

The Importance of ICT in EFL

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Abstract

Living in an information-based world, we can no longer separate teaching from Information Communication Technologies (ICTs). Even if some teachers tend to be reluctant in their ignorance of the fact, students seem so ardent and more inclined to use them whenever granted an opportunity. In fact, even when banned from schools, we still hear the bird-singing phones. Even though experts keep warning us about media-addiction, parents still find it difficult and hard to make their children abstain from being enslaved to those magical screens. The last resort then is to find how to orient this generation so as to appropriately use those technology tools. Technology tools facilitate the development of some competencies. Some learners proved to be good interviewers, or excellent photographers, others efficient actors who perfectly used mobile phones in acting out their plays. Owing to that, I understood that being assigned real roles in authentic contexts helped students better use their English. Technology thus was just a tool that facilitated their tasks and improved their performance.

1. Introduction

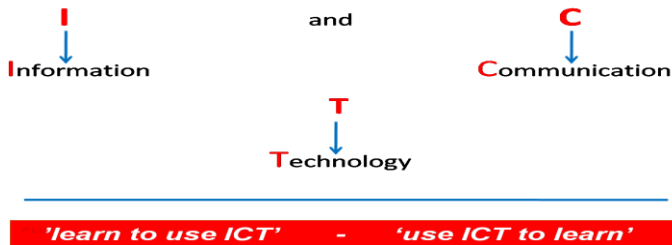
Educational systems around the world are under increasing pressure to use the new information and communication technologies (ICTs) which include radio and television, as well as newer digital technologies to teach students the knowledge and skills they need in the 21stC. The teaching profession is evolving from an emphasis on teacher-centered, lecture-based instruction to student -centered and interactive learning environments. Since the implementation of the competency-based approach in the secondary education some 5 years ago, we have witnessed a dramatic change in our educational system. The Ministry of Education recognizes that ICTs have a vital role

to play in improving the quality of education. So, Algeria's policies for ICT use in education are the center of the nation's efforts for innovation in education. At the initial stage of ICT introduction in education, Algeria mainly focused on computer use; the focus at the beginning of the reform was providing the physical infrastructure of ICT use and hiring ICT teachers.



An information society is one that makes the best possible use of ICTs. Martin (1995) supports this view by describing it as a society in which the quality of life, as well as prospects for social change and economic development, depend increasingly upon information and its exploitation. In such a society, living standards, patterns of work and leisure, the education system, and market place are all influenced by advances in information and knowledge. This is evidenced by an increasing array of information-intensive products and services.

2. What is ICT?





1st year pupils in SBA Technicum A literary stream

3. The Video and the Teacher

We cannot leave the topic of the video without mentioning the invaluable contribution that it can make to teacher development. Most teachers have an idea of how effective certain mannerisms and techniques can be. We judge the success of what we do not only on the student's ***gradual acquisition*** of the language, but also on their minute-by-minute reactions to how we behave in class, and on the perceptions this gives us of how well and appropriately we are teaching. Watching a film of a lesson we have taught, however, may give us different perceptions altogether, since it offers us the opportunity To see our teaching as the others see it.

Many teachers are alarmed at seeing themselves on video, just as many people dislike their videos on audiotape. It is very easy

to perceive one's own fault in such a situation: favorite catchphrases sound hackneyed and repetitive, rapport seems over-strained or over-intimate and the voice is too dramatic or too boring. But viewers should treat themselves charitably. The point of watching ourselves teach is not to engage in an orgy of self-criticism, but to evaluate our actions in terms of their effectiveness. Which bits of the lesson clearly work? How could we change the way we do this exercise so that the next time it is more engaging, less confusing, more efficient?

One major caveat about classroom videoing is that the camera does not actually tell the truth. If the lens is focused on the teacher it automatically makes them the main player in the scene even if what they are actually doing is just listening to students. This is why it is good idea for the camera to be pointed as much at the students as at the teacher. This means that the teacher can see the effect of what she does. Nor can a vision and sound medium entirely capture the atmosphere of a lesson. The classroom on the video screen is only a partial version of the real thing.

ICT removes problems concerning space and time

The students can communicate anywhere, any time. They can also contact the teacher easily. ICT provides them with a wide range of practical ideas, samples from current teaching materials. The students can collect and exchange information.

ICT gives access to knowledge

ICT will provide learners of foreign languages autonomy. They'll learn communicative skills through videos. In principles, the students can draw on a global pool of knowledge. Through the experience I had in Psycho-pedagogy sessions at Moulay Tahar University with 4th Year students. ICT helped my learners to assimilate the lecture about metacognition strategies and teaching styles through videos.

ICT makes saving-and sharing- knowledge easier

The students can individually and/or together create records of notes and presentations (portfolio) and thus register their progress and use it for exams. They are also trained for future participation in global research communities.

