

Implementing Information and Communication Technologies in the EFL Classroom: Benefits and Challenges

Authors:

Mountassar Billah KELLIL Phd Student Department of English Faculty of Letters and Languages Abbes Laghrour University of Khenchela Email: kellilmontasser@gmail.com	Dr.sabrina BAGHZOU Maître de Conférences "A" Department of English Faculty of Letters and Languages Abbes Laghrour University of Khenchela Email: bsabrina083@gmail.com
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The Track: Foreign countries' experiences with ICT.

Abstract

Much ink has been spilled on investigating the pedagogical issues that come with integrating Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) into the English language classroom. Several studies have highlighted the boundless benefits of using ICT in EFL classrooms in diverse areas, such as language skills and sub skills. With this being said, thwarting challenges have been reported during the exploitation of ICTs in different language areas. Therefore, through this paper, the researchers aim to investigate foreign countries' experiences in implementing ICTs within EFL classrooms in an attempt to reveal the language areas where ICTs has great potential to improve learners' overall academic achievements and to report the challenges that may hinder the learning process. This paper then outlines some pedagogical implications and recommendations for EFL teachers about how, where, and when to implement ICT in the EFL classroom.

Keywords: Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), English as a foreign language (EFL), pedagogical issues, pedagogical implications, ICT challenges, ICT benefits

Introduction

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) is an encompassing term; it refers to a variety of technological devices such as phones, computers, interactive boards, overhead projectors, internet, and social networks (Thierer, 2001). These devices can be brought to the EFL classroom by teachers for different purposes. For instance, some teachers may need to establish communication among learners and foreign persons by using phones or computers to connect to the internet or display information through overhead projectors. This variety of technological tools, as well as the variety of ways through which these tools can be utilized, makes the use of ICTs in EFL classrooms a powerful option since teachers are provided with diverse ways of implementing ICTs in the teaching and learning of many subject areas. It is therefore no surprise that there is a burgeoning interest in ICT shown by teachers and researchers during the last decade. This interest has been represented in the researchers' investigation of ICT's effectiveness and usage in teaching the productive language skills. Not only this, but the researchers also inquired about the main challenges that may be thwarting in terms of the implementation of ICTs.

In the Algerian context, the implementation of ICT is limited in terms of the type of tool and method of use. Algerian EFL teachers use devices such as phones and overhead projectors mostly to present information in order to avoid giving handouts or writing on the board. Teachers seem to lack access to a wide range of ICT since they are costly and difficult to handle. This lack of variety in the use of ICT creates monotony and boredom among both learners and teachers who find themselves resorting to the same devices again and again for years. The current paper, therefore, aims to review the research across the globe to gain insights

about where, when, and how to implement ICTs in the EFL classroom, along with pinpointing difficulties and requirements that may ensure an effective implementation of ICTs.

This paper, thus, aims to answer the following questions:

- In which areas of EFL learning is the use of ICT is advantageous?
- What are the difficulties encountered by EFL teachers during the implementation of ICT?

In order to answer the aforementioned questions, the researchers reviewed many research articles inquiring about the status of ICT in the EFL context.

Literature Review

The continuous fluctuations in lifestyles have forced educators to adapt their language teaching and learning practices. In a way to adapt their learning to these fluctuations, teachers have opted the use of ICTs in the language classroom particularly since the approaches to language teaching and learning have recently been based on the learner (Pareja-Lora, Calle-Martínez, Rodríguez-Arancón, 2016). According to Chapelle (2003), since there are drastic changes in technologies during the last decades, teaching practices such as language use, assessment and analysis should be changed in accordance with these changes, including in the Algerian EFL classroom. The existing literature suggests diverse ways through which English language teachers can tackle different subjects and skills.

The use of ICTs to collaborate and communicate, present and perform, explore and investigate, or analyze language are examples of reasons why teachers implement ICTs in the English language classroom (Rank, Millum & Warren, 2011). For example, Word processor can be used to trigger learners' motivation to investigate and explore. This can be done by

hiding parts of texts pushing learners to investigate and guess what the covered part might reveal. Images also can be used to explore and investigate. For instance, to introduce a topic about peace and war, a teacher can present to his or her learners a slideshow of pictures, presenting only a few pictures of a dove, a tank and a soldier. Then, the teacher asks the learners to guess what the topic will be about and asks them to guess what the rest of the pictures may present. This activity will most likely raise learners' interest and enable them to explore and investigate further. This, in turn, may prompt communication and collaborative work.

