



## **Integrating internet in teaching and learning EFL: the case study of first-year English students at sidi bel Abbès university**

**دمج الإنترنت في تعليم وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية: دراسة حالة طلاب السنة الأولى للغة الإنجليزية في جامعة سيدي بلعباس**

## **Intégrer l'internet dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage EFL: l'étude de cas des étudiants en première année d'anglais à l'université Sidi Bel Abbès**

Dr. Khadidja Ghouraf

English Department, Djillali Liabès University, Algeria

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### **ملخص**

من خلال هذه الدراسة، نحاول أن نستعرض استعمال ودمج الإنترنت في تعليم وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ونهدف بذلك إلى تحديد دورها وتأثيرها على العمليتين في الجامعة الجزائرية. لجمع البيانات من عينة طلابية ومدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة جلاي ليايس بسيدي بلعباس التي طبقت عليها الدراسة، ارتأينا أن نطبق منهجية متعددة الوسائل بما فيها من استبيانات، حوارات، محافظ ورقية وأخرى إلكترونية. بينت النتائج أن للشبكة العنكبوتية دور فعال في جعل الطلاب أكثر استقلالية، اهتماما بتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية وكذا أكثر اعتمادا على أنفسهم. من جانب آخر، استخدامها في التدريس يوطد التحصيل بفضل الأدوات والوسائط الأصلية التي توفرها. يتطرق المقال أيضا إلى عرض بعض التوصيات بخصوص استعمال الإنترنت بغرض تدريس وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية.

الكلمات الدالة: تدريس وتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية؛ استخدام الإنترنت؛ التعليم والتعلم عبر الإنترنت؛ وسائط تعلم اللغة عبر الإنترنت؛ متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية الجزائريين.

### **Abstract**

It is not a surprising fact that the prevalence of Internet use in language education nowadays has brought novelty to the field like never before. The present paper pinpoints its integration in teaching and learning EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and aims at investigating its role and impact on those processes at the Algerian university. A mixed-methods approach was applied to gather relevant data

from a sample of students and teachers at Djillali Liabès University in Sidi Bel Abbès; using students' questionnaires, portfolios and e-portfolios besides teachers' interviews. The results showed that Internet plays a key role in increasing learner-centeredness and makes students more autonomous and interested in learning EFL in addition, its incorporation to teaching does consolidate the language course, for it provides authentic and innovative materials and tools. The paper presents as well some future recommendations about Internet use in teaching and learning EFL.

**Keywords:** teaching and learning EFL; Internet usage; online teaching and learning; online language tools; Algerian EFL learners.

### Résumé

A travers cette étude, nous essayons de faire le point sur l'utilisation et l'intégration de l'Internet dans l'enseignement et l'apprentissage de l'anglais langue étrangère et de déterminer son rôle et son impact sur les deux activités dans l'université algérienne. Notre enquête a été réalisée au niveau de l'Université Jalali Lyabis de Sidi Bel Abbes auprès d'un échantillon d'étudiants et d'enseignants d'anglais selon une méthodologie multimédia, comprenant des questionnaires, des dialogues, des portfolios papier et électroniques. Les résultats ont montré que l'Internet joue un rôle efficace pour rendre les étudiants plus indépendants, plus autonomes, intéressés par l'apprentissage de l'anglais. Son utilisation valorise la réussite grâce aux outils et supports originaux qu'elle propose.

**Mots-clés:** enseignement ; apprentissage, anglais comme langue étrangère ; Internet; supports d'apprentissage; apprenants.

### Introduction

With the emergence of technology in our era and the development of new learning methods and strategies, the integration of the Internet in the field of EFL gave birth to new digital learning systems. The rapid change that is affecting language education is no more constant, putting the educational institutions in a competitive environment and engaging learners in lifelong learning in self-access centres without any constraints of time or place. There can be little doubt that the Internet is essential for the development of today's language pedagogy because of its flexibility with the easy retrieval of most recent and pertinent information as well as being as an extension of learning beyond class. To a certain extent, the Algerian teachers and learners are now obliged to get to grips with Internet use although it seems a very complex endeavour and thereby, they could make use of its easy access on their laptops, tablets or smart phones. That increases their interaction and boosts them to enhance their language and communication skills.



