

Learning English through Technology: A New Pedagogical Perspective for Students at the University of Bejaia

Sonia IMERZOUKENE

Department of English, University of Bejaia

sonia.imerzoukene@univ-bejaia.dz

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Abstract:

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the value of incorporating new technologies and to showcase how students at Bejaia University perceive the use of these tools to learn English. Moreover, it seeks to explore teachers' use and the administration's involvement in the integration of such teaching/learning device. The research method relied on is a questionnaire consisting of 23 questions addressed to 50 English students selected randomly from different learning levels. The findings demonstrate how crucial it is for students to use technology both in their personal lives and academically. Yet, students claim that there are not enough resources and that the majority of teachers do not use technology; whereas the administration focuses on the importance to the use technology in the classroom but it does not provide needed and accessible materials.

Keywords:

Technology, ELT, learners of English, views, perceptions

1. INTRODUCTION

At the present time, technological development is the leading power of the world. Therefore, technology has become an integral part of any individual's life and education of no exception. As infinite mass of information are being created, accessed, transmitted and received by electronic means; technology has increased contact and teamwork opportunities as well. For this reason, it is necessary for students from different academic backgrounds and different age categories to master it both as a tool and a means. Technology has become a tool, a technique to achieve the goals that have been unattainable for many years. As a means, it provides a wide range of data needed for both easy understanding and self-development of cognitive abilities.

The new generations follow the world's progression and are attracted by what is new and concrete. Hence, integrating new technologies in the domain of learning foreign languages, education in general, seems to be adequate since the new educational system takes into consideration learners' needs and interests.

Technology, through its different manifestations, is integrated in many educational institutions as a teaching and learning procedure that makes learners feel at ease and learn in an attractive way. Opportunities offered via new educational technologies are inevitably coupled with the learners' autonomy, self-esteem and motivation, hence better learning. As students' needs and interests are taken into account by the implementation of the new reform in Algeria, their learning process and necessary materials for its success are the centre. Webster and Murphy¹ argue that "at present, we are in an era where vast amounts of information are being accessed and transmitted electronically. This implies to all aspects of modern life, education and work". For that reason, technology plays a crucial role in the

¹ Webster and Murphy (cited in Kwan R, Fox R, Chan FT, Tsang P. (2008). Enhancing Learning through Technology: Research on Emerging Technologies and Pedagogies. World Scientific Publishing co. Pte. Ltd. Singapore) (p. 2)

language learning process as it enables “...learners to get a great control over their own learning” (ibid). Besides, a diversity of learning options provides students with opportunities helping them receive learning through different methods which best sustain their needs, interests and personal circumstances and conditions.

The present work explores the importance of integrating new technologies as a technique for teaching English at Bejaia University. It mainly seeks to highlight students’ perceptions and attitudes on the use of new technologies to learn English at Bejaia university as these latter enjoys a central place in one’s personal life. The COVID-19 period has accelerated the integration and the use of various technologies in order to insure the access to teachers’ courses and content and the avoidance of mass contaminations. The post-COVID period has kept many of the principles and applications of the previous phase, among which the use of technology for both teaching and learning.

2. Issue

University is the educational course in which learners make more research and need different tools to learn. Technology plays a central role as an efficient learning material which leads students to develop different and required strategies. This means is adopted in different subjects including English language learning. Therefore, the present work tries to respond the following questions from the students’ points of view:

- How do English learners perceive the use of this tool in their learning process?
- Do teachers adopt it in the classroom?
- And what is the role of the administration in this issue?

3. Review of the Literature

Erben et al² argue that “a potted history of educational technology would reveal that teaching in the 1980s meant being at the cusp of a quiet revolution”. Since the 1950’s, computer and other technologies have

² Erben T, Ban R, Castaneda M. (2009). *Teaching English Language Learners through Technology*. Taylor & Francis. Routledge. New york and London (p.1)

replaced the old methods of communicating, working and studying. The technological innovation, nowadays, is undoubtedly the most powerful resource of growth in every part and field of the globe. Information-Communication Technology (ICT) is a general concept which encompasses all communication devices of the modern society and their usage. It includes a variety of different computer, information and communication devices (hardware), applications (software), networks (internet), and services. These devices tend to motivate people of different generations including learners at different school levels.

