# Chapter 8

## Customizing and Sharing Language/Learning Contents

*Othman Ismail, Ph.D*

### Introduction

The traditional "Information via Chalk and Talk" method has been the teaching practice adopted by many educators in primary, secondary and tertiary classes in Malaysia. It is a method often described as 'uninteresting', 'monotonous' and teacher-centered method and has often been blamed for the students' lack of motivation to learn. The application of electronic teaching aids in the classroom has had mixed reactions especially for many teachers who do not view this intervention as effective teaching aids. Many studies conducted in the past decade have indicated that greater educational opportunities can effectively be achieved via computer technology; nevertheless, many educators choose not to utilize the technology as an instructional delivery media or choose to integrate technology in their classroom activities, (Bauer and Kenton, 2005). Other factors like lack of facilities in educational milieu, technical support, lack of knowledge and awareness of the benefits of the use of electronic aids affect the teachers' readiness in using the technology in the ordinary classrooms.

Technology 'awareness and readiness' among educators is one vital challenge that can influence the successful implementation of Customizable and Sharable Language/Learning Contents (CSLC) via a CD-based e-learning solution. Students will generally learn better when educators are more prepared to deliver their contents with the assistance of computer-mediated technology. In a language classroom, for instance, the implementation of CLSC not only requires language educators to be experts in their language areas, but also to be skillful and knowledgeable in designing, developing, and producing computer-based interactive multimedia e-learning materials. This implies that educators need to be trained in order to learn, relearn or acquire new knowledge and skills pertaining to the integration of technology in their classroom teaching. Retraining and reeducating educators may sound an ideal thing to do; but in reality, many are reluctant to be trained or to relearn new knowledge and technical skills.

Furthermore, Duhaney (2001, p.395) noted in the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) that "a majority of teacher preparation programs are falling far short of what needs to be done in meeting their responsibility for preparing tomorrow's teacher". This argument is supported by Aust, et. al (2005, p.171), as they

claimed that "with continuing advances in information technology and demands for more teachers…, there is a clear need for on-going innovations in integrating technology in teacher education". What this indicates is the need to seriously include technology courses in our teacher-education program. Our educators need to develop knowledge and skills in using technology tools to assist in the business of teaching and learning.

In addition, technology support from the school administration is also critical in ensuring that educators are motivated and encouraged to implement CSLC in their classrooms. The entire educational system – at ministry, district and educational levels, must all play a crucial role in ensuring the successful implementation of CSLC. Educational institutions must therefore provide the necessary infrastructure, adequate facilities and sufficient financial support for the maintenance and upgrading of technological equipment. What this implies is that, in order for the technology to be implemented in the classrooms, there must be careful planning, adequate financial support, as well as in-service training for teachers and educators. It is with careful and well-thought of preparation that interest in technology can be developed in the teachers and educators. Only then they would be motivated into integrating these computer-mediated learning facilities in their daily teaching activities. Therefore, future technological challenges and issues that may crop up would undoubtedly be dealt with by all teachers, educators and support staff.

At this point, the issue of readiness among those concerned in CSLC becomes questionable. To be ready for CSLC in the classroom requires readiness to be trained or retrained.

**Readiness in CSLC**

The purpose of this paper is, therefore, to look into the issue of educators' awareness and readiness in the implementation of Customizable and Sharable Language/Learning Contents (CSLC) in classroom activities. This paper will also discuss the direction and the importance of computer technology in today's classroom activities as reported in the literature. Furthermore, probable action plans and solutions will be suggested to overcome the issue of educators' lack of awareness and readiness in CSLC implementation.

Among the common reasons why educators feel that they are lacking in ICT are: limited enough hands-on experience in using technology, no computer-support person to assist, lack of time to learn new technology, and the feeling that they are too old to learn new tricks that technology has to offer. On the other hand, they have to keep up with the technology and to be, at least, one step ahead of their students.