## 1. Thesis Statement

Internet has a vital role in shifting the educational systems towards modernism. This does not mean that using the net is an easy task as it makes its conscious users among teachers and learners worry about finding the best way in order to incorporate it into teaching or learning EFL. Depending on that concern, in this inquiry, we tried to find answers for the following questions:

- How can Internet contribute to teaching and learning EFL?
- What are the Internet tools used by learners so as they could meet their needs in learning EFL?
- What are the pitfalls that can affect online teaching and learning negatively?

As an attempt, we formulated three research hypotheses for the questions we raised, respectively:

- Internet usually provides rich sources of updated information, which may boost teaching and learning the TL (Target Language);
- Learners may use online reference tools or chat programs for learning;
- There may be some hindrances, which could negatively influence the Internet use for teaching and learning such as the lack of digital literacy or the insecurity of Internet in terms of accuracy and reliability.

These suggested hypotheses were subject to testing by different research tools to either accept or reject them.

### 1.1 Study Aims

It is important to keep in mind that making such an investigation in an Algerian context is very challenging in the sense that educational technology is still considered as inapplicable because of the lack of digital equipment together with the holders of certain digital mentalities that would teach or learn using technological tools, namely the Internet.

Clearly enough, those were the reasons behind conducting the present pilot project, which hopes to make teachers and learners better understand the role of Internet in teaching and learning EFL. In addition, it aims at evaluating the use of the Internet tools used by learners and help them find solutions to Internet related problems. Importantly, the researcher also wanted to generalise the idea that technological and virtual learning are prerequisites for contemporary education. Last, the paper focused on the



practical side in order to help Algerian teachers and learners use Internet in a more effective way.

## 1.2 Relevant Background Literature

Whilst looking at how language pedagogy is shifting from old to newer approaches and methods, we realise how much technology is affecting that change. One of the central reasons why several technological tools are used in education is that they facilitate the teachers' job and have a great impact on the way they convey information and stronger effect on the students' strategies and learning outcomes.

The change that is happening in education, however, lies in that there is much pressure on governments and higher education institutions because of the knowledge-based economics. This dynamism leads to better life-long learning (Boulter, 2007, p. 33).

Luppacini (2005 in Boulter, 2007, p. 107) defines educational technology as a '*goal oriented problem-solving systems approach*'. According to him, this approach involves the use of different tools, techniques and methods, which are gathered from a variety of knowledge domains in order to, first, design human and mechanical resources in an effective way, and then develop and evaluate them for the reason of making easy the learning aspects. Second, it is for adapting the transformation of the educational systems and, thus affecting change in society.

As to the technological devices used in teaching, there is an unlimited number of multimedia, educational applications, online programs and other kinds of both hardware and software tools. Importantly, we will focus on the Internet, which is also making that paradigm shift since it could be accessible anywhere and at any time and simply because it has become a useful tool for teaching and learning EFL.

Indeed, the widespread of the Internet use in language teaching is not just a rumour. Yet, one thing that is certain is most university researchers, language teachers and learners and other professionals come together under the motto that the Internet is, certainly, a tool which has many strengths that reinforce the educational process either in class or in distant-learning settings. In this context, Bouhnia (2010, pp. 130, 132) asserts that the Internet makes learners go beyond the limits of a given country to reach another huge world where they can be able to retrieve information and have access to a variety of sources and references. In addition, it is an easy task for any learner



to find the information immediately by doing a simple search by his own on a search engine, and thus saving much time and money when compared to using other information resources.

What about the special characteristic that distinguishes the Internet from other tools is keeping both learners and teachers up-to-date i.e. having access to the most recent and pertinent data. Furthermore, the Internet is an open source for everyone from any society, creed, political or philosophical trend, etc. That is why the number of its users overcomes three hundred million.

In a similar vein, all information available on the Internet could be accessed all day long and everywhere as mentioned above. Collaboration among teachers and their colleagues and students or even with other teachers from other corners of the world is what the global network can provide, as well. It also offers an opportunity for those who are interested among teachers and learners in order to interact and exchange their opinions and their research interests; this is what enriches and develops the scientific research. Finally yet importantly, he added, the freedom to get access to the information from any place is for the reason that no one has the right to monopolize the flow of information to ensure that all Internet users are equal.