Schools are responding to political, economic, social and technological pressures to be more responsive to students' needs and more concerned about how well students are prepared to assume future societal roles. Technological means assume the success of these expectations. Webster and Murphy³ argue that “there is rapidly increasing use of social networking tools, such as blogs, Facebook, MySpace among learners”, so why not integrating them for learning; for two intentions, on the one hand to motivate learners and on the other hand to lead them to learn in their environment. They add that “the challenges to learning with technology include being in an information rich age, with the associated open source software developments, social networking tools, mobile devices and increasingly large and complex management systems”⁴. Franklin adds that “within the educational institutions that promote high-status forms of knowledge and certify the scientists, journalists, and other experts who promote consumer-oriented technological culture, the pervasive influence of computers has contributed to the acceptance of data as the basis of thought”⁵.

³ Webster and Murphy ((cited in Kwan R, Fox R, Chan FT, Tsang P. (2008). Enhancing Learning through Technology: Research on Emerging Technologies and Pedagogies. World Scientific Publishing co. Pte. Ltd. Singapore) (p. 3)

⁴ Webster and Murphy ((cited in Kwan R, Fox R, Chan FT, Tsang P. (2008). Enhancing Learning through Technology: Research on Emerging Technologies and Pedagogies. World Scientific Publishing co. Pte. Ltd. Singapore) (p. 2)

⁵ Franklin (1999, p. 11 cited in Chapelle, CA. (2003). English Language Learning and Technology.

Moreover, “different forms of technology are suited to the enhancement of different aspects of student learning experiences”⁶ (Webster and Murphy). ICT can be used for presenting and representing different materials in different shapes as charts, pictures, texts, as it can be used for communication. It also provides lessons on different language aspects as it helps their practice; this helps learners to learn according to their individual pace. This results mainly in learners constructing their own knowledge, their personal perceptions on the world and what surrounds it. Chapelle⁷ claims that “many sites for communication among English learners through computer-mediated communication on the Internet offer opportunities for conversation with other English speakers”. This means that even though our learners do not have the opportunity to be taught by native teachers, to visit English countries and converse with the natives as the most efficient way to master the communicative competence, they can manage to chat in special rooms on the net with these natives.

As ICT is believed to enhance the constructivist theory of learning, it is now necessary to include it as a teaching and reinforcing tool for language learning at different levels. University is definitely the level in which technology is most needed because of different researches and the mass of work required from students. Therefore, it should assist the teaching and learning processes with different technological materials. However, Webster and Murphy⁸ state that “typically, universities ... still lack a structured approach to collaborative innovation, development and implementation of educational technologies”

In the article entitled “the Roles of Information Communication

John Benjamins Publishing Company. Philadelphia (p. 7)

⁶ (Webster and Murphy (cited (cited in Kwan R, Fox R, Chan FT, Tsang P. (2008). Enhancing Learning through Technology: Research on Emerging Technologies and Pedagogies. World Scientific Publishing co. Pte. Ltd. Singapore) (p. 10)

⁷ Chapelle 1. Chapelle, CA. (2003). English Language Learning and Technology. John Benjamins Publishing Company. Philadelphia (p.35)

⁸ Webster and Murphy (cited in (cited in Kwan R, Fox R, Chan FT, Tsang P. (2008). Enhancing Learning through Technology: Research on Emerging Technologies and Pedagogies. World Scientific Publishing co. Pte. Ltd. Singapore) (pp.1, 2).