Computer hardware becomes available in an increasing number of schools around the country, more attention needs to be given to the capacity building of the key transformers in the process, namely, teachers. That's why the most important agent for the implementation of ICT in education is the teacher. Therefore, An ICT training program both for teachers and supervisors is needed. This training program should focus on the 'I' and 'C' of ICT rather than concentrating on the traditional 'T' for technology. The teachers will not only *'learn to use ICT'*, but – more importantly- *'use ICT to learn'*. In our case-study, basic skills training initiatives were organized at the beginning of the reform. In this computer hardware training which was delivered by two committed teachers, teacher-trainees learned basic skills, use of power point and presentation design. The aim, in fact, was computer literacy.

To increase the likelihood of successful initial computer training we considered teachers' anxiety about the change, learning and computer. Initial sessions in many institutions in Algeria aimed to build 'computer comfort', not high-level skills. Teachers were asked to learn by doing, not to learn by listening. We wanted to make them feel that they have to change otherwise they will be left behind. Teachers' concerns around technology and their willingness to use it depend upon a number of factors

Complexity

A teacher may feel more anxious about a computer, which is a complex tool, versus a radio for example.

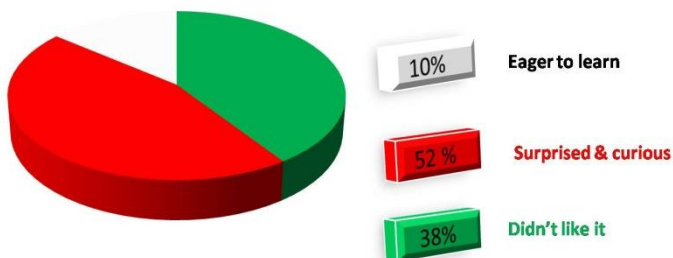
Support: teacher's ability to implement an innovation depends upon the amount of available support.

Expectations

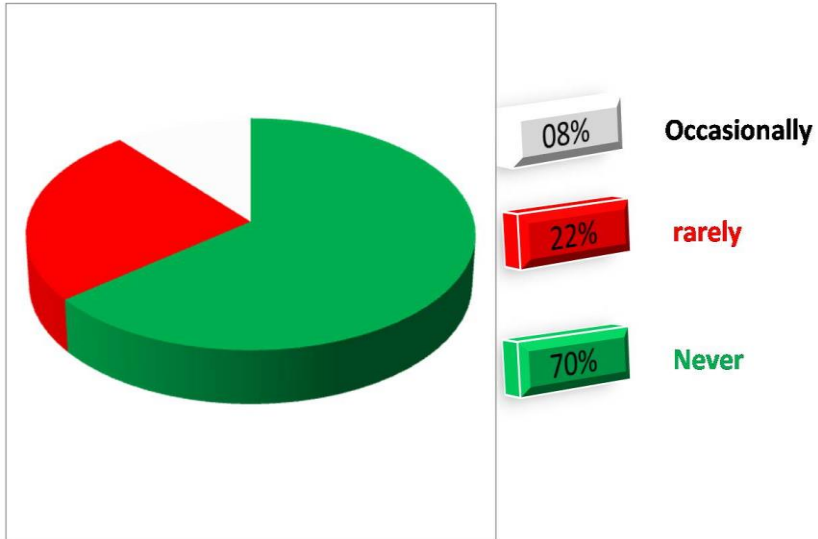
The more dramatic the expected change, and the more intense the teacher's concerns, the more help teachers will need. If ICT is kept simple, expectations are modest and ongoing support is provided, teachers are more likely to implement innovation at the school level.



Question1: How was your first reaction to the use of ICT in teacher training?



Question2 : Have you already used ICT in classroom teaching?



Pie Chart: The use of ICT in classroom teaching

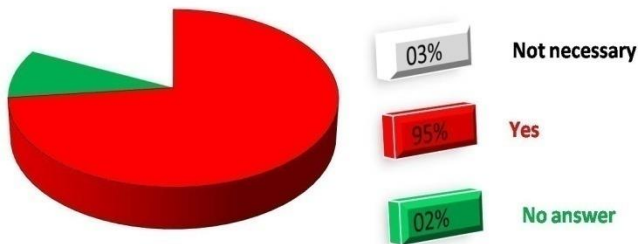
Question3: Do you find problems in using ICT equipment in your teaching situations?