In fact, those Internet use advantages in language education are not just exaggerations. Most researchers in the field do share the same view that the Internet use will surpass the ordinary ways of teaching seeing that it stimulates motivation and encourages autonomous learning. Moreover, the utility of the Internet lies upon offering a variety of options, which match the different learning strategies and preferences of the new generation of EFL students who find the recall of language much easier via digital devices, which, in turn, diminish what White (2003 in Boulter, 2007, p. 82) called the students' '*sense of isolation*'.

Towards meeting those benefits, there should be an alteration in the educational system and an educational paradigm transformation (Boulter, 2007, p. 78) because Internet integration requires entirely a new implementation system. This latter should go beyond the pre-existing methods, but unfortunately, most teachers and educational institutions are not aware enough to design suitable electronic courses that differ from face-to-face ones; that is why they criticise the Internet use in the educational settings



without knowing that it is a powerful tool for EFL didactics. The '*sound pedagogical practice*' is the most required, added Boulter (2007, p.77).

Unlike the other teaching instruments, the Internet can offer a huge amount of services and tools that are facilitating more and more the processes of teaching and learning as educational websites, blogs, video conferencing tools, webquests, wikis, podcasts, etc. Chiefly, there is the e-mail service, which saves the researcher's time when sending or receiving electronic letters. It is very useful with other social networking tools when it comes to make opinion polls about a given inquiry and posting questionnaires to be filled in by the target respondents and therefore making of the data collection procedure an easy task. Being in contact with other researchers and exchanging ideas and interests with them is, as well, among the advantages of e-mails. Bouhnia (2010, pp. 127-130) added another beneficial thing about e-mails which is supervising research projects of students from other universities, and who are not able to find a specialised supervisor in the topic they want to tackle. Finally, allowing the researchers from all over the world to write and conduct co-research with other associates.

Second, he further addressed the leading Internet service, which is the one related to electronic publications that means; researchers can be in touch with the most recent works done in a given area of study. Those works could be electronic versions of articles, books and the like; written in different languages and addressed to various audiences and most of them could be downloaded and saved to be used for a later time. Other electronic publications involve newspapers, magazines, reference tools as dictionaries and so forth.

Additionally, book e-marketing accomplishes the previous patchwork. It is a sort of boost to the researchers who encounter problems in buying books that are not available everywhere. Specialised websites allow any learner to find the book he wants to buy, just by entering the name of the author or the title of the book.

Bouhnia (ibid.) suggested that there are also some academic networks, which permit the access to many bibliographies of some famous institutions and universities; for example, the JANet (Joint Academic Networks) in the UK (United Kingdom), the Dutch Surfnet and the American OCLC (Online Computer Library Center). These networks help also connecting to other computers, to benefit from online educational programs and conferences, etc.



Moreover, newsgroups represent the most interactive online service, which include the use of emails. They are helpful for scientific researchers especially EFL learners who can communicate and practice their language. Newsgroups comprehend a variety of research areas taking for instance: language learning, so far mentioned, economics, politics, etc.

Overall, Internet tools and services are not limited only to the ones we cited. Hence, the virtual world is considered as a huge source for getting information to learn and teach EFL and thereby, most of ICTs are useful if integrated to language teaching and learning. This point is echoed by Motteram (2013, p. 98) when he said; “one way in which ICT has changed how languages are learned is that it allows learners to immerse themselves in the TL community easily”. Here, he talked about learners who combine language competence with language performance and who know very well “what works for them and how they want to learn”, he added.

However, it is no wonder that there are plenty of factors which affect the use of the Internet in teaching and learning. First, one thing that is certain is that the technological equipment including both hardware and software in most of the universities and institutions of the third world are not available. In addition, the lack of technical support for both teachers and learners is another problem which is usually related to technology training, which is a ‘new educational culture’ that the use of new technologies necessitate (Bindé, 1998 in Boulter, 2007, p. 17). In this regard, the teacher’s preferences either to incorporate technology or not may also hinder its use.

In an attempt to explain these influences, Felix (2003 in Boulter, 2007, pp.18-19) talked about, what she called, ‘stereotypical opinions’ of online learning. She expressed the view that the factors, which affect the Internet use do exist as administrations, which are not very interested in the quality of learning and tend to save costs. She added that some teachers are afraid that online learning will replace classroom teaching and so on. Nonetheless, she disproved that by arguing that technology adds value to face-to-face instruction. Additionally, it can help the teacher develop authentic learning tasks, materials and online language programs by the ‘creative context’ it offers, and which suits the students’ differences.