Technologies in Education, Review Article with Emphasis to the Computer and Internet”, FissehaMikre⁹ claims that “ICTs are exerting impacts on pedagogical approaches in the classrooms. Their contribution to changes in teaching practices, school innovation, and community services is considerable”. These technologies have a positive impact on our children. However, the importance given to this becoming vital tool differs from institution to another, from generation to another and from the members of the same generation. As university is an educational level which requires high level skills and strategies, it is important to include any tool leading to the well-appliance of knowledge, hence, our motivation in this research.

The COVID-19 period has obliged institutions from different school levels and contexts to adopt technologies and adapt to the living situation. The global COVID-19 pandemic has affected many facets of life, most notably the educational system, and has spread throughout the globe. To satisfy student expectations, teacher education requirements, and operational requirements for universities and schools, teachers must be ready for education necessities, decisions, choices, and adaptations¹⁰. In this context, researchers claim that in response to the COVID-19 emergency, teachers were compelled to make a hasty switch from the typical in-person teaching configuration in physically close space to alternative teaching approaches¹¹.

As schools closed down, “governments are taking action to support learners to continue their education remotely”¹². To cope with the

⁹ FissehaMikre. (nd) The Roles of Information Communication Technologies in Education, Review Article with Emphasis to the Computer and Internet, p4)

¹⁰ Rahayu, S., Rahmadani, E., Syafitr, E., Prasetyoningsih, L.S.A., Ubaidillah, & Tavakoli, M. 2022. Teaching with Technology during COVID-19 Pandemic: An Interview Study with Teachers in Indonesia.

¹¹ Sum, M. & Oancea, A. 2022. The use of technology in higher education teaching by academics during the COVID 19 emergency remote teaching period: a systematic review. International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education

¹² David, R., Pellili, A., Jordan, K. & Phillips, T. 2020. Education during the COVIC-19 Crisis: Opportunities and Constraints of Using EdTech in Low-Income Countries. University of Oxford (p. 2)

educational crisis, most of them had recourse to technology. Rahayu et al¹³ state that “because of this pandemic, many educators have been forced to teach online classes, necessitating opportunities to reshape education, teacher education, and educational institutions”.

4. Research Methodology:

The sample of my case study is based on 50 English students selected randomly from different learning levels (1LMD, 2LMD, 3LMD, Master I, Master II) at the university of Bejaia. Fifty is the number of students who gave me back the questionnaire. I handed it for more than 150 students but unfortunately, most of Bejaia students show certain reluctance in expressing their points of view regarding their teachers and the administration.

The research method I relied on is a questionnaire consisting of 23 questions. This aims at highlighting the importance given to technology by learners, by teachers and by the institution itself from the students' point of view. These questions treat the importance of (Information Communication Technology) ICT, its use in the classroom and its availability. The first question aims to know the level of study of the students as general information. The second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth questions deal with the learners' perceptions of ICT and its use when learning. The seventh, eighth, ninth and tenth questions deal with the use if ICT by teachers in the classroom. Questions 11 and 12 ask students about the administration and its interest in ICTs. From question 13 to 15, students are asked whether, they learn about ICT in the classroom, whether they communicate through internet and their preferences concerning the way of learning. The following seven questions deal with the students' perceptions for learning during and after the COVID-19 crisis.

The last question is free and asks learners to add any comments on the use of technology at school.

5. Results and Discussion

¹³ Rahayu, S., Rahmadani, E., Syafitr, E., Prasetyoningsih, L.S.A., Ubaidillah, & Tavakoli, M. 2022. Teaching with Technology during COVID-19 Pandemic: An Interview Study with Teachers in Indonesia. (p. 1)

The results show that for learners, the use of technology is very important in their lives as well as in their studies. They state that nowadays cannot work without technology. They feel “happy”, “self-confident and learn better with the use of a tool that highly motivates them”. The claim of most students is that “life without technology is impossible, is not life at all”; “technology is the source of our motivation and inspiration”.