The 75% and 15% of the respondents noted that it is due to

- Non-availability of ICT equipment
- Vast physical wastage: hardware broken or ineffective
- High educational wastage: insufficient irrelevant contents

The process of change is long. In creating and conducting professional development programs for teachers, it is important to be able to identify and understand change 'types' In order to set realistic goals for TPD. The conclusion I can draw after 5 years of the educational reform is that there are different kinds

of teacher attitudes towards ICT:



Teacher's attitudes towards ICT

The conclusion is that it is high time to plan ICT teacher training program. Most of the ICT training **initiatives**, programs which focus on computer literacy and don't enable teachers to integrate ICTs into day-to-day classroom teaching. the computer and the Internet is a relatively simple task, but mastering ICT use as an effective tool to improve teaching and learning is certainly not. I do believe that the quality of teachers is known to be a key predictor of student learning. Therefore teacher training is crucial. ICT can become a tool that on the one hand facilitates teacher training and on the other hand helps them to take full advantage of the potential of technology to enhance student learning. 'Teacher. ICT training program' will be reinforced to improve the professionalism of teachers, and enhance the quality of education. So, to maximize the benefits of training, training institutions, training centers and supervisors should include ICT training in their plan. To be more effective, we have to build partnerships with local and foreign institutions like MEPI to promote ICT use in education. Involving external partnership can enrich national reforms through financial and expert assistance.

4. Benefits of ICTs in education

It is all the more important to understand teachers' ICT skills and knowledge needs, to discover their priorities for future development and to establish what will encourage them to adopt ICT appropriately in their professional lives as classroom **practitioners**, as planners and managers and as learners. An investigation of the ICT skills and knowledge needs of teachers working low use of ICT and a number of key issues which have implications for teacher training and development.

- Global access to knowledge
- Instant sharing of experiences and best practices
- Self paced and self based learning
- Simulations and experiential learning
- Learning becomes interactive and joyful through multimedia tools
- Opening windows for new thinking, an atmosphere of innovation
- Bringing excitement and motivation: proud of owning technology, feeling of-in-a-way being ahead of times

5. Key Challenges in Integrating ICT into Education

The following issues to enhance the effectiveness of ICT literacy and education should be addressed.

Making teachers a partner in this effort

Some teachers see use of ICT as an add-on, extra work. ICT is helpful in their work, there is no hope for ICT turning out to be an effective tool in our mission of literacy. ICT must become integrated in teacher's repertoire of classroom practices.

6. Deciding what to, and what not to, deliver through ICT

The usual tendency is to try to deliver every learning item through ICT. I believe we must use ICT to deliver that which is best delivered through it, and we use other pedagogical tools wherever they are more effective, for example, ICT is most

effective when the learning item requires visualization and simulation. There is no point in using an expensive electronic tool as a replacement of the whiteboard.

Building the teacher's motivation

A good capability requires motivation to actually make it happen. It's a challenge to create a **motivating environment** for the teachers so that schools truly become centers of learning. I see ICT as a tool which will be effective only in the hands of a motivated and a capable teacher who is convinced that it can enhance the quality of education. Governments, on the other hand, should offer ICT professional development services to subject teachers rather concentrating on the hiring of ICT teachers only, the focus should not be only on technology skills. ICT is not about the computer or educational CDs or the Internet or the specific device or medium we use. The future will require creativity and problem-solving skills through cooperation. Teachers have innovative strategies and methods to reinforce their capabilities, and renew awareness on the development of their capability. This is not only a mission for future society, but also a key challenge for the development of the future of education in Algeria, It is said that the foundation of every country is the education of its youth, yes that's right, but without the consideration of the key transformer of education, namely the teacher, we cannot achieve the objectives assigned by policy makers, planners and others.

Technology tools facilitate the development of some competencies. Some learners proved to be good interviewers, or excellent photographers, others efficient actors who perfectly used mobile phones in acting out their plays. Owing to that, I understood that being assigned real roles in authentic contexts helped students better use their English. Technology thus was just a tool that facilitated their tasks and improved their performance. Some opinions were collected from teachers who experience ICT in their classes as:

- T1: Wrote, “from group work, I learnt the value of working together and exchanging ideas. A very important thing in that is making difficult things.
- T2: “People should work together to satisfy their needs. ICT has an important value which helps learn quickly and avoid weaknesses. I learnt that I must respect others’ opinion. We mustn’t be afraid to do things.
- T3: Admitted saying, “I learnt new vocabulary and got new information but the most important point was learning how to behave towards other persons.”
- T4: Said “ICT is very important. It helps me improve my English. It makes me more cooperative.”
- T5: “ICT enables us to show our abilities to work together and do magical things.”

Special thanks to 2nd year and 4th year students at both Jillali Liabes University in Sidi Bel Abbes and Moulay Tahar University in Saida.

7. Conclusion

Everybody ask for this change ; which requires elaborately devised techniques and updated ideas for the learning process. Meanwhile, two components of the reform proved to be essential for its accomplishment: the Competency-Based Approach (CBA) and the Information Communication Technology (ICT). The latter is considered to be an indispensable requirement to achieve the former’s objectives. However, this change in our educational system didn’t focus on teaching methods with such an importance as it urged for the implementation of highlighted objectives that exceed pedagogical levels such as the creation of a good citizen. This optimistic sight of “tomorrow” has made everyone of us welcomes this change and takes a determination to cope with it. Therefore, in order to get this well-mannered, tolerant, active, autonomous, creative, collaborative, open-

mindful student and the like of all qualities sought for in this educational reform, we have to be first all of these people.

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