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An Investigation of the Use of ICTs by EFL Students at the University of Algiers 2

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Abstract

ICTs in general and social networking in particular are having a significant impact on students' performances today and teachers should acclimatise themselves to the requirements of ICT technology. In order to achieve a successful policy and practices of ICT in higher education, two parameters are required :

The first parameter is to guarantee access to technology for learners and teachers and to develop their practical digital skills in the use of technology as a fundamental objective.

The second one is to guarantee that both learners and teachers have aptitudes to understand, authenticate and decisively evaluate materials from a variety of suitable sources.

The present article reports a study of part of the second parameter. It highlights the students' relationship to new technologies. The study was carried out with 30 second year EFL students enrolled in the English Department of Algiers2 university.

The research tool used is a questionnaire with four distinct sections: general information, students knowledge of computer software, use of software and attitudes towards ICT in learning and teaching. The data obtained were analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively. The findings of the study revealed that firstly, the students of the English department have good knowledge of computer software. Secondly, they use more often ICTs for surfing on the net and communication. Finally, they think that the computer is an important tool for learning that can change the way they accede to knowledge.

1. Introduction

Today, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have certainly infiltrated all spheres of human life. They are having significant functions in work places, business, education, and entertainment.

ICTs are regularly seen as a vehicle for change, adjustment in teaching /learning processes and in access to information. ICT is concerned with all technologies that carry out information through telecommunication.

Education has known a great change over the last few decades. In developed countries, the use of ICT in education has become a main concern during the last decade. Yet, very few have succeeded. In reality, a small number of schools, in some countries, have achieved high levels of efficient use of ICT to sustain and adjust the teaching and learning process in various subjects. ICTs have the potential to accelerate, enrich, and deepen skills, to motivate and engage students. They have become an important pillar of modern society; understanding ICT

and mastering the basic skills and concepts of ICT is regarded as a centre point of education, alongside reading, writing and numeracy.

In Algeria, the educational policy encourages and promotes the utilization of ICT in order to develop different domains (commerce, banking, health etc) and to improve the educational system in particular. The Algerian government is investing more and more in ICT-related human resources and has created a Committee to design the constituents of an Algerian National Information Society Plan. The Committee is expected to develop different spheres in the sector of communications, education, and research in addition to information systems and ICTs. The government has also established a national ICT working group, which is responsible for creating a short-, medium-, and long-term action plan for ICT.

2. Objective of the Study and Research Questions

The main objective of this study is to examine students' knowledge and use of new technologies. We will investigate three research questions: how do students manipulate these tools? How often do they use ICT for their personal purposes? And finally what are their attitudes toward introducing ICTs in English language education?

3. Literature Review on ICTs

A large number of studies on the use of educational technology in higher education have been conducted in the world, particularly in the industrial domain. Thus, new prospects in the incorporation of pedagogical and technological sources have emerged, which have led to flexibility through the learning procedure. Educational technology has enhanced the communication between teachers and students and the communication between diverse educational sources.

Howe (1998) argued that university education should follow the expansion of multimedia in various domains and develop it with students. Integration of ICTs is no more optional in education and teachers should reconsider their traditional role.

Oliver (2002) declared that the use of ICT in higher education develops student-centred learning. Within advanced education, one of the main educational challenges has constantly been helping students to overpass the space between information and real life practice. This is particularly significant in applied instructive disciplines such as education where professional knowledge is constantly being rehabilitated and improved throughout real practice.

Mekhoukh (2012) remarked that despite the popularity of the Internet and computer devices in Algeria, mainly in the 2000's, the situation in Algerian universities has not followed this expansion. Technology is quasi-absent. Teachers and students have hardly access to ICT tools. The introduction of the LMD system was expected to maintain the Algerian university close to new movements in higher education to reach the international standards which exist in developed countries and where the use of ICT undoubtedly supports learning/teaching processes. But nothing was done to improve and develop ICT in Algerian universities.

5. Research Methodology and Design

In this study, a descriptive survey method is used to investigate the research objectives stated above, mainly students' ICT practices and habits, perceived ICT competencies, and attitudes toward using ICT in education. A descriptive survey method allows the researcher to pose a series of questions to willing participants, summarize their responses with percentages, frequency counts, or more rigorous statistics, and draw inferences about a particular population from the responses of the sample.

6. Population and Sample for the Study

The target population for this study consists of four hundred and thirty (430) second year EFL students enrolled in the English Department of Algiers 2 university. From this population, a sample of 100 students was selected for the survey; this includes 69 female and 31 male students.