The first question asks students about their level of study. This aims to know whether students of different levels know and use ICTs in their learning. The question 2 asks learners whether they know what ICT means or not. All students state “yes”, which means that they are familiar with the new developments. Question 3 addresses the use of ICTs by the learners in their daily life. All of them (100%) respond that they use different technologies as I-phones, internet and its different options, televisions, CDs.... Question 4 asks learners whether they use these technologies for learning English or not. 80% of the students answer with “yes” claiming that “it’s something obvious” and that “technology offers many good things for learning as dictionaries, communicating with natives...”. While 20% of learners answer with “no” arguing that they do not have access to internet at home and that at school there is no technological material which is really adopted. They affirm that the crisis made their learning go down because of the lack of means mainly for those living in the mountains.

Question 5 aims at highlighting learners’ opinions on learning with different technologies. All the learners asked (100%) respond that technology offers many advantages, among which time saving is crucial. They argue that “this era is full of technology, and if we do not master its use, we no longer belong to this society”. The question 6 aims at knowing the opinions of the learners on learning without technology. All of the learners (100%) respond that “it would be boring and it is because we learn many modules without it”. They sustain that “unfortunately, we will never reach the other societies because we are not fully aware of the importance of technology, and Algeria does not provide the necessary materials to do so”.

The students show a positive view on the use of technology in their

learning process. They really want to be motivated, challenged and attracted by what they learn, and technology is argued to be an efficient tool to achieve this objective. Webster and Murphy¹⁴ argue that “strategic use of new educational technologies can enhance learning and teaching”. They add that “opportunities presented via new educational technologies are inevitably coupled with challenges” (p.2).

On the other side, students maintain that most teachers do not use technology and there are not enough means. They believe that after the pandemic, nearly everything has become as it was before. They argue that “these teachers give us courses in a traditional way: explaining, dictating or giving handouts”, “we no more need this because we can do it alone”, “we need challenging things, participating in doing the lessons”, “technology is the best way to learn anything about any subject”.

Question 7 asks learners about their teachers’ use of technology in the classroom. Most students (70%) respond with “no”. They state that “the teachers do not try to use any technology; it’s easy for them to dictate, explain or read the handouts”. They add that “though the LMD (licence, master, and doctorate studies) claims the use of innovative strategies, our teachers still teach us with the old way which does no more fit our needs and interests”. Only 30% of the learners asked respond with “yes” and maintain that their teachers use some kinds of technologies as “data show” and CDs. Question 8 is asked for those who answered “yes” for the previous question. It aims at knowing in which modules, their teachers do use these technologies. They list “data show” as used for lectures and CDs for listening sessions when laboratories are available. They also assert that the e-learning platform is available for them and that some teachers still post courses and activities.

Question 9 asks students whether their teachers encourage them to use ICT materials for learning English, though outside classroom, or not. 80% of the answers are “yes”. Learners argue that “teachers encourage us to

¹⁴ Webster and Murphy (cited in Kwan R, Fox R, Chan FT, Tsang P. (2008). Enhancing Learning through Technology: Research on Emerging Technologies and Pedagogies. World Scientific Publishing co. Pte. Ltd. Singapore) (p. 1)

use ICT materials at least at home”, and “since at university, the use of technology is limited, we had better to work with it at home”. Question 10 aims to know the feelings of students towards the use of technology in class. 90% of the students answer “yes” and argue that they feel “happy, motivated, and highly interested, self-confident and learn better with the use of a tool that highly motivates them” when their teachers use technologies. They add that they attend more the lectures with “data show” than without and ‘adore’ listening sessions because they “listen to real English”. There are some teachers who use the data show for lectures, others use CDs for listening sessions but most of the time the labs are either unavailable or computers do not work.

Question 11 is related to the administration awareness of the importance of adopting ICTs as a means for English language teaching and learning. All students affirm that the administration “claims the use of ICT materials, but it doesn’t provide these materials”. Consequently, the administration gives importance to the use of technology in the classroom but it does not provide needed and accessible materials to do so. As a teacher at the university of Bejaia, I do use technology only when it is available though I would like to do it more because I admit that my students prefer working with and through technology.

