

Improving the EFL Teacher's Proficiency Using ICT in the Algerian Middle School

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Abstract:

The use of information and communication technology is not yet widely spread in the Algerian Middle school language classrooms because of the challenges in using them effectively by the language teacher and the absence of such tools in some, if not in most of the schools. The purpose of this study is to examine the importance of using Information and Communication Technology in the Algerian Middle Schools in order to improve the language teacher's proficiency and develop the teaching skills through it. The data were collected from two different classrooms: experimental classroom and control classroom. A Comparative study of the findings led to form the picture that results gleaned from the experimental classroom were positive ones and reflected the modern language teacher's attitudes in appreciating the use of technological tools.

Keywords: ICT, proficiency, language teacher, teaching skills.

1.Introduction:

Literacy in Information and Communication Technology (hereafter ICT) is fundamental to life in our modern technological society. To equip students to be literate lifelong learners and global citizens of the 21st century with careful implementation of this new technology, we must successfully integrate this new invention into both the English curriculum and English pedagogical practice

Hence the importance of using such items may reduce the tension of the teachers on the one hand and give them the opportunity to develop their proficiency on the other hand .The introduction of this new process has important implications for the nature and purpose of educational institutions. ICT as well as newer digital tools such as computers and internet and other technological products are more powerful tools for educational change and reform. The

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process of learning a second language urges the language teacher to use such devices to help him feel more secure in doing his job more appropriately.

The study seeks particularly to examine the usage of the modern technology by the foreign language teacher in the process of teaching English as a foreign language, and to see the overall impact of that technology on the language teacher's teaching skills. For that purpose the following questions need to be asked.

- 1) What kind of technological tools are needed in the foreign language classroom?
- 2) How does technology serve the foreign language teaching learning process?
- 3) How does technology affect the language teacher's proficiency development?

On the ground of the above-cited research questions, the following hypotheses are formulated.

- 1) Because language is meant for communication pupils are in need of some practical tools that develop their communicative competence and those of helping developing the linguistic competence as well.
- 2) Teaching a foreign language in the globalized world nowadays requires the use of some sophisticated digital tools.
- 3) The teaching process is affected by the implications reflected on the language teacher's proficiency development.

2) Literature Review

The global adoption of (ICT) has been the landmark of the educational field for the last two decades. The adoption of ICT in education has often been premised on the potential of the new technological tools to revolutionize an outmoded educational system, better prepare students for the information age, and accelerate national developments efforts. Harvey (1983) predicts that the effectiveness of the use of the computer in education may be an important factor in determining which countries will succeed in the future.

In developing countries in particular, the metaphor of the information age has generated the whole set of wild speculations about the necessity of educational reforms that will accommodate the new tools (Pelgrum, 2001). Educational planners in most developing countries have responded to the challenge by initiating national programmes to integrate new technologies (computer, educational software, the Internet and other computer-related technologies) in education.

The act knew frequent disappointing results in transferring electronic technology to developing countries, and the important reason beyond doing so lies essentially in the

inattention of the decision-makers though, its integration doesn't serve only for the benefit of the learner but also for the teacher to modernize his teaching skills qualities.

3) Teacher's Role in Education

The role of the teachers in controlling the rhythm of change and development of a given nation cannot be overestimated. Considering the vital role of teacher in the society, it can be asserted that, for the welfare of the youth and society as a well, there is need for teaching to be established, improved and upheld by society as a full profession. The Algerian education authorities therefore have an obligation to seek and provide opportunities for teachers to grow professionally. According to Stone and Schneider (1971) Orology (1998), "a teacher must be the best educated". This includes his academic qualification and character. It must not be forgot where the ultimate power to change is and always has been in the hands, and hearts of the educators who work in our schools.

True reform must go where the action is. We must continue to ask questions about how to improve the profession of teaching. What makes teachers successful at improving instructional practices? What kind of thinking and decision making underlie their practice? Engaging teachers in the process of raising question and answering questions about how to improve the practices of teaching is essential. The teachers presently teaching in middle and secondary schools face a challenge in keeping barest of development in teaching and being able to ascertain their potential contributions for the improvement of instrument at the classroom level. These teachers face the challenge of dealing with today's youth who become more curious, more sophisticated and more demanding in their approach to learning, thereby complicating the teaching function.