In summary, the Internet, as many other technological devices, is of use in learning and teaching EFL and all the rumours we hear about it are said by those who prefer to use other old methods or those who have already failed



in incorporating that tool to their instruction. Thus, it is better for such teachers and learners to rethink about the usefulness of the Internet and the services it can offer.

## 2. Methodology

This part discusses the research design, the methodology and the methods selected. In order to test the reliability of hypotheses, the researcher adopted an action research, which comprises the use of a mixed-methods approach including qualitative and quantitative research tools.

### 2.1 Sample

The sample considered for our investigation consisted of (50) first-year English LMD (Licence, Master and doctorat) students at *Djillali Liabès University* who answered the background questionnaire, and (20) of them were required to use the language portfolio and e-portfolio. The students' levels represented quite a mixture between intermediate and upper-intermediate in the four language skills. They were both males and females whose ages ranged between 18 and 29 years old. On the other side were (13) teachers from the same study site with whom we conducted the interviews.

### 2.2 Instrumentation and Data Collection Procedure

The research instruments we cited above were used to gather data from the informants for analysis. The purpose of using those tools was to precisely determine the status of Internet in EFL teaching and learning from an Algerian perspective by combining the different views to a variety of methods.

#### 2.2.1. Students' Questionnaire

The (50) student respondents were asked to voluntarily answer a questionnaire, which statistically focused on measuring the way Internet use could affect the processes of teaching and learning. It comprised of a set of questions and was divided into four parts in which most questions we included were closed format and only few ones were open format. In addition, we incorporated a mix of tick boxes as well as some gaps for additional comments. As to the sections, the first one dealt with some general information about the participants, their age, gender, and the actual learning situation using the Internet. Then, the next one dealt mainly with Internet and language learning; section "c", however was devoted to the





Internet tools, which could be used by EFL learners and the last part was about Internet use pitfalls.

### **2.2.2. Students' Portfolio:**

A sample of (20) participants was chosen to keep paper portfolios to help us make a sort of formative assessment in an eight-week period; two weeks were devoted for each of the four language skills. The portfolio was divided into three parts including a language passport containing personal information and defining the language proficiency levels, a language biography including reflection sheets and a language dossier accumulating learners' artefacts. Our portfolio followed the European portfolio model, and the reason behind using the ELP (European Language Portfolio) as a tool of research was to supplement the data collected from the other tools used.

### **2.2.3. Students' E-portfolio:**

The electronic version of the previous ELP was added to the data collection tools. It represented a compilation of digital artefacts that students had been asked to prepare in a form of an English learning discussion group via Facebook i.e. we set up a new Facebook group account and then asked the (20) participants to join it. After that, we started to post each two weeks a specific task related to one of the four skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking; the same ones we assigned for the paper version and students were asked to keep samples of their works and attach them to it. Of course, we provided clarifications and illustrations all-weeks long and allowed learners to rely on the sources they think appropriate, either web-based or paper-based ones.

### **2.2.4. Teachers' Interview**

We conducted a teachers' interview with the (13) university teachers having different experiences in teaching. The conversation was done face-to-face and was audio recorded. It consisted of open-ended questions instead of leading ones, which suggest an answer.

As to its type, we used a standardised and structured one, containing '*a predetermined set of questions*' i.e. the same questions were asked to all the participants in order to make the data analysis phase easier and to be in control of it when comparing the results (Vanderstoep & Johnson, 2008: 88-89). Evidently, both the researcher and the interviewees did not stick only to that set of questions as other ones emerged during the interview. Additional comments about the role of Internet in language pedagogy were also



allowed. After having dealt with the data collection stage, we started to analyse them giving either numerical statistics as percentages or accumulating related qualitative values as speech units and chunks.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Based on the three research questions of the present study, we examined the data we collected. Now, we are going to display instances of the analysis of some central qualitative and quantitative questions.