**The Importance of Integrating Computer-Mediated Tools in Classroom Activities**

Students today are becoming more technologically savvy than many of us - teachers and lecturers. Whether we like it or not, technology is here to stay. Walters (2007) mentions that students learn more efficiently by using computer-mediated programs which provide 'context-based instruction' using simple, self-directed CD or web based environment accessible through graphics, animation, digital audio and video capabilities. In addition, by integrating technology in our classroom instruction, learning can be sequenced more systematically. Technology-based teaching typically follows a systematic 'content sequence and clustering' that facilitates an easy way for students to understand what is taught (Dick & Carey, 2005:186).

In addition, incorporating technology in language teaching and learning is relevant since technology has become "an everyday part of most students' lives" (Lacina, 2005). Computer mediated instruction is becoming an acceptable norm, a trend in the business of education. As argued by Manzo, et. al (2002), by integrating the technology in language learning, teachers and schools can expect a significant improvement in the students' higher order thinking skill, reading comprehension and writing ability.

Thus, by integrating technology into the teaching of language skills, we can ascertain that the delivery of the instructional contents be made more effective, efficient and interesting. This approach can increase student's comprehension and performance. The most logical thing to do, therefore, is to make the best of the technology that we have around us. Garnham and Kaleta (2002) discussed blended teaching using hybrid courses where "the best features of in-class teaching [are combined] with the best features of online [technology-mediated] learning" to encourage autonomous learning. A blended teaching approach combines a traditional face-to-face teaching with technology-based instruction, a combination that can maintain students' enthusiasm, competency and motivation towards acquiring new knowledge and skills that we have to offer.

**Benefits of Applying Technology in Teaching and Learning**

Computers have been used as teaching aids that can support the process of teaching and learning in the classrooms. Although computers can never replace good teachers, the tools can be capitalized to assist the business of schooling – teaching and learning (Ismail, 2006). For instance, computers can be used for computing tasks such as word processing, managing databases, designing graphics and preparing diagrams, charts, graphs as well as spreadsheets. Computer-Aided-Instruction (CAI) or Computer-Aided-Language-Learning (CALL) programs have been widely adapted as alternative teaching materials provided to students. Ismail (2001) claimed that educators, who are becoming

more aware of the impact of technology in education, have begun to integrate computer telecommunication technologies into their teaching.

## Teachers' Readiness towards Computer Technology

It is unmistakable that computer technology has paved its way into today's classroom environment. The technology is here to stay. More and more students are working with computers daily, at home and in school. With gadgets such as laptops, personal digital assistants, mobile phones and devices, WiFi facilities and so forth, our students are becoming more technologically equipped than those who choose to ignore the blessing of technology. Marc Prensky (2001), as cited by Lacina (2005), discusses the notion of students as "digital natives"; and, educators as "digital immigrants". This notion signals that while our students are progressing rapidly parallel with the constant and dynamic change in technology, some educators choose to down play the importance of technology in their everyday teaching activities.

These educators commonly argue that they are constantly confronted with overwhelming work and responsibilities that they could not catch up with the fast development in technology. Some educators also find excuses not to participate or improve their knowledge and skills in technology because of their personal preferences.

## Probable solutions for CSLC

The arguments – that educators are constantly confronted with overwhelming work and responsibilities; and that, they could not catch up with the fast development in technology – are valid and must be dealt with. Being an educator, the author of this paper can relate to common excuses such as not having enough hands-on experiences to use the technology, not having a computer-support person to assist, not having the time to learn new technology, and the feeling that they are too old to learn new technology bells and whistles.

Imagine if the burden of having to learn new technology can be minimized. Imagine if anybody can easily use e-learning tools without having to worry about how to write computer programming scripts, how to digitize audio or video clips, how to sequence multimedia elements, or how to design, develop and produce interactive multimedia contents. Imagine if we have a "Ready-to-Go" CD-based e-learning tool that can facilitate non-trained or partially trained educators in their teaching practices. Better still; imagine if we can constantly customize our own teaching contents, on the fly, using an existing "Ready-to-Go" e-learning tool with all its bells and whistles. Imagine no more!