4) Proficient Development of Language Teachers

Proficient development (PD) on the whole is the development of a person in his/her professional role (Villegas-Reimers, 2003). According to Villegas Reimers, the notion of PD is linked to two similar but narrower concepts: *career development*, as the maturity teachers attain through their professional career, and *staff development*, as the in-service programs aimed at promoting the growth of teachers. For Richards and Farrell (2005), PD is one of the two views derived from two general objectives in teacher education: *training* and *development*. Training encompasses the initial or pre-teaching teacher education, in a BA program, university program or educational institutes, for instance; development refers to the in-service and long term development of teachers.

For the educationalists, teacher training usually establishes short-term goals linked to the teachers' present or immediate needs. Teacher training typically involves comprehending theory, and then applying it to teaching until skills in demonstrating the principles and practice are developed and observed. In turn, teacher development is designed for long term periods whose goal is to facilitate teachers' self-understanding and to include a reflective component as a basis of the program. Proficient development improves the performance of teachers, students, and the school itself. They are considered as a bottom-up process. Furthermore, regarding the distinction between teacher training or education and teacher development. "The distinction is that training or education is something that can be presented or managed by others; whereas development is something that can be done only by and for oneself"

5) Knowledge and /or Ability Determining Teaching Proficiency

To be an effective teacher requires different adjectives to describe what a teacher must be like, but in all cases there are different points of view that must be respected. The following description summarizes what indeed a good teacher should be like. Good teaching isn't about technique. I've asked students around the country to describe their good teachers to me. Some of them describe people who lecture all the time, some of them describe people who do little other than facilitate group process, and others describe everything in between. But all of them describe people who have some sort of connective capacity, who connect themselves to their students, their students to each other, and everyone to the subject being studied (Palmer, 21).

Although effective teachers in general may have some characteristics, there are certain qualities that differ among them depending on the subject matter they teach. Some researchers believe that it is the nature of the subject matter that makes language teachers different from teachers of other fields (Hammadou & Bernhar, 1987). Some others even go farther, and claim that diverse subject matters are not the only distinction between teachers of various subjects (Borg, 2006). Rather a teacher's beliefs, perceptions and assumptions about teaching and teacher efficacy affect the way s/he understands and organizes instruction (Chacón, 2005).

It is also important to study the perceptions of learners about learning and teaching. Their beliefs about language learning seem to have obvious relevance to understanding their expectations of the course, their commitment to the class as well as providing them with the opportunity to be successful and satisfied with their language learning program (Horwitz, 1988). Moreover, investigation of the student beliefs about different behaviors in the language

classroom is useful in informing teachers about different types of learners that need to be catered for (Cotterall, 1999). In all cases, in the mind of most of the students, whether good or bad. Clever or stupid, an effective teacher should have the following characteristics:

6) The Use of Multimedia Technology in Language Teaching

The use of modern technology in teaching English is broadly understood to encompass an innovative application of methods, tools, materials, devices, systems, and strategies which are directly relevant to English language teaching and lead to the achievement of the desired goals. Thus, while technology is now generally accepted as an important educational and auxiliary tool across a range of teaching and learning contexts, it is particularly true of English language teaching since it affords a number of potential opportunities to enhance both the content and delivery of the pedagogies typically associated with traditional English language instruction, namely teaching skills

This is primarily achieved by enabling the student and/or teacher to revisit problematic content time after time until it is fully understood and assimilated. Familiarity with the concept of using modern technology is not merely limited to the use of modern appliances and devices, but rather obtains to the introduction of innovative systems and methods of teaching which facilitate faster and more comprehensive learning progression. According to prevailing pedagogical theories, in utilizing the learning potential of technology students are better able to acquire and hone their language knowledge and skills. Meanwhile, it offers opportunities for the teacher to be an up-to-date contributor in this globalized world.

The use of technology in teaching English consolidates the integrated view of the modern means system and association with other components which benefits students by achieving the required results. The use of modern technology in English language teaching has therefore become indispensable, especially in the wake of unprecedented developments across numerous fields and disciplines. It is essential that the education sector keep apace of the global technological revolution by adopting modern technological means such as computerization, multi-media devices, mobile phones, audio/visual effects applications, and social media, to optimize English language instruction and equip teachers to connect with classroom language learners in a systematic and advanced way.