#### 3.1 Students' Positive and Negative Attitudes towards the Internet

A Likert scale was used to measure first- year English students' degrees of agreement or disagreement on some proposed statements about Internet. Firstly, (78%) strongly agreed and (18%) agreed that the Internet is an essential tool for learning EFL. The rest gathering (4%) chose the impartial position while the '*disagree*' and '*strongly disagree*' boxes did not accumulate any percentage. The second statement notifying that the Internet is a useful source of getting information amassed, as well, most of the positive opinions under the scores of (10%) of those who strongly agreed and (82%) of the ones who agreed. Still (8%) were neutral but no one was against it.

For the opposite statement: *Internet is not a useful source of information*, most of the reactions were negative including (66%) of the respondents who strongly disagreed and (28%) who disagreed. In contrast, only (6%) chose not to take any side and the other two boxes of agreement did not receive any ratio. Then, the results of the other statement about the helpfulness of internet-based learning accumulated also a huge number of students covering (74%) and (26%) who believed that the integration of Internet in learning EFL could be helpful while all the remaining choices took a rate of (0%).

The next proposition was suggested to report whether students have negative opinions concerning the contrary: the needlessness of Internet-based learning and since the same informants answered, the previous results were reversed. Thus, (22%) and (76%) of the whole strongly disagreed and disagreed whereas the estimation of (2%) of them was undecided and (0%) agreed. To confirm students' autonomy and independence in relationship with Internet use for learning, we proposed another statement, which did not reveal exact percentages because the majority of the respondents (42%) were neutral while, (18%) strongly agreed and (24%) agreed. Conversely,

