

Identifying Our Approaches to Language Learning Technologies: Improving Professional Development

Determinist position

According to Warschauer (1998), a determinist position associates the mere presence of computers with successful language learning. In other words, technology has a “magic” effect on learning, and simply including it will determine a more positive outcome for any activity. Researchers who approach their work from this position are quick to draw positive conclusions about technology’s impact and are likely to ignore the many complex and intervening factors surrounding technology use.

Instrumental position

Those who hold the instrumental perspective believe that technology is just a tool that is not capable of bringing about positive learning results in and of itself. Rather, the result depends on how well the technology is incorporated into the lesson, how well it supports the objectives, and how well the computer-based activities are managed. Thus, although technology can be instrumental in bringing about effective language learning, it all depends on the abilities of the teacher to implement CALL in the classroom.

Critical position

The critical position regarding technology and language learning indicates that a learning environment is its own ecosystem and that any addition to the ecosystem—such as instructional technology—brings about a slightly or radically different learning environment. These subtle or obvious changes are often sociocultural; there may be shifts in power, identity, or communication patterns, or changes in relationships between individuals and groups. For example, a teacher may notice that when students hold a class meeting through an online discussion board (rather than face-to-face), there are changes in power, identity, and relationships. Quieter students may lead or even dominate the online discussion, and students with stronger reading/writing proficiency have the advantage in a text-based environment, in contrast to the advantage in face-to-face settings for those with stronger listening-speaking skills.