Internet provides easy, immediate, and virtually unlimited access to software, applications, and a host of ancillary platforms and materials which can expedite English teaching and learning. While these affordances may be widely available to all, it is noted that teachers often play a key role in operating the different tools and teaching methods. Moreover, many such

programs are specifically designed to promote effective English teaching whilst simultaneously increasing learner understanding and attainment of English language skills

7) Rational of Technology Use for Pupils' and Teachers.

The objective of using technology in the language classroom is to organize information, produce high-quality products, and enhance thinking skills. In classroom settings, proficient teachers are those with the ability of teachers to integrate technology to teach and facilitate, as well as to improve learning, productivity, and performance. These abilities are needed to participate in a technological world. Technology enables teachers to identify and explore a wide variety of technological tools and devices in order to determine and select those that best respond to teaching and learning contents. Among teachers, basic proficiency in information technologies is typically used to communicate electronically, organize activities and information, and create documents in schools.

Proficiency in using technological tools and devices can be achieved through experience and instruction. It is necessary to introduce experimentation into teaching practices and maintain accessible technological tools and devices. Technology proficiency for the foreign language teacher seems relevant to many aspects of the teaching profession, such as lesson preparation and development of teaching kids. Other aspects that impact teacher decisions to introduce technology into teaching and learning activities are teachers' beliefs about the way the subject should be taught and the skills associated with teacher competence in managing classroom activities using technology tools and devices.

Therefore, teachers must be able to apply the technological knowledge and skills required in professional job roles and responsibilities in order to achieve the expected outputs. As an educator in the 21st century, it is imperative to integrate technology into the curriculum for a variety of reasons. Students need to be exposed to and be familiar with technologies in order to compete in the world marketplace, and they need to be able to integrate them in dynamic social environments. The world is dominated by technology in all forms, and to be successful, students must possess 21st-century skills. Being more efficient usually means that teachers have more time, and it allows additional space for innovation, planning, conversing, thinking, and creativity. Technology can be instrumental in making teachers more efficient.

8) Methodology

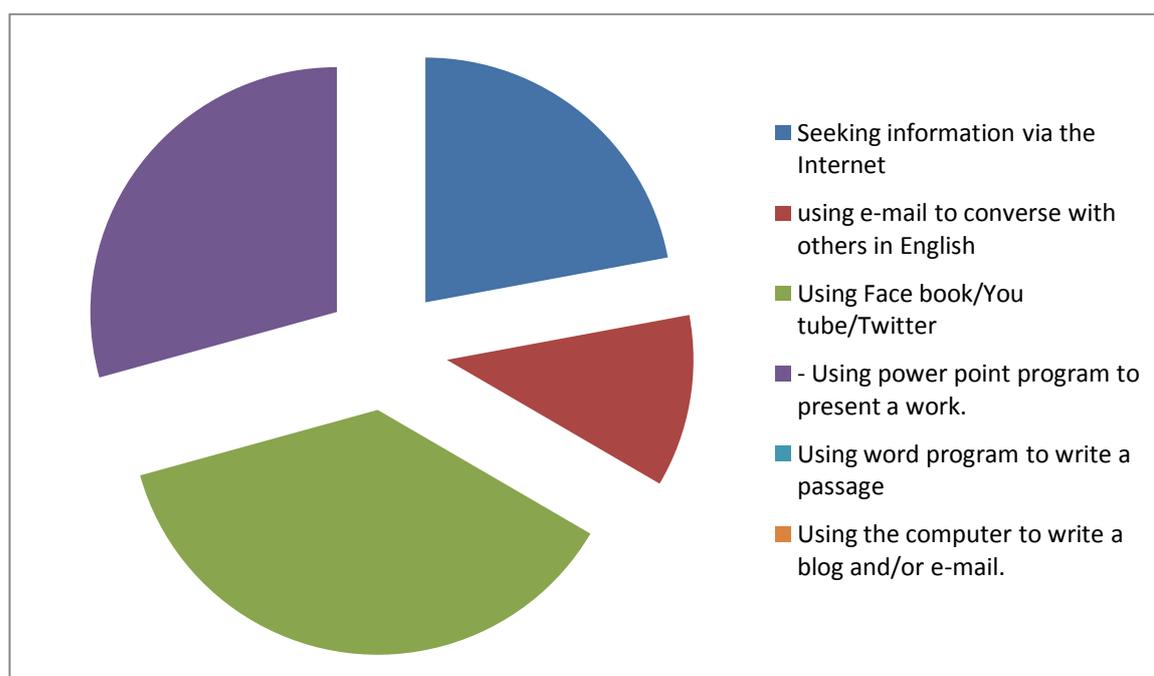
To contribute to the advancement of accurately describing and understanding effective teachers' professional development experiences in terms of manipulation, quality of some digital tools used in the language classroom, a descriptive-comparative design was used to

