should seek for a connection between program activities and learning outcomes. This means that along with objectivess, golas, and activities, the technology plan must include indicators, benchmarks, and data sources which we could not see within these learning environments. **To be effective, technology planning should asist educators in making the right purchasing decisions, improving their use of technology, using resources more efficiently, and, most important, improving learning for all students regardless of educational level, age, or socioeconomic background.**

5. Limitations of the Study

This research is limited to the time when the data were collected; the situation investigated may change as time goes on. Furthermore, the researchers did not carry out any observation about the technology planning processes of the participated schools of foreign languages. The responses to the questionnaire were self-reported by the participants, so the data collected rely on the participant administrators' declarations on the existing situation.

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