In corpus analysis, ICTs are a powerful tool for facilitating English language teaching and learning. The use of the application Wordle, for example, may save much time and effort. Wordle is believed to be efficient and practical since it ignores function words, counts other words, uses similar font sizes of words that are similar, and presents results in an attractive way that will likely attract the learners' attention (Rank, Millum & Warren, 2011). A teacher of literary texts can use Wordle to analyze a poem from the Romantic literary era emphasizing on words that are related to nature and emotions, leading the learners to deduce that during the Romantic era there was a huge reference to nature and feelings by poets.

As it can be perceived, ICTs can be used in a plethora of ways to tackle various subjects in the English language teaching and learning context. In accordance with the recent English language teaching and learning approaches, most methods of implementing ICTs can be based on the learner, as per the learner-centered approach.

Methodology:

The objectives of this paper are to review foreign countries' experiences with ICTs in attempts to examine if the implementation of ICTs is fruitful in regards to productive language skills as well as label the challenges and the requirements to ensure a successful implementation of ICTs in the English language classroom. Therefore, the researchers of the current paper chose diverse studies that tackle the productive English language skills, besides other papers that cover the difficulties that the English language teachers encounter before and during the implementation of ICTs. To this end, the researchers opted for purposive sampling so that the objectives can be achieved.

Results and Discussion

As a first step in the review process, the researchers selected five studies that aimed to examine the usefulness of ICTs on learners' writing skills. In spite of highlighting a few drawbacks, all the studies report positive outcomes as a result of the implementation of ICTs in teaching writing. Yunus et al. (2013) report that the integration of ICTs in the English language classroom facilitated the learning process since learners' linguistic stock was reinforced by the use of ICTs. Similar findings were reported by Yunus, Salehi, and Embi (2012), who found that using comics to enhance English language learners' writing skills helped low-achievers produce written pieces. In another study, Selcuk, Jones, and Vonkova (2019) suggest that using Google Translation in the pre-writing stage boosts learners' confidence increasing their chances of producing better writing. Likewise, Yunus, Salehi, and Chenzi (2012) revealed that integrating social networking means has the potential to increase learners' confidence during writing, particularly by fostering their knowledge about the target topics. In his five month

experiment, Alobaid (2021) found that using YouTube captions increases learners' writing accuracy.

To promote the other productive skill, speaking, the existing literature overall suggests and recommends the integration of ICTs in the English language classroom. Torres (n.d) claims that bringing ICTs to the EFL classroom boosts learners' oral performance. When learners recorded themselves and then listened to their recordings, they were offered a chance to reflect and monitor their performance. This allowed them to identify their weaknesses, which prevented them from committing the same mistakes; thus, their pronunciation and fluency have improved significantly. In another study, Namaziandost and Nasri (2019) investigated the effect of social media on EFL learners' speaking skills. The outcomes of their inquiry accentuated the positive effect of social media on both teachers and learners, especially by promoting mutual understanding among speakers. Similar to the two above studies, Maria et al. (2018) inquired about the use of TED Talks as an ICT instrument for enhancing EFL learners' communicative skills. Their triangulated study revealed that the use of TED talks, an authentic material, provided the learners with various communicative elements that boosted their communicative skills. Similar results were found by Ahmed Eltayeb Mohammed (2020), who argued that implementing ICTs in the EFL classroom fosters and assists EFL learners since they demonstrate features of how oral communication should take place.

In spite of the boundless benefits that come as a result of integrating ICTs in the writing and speaking classroom, different drawbacks and challenges have been reported by researchers. Problems related to time, distraction and lack of concentration with to the integration of ICTs have been reported by (Azmi, 2017; Yunus et al., 2013; Yunus, Salehi, & Chenzi, 2012). Learners' concentration span might be reduced owing to the use of digitals; hence, it is not

surprising that Yunus et al., (2013) found that learners preferred short writing tasks. Moreover, Azmi (2017) claims that teachers need to define learning objectives clearly and prepare their lesson plans carefully to be ready to use ICTs to achieve those objectives.

Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to reveal the extent to which the implementation of ICTs in the EFL classroom as found by previous researchers to enhance learners' productive skills. After reviewing different studies, which tackled the role of ICTs in promoting EFL learners' speaking and writing skills, many positive results have been reported by different researchers in various countries. Using ICTs to teach writing is beneficial since they facilitate the learning process and assist students during the writing process, like when using websites or displays that help their linguistic stock and knowledge about different topics. In regards to the speaking skill, ICTs are found to be helpful as they generate mutual understanding among learners, and show elements and methods of how communication should take place. In spite of these positive findings of ICTs, researchers reported some disadvantages. Mainly, ICTs require teachers' careful planning to achieve their carefully set learning objectives; otherwise, the use of ICTs can be time-consuming and takes considerable effort. Not only this, but the use of ICTs also causes learners to be distracted since electronics are believed to reduce learners' concentration span.

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