explore how the professional development experiences of teachers in 10 different Middle school classrooms. Five control classrooms, and five experimental ones. The descriptive method does not by itself tend to do the job of the current research and gives the expected results. Yet this research uses the case study approach.

The case study is the most flexible of all research designs, allowing the researcher to retain the holistic characteristics of real-life events while investigating empirical events. In general, a case study is an empirical study inquiry which “investigates contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used (Robert, 1998, 23)

The present research deals with the case of 4th year pupils at the Middle School of Ben Badis Chlef). It investigates the use of ICT by English language teachers. The purpose of using the case study besides the descriptive approach is to have the possibility to draw generalizations from that unit to the whole population. Hence, this study investigates the use of the technological products of some English language teachers with the intention of generalizing the findings to the rest of the population.

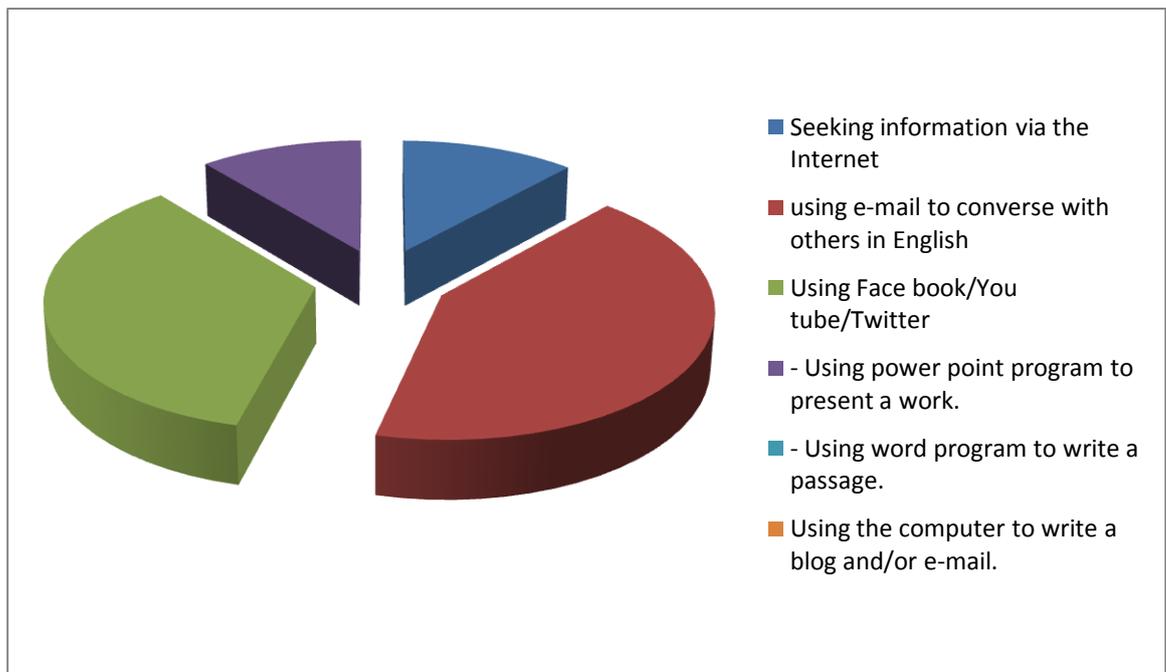
9) Discussion of the Findings



Graph .1. Tasks Conducted by pupils via the Use of Technology

(Scores from the experimental Class)