Question 12 is related to the way the administration gives importance to ICTs. The students assert that they have modules mainly called ICT, computer-assisted translation. However, there is no practice, all what they learn is theoretical. These modules are allocated as follows: ICT module for 2LMD (workshops) and computer-assisted translation for Master I. Concerning 3LMD and Master II students, they have no module related to technology though they strongly need it for their research.

Question 13, “do you communicate through internet with: friends, family, peers or teachers”, aims to know for which purposes do English students use internet. Most students answer that they communicate (chat through Skype, Facebook, blogs...) with their family, friends and peers but not with teachers. However, 30% claim that they discuss with four teachers through Facebook. Only Master II and Master 1 students answer “yes” to

question 14 which asks: “do you get feedback from teachers through internet. The type of feedback is correction of their research work. However, one of the Master I students argue that she asks questions about her lessons to her teacher who answers and makes things clear for her. Most of the students add that they would really like to communicate with their teachers through internet, because first of all they like internet and second of all it is “an easy time-saving tool”.

Question 15 asks learners about their preferences in learning. Most of students (95.2%) respond that they prefer learning with a device attracting them. They state that “if our teachers use any type of technology as blogs, word processing... it will be a pleasure for us to learn”. One student claims that “what really keeps me following my studies is the fact that I do love English. Where is development, or technology or even globalisation, the lack of means and opportunities kill our creativity”? This evidently shows the positive perceptions towards technology from the part of the learners. In this sense, students require the use of technology in class. However, 4.8% of the students sustain that the best way to learn is through reading books and not through internet or any other technology. They claim that “from books you can get real knowledge”. This is related to learners’ preferences.

Questions 16, 17, and 18 ask students about the pandemic times and the ways they have adopted to carry on their studies. All of the respondents claim that they continued the current year and the years after online and that teachers were posting their courses on the e-learning platform of the university. The tests and exams are also mostly done on the platform. They however admit that it was not an easy task because of many constraints. Hence, in addition to familiar contaminations, caring and fear; students faced problems of connection and lack of technological means. Additionally, they struggled to understand their courses. Among the faced intricacies, students mention: misunderstanding and lack of feedback: stress; anxiety and isolation from classmates and teachers. These aspects were reported by many researchers (Maphosa, 2021; Curelaru, Curelaru & Cristea, 2022; kang & Duong (nd); Ghounane, 2022) since the entire globe was living the same social, health, economic and educational restrictions.

This is not to neglect the fact that online learning and technology were helpful and supportive amidst the closure phase. ICTs have contributed to the progress of students' studies despite the total absence of direct teaching/learning classrooms. In fact, the world was under constant pressure all the time as every aspect was affected. Henceforth, resorting to online teaching, learning and evaluation was amongst the practical decisions taken by different institutions. The transition from traditional face-to-face instruction to online instruction was a difficult step that constrained Algerian universities in an arena where many international ones are already settled. This step put even the Algerian qualifications and certificates at an international sight and rank.

Questions 19, 20, 21 and 22 treat the post-pandemic learning situation. The respondents sustain that they still have some courses online though most of their learning takes place at the university (face-to-face). They affirm that coming back to class and being close to their teachers is a reviving event for all what they have endured. When asked them about their preferences about the type of teaching (online or face-to-face), the answers state that the issue is difficult because both types of teaching have advantages and disadvantages at the same time. So, they believe that adopting both online and direct teaching would maximise the chances for better learning as it would provide better opportunities for both learning/teaching and research. One of the students claims that "I want to learn in hybrid way, sometimes at university with the presence of the teacher, and sometimes at home with my computer". Another one says: "today, we cannot learn only in class, because technology helps us to learn more things and better". Another student states "the pandemic crisis has brought at least one positive point; it pushed our university to reconsider the place of technology in our learning". According, relying on ICT tools as a supporting means would just bring positive results.