7. Research Instruments

The only instrument for this study is a survey questionnaire.(used for the collection of the research data) The questionnaire was structured into four sections; the first section elicited demographic details such as department, gender, age, academic level of the respondents and some general questions about their awareness of ICTs devices. The second section deals ICT knowledge of respondents. The third section required the respondents to give information about their use of new technologies for their personal purposes. The last section investigates the students' attitudes toward new technologies. A pilot questionnaire was used with a sample of 5 students from the target group to avoid misleading or redundant questions and check if every word was understood by the respondents.

8. Data Analysis and Findings

The research findings are presented below in three sections (one, two, three) corresponding to the three research questions outlined earlier.

Age	95% <u>Between 20 and 25 years</u> and 5% over 25 years
Gender	Male 31% Female 69%
Year of study	Second year
Have an access to an ICT tool	100% yes
Access to Internet	98% yes 5% no
Use of an ICT in learning	55% yes 45% no
<u>Synchronous/Asynchronous use</u>	70% prefer <u>synchronous communication</u>
Using ICT in class	NONE

Table 1 above presents the demographic profile of the respondents.

9. Demographic Information and General Information on ICT

The majority of the respondents (70%,) were females. This is in line with the general statistics on the prevalence of female students in the English department; they represent (70%) of the respondents. Respondents' age range fell within the 20-25 year bracket. This age bracket was the highest, representing (95%). Mature students, those in the above 25 years group, were only (2%). All are second year students from Algiers 2 university. From this table, it is clear that the majority of these students (95%) have access to internet in their daily life but only (55%) use ICT in their learning. More than half of the students favour synchronous communication such as emails and only (30%) prefer asynchronous communication. And none of them use ICT in class.

Section One : Students' Knowledge of Computer Software

	I am able to use it	I am able to use it to a small extent	I am able to use it satisfactorily	I am able to use it well	I am able to use it very well
Word processing	15%	8%	29%	25%	23%
Spreadsheet	24%	23%	13%	25%	25%
Internet	-----	-----	10%	53%	27%
Data bases	10%	14%	15%	30%	31%
Email	-----	-----	-----	13%	87%

TABLE 02: Students' Knowledge of Computer Software

Table 02 above presents students' knowledge of computer software; it can be summarized as follows:

- The majority of students (77%) use word processing well or very well and all students know the basics of this application.
- Spread sheet application is acknowledged by 53% of the students.
- More than half of the respondents (90%) surf on the internet quite well and the rest (10%) are able to use it satisfactorily.
- 61% of the students are able to use data bases well or very well and they are all able to use email successfully.

Concerning their knowledge of computer software, the findings revealed that the respondents are very comfortable in using ICT tools in general and are especially familiar with using emails and surfing on the internet. They are also able, to some extent, to use other applications such as word processing, data bases and spreadsheet. Since they have grown up surrounded with technology they are able to understand and to use technology rapidly. They use technology to keep social contact, for their leisure and /or almost everything in their life. They have cognitively developed some kind of automaticity when using technology, that allows them to use it efficiently and in a spontaneous way. They do not need guidance or training to use these tools. These students have a natural mastery of ICTs devices and are particularly interested in internet. It changes their perception of time and space and allows them to interact, communicate, play with anybody, anywhere and at any time. They have the occasion to access a lot of information in a very short time. Internet is an open door to the whole world and could make a great contribution to their academic progress.

Section Two : Frequency of Software Use

Table 03 Frequency of software use

I use the computer, smart phone or to tablet	Never	Once or twice a semester	Once or twice a month	Once or twice a week	Almost every day
Play games	13%	34%	13%	23%	17%
Make presentations	88%	12%	---	----	-----
Publish material	95%	5%	---	-----	-----
Prepare spreadsheets	67%	15%	9%	9%	-----
Create graphics	89%	7%	3%	1%	-----
Communicate	10%	-----	-----	5%	85%
Access the Internet	---	-----	7%	5%	88%
Develop web pages	90%	5%	5%	-----	-----
Program the computer	17%	50%	23%	10%	-----
Use CD and DVD	51%	27%	13%	5%	4%

From the above table, we can see that students access internet regularly and the latter plays a huge part in their life. The percentage of students who use internet daily is 85%. Some students (53%) use also ICT for playing games.

ICT is mostly used for communication: 93% of students interact via computer, smart phone or tablet.

However, the respondents did not deal with aspects of ICT such as making presentations, publishing materials, preparing spread sheets, creating graphics, or developing web pages.