Results from the experimental class have shown that there is a clear distinction between teachers who have been trained on the use of technology in order to perform some tasks. Hence and as it is believed “practice makes perfect”. This will pave the way to conclude that teachers who have not made some practice on the use of digital tools did not show fair results as graph 1.1.shows. Despite the fact that few of them display some qualifications concerning the manipulation of digital tools, they don't very often use them appropriately



**Graph .2. Tasks Conducted by pupils via the Use of Technology
(Scores from the Control Class)**

Our design, in the analysis of results gleaned from the control class, falls on a graphic representation. The reason behind doing so is to give the research a kind of validity and credibility. Furthermore, to make it as easy as possible for the interpretation.

10) Data Interpretation

On the basis of independent classroom observations carried out through a checklist, it is concluded that despite some similarities in both classes in terms of organization and medium of instructions, the pupils of experimental class were more actively engaged in the realization of the different tasks that were attributed to them, showing hints of self-dependency and much interest. On the other hand, the pupils of the control class were apparently very passive

and spent more time in listening to the instructions given by the teacher. Moreover, the pupils of the experimental class were noted to have been engaged in creating their own techniques of conducting their work as was the case in the control class, but with lesser extent with regard to the experimental class.

The teacher in the experimental class was also found active and more effective as S/he motivated his pupils, helped them create ways of manipulating their computers and gave them confidence to become independent thinkers. He guided the class individually as well as collectively, and also paid attention to weak areas of the pupils. Whereas teacher in the control class remained very active but it cost him much time for pupils to participate in the practice stage in order to achieve the outputs as they have been planned before. He was noted paying more attention to the instructions he gave and see the extent to which the pupils are able to use digital tools to perform tasks.

We can therefore assume that the experimental class where the teacher was using process based method for conducting the different tasks under the use of computer and in some cases the use of Internet to navigate information or using the latter to perform some activities that necessitate the use of Internet such as writing e-mails, chatting, etc...As for the control class, the pupils were not engaged enough in performing their tasks appropriately. Therefore their level of performance was not so impressive. Hence they should pass through different sessions of practice, so that they can show results looking like the ones derived from the experimental class.

The latter, tends the view to say that technology play a different role in pupils learning. Pupils can learn “from” computers where technology is used essentially as tutors and serves to increase pupils’ basic skills and knowledge, and can learn “with” computers where technology can be used as a tool that can be applied to a variety of goals in the learning process and can serve as a resource to help develop higher order thinking, creativity and research skills (Reeves, 1998; Ringstaff & Kelly, 2002).

11 Conclusion

It is clear that despite genuine efforts to modernize traditional methods of teaching English, traditional ways of teaching should be phased out and replaced by the use of the available technology on offer via audio-visual materials, and electronic approaches. This study underscores the vital educative potential and numerous benefits of technology in the language classroom for positive learning outcomes in the language classroom and the wider

world, the financial implications of setting up the infrastructure, and encouraging teachers to overcome their anxieties around of teaching technologies. Of course, the purpose of both traditional and modern technologies is to maximize students' English skills and provide a space where learning can be best facilitated for both the learner and the teacher. One of the ultimate goals of using modern technology is to actively engage students in language learning and motivate them to acquire English language skills in a practical and realistic way. This can be achieved through an open learning context which fosters openness and access to the subjects and information through modern technology means, wherein students are motivated and directed to communicate with each other.

In terms of future development, it is clear that multimedia will be integral to the student-centered process of teaching English to modern standards. As such, the quality of teaching and the language teacher, and application of pupils to modern educational foundations would benefit from an extensive survey of English language skills to improve the overall communication proficiency. In conclusion, we believe that this process can fully enrich student thinking and practical language skills and promote improved efficacy in overall teaching and learning. Indeed it is evident that many routine learning issues that can be overcome through the effective incorporation of technology and appropriately trained teachers, while funding ramifications can be addressed through ministerial planning and the establishment of an infrastructure which prioritizes the interests of effective learning.

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