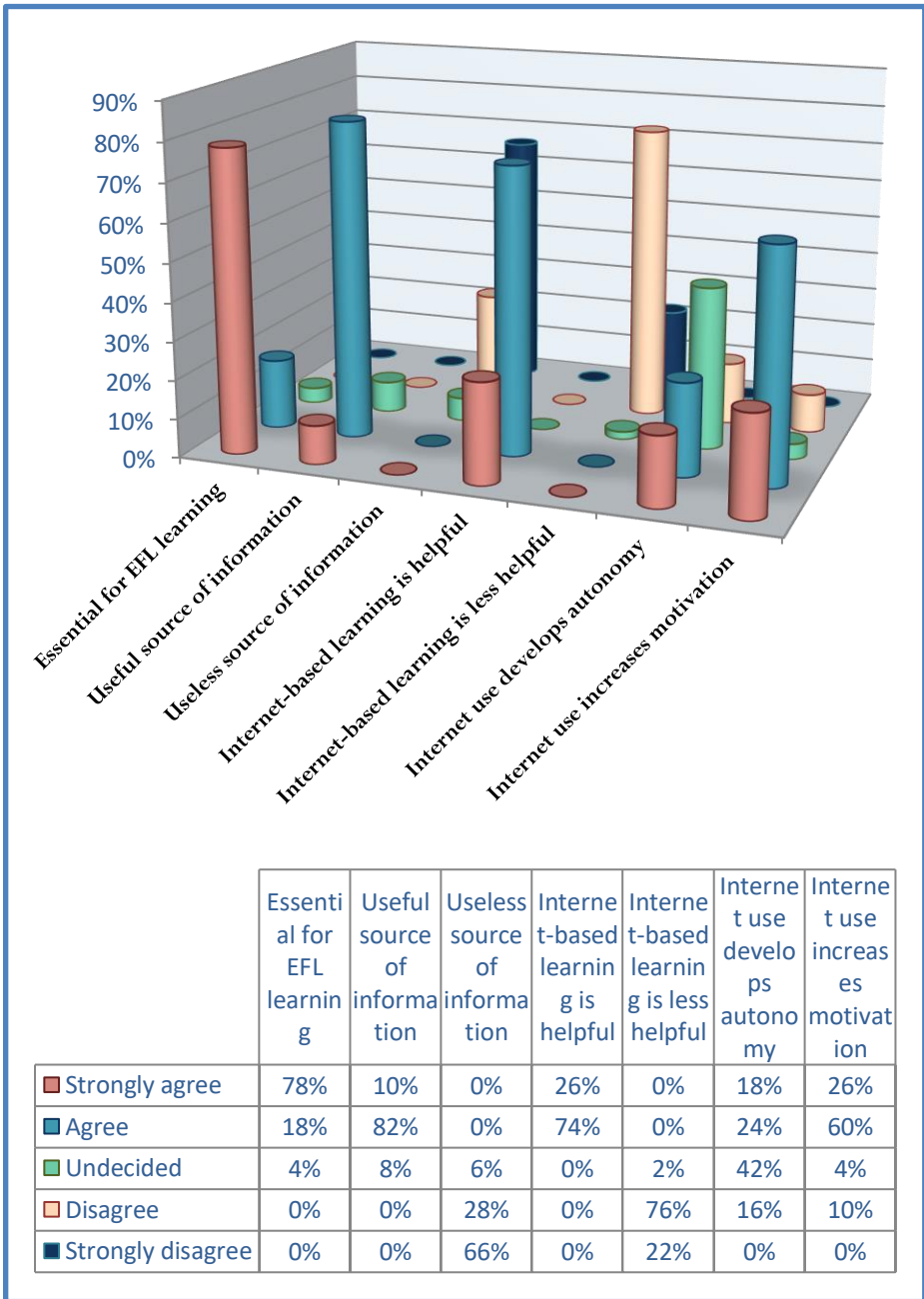


(16%) disagreed and yet, no one strongly disagreed. As to the last one, it was asked to assess the influence of the Internet in motivating learners and increasing learner-centeredness. The results were as follows: (26%) strongly agreed, (60%) agreed, (4%) undecided, (10%) disagreed and (0%) strongly disagreed.

Conclusively, the percentages obtained showed that most of EFL learners consider the Internet as an essential tool for learning and a useful source for getting information, Internet-based learning is helpful and Internet use may increase learners' autonomy and motivation. The next bar graph and table puts on view all the numerical results.



**Figure 5.1.** Students' Positive and Negative Attitudes towards the Internet.



## 5.2 Students' Preferable Ways to Enhance Their Language Skills Using Internet Tools

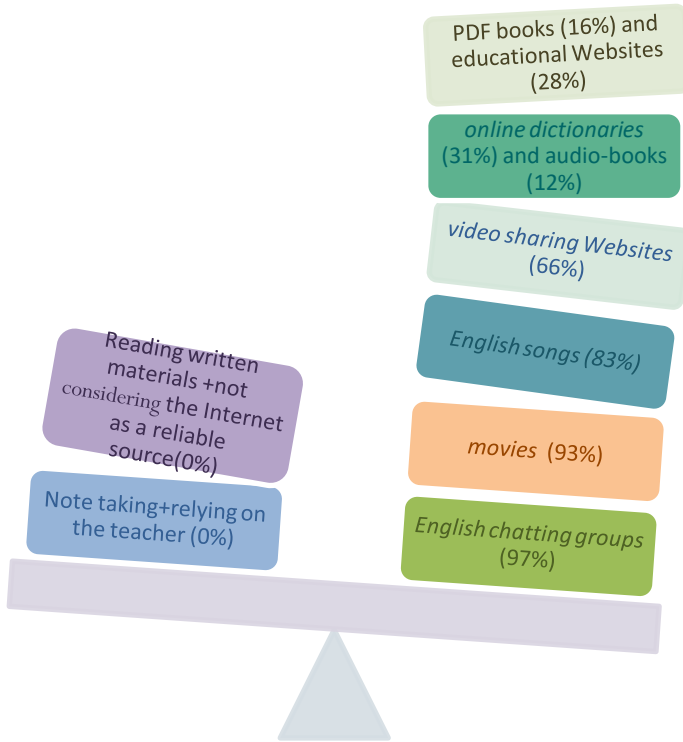
For this question, we listed a bunch of such tools and asked the participants to tick the appropriate ones. In order to analyse the results of such a multiple-choice question, we tried to give separate percentages for each option according to the whole rate (100%) since there were some students who chose more than one.

The first option about *educational Websites* received (28%) while the one of *audio books* took only (12%). For *chatting groups*, the rate was very high (97%) alongside with *watching movies* under the rate of (93%), *listening to English songs*, which accumulated (83%) and using *video sharing Websites* that came out with (66%). What is more, *online dictionaries* had a low score (31%) besides *PDF (Portable Document Format) books*, which, in turn, took only (16%). Unpredictably, on the other side, (0%) was the estimation rate for the two traditional ways of *taking notes during class and relying only on the teacher* to improve the language skills in addition to *reading only written materials* like course books believing that *the Internet is not a reliable source of information*.

