Chapter 1

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ABSTRACT
Cultural awareness and intercultural understanding are crucial parts of learning a new language. However, not everyone has the chance to have face-to-face interaction with the people from diverse cultures. Computer-mediated technologies are favorable tools that can help learners to engage in intercultural communications. This chapter aims at intercultural learning through technology-enhanced language learning. Five main themes have emerged as the result of literature review alongside a report on major research descriptive. The literature revealed that there are 1) positive attitudes toward using digital tools in intercultural language learning, 2) the development of critical cultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence, 3) opportunities for improving all aspects of language learning. However, 4) textbooks are still the predominant learning resource, and 5) a necessity is felt for special technical skills and competencies. This study is helpful to consider the existing challenges and find new directions for future investigations.

INTRODUCTION
Over the past few decades various range of technologies have been designed for language learning classes all over the world. Currently, digital tools have turned to a feature of the world education (Bates, 2005), and language acquisition (Salabery, 2001). In the field of foreign language learning and teaching, technology provides students and teachers with a great deal of learning opportunities, such as a host of...
authentic materials in the target language and various ways of interaction across geographic boundaries (O’Dowd, 2007). In language learning curriculum, teachers and learners apply various tools of technology (including computer, tablet, mobile, internet, weblog, website, Facebook, etc.) which can facilitate language learning process. Furthermore, the life of present generation of students has integrated into technology. As a matter of fact, current generation of learners are known as “digital natives” (Prensky, 2007) or “net generation” (Oblinger, 2003) which means that technology plays an outstanding role in their lives. On the other hand, technologies bring the people of various nations closer together and make the globalization faster and easier.

Moreover, the advent of technology opens the door to intercultural contact with native speakers. Thus, in the field of language learning, technology can play significant roles. Additionally, foreign language learners need to become an intercultural mediators who are able to handle multiple and complicated identities; and this can be possible through linguistic ability as a mediation between different cultures (Byram, Gribkovo & Starkey; 2002). Moreover, the knowledge of culture is crucial to success in learning a foreign language. A poor cultural learning environment leads to less understanding of the target culture which in turn increases communication barriers between learners and native speakers of the target language. Brown (2007) described the interrelation of language and culture indicating that “one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture, the acquisition of a second language, except for specialized, instrumental acquisition […] is also the acquisition of a second culture” (p. 189-190). Thus, learning a cultural knowledge is significant among EFL learners which are considered as the first step toward effective cross-cultural communication. Language and culture are the most important parts of successful communication and they cannot operate without each other (Valdes, 1986). However, according to Lafayette (1988), teachers would rather spend the greatest amount of time and effort on teaching grammatical and lexical components than on teaching culture. On the other hand, Abrams (2002) asserted that one of the teachers’ duties is to aid their students to recognize their own complex cultural microcosms and to offer learners opportunities to develop their skills to investigate cultural complexity and to promote cultural curiosity. According to various researches, the classroom activities will not help the students learn to use second language unless they are contextualized and attached to real life issues, concerns, and activities (e.g., Firth & Wagner, 1997; Hall, 1997; Van Lier, 2000). Since culture has gained a more central role in language education, learners are known as “cultural mediators, intercultural speakers, or border-crosser” (Liaw & Bunn-Le, 2010).

Furthermore, the rise of technology has enable learners to apply various tools in intercultural exchanges in real life communication. Also, teachers use digital tools in their classes to help their students communicate with other students who have diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, easy access to technology (e.g. Facebook, Skype, internet, etc.) has changed the nature of language study to the point that today students experience a fundamentally different environment of language classes. As Eaton (2010) indicated today’s language classrooms have been changed vastly. In 21st century, the focus of language classes have changed from learning grammar, memorization, and learning from rote to applying language and cultural knowledge through connecting to others around the globe and this is facilitated by technology.

In recent years, significant investigations have been carried out to present infrastructures, content, and resources related to different technologies such as mobile, website, weblog, internet, video, and the like (e.g. Blez, 2002; Blez & Thorne, 2006; O’Dowd, 2003; Prensky, 2007; Salabery, 2001, etc.). They also explore technology integration into language learning environment and cross-cultural circumstances. However, they treated the various tools of technology separately. In the field of foreign language, most
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