**Creating a prototype of a CD-based e-learning template: The Designer(s) Role**

The author/designer of this paper has developed a prototype of a CD-based e-learning template that allows for customization of language contents.  An authoring tool called *Macromedia Director MX* is used as the development software for the prototype. This authoring tool allows the designer to create a template for any customizable interactive Multimedia Instructional Package (MIP).  Using other computer software for designing graphics, creating animations, digitizing audio and capturing video clips, the designer has also created a template that can be reused with different learning contents.

Compact Disk platform (CD) is used as a delivery media for this interactive MIP prototype. This media is chosen because it is cheap, convenient, easily accessible, and it contains larger disk capacity.  CDs can easily be shipped or mailed to remote schools where Internet facilities many not be available. Even though Internet is perhaps a better media that can reach distance users, in reality, many educators in Malaysia still do not have full access to the Internet facilities, especially in remote schools. In addition, due to the bandwidth limitation, many multimedia elements - such as audio and video clips, are difficult to be streamed via the Internet.

The interactive multimedia e-learning environment created in this prototype follows a systematic Instructional System Design (ISD) approach and development. The designer applies Gagne's Nine Events of Instruction (Kruse, 2005) in sequencing various learning activities which can maximize students' motivation and their learning experiences.  The Nine Events - 'Gain attention', 'Inform learners of objectives', 'Stimulate recall of prior learning', 'Present the content', 'Provide learning guidance', 'Elicit performance (practice)', 'Provide feedback', 'Assess performance' and 'Enhance retention and transfer', have been carefully included in the MIP. However, these Events will not be discussed in detail as it is beyond the scope of this paper.

The role of the designer(s) here is to come up with various e-learning templates which can be used with any learning contents that educators wish to customize. The process of creating these interactive multimedia templates is, indeed, time-consuming and requires computing knowledge, skill and techniques in Multimedia development as well as Instructional System Design (ISD) approach.

**Creating Sharable Language/Learning Contents: The Educator(s) Role**

The development of the above mentioned prototype takes into consideration that most language educators are either not trained or partially trained in computer technology. Hence, the basic computer skills of using a mouse, typing, copying, pasting, clicking, dragging and dropping are only required of the users. The end-users or the educators will not be burdened with creating the templates. A better analogy is perhaps to compare this prototype with a Power Point application. When using a Power Point program, a user does not have to worry how the programming engine drives the Power Point program. He does not need to write programming scripts, digitize audio or video clips, create graphics or text effects, produce animations and so forth. Most of these features are available via a pull-down menu where the user can either click and choose or drag and drop.

Creating a sharable e-learning environment with templates allows language educators to produce their learning contents almost immediately. They can change, modify, upgrade, improve, delete, add and do anything to ensure that their learning contents are relevant to their students and the immediate teaching. Language educators should not be burdened with the responsibility of creating these templates. Their responsibility, however, is to ensure that the teaching contents are accurate, free from copyright infringement, and up-to-date. These contents, created by the educators, can then be saved in sharable databases where the materials can later be retrieved and used by other language educators.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the issue of educators' readiness to embark and integrate technology in the classroom activities can be minimized, if not overcome. What needs to be strategized is to create an environment conducive for any technology assimilation. By creating an e-learning milieu that allows for customizable and sharable language/learning contents, many traditional educators may consider adapting the blended teaching and learning approach in their classroom. By creating a "Ready-to-Go" CD-Based e-learning templates, perhaps remote educators - who do not have the privilege of enjoying the Internet facilities, can still benefit from using dynamic computer-mediated learning tools.

With the notion of 'Sharable' contents, the community of educators can benefit from each other by sharing their teaching and learning materials. Building and improving on existing knowledge can also be made easier when we educators seriously believe in the sharing of resources. After all, why reinvent the 'wheel' when we can all work towards improving it. Hence, the idea of sharable language/learning contents via SCORM compliance is the direction that many educators should agree upon and come to terms. In the effort of "Texturing English for New World Realities", the move to creating a customizable CD-Based e-learning environment should seriously be explored and capitalized.

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