In sum, those results showed that too much importance is given to online tools than other ways of learning and this confirms our claim that the new generation of learners relies chiefly on digital and online learning aids and sources. The figure below demonstrates the outcomes



**Figure 5.2. Students' Preferable Ways to Enhance their Language Skills**



### 3.2 Students' Difficulties about Internet Use

This question encompasses the problems English learners' encounter when using the Internet. It yielded in a variety of answers among the most part of the respondents who believed that there are no difficulties using technological tools and the Internet, particularly. Some of them added that everyone could use it regardless of their age or educational level.

On the other side, some of the learners listed almost the same problems comprising the non-availability of free PDF books they often search for and the fact that some information are not reliable for academic research. As for one of them who stated, "*Some websites are not free and most useful books*".

Responses to this question showed that there are few problems with digital literacy if they may not exist at all since no one of the participants cited them.



### 3.3 Students' Comments on the Use of Portfolios and E-portfolios

The interest of students' in the ELP use seemed like no other language assessment tool; not only in developing their language skills, as they said, but also in terms of encouraging their self-directed learning and increasing their autonomy and confidence. In this respect, one of them commented,

*“I became more confident about my language competencies and this is the first time I enjoy doing tests.*

*Really, it was a good experience for me to participate in this research”*

Interestingly, the language portfolio achieved positive results and received valuable and positive reactions among Algerian first-year English students.

### 3.4 Internet Benefits which can Promote Learners' Skills and Teachers' Experiences:

Categorising the speech chunks for this question, there appeared the most frequent ones being Internet benefits, which can enhance English language learning skills together with teaching experiences. Thus, according to the results, it can be concluded that those profits are as follows:

#### a. For Learning Skills:

- Creating real-life situations to develop learners' abilities through spoken and written communications;
- Providing various tools to find information and improve different language skills;
- Providing tools to check the spelling or the pronunciation of words such as, online dictionaries or offline dictionary smart phone applications;
- Providing entertaining ways for speaking, listening and reading as music and song lyrics;
- Increasing learners' motivation to study skills like, selecting information or developing research strategies;
- Broadening learners' perspectives that make them seek for extra information, instead of sticking to the teachers' handouts.



## **b. For Teaching Experiences**

- Helping the elaboration and the preparation of lectures;
- Providing tools to assess learners;
- Providing different sources of information for teachers and teacher-researchers such as, articles in scientific journals and periodicals;
- Making communication between teachers and their learners possible and with their colleagues easier and thus, helping supervision or experiences exchange;
- Broadening teachers' knowledge in specific areas of interest.

## **Conclusion**

The major findings of our investigation confirmed the first two hypotheses, while we considered the third one as a null hypothesis. They demonstrated that Internet is a useful means for teaching and learning English by means of the great amount of data it makes available and accessible for teachers and learners alike besides the variety of language learning tools it provides and which are easy-to-use; and even with other sophisticated tools, technical support is always available. Moreover, formal technology training courses could be utilitarian too, even for the digital generation for the reason that we should take notice of some issues as web content analysis, copyright, reliability of online resources and learners' productivity.

Regarding the third hypothesis, the reliability of online resources with digital literacy are no more hindrances which affect the Internet use. As a result, the existing pitfalls are limited only to a tiny minority of digital illiterates and those who do not possess web-evaluation skills.

Hence, we recommend some helpful implementations including the latter for it is of paramount importance the know-how to use search engines and to select the most useful and reliable resources by checking their functionality, accuracy and currency. In addition, we propose the use of e-portfolios as a language assessment tool and other Internet-based activities, project work or simulations using the variety of online tools that Internet provides like blogs, wikis, podcasts, emails and so forth.

Teacher and learner technology training is also essential; it may be included within the teachers' pre-service or in-service training courses and within the students' study skills module. Moreover, both the e-learning and the online





language course should be designed taking into account many factors as learners' needs and their different learning styles, technological equipment available at the level of the university, the number of students per group, age, language course type, as well as time and classroom management skills.

In closing, teaching and learning EFL are subject to different factors counting the time factor. That is, with time, the educational systems and approaches change as new concepts are created or innovations are introduced. Internet among the very influential technological tools, which revolutionised the field of language education, has the potential to develop the way we teach or learn English in spite of its drawbacks.

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