For the question on their use of CD or DVD, the number of students who use it does not exceed 22%.

Students use ICT for different purposes: all students use their computers or smart phones to connect on the internet and use ICT for communication; however, less than half use it for learning. From these findings, it is clear that the respondents believe that the computer is a very exciting and useful tool in teaching and learning that permits them to understand the world in a more efficient way. Students have access to ICT devices regularly to enter services offered on the Internet, such as computer-mediated communication (Internet telephony, e-mail, instant messaging, chat, etc.), web-based services (social network and online community services, news websites etc.) and cloud computing services based on data transfer systems (software-as-a-service, file storage, video streaming, etc.). The majority of these services enhance formal and informal learning. Consequently, computers, smartphones and other ICT

devices represent an important educational resource. Without a connection to Internet, students can access to limited resources such as dictionaries or download files; they cannot reach online encyclopedias and other content. Students also use ICT instruments for their entertainment and leisure, regularly surf on the net to communicate, play games, download films, music, chat and occasionally use internet for educational purposes.

Section Three : Computer Attitudes

	<i>Completely disagree</i>	<i>Disagree</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Agree</i>	<i>Completely agree</i>
<i>I feel comfortable with the idea of the computer as a tool in teaching and learning</i>	--	--	23%	20%	57%
<i>If something goes wrong I will not know how to fix it</i>	60%	35%	--	05%	--
<i>The idea of using a computer in my study makes me nervous</i>	78%	20%	--	02%	--
<i>Using computer as a learning instrument excites me</i>	09%	10%	05%	20%	56%
<i>Using computer as a learning instrument frightens me</i>	91%	06%	03%	--	--
<i>The computer is an important instrument for learning</i>	--	05%	--	15%	80%
<i>The computer will change the way I learn</i>	--	--	05%	06%	89%
<i>The computer is</i>	45%	50%	01%	04%	--

<i>not functional because it is difficult to use</i>					
<i>The computer allows me to understand in more efficient ways</i>	--	06%	04%	36%	54%
<i>The computer allows me to express my thinking in better and different ways</i>	13%	07%	03%	20%	57%
<i>The computer helps my teacher to teach in more efficient way</i>	26%	09%	10%	19%	36%
<i>The computer creates technical problems</i>	29%	30%	14%	10%	17%

Table 04 : Computer attitudes According to the table above:

- (77%) of the respondents feel comfortable with the idea of the computer as a tool for teaching and learning.
- (95%) of students affirm that they can manage technical problems.
- (76%) of the respondents agree with the fact that learning through ICT is very exciting.
- (98%) of the respondents do not consider that ICT could cause nervousness.
- (95%) of them consider the computer as an important instrument for learning and that it is functional and changes the way they learn.
- 90% think that the computer permits them to understand in more efficient ways and 77% of them think that the computer helps them to express their thinking in more efficient ways.

From the above findings, we may conclude that these students have positive attitudes toward new technologies; they are very confident when using it and want to integrate it in their studies. Integrating multimedia devices in TEFL seems ingenious and useful for enhancing learners' motivation. Students find new technologies very helpful because they improve the way they express their thoughts. EFL learners are very enthusiastic and optimistic about using ICTs in class with their teachers; according to them, new technologies help them to be more efficient. All in all, learners find that new technologies are very exciting and helpful; they allow them to learn differently and can revolutionize the way they are taught.

10. Conclusion

This study was conducted with undergraduate students in the English Department of the University of Algiers 2. The first objective of this investigation was to study ICT students habits and attitudes. The second one was to evaluate the frequency of using ICT for personal purposes. The results stress the students' familiarity with ICT tools and their significant digital culture since they have access to these devices very early in their lives. Therefore, it is quite important to introduce ICT in teaching foreign languages and teachers should integrate these tools in their teaching methods and materials systematically. Students feel at ease and comfortable when using ICT instruments and are quite excited at the idea of using internet and ICT devices in class. In this survey, we have noticed that most EFL students have access to ICTs tools outside the classroom and use them for a variety of purposes and reasons, but when they come to university they have no access to these tools. The study has also shown that students have a good mastery of ICT tools, but this important digital skill is not valued at the university and is not enhanced for the benefit of learning. Technology is omnipresent in students' lives and almost all of them have access to ICT tools outside university; so integrating ICTs tools at university is crucial. In developed countries, technology has revolutionized the learning and teaching process as well as affected students' outcomes because new technologies can enhance learners' autonomy and permit teachers to change their teaching approach from a traditional / behaviorist to a more constructivist approach.

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