The last question asks students to add any comments on the use of ICT materials in the classroom. Nearly all learners agree on the same thing: "technology is useful, practical and motivating in the classroom". As they claim that "life without technology is impossible, is not life at all";

“technology is the source of our motivation and inspiration”. One of the students asserts that “life of today knows a digital progress, so as students we need to touch this progress, to be updating to what is new; this is the only way to integrate the world”. Another student states that “I can’t and I don’t want to imagine my life without my I-phone, or my computer, or internet, it’s just impossible”.

The claims of the students are clear; they want and need to adopt ICT tools in their learning process. Teachers should be more sensitive to their students’ needs and interests. Concerning administration, it promotes the use of ICTs but it does not provide enough means to get to the bottom of these issues. All of them should work together to achieve the objectives of today’s innovations. Reconsidering the potential that ICTs could bring to the development of our students’ critical and creative skills is crucial. Of course, teachers are subject to the same constraints and benefits.

6. CONCLUSION

Currently, the shift to and development of ICTs are gaining more and more value in different societies. Fundamental reforms are required in every field abandoning traditional beliefs and ways. This leads to creativity and innovation. Therefore, nowadays time knows the end of an era and the beginning of another which is based on technology as its central source of improvement. This has been accentuated with the pandemic crisis that has changed every aspect of our lives. As humans are endowed with a great ability of adaptation to any situation, they have adjusted their lives so as to ensure living. In fact, people witness a great shift in their living styles; as a result of changes in ideology, society and politics but mainly in technology. In the end, this promising era collapsed into the immense use of ICTs everywhere at any time.

Technology is widely used and can be adapted for a variety of subjects and age groups. The younger groups keep up with global development and are drawn to fresh, tangible things. As a result, it would seem appropriate to incorporate new technologies into the instruction and learning of foreign languages given that modern educational institutions take their students’ needs and interests into account. Hence, it is our task as teachers to redirect our teaching in a way that leads students use these technologies in their

learning in general and in their English language learning in particular. However, while technology can play a supporting and enhancing role in language learning, the success of any technological tool depends on the knowledge and proficiency of the language teacher who manages to facilitate the language learning environment.

For this reason, the university of Bejaia, and all Algerian universities, are undertaking a teacher training programme to help teachers master the use of ICTs in class. The training starts this year, 2023, and, for now, it concerns teachers of the transversal units that should be taught in a hybrid way. In the future, it surely would encompass all teachers taking in charge different modules.

6.1. Implications

As the study shows the positive attitudes of the students on the use of technology in the classroom to learn English, some implications can be drawn:

- Teachers have the responsibility to help and guide learners, therefore they have to manage and adjust their teaching so as to use ICTs in the classroom, on the one hand to motivate learners and get better results, on the other hand, to facilitate their teaching processes.

- The administration should provide the materials necessary to the motivation and satisfaction of the needs of the learners.

- As the new reform aims at globalisation, the ministry of higher education should equip our universities with required tools to achieve this objective.

- The different modules studied by English learners at Bejaia need different but accessible materials. We can use visual materials (as movies, documentaries) for the modules of civilization and literature, because learners need to see, to be in contact with the accurate use of the English language and to gain access to the target culture, since this latter is a pivotal element in language teaching and learning. Modules like “quantitative data analysis” and “qualitative data analysis” need some scientific data, illustrations, therefore the use of computers and maybe internet is crucial. Modules like didactics need illustrations about real teaching to be analysed

and not learn systematically the principles underlying each teaching approach or method. The writing module requires the use of computer means as “word processing, blogging, Facebook, what’s up and messenger conversations”. Finally, all modules require research and this latter is available in books or on internet and learners prefer much more surfing on the net, hence we, as their tutors, have to provide them with essential tools.

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